



LETTY'S  
GOOD LUCK  
HELEN SHERMAN GRIFFITH



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TALKING IT ALL OVER

# Letty's Good Luck

BY HELEN SHERMAN GRIFFITH

AUTHOR OF

"LETTY OF THE CIRCUS"

"LETTY AND THE TWINS"

"LETTY'S SISTER"

"LETTY'S TREASURE"

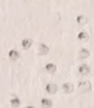
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## Introduction

LETTY GREY first made her appearance in "Letty of the Circus," which told of a little girl who drove Punch and Judy, a pair of trick ponies. When she was left alone in the world by the death of her mother Letty was adopted by Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, "the writer lady." A jolly little boy and girl who had befriended her during her hard times took her to the country, and what they did there was described in "Letty and the Twins." Afterward she and her adopted mother move to New York, where Letty has some interesting new experiences at Miss Sims' School, and where she begins to suspect that she has a voice worth cultivating. This is all in "Letty's New Home."

A trip to England is described in "Letty's Sister," which tells also how Mrs. Hartwell-Jones discovers a child of her own, Violet, whom she had long believed to have been lost at sea. "Letty's Treasure" is mostly about

school and the girls there, with something of Madame Henri, Letty's teacher. Part of the time the girls are at Lakewood, where a little seed of jealousy springs up and sprouts and causes trouble, though not enough to prevent some very good times with a large circle of friends.

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Letty's Good Luck



# Letty's Good Luck

## CHAPTER I

### SOMETHING FOR LETTY

LETTY GREY was cuddled very comfortably in a hollow of warm, dry sand which she had made for herself on the beach. She was feeling very contented and a little sleepy after her sea bath, and not at all inclined to move.

Even when she saw her sister Violet and Molly Wilson approaching she did not get up, but lay watching them idly, out of half-closed eyes. She smiled a dreamy greeting when the two girls flopped down beside her and curled up her feet to make room.

"Here are two letters for you, Letty," announced Violet, dropping them in her lap. "We've just come from the post-office. One of them looks rather interesting; such funny handwriting."

Violet did not bathe in the sea. The doctor

was afraid that the energy of the surf might have a bad effect on her weak hip, and Molly Wilson frequently missed her morning dip for the sake of being with her friend.

Molly and Violet had established an intimacy which was almost David and Jonathan-like in its intensity. Letty often declared to herself that she was not jealous of this ardent friendship, just as she had so often declared to herself the winter before that she did not mind giving up her pretty bedroom to Violet and moving herself and her belongings up to the third story. But she was surprised to find that timid, shrinking Violet had actually grown to prefer some one's else society to her own; and she felt lonely sometimes. Her illness in the spring had left Letty not quite so strong as formerly and a little more sensitive.

But every day of the simple, well regulated life in the invigorating sea air brought back fresh health and nerve force; she was at least strong enough to keep all such petty emotions to herself, so that no one, not even her beloved Aunt Mary, guessed at her state of mind.

"Aren't you going to read your letters?" asked Violet curiously, after a pause.



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Letty sat up and yawned.

“It’s so deliciously warm and comfy, I hate to move,” she said lazily. “Who’d you say my letters are from?”

“One’s from Meta Lowell; I recognize the handwriting, but who the other is from, I don’t believe you can guess yourself.”

“Go to the foot of the class for a mistake in grammar,” interpolated Molly playfully. She had undertaken in a quiet, tactful manner to bring up to time some of the lagging ends of Violet’s tardy education. “From takes the accusative case, ‘from whom.’ Repeat after me, child, and I’ll overlook the slip this time.”

Violet rewarded her instructor by throwing sand at her, and then urged Letty to try and guess the name of her correspondent.

Letty’s curiosity was roused and she took up the letter in question. It was addressed in a cramped, unformed hand, and had been forwarded to Sea Side from the New York address.

“I wonder if it can be from Tottie Haines,” she speculated. “But Mrs. Goldberg knows our address here. I wonder ——”

“What good will wondering do?” laughed

Violet. "Do open it, Letty; then you'll know."

"I think it's part of the excitement of getting a strange letter to wonder about it," put in Molly. "Let's each make up a person it might be from. I say the writer is a widow, the mother of seven children, who wants you to get up a concert and give her the proceeds."

"Mercy, how could a poor widow with seven children know that Letty sings," objected the literal Violet. "It probably is from Tottie and she sent it off without telling Mrs. Goldberg anything about the matter."

"We might as well solve the mystery," said Letty. "Here goes. Oh! Why, it's from Mrs. Drake. Poor soul, her husband is ill," she added, glancing over the contents of the letter.

"Who is Mrs. Drake?" asked Molly, completely unenlightened by Letty's ejaculation.

Violet explained that the Drakes were owners of a circus with which Letty had once performed. While she sketched, as well as she could, the little page of Letty's past history, Letty herself was reading her letter with some astonishment.

"Well, this is funny," she exclaimed at length. "Let's go home, girls. I want to show this to Aunt Mary."

"There!" exclaimed Violet. "I felt sure that it was something more than an ordinary letter. Do tell us what's happened, Letty."

"Why, nothing's happened. At least, I don't suppose anything is going to happen, really, but I'd like to talk over the matter with Aunt Mary. It—it has brought up the past," she added with a little break in her voice. And the two girls, seeing how sad Letty looked, did not ask her any more questions.

When they reached Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's cottage, Violet and Molly, by mutual consent, stopped at the gate to let Letty proceed alone. But she turned with her own merry laugh.

"Why, come along, you dear geese! There isn't anything private about it," she laughed. "I declare, look at the disappointment in Violet's face. I do believe she's been cooking up a mystery."

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones came out on the veranda to meet them. She generally took the mornings for her literary work, but always

managed to be through in time to greet the girls when they came home from the beach, to have a little walk or talk all together before luncheon.

The girls made a pretty picture, with their fresh young faces and bright summer dresses, as they came up the path, arm in arm, and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones smiled in great content as she watched them.

"Oh, Aunt Mary," called Letty, "do you remember Mrs. Drake?"

"Of course I do, and the funny little circus. Why? Have you heard something about her?"

"I've heard from her," answered Letty, waving her letter. "And we've come to you for a consultation."

"Mrs. Drake's is the circus we got Punch and Judy from," explained Violet in an aside to Molly. "I forgot to tell you that. Do read the letter aloud, mother, if Letty doesn't mind," she added. "She said there wasn't anything private in it and we don't know what it's all about."

"Of course I don't mind. Read away, please, Aunt Mary. That is, if you can make

it out. Or would you rather have me read it? It's pretty blotty and scrawly, but I've deciphered it once."

"Then you will do it much better justice than I could," laughed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, who had surveyed the grimy, misspelled letter with some dismay.

"Well, here goes. But I'm going to read it in good English, so to speak, and you can all look at the mistakes afterward, if you like. There are some funny ones."

They all seated themselves on the veranda, Letty perching on the balustrade to get a good light on her paper.

" 'Dear little Miss Letty,' " she began, " 'I'm most ashamed to write you, 'deed I am, because what I'm about to write ought to have been written long ago.' (I hope you all appreciate my 'rendering at sight,' " Letty said in a parenthesis.)

"Do go on," urged Violet. "It sounds like the opening pages of a mystery story. Perhaps you are the long-lost grandchild of an exiled king and she was the nurse who changed you in your cradle."

"My dear child, what sort of books have

you been reading!" ejaculated Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. "It sounds like a mixture of 'Pinafore' and the 'Duchess.'"

"If you are what Violet suggests—I should say, suspects—you ought to have three gifts with magical properties," laughed Molly gayly. "I'll present you with a magic cup which will appear before you, filled with ice-cream soda of any desired flavor, whenever you express the wish for it."

"And I will give you a magic coin that will pay the doctor automatically whenever you express your wish too frequently," said Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, always ready to enter into a game.

Violet sought her brain frantically for an appropriate gift in her turn. She was not accustomed to these little flights of fancy and nonsense, but was anxious to keep up with the others.

"Never mind, Violet-Mary, your gift being the third and last, is important, so you think up a really marvelous one while I finish the letter," advised Letty and went on reading, after she had found her place.

"When your brother Ben died that sum-

mer—you remember, my dear, for all you was so young then—I was never quite so sorry for any one. Well, as I was saying, when Ben signed with Mr. Drake, he gave him a little bundle of papers which he asked him to keep for him, and to give them to you in case anything ever happened to him.

“ ‘ Well, something did happen—something none of us could ever have expected or been afraid of, because he was so awful skilful on the trapeze, so quick and sure, but —— ’ ”

Letty stopped reading abruptly, her eyes filled with tears, and she sat with face averted, staring out over the bright, sunlit sea until she could recover from her emotion. Ben had been her only brother, a good brother to her, although rough and careless; and his sudden death had been a terrible shock.

Her three listeners sat in respectful silence. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones changed her seat to one on a bench beside the balustrade, where she could take one of Letty's hands and stroke it sympathetically.

Letty was soon ready to go on with her letter.

“ ‘ But it did happen, ’ ” she read, “ ‘ and

when Mr. Drake remembered about those papers, why, he couldn't find them. He felt mighty bad about it, of course, but as you remember, a good many troubles rose up and fastened on him that summer, and he knew they wasn't important papers, anyhow. At least, he supposed they wasn't. Only he would have liked to do what Ben had asked him to do—to give them over to you. But they wasn't nowhere to be found.

“‘ But now, I guess you know what's coming next. They've turned up, that bunch of papers and letters, in a funny way, and Mr. Drake, he's most anxious to give 'em back to you. The bundle's all here, sealed up in a big envelope, just as Ben give it to him, and he's so relieved that it seems as if he couldn't wait to get it into your hands.

“‘ But he isn't willing to send it to you by mail, Miss Letty. He's afraid it'll get lost again, and he'd be double to blame. He wants to know if you can't come after it?

“‘ I forgot to say that we've given up the circus business, and Mr. Drake has charge of a moving picture show here at Narragansett Pier, Rhode Island. It pays real well, better'n



the circus ever did, and is heaps easier. We're both gettin' too old to go about country with a circus any more. Besides, this pays better.

“ ‘ Mr. Drake won't trust the mail, because once he had a letter with some money in it sent to him and it never came. But he says most likely you'll be coming up this way on one of your automobile trips—heaps and heaps of people come here—and you could stop over and get the bundle. Anyhow, I told him I'd write and see what you'd say about it. He's keepin' the bundle most careful, but it frets him. He's been right sick, a spell of fever and cold, and things fret him easy, so I hope you can come.

“ ‘ Do you remember my baby you used to carry about and who cried so pitiful after you left us? Well, he's a bouncing boy now, and as good as gold. They use him sometimes to pose in the moving pictures, when they need a baby or small kid. Ain't he beginning young to be an actor?

“ ‘ My respectful regards to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and the other young lady. It seems a long time since we were at your party, which was very nice.

“ ‘ Hoping to hear from you soon, where our address is Baily and Drake’s Moving Picture Aerodome, Narragansett Pier, Rhode Island, I am,

“ ‘ Your obedient servant,

“ ‘ SUSAN DRAKE.’ ”

“ There, I told you so ! ” exclaimed Violet triumphantly, as soon as Letty had stopped reading. “ They are important papers, only that Mr. Drake knows how careless he was to have lost them, and won’t own up, but he’s taking very good care not to let them get lost a second time, you see. Do you suppose your brother had a fortune hidden away somewhere, Letty ? ”

“ Oh, no, no, ” exclaimed Letty quickly and gravely. “ I am quite sure I know what the papers are. They are surely the letters my mother wrote to Ben whenever he was away from us. How glad I shall be to see them ! I was never away from my mother while she lived, you know, and so I never had any letters from her. How glad I shall be to have these, ” she added solemnly.

“ Of course you will, my darling, ” agreed

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones tenderly. "Do write to Mrs. Drake at once to send you the package. Ask her to tell Mr. Drake that if he will register the package it will come in perfect safety."

"I think it would be great fun to go on a motor trip after them, as Mrs. Drake proposes," observed Molly, trying to cover a secret disappointment she felt in Letty's practical solution of the promised mystery. "My aunt and uncle were talking just the other day about a trip. Has Aunt Isabel spoken to you about it, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones?"

"She suggested something of the sort, for some time during the summer," replied Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, "but it was all very indefinite."

"I know. They didn't know just where to go. Perhaps this about the letters will give them an idea. I'll speak to them about it, anyhow, if I may?"

"It certainly would be no end of fun," exclaimed Letty, "but we couldn't go until after the concert, you know."

"Oh, no, of course not. But the concert is coming off so soon now."

"Yes, awfully soon," agreed Violet a little nervously, and the other two girls laughed mischievously.

Just then Katy appeared in the doorway to announce luncheon, and Molly rose to go—expressing her astonishment at the lateness of the hour.

"You'll stay, of course, Molly?" said Mrs. Hartwell-Jones hospitably, but smiling at the form, for Molly generally stayed for luncheon.

"I'd like to, if you don't mind? I do hope I'm not an awful bore, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones."

"Silly!" answered Violet for her mother, tucking her hand fondly into the crook of Molly's elbow. "You know perfectly well we'd all be furious and offended if you didn't stay."

The girls chattered about the approaching concert all through luncheon and apparently had forgotten about the odd letter—even Letty herself. But Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had not forgotten and she allowed her imagination a little free play. She, at any rate, had not been wholly convinced by Letty's statement as to the probable contents of Mr. Drake's bundle of papers. No doubt there were letters

in it, but she felt sure that there was something else beside. Mrs. Drake would not have used the expression "papers" if her husband had not got the information from Ben when he took the bundle into his care that there was something more than mere correspondence.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones looked across at Letty's animated face with a sudden curious thrill. What if her brother Ben had left her a fortune, even as Violet had said? There had always been some vague, illusive charm to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones about her picture of Letty's big, bluff, kindly brother. It would not be at all out of keeping with her impression of him if after all these years he should turn out to be her benefactor.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CONCERT

“GIRLS, please don't think me a turn-tail, or a silly, or anything horrid,” exclaimed Violet, “but I really can't go on with my part in the concert to-morrow night unless we tell mother. I've just tried to do as you all want me to, but it makes me too miserable. Let every one else be surprised, but not mother.”

“Why, Violet-Mary, if you feel that way about it, of course we'll tell,” replied Letty emphatically. “We only thought it would add to the general fun and Aunt Mary's pleasure.”

“But that's just what I'm afraid it won't do. I've gone over it all in my mind a thousand times, and tried to think it was all right, but I can't. I haven't said anything to any of you before because, well, to tell the truth, I was afraid to. I was afraid you girls would think me a spoil-sport.”

Poor Violet was nearly crying by this time from nervousness and the consciousness of her own weakness. Letty flew across the room and took her protectingly into her arms.

“You poor, dear little goose,” she cried, “that is the very last thing in the world any one would think of calling you! Let’s Molly and you and me form ourselves into a committee of three to go and tell Aunt Mary all about it, at once. It’s time the meeting adjourned, anyway—at least as far as I’m concerned, for I have to go to the station to meet Meta.”

From the day the girls had begun their plans for getting up a concert, which was to be given for the benefit of the local church of Sea Side village, Molly Wilson was determined that Violet should take some part in it.

She proposed a recitation, a part in one of the little plays, for although the girls spoke of the entertainment as a concert—for short, as Letty expressed it—it was in reality to offer a great variety of features. But Violet shrank from any suggestion on the plea that she had never done any of those things and would simply be scared to death to begin.

At length, by persistent coaxing and questioning, Molly extracted from Violet, in a supremely confidential moment, the fact that she had one accomplishment; that there was one musical instrument upon which she could play fairly well—the concertina. Violet was ashamed of her commonplace, plebeian attainment, but Molly fairly screamed with joy.

“Oh, just the thing for the concert! You’ll surely do it? Let’s tell Letty at once!”

“I don’t mind if you tell Letty, as a dead secret, but I don’t really believe I’d have the courage to play it in public,” protested Violet. “Besides,” she added as a conclusive argument, “I haven’t got a concertina.”

But the girls found this last difficulty one of the easiest to overcome. They combined the remnants of their allowances and thought the amount quite sufficient to buy an instrument.

“What do they cost, Violet-Mary?” asked Letty practically.

“I don’t know, I’m sure. The one I used to play on at Lyme Regis belonged to a little girl in the village who had never learned it.



She won it as a premium for selling soap, or reels of cotton. When I came away I asked Mother Moore to send it back to her."

"Well, I don't believe they cost very much anyway," put in Molly, the optimist. "We'll see what our money will buy. But if Violet-Mary's appearance at the concert is to be a dead secret, how can we buy it? Neither Aunt Isabel nor Mrs. Hartwell-Jones will let us go up to town by ourselves. We'll have to confide in somebody."

"Then let it be Mr. Jack Beckwith," said Letty with conviction. "He's as safe with a secret as a locked safety deposit vault with the key lost. I'll ask him to get it this very next Monday when he goes up to town, and bring it down himself on Wednesday."

"My, yes, don't let him send it! Every one's curiosity would be on the rampage if they heard that one of us had received a mysterious package."

"I'll give him what money we have—are you sure you can spare all that, Molly? Here, you'd better keep out a quarter. The sundae craze may prove too much for you before the beginning of the month. And I'll tell him

that if they cost more than this, to buy a second-hand one. I don't see why a second-hand one wouldn't do, in any event. How about it, Violet-Mary?"

"I suppose it would be all right if the bellows isn't punctured," replied Violet doubtfully. "Of course Mr. Jack would try it. I'd like to have it as soon as possible, to practice. I may have forgotten how."

Accordingly the concertina was bought, and Mr. Jack Beckwith, when he understood for what purpose the instrument was intended, took the liberty of adding enough money out of his own private "allowance" to buy a creditable one.

The girls had great fun inventing times and places for Violet to practice so that no one should hear, and Letty and Molly were really surprised to hear how much sweetness and expression Violet could extract from what to them had always been an impossible musical implement.

Violet was very much at home with her concertina, but she still felt timid about a public appearance, so Letty's fertile brain concocted a little scene.

“I know the very thing!” she exclaimed. “You and I will dress like Italian peasants, Violet-Mary, and we’ll come on the stage together. That will be easier than for you to do it alone, won’t it? And I’ll sing some song to your accompaniment—an Italian street song—just to get you started. Then for an encore you’ll have got up enough courage to go on by yourself and show them what you really can do.”

“But she must appear at least twice on the programme,” declared Molly firmly.

“So she shall. The second time she can come on—let me see—why, just after your farce, Molly, of course. Keep that outdoor scene with the house in the background and Violet-Mary can come on as the peasant again; it’s always easier to do things when you’re dressed up in some sort of costume, Violet-Mary.”

“Yes, always,” agreed Molly. “It takes you out of yourself. And you can play in front of the house, Violet-Mary, just like a real street musician, and at the end one of us will appear and toss you some pennies. That will be very realistic and no end of fun.”

So the plans for the entertainment went along with perfect smoothness, and splendid success promised to crown their efforts. Letty had planned a certain deed of great kindness, which she unfolded to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, prefacing her confidence with the request for permission to invite Meta Lowell to visit her.

“Don't you think it would be nice, Aunt Mary,” she said, “if we could make one of the numbers on the programme that scene from *La Malade Imaginaire* between Argan and Luison, and let Meta do Argan? You know she was terribly disappointed that time she missed doing it at school, although she's never said much about it to any of us. It really wasn't her fault, either. She would have got there in plenty of time if the motor hadn't broken down. And I've always felt secretly selfish to have taken her part away from her. If she could do it again, here, I'd feel as if she'd got her chance back somehow. Do you think Mrs. Somers would let little Ellen do Luison again?”

“I'll ask her, myself, Letty mine. I think it very sweet of you to think about Meta,” and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones embraced her

warmly. "But do you think Meta can come?"

"Oh, I think so. She is at Watch Hill, you know, and they have their motor there. She could motor down to New London and take the boat across to Sag Harbor, and come up here by train. Nobody would object to her traveling just from Sag Harbor to here by herself."

"I am sure that would be a perfectly safe journey for any one so self-reliant as Meta," smiled Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, "so go ahead and invite her, Letty mine, and I'll enclose a note to her mother."

Meta accepted her invitation only too eagerly and the days sped busily, happily by. Letty did not feel particularly disappointed when Violet confessed her imperative desire to have her mother share the secret of her own part in the coming entertainment. She was rather relieved, indeed. Letty had never had any secrets from her Aunt Mary, except the secret of a discontented, rebellious spirit, which is a form of secret always best locked up in one's innermost soul and never confided, even to one's self, until it languishes

and dies out from sheer neglect and lack of sympathy.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was not exactly carried away with enthusiasm over the idea of her daughter playing a concertina in public, but she appreciated heartily Molly's generous anxiety to have Violet share in the good time, and felt that Letty had made the best of the occasion with her plan of peasant costumes. She expressed only her pleased surprise and heartiest good wishes, and Violet went to work with more eagerness and interest than she had yet shown.

"I'll go and practice up in my own room, while you are at the station getting Meta," she said happily. "It's a great comfort to think I don't have to huddle myself away in Mrs. Emlin's loft, or be driven down the beach to hide in the dunes."

"So that is why you girls have taken such a fancy lately to that remote corner of the beach," laughed her mother. "I've often watched poor little Punch and Judy toiling across that soft beach road with a load of you, and felt a little sorry for the ponies."

"Oh, it has done them good, Aunt Mary.

They were getting disgracefully fat, and you know Mr. Parsons said that was bad for them."

"But you must also remember that they are not so young as they once were, my dear."

"Oh, you little darlings, surely you aren't growing old and stiff and short-breathed," cried Letty, and she ran out to the gate to fondle her pets, who were standing there in philosophic patience until it was time for Letty to drive them to the station.

"I hope Letty isn't overdoing in her zeal to make the concert a success," exclaimed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones with an anxious little sigh as she stood watching the pony carriage out of sight. "She doesn't seem listless or languid to you girls, does she?"

"No, mother, of course not," rejoined Violet positively. "It seems to me that Letty gets better every day. She's got lots more energy than she had when we first came down, and is more interested in everything that is going on. I think the concert's doing her lots of good."

"And how about my own precious daughter?" asked her mother fondly. "It

is not fretting you to do your part? You must not let Molly bully you into doing something that gives you pain or worry."

"I don't mind a bit, mother, now that I know you think it all right. I was afraid you might think the concertina common or vulgar. That is the reason I have never spoken about playing it."

"Naturally it is not in the exalted rank of the harp or violin, and I am not trying to pretend that it is, dear little daughter, but Letty's adaptation of its use will give the programme a pleasing variety; and it does make me very happy, my darling, to know that you are strong enough and interested enough to want to take part in the life of the girls about you. It means so much to a girl, as she grows older, Violet mine, to be able to adapt herself to whatever surroundings she may find herself among, and to be deservedly popular among her mates."

"I know, mother," whispered Violet tremulously, creeping close to her mother's side. "It does please me so—makes me feel all thrilly and furry inside somehow—when I know that the girls like me and want me with



them. But it's awfully hard sometimes to keep on. It's so hard not to criticize or be afraid when they're silly or—or a little rough."

"You are conquering your shyness wonderfully, my dear, and I am very proud of your efforts. Don't allow yourself to be frightened. Don't think of yourself or your own feelings at all, but ask yourself what you can do to make your comrades happy or comfortable."

"But they all seem so very capable of making themselves comfortable and happy, mother."

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones smiled and frowned.

"You speak more truly than you realize, dear, of the modern tendencies. But see, there is the pony carriage coming back with Letty and Meta, both chattering at once as hard as they can," and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones as she spoke moved forward to the gate to welcome Letty's friend.

They had scarcely alighted when Mary Beckwith came flying down the road, the evident agitation of her manner betraying a greater excitement than Meta's coming alone could have roused.

“Girls, oh, girls,” she gasped breathlessly, and then kissed Meta and shook hands all round while recovering her breath. “It’s so nice to have you here, Meta, and I’m going to send little Ellen straight over to practice her part with you, for it’s my private opinion, publicly expressed, that she has forgotten every word of it. She won’t say a line to me, although Madame Henri says she rattled off a few sentences to her the other day, and then was overtaken by shyness, Madame Henri says. I say forgetfulness. I never saw little Ellen shy. Or else it was pure contrariness. Thank goodness the child’s mother will be home to-night. We can’t do a thing with her or Budsey. Their latest accomplishment, Letty, is to recite ‘The Walrus and the Carpenter’ together, as a dialogue, and they want to do that at the concert, instead of little Ellen being Luison. Of course I headed off any such scheme—after bringing Meta all the way here and everything—but mercy on us, girls, think of my not having told the news I am just bursting with. Who do you think has come to Sea Side?”

“Who?” chorused the girls, duly mystified.

“Why, Miss Sarah Terlowe, the famous actress! She is going to stay at the Inn and will surely come to the concert. Think of it!”

“Who said so?”

“I saw her with my very own eyes, getting out of the hotel bus as I came here, and I asked the porter and he said it was.”

“Did you ever hear of anything so exciting!” exclaimed Letty and Violet in chorus, while Meta added solemnly:

“Then I came down on the train with her! I thought her face was very familiar. Such a sweet, dear face! And she was so quietly dressed. Oh, dear, girls, why didn’t I take in the situation and pick up her handkerchief, or book, or do something to make her speak to me! What a lost opportunity!” groaned Meta.

“Never mind, Meta. Perhaps she’ll ask to have the performer presented to her after the concert to-morrow night,” laughed Letty excitedly. “Mary, don’t you think we’d better call a special rehearsal this afternoon?”

“Yes, I most certainly do, and I must get after little Ellen. Oh, no, thanks, dear Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. I can’t stay for luncheon,

much as I'd love to. I'll see you all later. It's awfully nice to think you're really here, Meta. Isn't Sea Side lovely? Shall we say three for the rehearsal, Letty, and at our house?"

"What—another rehearsal?" groaned Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, who had only rejoined the little group in time to hear the end of Mary's speech. "Don't overdo it, please, girls."

"But, Aunt Mary, we must do our very bestest, now that we are to have a real actress in the audience," laughed Letty. "Oh, what a lark it is all going to be. Three cheers for the concert!"

## CHAPTER III

### AN ERRAND OF MERCY

“I THOUGHT you said Sea Side was a quiet place, Letty Grey,” exclaimed Meta over the breakfast table the morning after the concert. “We have at least four engagements for to-day, and I haven’t had time to write anything but a telegram to my mother since I got here.”

Letty answered a little abstractedly. She was experiencing the dull, generally let-down feeling one is apt to have after the climax of a successful undertaking.

But had the concert been a real success? The hall had been crowded, the applause hearty and well-sustained, and the numbers on the somewhat overlong programme had followed one another with very few delays. And, finally, the Ladies’ Aid Society of the village had expressed in extravagant terms their gratitude and surprise at the goodly sum

deposited in their hands at the end of the evening. But had it been really good?

Miss Terlowe's behavior had been disappointing. She had insisted upon being seated in a remote, inconspicuous corner of the room and, instead of fulfilling certain fond hopes, secretly cherished in the minds of most of the performers, that she would—if not actually ask to be presented, at least graciously allow them to be presented to and congratulated by her. But instead she had actually retired before the end.

Letty, her eye at the peep-hole in the curtain, saw Miss Terlowe rise, and realized with dismay the significance of the move. She rushed off the stage and reached the side hall just in time to catch a fleeting glimpse of the retreating figure and to hear her say, with gracious voice and tired eyes, to the manager:

“A very amusing evening. Who was the little girl who sang so well?”

This impersonal praise afforded some balm to Letty's soul, for she had been the only singer, except in the glee choruses; but she also noticed, with shrewd perception, that

Miss Terlowe had not waited for a reply to her polite little speech. She had not really wanted to know who the singer was.

But Meta and Violet were full of the event, and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones seemed very well satisfied.

“Perhaps I’m only tired,” thought Letty. “It was awfully hard work and I guess I’m not quite over that nasty scarlet fever. Why, a year ago I’d have been all cock-a-hoop over it as a brilliant success! Well, some day I’ll do something to make them all really proud of me. I’ll make Miss Terlowe really want to know who the singer is.”

Then she came out of her abstraction and joined the general talk. Mary Beckwith came in, before breakfast was over, to lend the weight of her opinion and that of her whole family to the general verdict of success, and the group had scarcely seated themselves on the veranda before others of the performers dropped in to indulge in the delightful pleasure of “talking it all over.”

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones fled, at length, to the sanctity of her writing room at the back of the house, reminding Letty and Meta that

they had an engagement to play tennis at half-past ten.

Meta's visit was an unbroken round of gayety and excitement, but she could stay only a few days, which perhaps was for the best, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones thought privately, if such a pace were to be kept up during her entire visit. After her departure, motored down to Sag Harbor in great state by Mr. Emlin, Molly Wilson's uncle, the girls naturally relapsed into a listless period of reaction.

Letty had been keenly disappointed by her repeated failures to see again the distinguished actress stopping at the Inn. Miss Terlowe took her meals in her private sitting-room and the only glimpses the girls ever got of her were an occasional whisking by in her motor or, in the dusk of the summer evening, her flitting form, wrapped in a silk raincoat, on the side path leading from the Inn to the bathing beach, at which eccentric hour she chose to bathe, accompanied only by her maid.

"Just because she is great, I don't see why she need be so terribly exclusive," grumbled Letty crossly one day. "It's a well-known fact in—in—what do you call the study of



human nature?—that the truly great people are the simplest. But I don't call it simple to hold yourself at arm's length from everybody, and act as if every one else in the world were non-existent."

"Miss Terlowe is not very well, Letty, dear. I was told that she came here specially to be quiet."

"Well, she's certainly getting what she came for. But if she's so terribly anxious to be quiet, why did she come to a big hotel? Why didn't she take a nice, obscure little cottage somewhere?"

"Nice, obscure little cottages don't happen to be set down just wherever one might like to have them, and perhaps Miss Terlowe could not afford a house, just for herself."

"Could not afford it!" ejaculated Letty in surprise. "Why, I had an idea that actresses—successful ones—were always terribly rich, and could afford anything they wanted, from a diamond tiara to a Pekinese pug-dog."

"Naturally, I do not know anything about Miss Terlowe's fortune or income," laughed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, "but I could easily understand how a sensible woman would feel

the extravagance of a complete establishment merely for her own comfort. She is too tired to care to entertain and besides, there would be the burden of housekeeping. So you see, Letty mine, there is some reason for her going to a quiet, retired Inn like this."

"Well, of course she has a right to do as she chooses, but it certainly is tantalizing to have her right in our midst, as it were, and yet not be able even to say how-do-you-do to her. It's like those tiresome 'keep off the grass' signs that used to irritate me so when I was little. Why don't you call on Miss Terlowe, Aunt Mary? Celebrities ought to know each other."

"Thank you for the pretty compliment, my dear, but I respect Miss Terlowe's desire for privacy. Moreover, my name would convey nothing to her, if she heard it. I am sure she has never read a single one of my stories for children, nor even given one as a Christmas present to any of her small nephews or nieces."

"Oh, do you suppose she has nephews and nieces?" asked Letty eagerly.

"It's a very natural supposition. Why?"

“I should like to think she had; and brothers and sisters who are just like other every-day people; and even a father and mother. It would make her so much more human.”

“You dear little goose! You must learn not to keep putting people up on pedestals in that highly romantic, exalted way. They will never be able to keep their balance. If you ever get a chance to become acquainted with your idols, their pedestals will begin to rock before your eyes until they tumble down onto the solid ground of real life and give you a great and most unnecessary disappointment.

“I am not meaning to criticize your admiration of greatness, Letty mine, only be a little more practical about it. Look at the other side of success. Consider the privations, the hard work, the patient drudgery that go to make up any form of successful achievement, and admire the force of will and character that can win greatness. There are very, very few brilliant coups in the world of success, Letty, dear—no short-cuts to fame; only the long, long, dusty, often tiresome and monotonous road of work and struggle.” As she spoke,

she turned and caught Letty in her arms with an impulsive embrace.

"I am saying this to you, my precious little girl, because you know—we all know—that some day you may be numbered among the great ones of the earth, and I want you to understand the road you must travel." Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's voice was very grave as she spoke these last words, and Letty felt solemn and awed.

"Oh, Aunt Mary, do you really and truly think so? I do get so up and downy about my voice. Some days I can believe almost anything of it—I even picture myself in Grand Opera; then other days I get so down-and-out-y and think we are all silly and mistaken. You know how it is?"

"I do, indeed, my darling. We all have to struggle against those ups and downs, especially those of us who are gifted—or burdened—with any special talent in greater or lesser degree."

"It can be a burden, can't it?" ejaculated Letty eagerly. "Aunt Mary, you are such a comfort. You always understand me. Not only what I say and feel, but the other things

that I can't say, and am not even sure that I feel until you put them into words for me."

"That is a doubtful compliment, I must say," laughed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. "I hope you aren't accusing me of putting ideas into your head."

"Oh, Aunt Mary, indeed no; just bringing out my own weak little seedlings of thought! So often I want to have a good time and the objection comes up whether it might not hurt my voice. It began last winter when I went on the house party at Sunnycrest. Madame Henri was simply horrified at the idea of my risking a chill or wet feet from the snow. And when I was sickest with my scarlet fever, I used to get so scared for fear it would spoil my vocal chords.

"Do you know, Aunt Mary—it sounds silly and you may laugh at me if you want to, but every morning when I wake up, what do you suppose I do, the very first thing? I sound a note, just to make sure my voice hasn't gone in the night."

"No, I won't laugh, of course, child; I understand very well. It is the same with us all. I often sit down at my writing table

feeling that I haven't an idea left in my head, and privately convinced that I shall never put pen to paper again except to write letters or pay bills. Madame Henri did quite right to make you realize the importance of taking care of your voice, but don't get monomania on the subject, Letty dear. And now, to change the subject, how would you and Violet like to take Punch and Judy and go on an errand of mercy for me? Down at Bear Creek—that poor little fishing village next below us down the coast, you know—is a poor widow with several small children for whom we have been collecting a bundle of clothes and provisions. Mrs. Emlin was to have taken the packages, but her motor is out of order, and Mrs. Somers has gone to town.”

“I think it would be great fun. You know I always love playing Lady Bountiful. Are there any sweeties we can take to the children?” exclaimed Letty joyfully.

She and Violet were soon on their way, and the ponies, in spite of their age and a somewhat heavy load, trotted briskly along the hard, smooth highroad that paralleled the coast. It was a delicious summer day. The

air sparkled with heat but a fresh salt breeze gave a tang to the summer languor that was stimulating.

“There’s no doubting the fact that sea air agrees with Punch and Judy,” laughed Letty. “Just see how cheerfully they trot along, Violet-Mary, as easily and steadily as two-year-olds. Why, they are almost frisky, bless their hearts!”

The sun was shining in a cloudless sky of palest, illimitable blue; the sea lay placid and shimmering like a changeful aqua-marine against its golden setting of glinting sand; and far out on the horizon was faintly visible a picturesque sloop with idle, flapping sails under the becalmed noontide.

“Like ‘a painted ship, upon a painted ocean,’” quoted Letty softly, and Violet startled her exceedingly by bursting into tears.

“Why, Violet-Mary, whatever in the world is the matter!” cried Letty in amazement.

“Nothing—nothing!” sobbed Violet, and then added miserably, drying her sudden tears sheepishly, “You always do everything so wonderfully, Letty, and I’m such a poor,

weak, useless thing. There was your glorious singing at the concert the other night, which just made every one hold his breath, while all I could do was to squeak out a cheap little tune on a vulgar, third-rate instrument. And you know so much—always thinking of the right line of poetry to quote or suitable proverb to say. And your strength and capability in driving. In spite of all you and mother say about Punch and Judy being old and gentle and all that, why, it would scare me to death to hold the reins and feel that I had to be responsible for where and how they went.”

Letty stared at her in astonishment.

“Why, bless your dear little heart!” she ejaculated. “Violet-Mary, I was never so amazed in my life, never! I thought you’d got over all those bashful fits long ago. To tell the truth,” she added with an effort, “I’ve been inclined to feel a wee bit jealous now and then—of your intimacy with Molly Wilson. There, that sounds mean and silly; please forget that I said it.”

“Indeed, I shall not. It makes me proud and warm inside to know that you really



want me to love you first and best, which of course I do, Letty; you know that," she added earnestly. "Only Molly—well, Molly seems more like me, somehow. She's bright and clever and all that, like you, but she isn't—upon my word, I don't know how to say it, Letty, except that she isn't as soaring as you. I guess I must feel your future greatness cropping out in you," she ended simply.

"Nonsense!" laughed Letty, but reddening with pleasure and feeling immensely flattered just the same. "And as to your being afraid to drive dear old Punch and Judy, why, I'm going to get you over that this minute. It's all your imagination, you know. They don't really need reins at all, they mind the voice so well and have so much sense of their own."

As she spoke, Letty drew up the ponies at the side of the road and insisted upon Violet's changing places with her. At first Violet held the reins in a loose, nervous fashion and jerked Punch and Judy anxiously to the side of the road whenever a motor or a carriage came in sight. But a few words of direction and encouragement from Letty, and the sedate

behavior of the ponies themselves soon emboldened her and by the time Bear Creek was reached, to her own surprise and delight, Violet was driving as if with a practiced hand, and furthermore, was enjoying the experience immensely.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ERRAND OF MERCY AND ANOTHER

THE girls soon found the house at which they were to leave their packages. It was a tiny, forlorn cottage situated in the meanest locality of the poverty-stricken little hamlet. The whole village was a pathetic spectacle of want and privation and should be a constant reproach to the eyes of those prosperous summer people whose expensive houses lined the shore for miles on either side, and whose expensive motors whizzed unmindfully through the melancholy settlement, most of them considering it, when they noticed it at all, merely as an unfortunate blot upon an otherwise charming landscape.

“That is the house, I think,” said Letty, pointing to it. “The grocery man said it was the last house on the row. Oh, Violet, aren’t you glad we’re going to bring a little comfort, at least, into such dismal lives!”

Violet stopped the ponies and Letty jumped out and tied one of the reins around the rickety top rail of a decayed fence. Then she and Violet collected as many of the bundles as they could carry at once and bore them to the door of the cottage. The door was ajar and the girls responded to a faint voice bidding them enter.

They found a very thin, very tired looking woman leaning back listlessly in a wooden chair with a broken rocker, holding a baby of about three years old, almost as thin and tired looking as herself. A child of eight stood in front of the small cooking stove at the opposite side of the room, trying to coax a fire to burn enough to boil a leaky kettle. Through the opened back door two other children, mere babies, could be seen playing dully with a box of empty spools. The utter dejectedness of the whole place made Letty want to cry out against the injustice of life.

“When I am great, and make money with my singing,” she told herself fiercely, “I’ll give it all to helping poor people to live.”

And it was actually from that moment that Letty really saw her career take definite and

possible form before her. Something inside her woke up and substituted a firm resolve in place of the misty dreams of future greatness. "What if" was ousted by "When."

"We have come from Mrs. Hartwell-Jones," she said hesitatingly as she and Violet entered and put down their burden. "She and several other ladies heard you were ill and sent these to—to help you and the children until you can get well again."

The woman's eyes grew large and luminous with thankfulness and renewed hope, but she was literally too weak from hunger to rise or even to express her gratitude in more than a few broken words.

"There's more," added Violet brusquely, and ran from the room, followed by Letty.

Outside, in the sunshine, the two girls faced each other in a state of dismay bordering on terror.

"Why, she's actually starving, Violet-Mary," sobbed Letty, clasping her hands and struggling to keep back her emotion. "Think of any one actually starving with so much to eat all around, and me refusing food at almost every meal!"

“Well, we mustn’t waste time talking about it,” replied Violet practically. “We’ve just got to cook ’em a meal, that’s all, and hurry up about it, too. And on the way home, don’t you think we’d better send the doctor to see that woman? Mother won’t mind paying him. I wish I hadn’t spent all our allowances on that stupid concertina,” she added with a sigh.

They carried in their second load and then, without so much as asking leave, proceeded to investigate the possibility of cooking some of the food they had brought. Letty could find no scrap of fuel except the few bits of wood the child was poking vainly into the stove, so she untied Punch and Judy and drove quickly away to fetch a bag of coal.

Violet, meanwhile, bustled around the room, smiling encouragement to the woman and making friends with the baby. She cut bread and butter for the children, who stood around her in subdued excitement, whispering to one another their belief that she was a beautiful fairy. Violet gave the oldest Smith child ten cents to buy a quart of milk at the grocery, and by the time Letty arrived with the coal

and a new kettle, Violet had the table spread and the first pangs of acute hunger assuaged.

Letty had insisted upon the man's loading the bag of coal into the pony carriage, as that seemed the only immediate prospect of getting it delivered, and she and Violet, after vain efforts to carry the heavy, clumsy bundle up to the house, were obliged to abandon it at the gate and carry a bucketful indoors. The children found the labor of transferring the rest of the coal by pailfuls from the bag to the bin a fairy play.

Mrs. Smith leaned forward in her chair, when the stove was finally lighted, as if the glow of it was welcome to her, even on that hot day; and when Violet brought her a cup of tea, it was like nectar. She held the now sleeping baby, replete with bread and milk, in the crook of one arm and the cup of tea in her free hand, sipping and watching with eloquent eyes the simple transforming of her humble dwelling into a home, where, for the moment at least, comfort and plenty abided.

"I used to help cook our meals when I was with Mother Moore in Lyme Regis," said Violet eagerly, "and I don't believe I've for-

gotten how. Let me try my hand at the cooking, Letty. What is there to bake, boil or fry?"

The contents of some of the packages revealed a glass jar of soup, a cup of which was heated and given to Mrs. Smith as soon as she had finished her tea; and some slices of cold meat which Violet warmed over in a savory butter sauce and fed to the ravenous children.

Indeed, the girls used up nearly all the provisions in preparing the dinner, but that one meal was a glorious feast, and put new heart into the patient, enduring little family. Mrs. Smith's voice came back as her body and soul were cheered and heartened by good food and eager sympathy, and she was both ready and anxious to tell her little story.

It was, after all, a very commonplace, brief history: her husband, a poor fisherman, had died two years before and left her to support her family. There was practically no work by which a woman could earn money in that tiny village. During the summer she could get washing to do for the summer boarders in the neighborhood, but the season was short



and the proceeds of her two or three months' labor had to last the family for the entire year unless, as occasionally happened, one or two of her patrons remained later than the regular summer season. This year she had fallen ill and consequently was unable to work at all. The family had struggled along patiently on the fast dwindling savings, hoping for a miracle which, indeed, had happened.

"I was sure God would not let us starve," Mrs. Smith said pathetically. "'Not a sparrow falleth,' you know, so I was sure He would help us as soon as He got time, if we could only wait. And sure enough, in come you two white angels, if you'll pardon my making so free."

"And we're coming again, many, many times, dear Mrs. Smith," exclaimed Letty, springing to her feet with a sudden realization that they had remained a long time. "We'll be back in the morning, and this afternoon the doctor will stop in to see how you are getting on. We'll have to help you to get well enough to work again, you know."

The girls were very solemn as they drove slowly homeward.

“Something’s wrong with the universe, Violet-Mary,” remarked Letty sagely, as if she had just discovered a new and surprising fact. “Think of it! Most of us grumble when we get an attack of indigestion, due generally to overeating, and scold the doctor for not getting us well in a hurry so as to have a good time and overeat again. But that poor woman was prayerfully grateful for a cup of weak soup and bread and butter, and all she asked, ready to thank us on bended knees for the boon, was to be made well enough to work her fingers to the bone to earn money enough to furnish her children with less than the necessities of life! It seems wrong to think of sitting down to a full dinner table.”

“And yet we’re both hungry,” added Violet. “If I hadn’t seen what we have just seen, I’d say I was simply starving!”

They both shivered at the simple word, so cruel in its real, deeper meaning.

“Don’t!” Letty begged. “I shall never say that again unless it is true, and oh, I pray I may never have it happen. Why, Violet, think what it means to be starving! Wouldn’t you rob the first bake-shop you came to? I

don't think I should have any moral principles left after the first pinch of acute hunger. But bless me, what's this!" she interrupted herself with a little gasp.

"This" was a large gray touring car drawn up at one side of the road just ahead of them. The chauffeur was bending over the front wheel and a lady, simply clad in white linen, was walking nervously up and down the dusty road.

"Letty, I believe—it surely is—Miss Terlowe!" exclaimed Violet in a breathless whisper, "and her automobile is in trouble. Shall we stop?"

"Stop? Well, I should just say so, Violet-Mary. We can't stop quick enough," ejaculated Letty. And as if in contradiction to her words, she urged Punch and Judy into a faster pace, much to their indignant surprise and Violet's distress, for she was holding the reins again.

The speed lasted for but a moment, and at Letty's direction, Violet stopped the ponies at the opposite side of the road at the point where the motor car was standing, and both girls jumped out and ran across. Miss Terlowe

had seen their approach and paused expectantly.

"Oh, Miss Terlowe," exclaimed Letty diffidently, "are you in trouble? Can we help you?"

The great actress glanced from the two eager faces before her to the low, wide pony carriage they had abandoned with such complete confidence in their ponies.

"Yes, I am in trouble," she answered in the low, expressive voice that had moved thousands to laughter and tears. "The front spring of my car is broken. The man is trying to brace it up enough to crawl back to a garage, but it is slow business."

"And it is long past luncheon time, I'm afraid. We're late, too. Won't you let us drive you back to Sea Side?"

"Is there room?" asked the actress, looking amused and relieved.

"Plenty. One of us can sit in the rumble. We'd be so delighted to have you."

"But the ponies. Are they strong enough to bear such an addition to their load?"

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Violet eagerly. "They often carry three—often!"



“CAN WE HELP YOU?”



“And if I thought they could not, I’d be only too glad to walk back,” added Letty fervently; and then fell suddenly silent under the amused side-glance the great lady gave her.

Miss Terlowe had not meant to laugh at Letty, of course. She was only honestly amused by the ardor of the girl’s so evident hero-worship. But Letty caught the glance and it hurt her. Naturally very sensible, she was quick to feel the slightest degree of disapproval or reproach and she fancied that Miss Terlowe thought her gushing and silly.

This uncomfortable fear, coupled with the effect of the sad scene she had just witnessed, served to silence Letty’s usually ready tongue. She indicated with a gesture that Violet was to drive and clambered into the tiny rumble, unable to enjoy the triumph which she knew their entry into the village would bring.

Violet, on the other hand, had been carried out of herself by the recent experience and related their adventure to their new companion with a sweet, naive earnestness that was very charming.

Letty listened, and responded in mon-

osyllables whenever Violet appealed to her. She was too afraid of saying too much, of exhibiting again for Miss Terlowe's entertainment any possible over-enthusiasm, to speak at any length upon the subject, and therefore unfortunately gave the impression that she was a little indifferent if not unfeeling at the sight of suffering.

When they stopped in front of the Inn at last, and Miss Terlowe alighted, it was toward Violet that she inclined. She shook hands with both girls and thanked them prettily for their thoughtful attention, but it was Violet's hand that she held longest and Violet who received her parting smile and friendly wave as she mounted the hotel steps.

Letty turned away quickly to hide two great, hot tears that suddenly and unexpectedly sprang to her eyes. Could it be possible that she was jealous of Violet? She bit her lip and tried to look her heart straight in the face, if one may be allowed such a figure of speech, and why not, pray? As we are told to face our troubles, and most of them come from the heart!—and to shame all ugly feelings out of it.



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Violet fairly tumbled into the pony carriage, full of thrills and excitement.

“Oh, Letty, but hasn't it been an eventful morning!” she exclaimed, “and what a lot we shall have to tell mother! Get up, Punch and Judy.”

“I only hope she isn't worried to death about us; it's most awfully late,” added Letty soberly.

## CHAPTER V

### MR. DRAKE AND THE PAPERS AGAIN

“MY dear gurlies, do you realize that it is nearly two o'clock!” were Mrs. Hartwell-Jones’s first words as she hurried down to the gate to meet them. “I see by both your faces that you have a great deal to tell, but here is Eddie for the ponies; he’s been waiting over half an hour, poor boy, so jump out and run into the house; then we’ll hear all about it. Here, Eddie, is ten cents to cheer you up for your long wait. Ask the man at the stable to give Punch and Judy a good rubbing down, please.”

“Oh, Aunt Mary, whom do you think we picked up in the road and brought home?” cried Letty, unable to curb her excitement even until they reached the house. “Miss Terlowe, of all people in the world!”

“And, mother, that woman was actually and seriously starving,” added Violet in equal excitement.

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Mrs. Hartwell-Jones looked genuinely bewildered.

“Miss Terlowe starving!” she ejaculated. “I don’t understand. I can’t believe ——”

“Oh, no, no, no!” cried both the girls at once, laughing heartily at her very natural mistake; and each began an eager, voluble explanation.

“My dear children!” remonstrated Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, putting her fingers to her ears to shut out the babel of tongues. “One at a time, I beg of you. Letty says you picked up Miss Terlowe in the road and brought her home in the pony carriage, and Violet adds that she was in a starving condition ——”

“Oh, but mother, I didn’t mean Miss Terlowe, of course. That was just—just by the way. We ——”

“Well, if Miss Terlowe is not starving, let us go in to lunch, for I am, or nearly so.”

Violet shuddered and grew so pale that her mother put her arm around her. “My dear little daughter, you are overtired! Come to the table at once. A cup of hot soup ——”

But at these words Violet, who was both

overtired and overwrought, cried out so distressedly that Letty hastened to explain the sad episode of the morning.

“Oh, my poor, dear children, I certainly never should have sent you if I had realized that the poor woman's case had reached such an extremity as that! I shall return there at once, this very afternoon. But you both must sit down now and eat your own luncheon. Come, Violet dear, don't be morbidly unhappy. On the contrary, be thankful for your own blessings and appreciate them.”

“Mother, I feel as if I could never touch soup again,” declared Violet, almost in tears, as she permitted herself to be led reluctantly to the table.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones almost smiled as she kissed her daughter's sad face, but she controlled her features and answered gravely:

“I don't wonder you feel upset and distressed, daughter mine, but you ought not to be set against something that has done so much good—which has almost saved a life under your own supervision. That others in the world should be in want is a sad state of affairs, but it does not necessarily follow that

we, too, should go in want out of sheer sympathy. It would be only foolish to weaken our own powers when by keeping strong and well ourselves we may be enabled to help and minister to the unfortunate ones."

"But it's the too-muchness of everything that worries me," sighed Violet, yet yielding even as she spoke to the demands of her healthy young appetite. "As Letty said coming home, it's so terrible to realize how many people overeat when others haven't enough. Why aren't things evened up more, mother?"

"Older heads and hearts than yours have asked that question many a time, my child. I suppose the best answer is that this earth is not heaven and human nature is—well, frail human nature. We can only do our best, children."

"Violet-Mary, suppose we form a 'No-Over-Eating Society,'" suggested Letty. "It will be lots of fun. Now and then a treat is necessary, of course, for the sake of keeping our tempers sweet, if for nothing else; but we do spend a lot of money on stuff, don't we? Ice-cream soda, chocolates, cakes, sticky popcorn—gracious, I didn't realize how many

good things to buy there are. Instead of buying a plate of ice-cream or box of candy whenever we think of it, let's pop ten cents in the missionary box."

"All right. I agree, if you'll get Molly to join. I couldn't go and sit with her day after day, and watch her eating maple-nut sundaes without ever touching one myself."

"Even if it does seem wicked to eat soup when others are starving?" suggested Mrs. Hartwell-Jones teasingly, and they all laughed.

"Oh, of course you can get it now and then," agreed Letty. "I said we must have a treat sometimes. We are entitled to it occasionally, to make up—like when Bridget has junket for dessert," she added pointedly, making a wry face as Katy carried in a dainty, cut-glass bowl and set it before Mrs. Hartwell-Jones.

"But it's flavored with chocolate, Letty mine, and there's your favorite cake to eat with it. Besides, it's so wholesome."

"Of course it is," acquiesced Letty promptly, "and so let's send it to the Smith family! Think how their little eyes will pop out of their

heads with joy, Aunt Mary, over such a treat. No, I won't have any, thank you. I've joined the 'N. O. E.' society, you know. Yes, Katy, please, a good wide slice of cake."

"A nice way of escaping rules," scoffed Violet. "You know mother makes us eat whatever dessert is prepared. No junket, no cake, Letty-smarty." And as it was offered her, Violet calmly removed the whole cake from the tray, to Katy's supreme astonishment.

"You cheeky thing!" retorted Letty, reaching for the cake, which Violet defended gallantly, while Katy hovered nervously in the background. "Cake is part of the dessert prepared, as much as the junket, and because I decline to be greedy and take everything, why must I be denied half? Hand it over, miss. Ha, ha! You didn't know my arms were so long, did you?"

"Ow, mind that glass of water," cautioned Violet. "Look out, you'll have the cake on the floor. Oh, I say!"

When the short, good-natured scuffle was over and order restored, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones said, rather glad to change the subject for a

few moments from the sad experience of the morning :

“ What was it you started to tell me about Miss Terlowe, Letty ? Something about picking her up in the road.”

The girls related their meeting with the actress and its sequel.

“ And, after all, we're no better off than we were before,” concluded Letty dolefully. “ Unless she sends for Violet. She surely did take a shine to Violet-Mary.” And as if to atone for her moment of secret jealousy, Letty described, in rather exaggerated terms, the actress's attentions to Violet during the short drive home.

“ But I didn't hear any invitation to call following her thank-yous and so-gratefuls, did you, Violet-Mary ?” Letty ended with a sigh. “ If ever I'm grown up and celebrated, I intend to kiss every little girl I meet on the street, and have a whole army of schoolgirl protégées.”

“ And you say that Violet was driving !” ejaculated Mrs. Hartwell-Jones in dismay. “ Dear me, how many shocks am I called upon to bear in a day ?”



“But she did it so beautifully, Aunt Mary, and I’m sure you’re glad that she has learned, aren’t you?”

“It’s great fun, mother, and I do like it tremendously. May I go on driving them? That is, taking turns with Letty, of course. But there comes Madame Henri,” she added, glancing out of the window.

“Just in time for a plate of nice, wholesome, home-made junket. Aunt Mary, do you suppose Madame Henri is really comfortable at the Prestons’? I do so wish she would come and stay with us, as she promised.”

“She did not actually promise to stay with us, Letty dear, only to go wherever we went. She feels that she can be more independent, I fancy, by this arrangement, and besides, she has her own reasons for going to board with the Prestons, you know. Ask her for that reason some time, girls, and you will hear a little story and learn another way of doing charity-work without labeling it as such.”

Madame Henri had come, as she came every afternoon, to hear Letty practice. It really amounted to a lesson, but as Madame Henri refused to allow it to be called by that name,

and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones dared not offer any remuneration for this giving of time, the daily half-hour was always referred to as Letty's practicing.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones sent an order to the village livery stable for a carriage to drive her to Bear Creek, as a second journey that day would be too much for Punch and Judy, and wished to invite Mrs. Emlin to join her.

"Generally I rejoice in the temporary freedom from the tyranny of a telephone," she said, "but sometimes I realize that it is a convenience after all."

"I'll take a note to Mrs. Emlin," volunteered Violet eagerly. Mrs. Emlin, it must be remembered, was Molly Wilson's aunt, and Violet had not seen her friend that day. "And I'll wait for an answer."

Molly arrived, however, before the note was finished and she and Violet departed with it together, leaving Letty to her trills and scales.

"I know Aunt Isabel will be glad to go, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones," said Molly as she took the note. "She misses the motor awfully

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and we won't get it back until next week. Come on, Violet, and on the way back I'll go treat for a sundae."

Violet saw her mother's eyes twinkle at this speech, and she answered positively :

"No, thanks; and you mustn't have one either, Molly. We mustn't have any more sodas until Letty ——"

"Oh, of course Letty shall have one too," interrupted Molly. "She'll be through her practicing by then and if not, we'll wait for her. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, will you tell Letty to meet us at Northup's as soon as she can come? Tell her we'll wait for her."

"But I didn't mean that," remonstrated Violet. "I hadn't finished my sentence. Until Letty can explain, I was going to say. It's a new scheme—a society we want to form, Letty and you and I. Come on; I'll tell you about it as we go. It was Letty's idea and I was going to let her tell, but it's too good to keep."

"And by the way, mother, I'll stop in at the Bazaar as we go by and get a toy bank or something to use as a fine box for the

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'N. O. E. S.' to keep the funds in." And laughing at Molly's puzzled face, Violet put on her hat, kissed her mother good-bye and ran out.

"Here are some letters, mother," she said, running in again a moment later. "We met the boy from the post-office at the gate. I'm very glad you've got letters to keep you company."

"Thank you, dear, but don't forget that the note you are taking to Mrs. Emlin requires an answer."

"Oh, so it does. Well, we'll come straight back, so tell Letty to be sure to wait for us here."

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones watched the two girls depart, arms clasped about each other's waists in true girl fashion, and then returned to her letters with a thankful heart that Violet was growing so strong and well, and was fast losing the painful shyness from which she had suffered.

A vague familiarity of the handwriting on one of the envelopes caught her eye as she turned the letters over idly, and taking it up, she realized that the letter, although addressed

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to herself, was in the same handwriting and bore the same postmark as the one Letty had received just before Meta Lowell's visit. She fingered the letter nervously.

"It's from that Mrs. Drake again, and to me," she thought a little anxiously. "Can it be that the poor woman's husband has died and she wants me to break the sad news to Letty?"

She opened the letter hurriedly and found some difficulty in deciphering the contents, badly written and worse spelled.

"Esteemed Madam," it began, quite correctly written and very evidently copied from a "correct letter writer." The manual of instructions, however, apparently afforded very little further help, for the rest of the letter was wretchedly misspelled and constructed. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones spent some time in mastering its contents.

"Letty certainly was more clever in her rendering into English than we gave her credit for, if Mrs. Drake's other letter was like this one," thought Mrs. Hartwell-Jones a little impatiently.

The gist of the letter was that the papers

which Mr. Drake was holding in charge for Letty were of more importance than Letty herself had considered them; that Mr. Drake was still unwilling to part with them, except to put them into Letty's own hands, and that he himself would explain the circumstances and reasons why they had been withheld so long as soon as he could see Letty.

Violet's and Molly's voices were heard returning before Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had fully mastered the subject, and she felt too excited and puzzled to be willing to discuss the matter, so she put the letter hurriedly out of sight, resolved to say nothing about it until some action in the business could be decided upon and taken. She was abashed to discover how excitedly her heart was beating, and how her brain buzzed with curiosity and speculation.

“What if my little Letty should turn out to be an heiress!” she reflected. “How it could come about I cannot imagine, but those papers must contain something really important, and Mr. Drake knows it, or he would not be so anxious about Letty's claiming them.”

“We surely must get hold of them in some way, and soon.

“Only supposing Letty should come into a fortune! I wonder how she would spend it? It is easy enough to guess how a great deal of it would be used,” she added, her face softening as she remembered Letty’s errand of mercy in the morning, and her eager desire to help all who were in need and sorrow. “Bless her tender heart, she deserves a fortune, for it would surely be well used in her hands.”

Violet and Molly were chattering on the veranda outside, lowering their voices so as not to interrupt the singing lesson. Above their girlish laughter, above the soft sighing of the surf, and the sleepy twitter of birds, Letty’s voice rose, full and clear and a-throb with that elusive quality we call charm.

“Well, if Mr. Drake’s mysterious bit of paper does not turn out to bring my child a fortune, she will quickly win one, and hearts by the thousand to boot, with the pouring out of that wonderful treasure,” murmured Mrs. Hartwell-Jones with tears in her eyes as she listened.

“Aunt Isabel says she will love to go with you, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones,” said Molly from the doorway, “and I think the carriage is just driving up now.”



## CHAPTER VI

### A SMALL STORY AND ITS MEANING

IN the meantime Letty and Madame Henri were closeted in the little living-room, for the time being lost to everything but their music.

After Letty's illness in the spring, and her removal to the cottage at Lakewood to recuperate, Madame Henri had come, too, for a visit. Summer plans were then discussed and Madame Henri had accepted an invitation to go with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones to the seashore, and it was her expectation, at that time, to become Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's guest for a part of the summer at any rate. But later Madame Henri had received news of a former protégée of hers, in need of assistance, and she modified her plans in order to give that assistance in a form that could not offend nor be refused.

"This young Mrs. Preston and her husband," she wrote to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, "are living at Sea Side village, and if I go to board

with them, I know that the price I should pay them each week would be a very great help to them just at present. I am sure you will understand why I do this, *chère Madame*, instead of accepting your so generous hospitality. We shall all be very near together, and if you will allow me, I shall come to Letty every day and sit with her while she practices."

And so the arrangement had stood. Madame's room in the cottage of the young huckster and his wife was small, and overlooked a side road away from the sea and the breeze, but she declared herself very comfortable with her own books and personal belongings about her, and never expressed by word or look any regret at her choice of summer quarters. But Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and the girls often speculated upon what reason she could have for submitting to such inconvenience.

"Ma *chère*," said Madame Henri at length, after she had bidden Letty repeat an exercise for the third time, "you do not sing so well as usual this afternoon. What is it, *chérie*? Has anything happened to take your mind off your work?"

“ Oh, Madame, we had such a sad experience this morning, Violet-Mary and I! We took some food and things to a poor family down at Bear Creek, and found them literally starving! Doesn't it seem cruel, Madame, that some people should have a thousand times as much money as they can possibly spend, while so many others are just dying for the lack of a few dollars!”

“ Ah, Letty, there is so much in the world that we do not understand—that we cannot understand; but that we must accept with faith. Our duty, chère enfant, is to do what we can to relieve suffering, wherever and however we find it. For example, take the case of young Mrs. Preston ——”

“ Ah!” exclaimed Letty eagerly. “ I knew there was a story there,” and she was about to rise from the piano stool when Madame checked her with a raised finger.

“ No, no, child, our work at the singing is not over. You have only the ten minutes more, so do your best, and then I shall tell you the little story. I think it a very helpful little story.”

So Letty, with a promise of reward, sang

her sweetest and Madame listened with twinkling eyes.

“My commonplace little story is bringing me a good price,” she observed. “It will make a very small reward, chère Letty, but it is always so. It is the spirit of reward, not the—the poor little concrete thing itself, that helps one to do one’s best. I have seen it so, often. I have seen a child work, work, work, with the earnestness and industry of an artist, over a task, and all for the sake of a promised sweetmeat so tiny perhaps as to make but a mouthful. Well, dear child, you certainly have earned your reward to-day. As I was about to say, this Mrs. ——”

“Oh, may Molly and Violet-Mary hear it too? I hear them outside,” interrupted Letty. “Let us all sit out on the veranda, where it is cool and shady and we can watch the sea. Wouldn’t you like to?”

“That will be a charming arrangement, ma fille. Shall we go?”

“Girls,” called Letty, opening the door and then stepping back to allow Madame to go out first, “girls, Madame is going to tell us a story; come on. She is going to tell us at last

why she chose to go away back to the Prestons' stuffy little cottage instead of coming to us for the summer."

Madame laughed as she took the chair Molly had pushed forward for her.

"It is nothing," she said. "Quite nothing. So little, in fact, that it never occurred to me to tell you of it before. But Letty is so moved by the sad scene she saw this morning that I thought her sympathy was awakened and she would care to hear. Under ordinary circumstances I would not have thought to tell, lest it sadden your young hearts. I have no wish to—how do you say *ennuyer* in English—any one."

"Oh, but we won't be bored. Please tell us, Madame; let us hear it. To tell the truth, we've all been dying of curiosity to hear the story."

"There is nothing romantic, my dears, nor great, nor even tragic. It is just a commonplace story, but as sad and hard to bear—harder, perhaps, in a way, for there is something in a great grief or sudden calamity which lifts one up to a higher plane of patience and endurance; whereas it is the poor,

trifling, every-day burdens that fret and harass the soul.

“ Well, then, this Mrs. Preston I knew as a girl. She was a very fine girl, cheerful and patient. She sold music in the shop where I bought my songs, and supported her mother and herself; not an exciting life, but the salary was reasonably good. They were really very comfortable, those two, in their way, in a little, three-roomed, housekeeping flat. Kate—that is Mrs. Preston’s name—became affianced at length to a carpenter, very skilled at his trade and with promise of rising to the grade of—ah—ah—yes, of builder and contractor. But they could not marry, because she had her mother and it was not advisable to make a three-cornered household, so to speak.

“ So Kate waited patiently and cheerfully, taking good care not to let her mother guess what were their reasons for putting off the marriage, lest the good old lady feel sad and *de trop*. But she died, at length, the good old lady, and Kate did all sorts of extra work, after hours, to pay off the debt of her long illness.

“ Then she and the carpenter were married

and were, ah, most happy! And beginning to be quite prosperous as well, when, alas, he met with an accident! A—ah, how do you say it in English? Ah, but I remember—a scaffold upon which he was standing broke, and gave him a bad fall. His leg was injured, and after weeks of pain and illness, the doctor told him he could not work at his trade again and that he would be lame in the leg for always. *Figurez-vous!* It was his trade, his one way of earning a livelihood, which the doctor's words took from him. They were almost in despair, but Kate, brave little woman, did not lose heart. She felt sure there was a way out. She inspired her husband and instead of losing faith and hope they hunted for the way out; and they have found it."

"What did they do?" chorused the girls, much impressed.

"He sells flowers and vegetables, my dears. They rent this tiny cottage and have a garden, and he sells vegetables and flowers to the summer people. It is surprising how well it pays, and it is such happy, healthful work tending the garden; and a work in which they can both take part.

“In the winters he carves in wood. He sells all sorts of nice little window boxes and *tout cela*. Naturally they are not, as dear Letty says, rolling in dollars, but they have enough—or almost enough. It takes so little to make enough with some people. But the point of my story, *mes enfants*, is that they have fought the fight and won. They faced a loss that seemed to be their very life, but they did not lose courage and repine; they kept their faith and won. That is what makes life great, *mesdemoiselles*.

“But ah, forgive me! Here I am, preaching on a golden summer day, and telling a sad story when you already have had too much sight of sorrow for one time.”

“But it isn't a sad story, Madame; it is wonderful,” exclaimed Molly. “I should like to meet Mr. and Mrs. Preston some time. I think they are splendid.”

“And to think that we all of us get blue and cross if our foolish insignificant plans for a good time go wrong,” exclaimed Letty thoughtfully. “How petty and useless it makes me feel.”

“But you must not feel so. It grieves me,



and I shall regret that I told my little story. Let us play a little game, shall we not, to get ourselves cheerful again?"

"Yes, but may I ask one more question? Is that why you went to board with the Prestons, Madame? I mean, so that you could help them by paying a certain amount of board?"

"Yes, my dear, and I hope it helps. Now, shall we have a little charade? I shall be glad to help."

"Let's play 'Why, When and Where,'" proposed Molly. "It will be such fun puzzling Madame with the contrary meanings of our English words."

And so they played very merrily until Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Mrs. Emlin returned from their errand of mercy.

But after their guests had gone, Letty followed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones up-stairs to her own room.

"Aunt Mary," she said gravely, "may I have a serious talk with you?"

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones turned from her desk with a startled air. To tell the truth, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had certain private worries

that summer which were beginning to tell on her nerves.

"A serious talk, Letty mine? About what?" she asked anxiously.

"About my future," replied Letty seriously. "I feel as if I'd been—well, a sort of butterfly these past two or three years, Aunt Mary. I am always flitting about from one nice thing to another, but I don't seem to get anywhere. Every one talks about my voice until I'm afraid, between you and me, Aunt Mary, that I'm getting a bit conceited. After all, have I really such a very wonderful voice?"

"Oh, Letty, dear, don't lose faith in yourself!"

"No, I haven't lost faith in myself," replied Letty a little bitterly. "I think that is about the last faith one loses in this world. It is faith in something higher and nobler that I want to get, Aunt Mary, than just my own foolish self."

"Who has been talking to you?" asked Mrs. Hartwell-Jones quickly, with a sudden qualm of jealousy that some one else should have been the one to rouse such high sentiments in her daughter's heart. "Tell me about it."

And Letty did, perched on a stool at her mother's feet, in her favorite attitude. She told of the sensations her visit to the Smith family in the morning had given her, and her first view of real privation; and then Madame Henri's commonplace but infinitely touching anecdote of the couple who had lost all that made life possible and yet who had had the faith and courage to begin over again, and succeed.

"I feel that I want to do things, Aunt Mary; not just sit around and talk about what I am going to do some time. Funny Mr. Goldberg, Madame Henri—every one, says I have a treasure in my voice. Well, Aunt Mary, I want to begin to dig for that treasure."

"Good for you, Letty mine! That is the right spirit."

Letty turned and looked up at her mother, a little shamefacedly.

"I'm afraid," she confessed, "that I've been going a little on the high and mighty idea that I was a sort of full-fledged genius, all ready to perform when the proper time came—a sort of bottle of champagne, so to

speak, all ready to bubble and sparkle out when the cork was pulled.

“But I’ve got a lot of hard work ahead of me, Aunt Mary—more than I guess just now, I’m afraid,” she added mournfully, “and I do want to begin.”

“I understand your feelings perfectly, daughter dear. It is the new strength and energy that you are generating after your long illness that makes you feel so eager and ready for work. And don’t get impatient and fancy that time is being lost. You have not been ready to start until now, and you must feel no self-reproach on that score for your dreams of what is to be. And you must remember that your illness was both long and severe, and you must surely get thoroughly well over it before you try your new strength too far.

“But Letty, dear, I am glad you have the right idea about your work. I am sure no one exaggerates who calls your voice a treasure, provided it is properly brought out. But no treasure is found on the surface. It is all buried deep, and hidden in hard, crude ore that requires deep, patient digging, and even when it is brought to the surface, the ore

must be tested and burned with fire before it is ready for the world. Consider all that well, Letty mine, and don't get discouraged."

Letty smiled understandingly and a short silence fell between them. Then Mrs. Hartwell-Jones asked softly :

"Is it Madame Henri who has put these new thoughts into your head?"

"No, Aunt Mary, it was Miss Terlowe. Yes, an honest confession is good for the soul, you know, especially if it's the confession of a fall of pride.

"On the night of our entertainment I was made to realize all of a sudden, in the midst of the concert, that Miss Terlowe, a perfectly unprejudiced but awfully good judge, had been entirely unimpressed by my voice. She merely considered me to be a little girl who sang very well. Those were the very words she used to the manager, and she cared so little that she didn't even wait for his answer.

"You see, before this, I've always had the opinion of very dear friends—even Madame Henri's heart, gets ahead of her head, you must admit. But Miss Terlowe was a complete outsider and she—she saw only the ore."

Letty laughed a little shakily as she rose, for her vanity had been pretty hard hit.

“My precious sweet, don't take it so to heart. Miss Terlowe isn't well; she was probably very tired, and I don't believe even Caruso's voice would have made her 'sit up and take notice,' as you girls say ——” Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was beginning, but Letty shook her head.

“Never mind, dear Aunt Mary. I don't —very much. And I'm going to get acquainted with Miss Terlowe, somehow, some time, and make her feel interested in—well, in mines. I am so glad you found that poor Mrs. Smith better.”

## CHAPTER VII

### AN OLD FRIEND GOES AWAY

“ АНОУ, little Miss Grey! Come along to Northup’s and have a sundae with me,” called Mr. Jack Beckwith, overtaking Letty on her way home from the beach.

Letty was roused out of a brown study and looked bewildered for a moment. Then she laughed and said gayly :

“ I wish you belonged to our ‘ N. O. E. ’ society, Mr. Jack. Then I could charge you a fine of at least twenty cents for that invitation.”

“ Who ever heard of being fined for giving an invitation? And what in the world is the ‘ N. O. E. ’ society? In what sort of mysteries have you been indulging during my absence in town? ”

“ It certainly didn’t sound very gracious the way I put it,” answered Letty apologetically, “ and I think you deserve an explanation, although one of our rules is not to tell

what the society is for unless the questioner expresses a willingness beforehand to join."

"A sort of price for curiosity, eh? Well, I admit that my curiosity is only too willing to pay almost any price. I'll join with eagerness. It must be a unique society, because one is invited to join most clubs only after a careful private investigation into one's character has been made and passed upon. But let me repeat my invitation, even if it should cost me another twenty cents. We can talk so much more cozily over an ice-cream soda."

"Well, I think I will accept, thank you," replied Letty consideringly. "For I am just awfully hungry, and perhaps if I take a sundae now it will keep me from overeating at lunch."

"Overeating," repeated Mr. Beckwith significantly. "Don't let my brain act for a few minutes, Letty, or I shall guess your secret. Here we are at Northup's and my favorite table vacant. Aren't we lucky?"

"The 'N. O. E. S.,'" Letty began, poking reflectively into the depths of her peach sundae, "stands, as you have already guessed, for the 'No-Over-Eating Society.' And it was formed by Violet, Molly Wilson and my-



self as charter members after Violet and I had visited that poor Smith family down at Bear Creek. I had never seen any one starving before, Mr. Jack," she added with a little break in her voice, "and the very thought of those poor, weak children spoils all this sort of thing for me." She laid down her spoon with a sigh as she spoke.

"We want so much to help them," she continued, "and we girls have agreed to put money into a little fund we are raising, instead of spending so much on trash. But Aunt Mary and Mrs. Emlin say we must be careful not to pauperize Mrs. Smith and that she must go back to work just as soon as she is strong enough.

"But it seems a long road from the brink of starvation back to washing clothes for a living, and we've been thinking, we girls—— Do you mind if I talk to you about it?" she asked shyly. It seemed to her all at once that Mr. Jack was only half listening. "I don't want to bore you."

"Nonsense! I am all interest. I'm just a bit bothered by a little business of my own that will keep poking its disagreeable head

into all my other affairs, like a toothache at a dinner party. Your story will help me to put my mind on something else for a while."

"It is really Violet-Mary who has solved the difficulty," went on Letty, returning to her neglected sweet and too absorbed in her subject to take in what Mr. Jack had said about his own affairs. "That is, if we can only succeed in carrying out her idea.

"As I told you—or didn't I?—Mrs. Smith has been earning her living by taking in washing for the summer boarders, and Violet-Mary thought it would be so much happier and easier a life for her to have a garden instead, and raise vegetables and flowers to sell. The Prestons, where Madame Henri boards, you know, do that, and make quite a comfortable living out of it.

"As Violet-Mary says, working in a garden is so much more healthy and pleasant than bending over a tub full of hot suds and soiled clothes. Doctors actually order it for sick people, you know, whether they have to work for a living or not. The trouble is, that so many things are needed to get her started."

"I should think that ground for the garden

would be the first and most serious consideration."

" Luckily it is not, because that dreary old house Mrs. Smith lives in has a great, deep yard behind it which needs only to be turned over and properly fertilized. That is what we are so anxious to raise money for—to hire some one to plough the garden this fall and get it into shape, ready for next spring's planting.

" And when you called out to me just now I was trying to cudgel my brains for a novel sort of entertainment. You see, it would be pretty rough on the people down here to give another concert right on top of our other one, and expect them to buy tickets—not to mention listening to it afterward. And the only thing I could think of is impossible, I'm afraid."

" What is it? Anything that I can help make possible? "

" I'm afraid not, although you can do almost anything," she answered gratefully. " I was just wishing that Miss Terlowe would give a recital! Why, we'd make a perfect mint of money! "

Mr. Jack Beckwith shook his head.

"I would not suggest it to her," he said positively. "I happen to know Miss Terlowe, and know that she is not in good health this summer. She is anxious to live in as quiet and secluded a manner as possible to add to her strength for her next winter's work. Remember, little Miss Grey, that that is what greatness means; work, work, work."

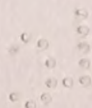
Letty nodded briskly and looked across the narrow table at him with her newly awakened resolution in her eyes.

"I know that, Mr. Jack, and I mean to start my work this fall. Aunt Mary has said I might. I don't know about the greatness, but I am sure of the work, work, work."

"Good for you, little Miss Grey. That's the right spirit. Have another peach sundae?"

"Oh, no, indeed, thank you. And twenty cents, please, because now you are a member of the 'N. O. E. S.' and must pay up."

"That makes forty cents, doesn't it, counting the first fine? Here's half a dollar. I dare say I'll forfeit the other dime too soon to make it worth while to take change."



“Oh, thank you so much! The girls will be tickled to death to have such a generous member in the club. We’ll watch you closely for the rest of the summer, I warn you.”

She was too busy with her own thoughts to notice the grave look that settled over her companion’s face at these words.

“To think that you actually know Miss Terlowe,” she was saying with a swift change of subject. “Tell me all about her, won’t you?”

“Would you like to know her?”

“Oh, wouldn’t I just!” exclaimed Letty rapturously. “I’d like it above—above almost everything!”

“I wish I had known sooner. I am sure I could have managed it.”

“You mean she is going away?”

“No, Letty dear, but I am.”

His voice was so full of regret that Letty looked up, startled.

“You are going away? But not far! Nor for long, I hope?”

“I have to go out to the Pacific coast, and shall probably be gone for several months. That end of our business needs personal

supervision and reorganization, and it is up to me to go."

"Oh, dearie me, it doesn't seem possible," exclaimed Letty in genuine dismay. "I just can't picture the 'Rubber Band' or Sea Side at all, for that matter, without you bobbing up serenely every Saturday afternoon. And when we go back to town—why, you won't be there either. Oh, dear!"

Letty looked ready to cry, but remembering that they were in a public place, tried bravely to smile.

"Well, after all, time does go by awfully fast, doesn't it, Mr. Jack? And a few months isn't forever. You'll be back almost before we know it," she said with forced cheerfulness. "And it will be very interesting for you to see all those Western places. Mrs. Goldberg was out there once, you know, and she does tell such funny tales about her experiences. You must keep a long journal and describe every new place you see."

"I surely will; if you will promise to read it, and long letters to boot which you must answer with all the home news. And now, may I walk home with you to tell Mrs.

Hartwell-Jones? Perhaps she will invite me to lunch."

"I am sure she will. I was hoping you would come along up and give her the chance."

"As to Miss Terlowe," said Mr. Jack as they walked the short length of village street to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's cottage, "I am sorry I can't arrange a meeting between you, but I'll tell you what I can do. I'll give you a note of introduction to her and you can call on her some day and present it. How would you like that?"

Letty considered a moment.

"Thank you very much," she said finally, "but I think I won't. If I did that, don't you see, she would put me down just as a troublesome, romantic schoolgirl nagging a celebrity. I think I'll wait and get to know her in some other way, if you don't mind."

"When she hears you sing, she will ask to be introduced to you."

"Ah, but she won't," Letty answered with a little catch in her voice, for she was sensitive and that unintentional slight still rankled. "You forget that she attended the concert—

and left before it was half over! I heard her ask the manager who the little girl was with the pleasant voice!" she added ruefully, "and she did not care enough even to wait for his answer.

"Then," she continued, "when Violet and I brought her home, the day her motor broke down on the road to Bear Creek, there was no electric current such as is supposed to draw together kindred spirits. She had no sensation or premonition that she was talking to future greatness. Indeed, she hardly spoke to me at all, but infinitely preferred Violet-Mary's conversation.

"No, please don't say anything about it. It was good for me, Mr. Jack. I needed it. Really, you all spoil me too much, and a little wholesome snubbing is waking me up. I guess I'll get a lot more of it before I'm through," she ended philosophically, "and I'd better learn to get used to it."

And Mr. Jack, knowing the cold indifference of the workaday world, felt the truth of her words too keenly to try to deny them.

They found Mrs. Hartwell-Jones alone, as Violet was taking lunch with Molly Wilson,



and only too glad to welcome so popular a guest as Mr. Jack Beckwith. He thought she was not looking very well, and after luncheon, while Letty and Madame Henri were occupied with their music, he sought a confidential talk.

“Are you feeling quite fit, dear lady?” he asked her, when they had established themselves in the cozy little writing room to which Mrs. Hartwell-Jones admitted only her intimates. “You know you used up an awful lot of vitality over Letty’s illness in the spring. I’m rather inclined to think that she has come out of it more victoriously than you.”

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones smiled brightly and sat more erect in her chair, very much as if she were giving herself a little mental shake.

“Oh, I am all right,” she assured him. “Just a trifle worried over business. Mr. Shoemaker writes that some of my investments are not behaving quite as they should—or as they were expected to.”

“Is there anything that I can look after for you?”

“Oh, no, thanks. I think not. Mr. Shoemaker is doing everything possible. I am

quite sure it will all turn out right in the end, but I am so ignorant about business that I imagine all sorts of catastrophes that I know you or any man I told them to would only laugh at and say could not possibly happen.

“But speaking of business, I am interested in some on Letty’s account,” and she related briefly the story of Letty’s letter from Mrs. Drake, followed by the one to herself, which latter she handed to Mr. Jack to read.

He read the letter through and tried hard to be interested in and impressed by Mrs. Hartwell-Jones’s theories and speculations as to the real nature of the papers about which Mr. Drake was so foolishly concerned, but he was much more inclined to take Letty’s view of the situation, that they consisted solely of old letters. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones’s reference to her business anxieties, however, and her quick turning of the subject, worried him.

“I wonder if this man Shoemaker is all right and thoroughly to be depended upon?” he considered. “Mrs. Hartwell-Jones evidently reposes absolute confidence in him and his methods; and he has all of her affairs

completely under his control. I'll try to get time enough to look up his record when I go back to town. I wish I had had an inkling of this earlier in the summer."

Aloud he said, in answer to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's account of Mrs. Emlin's prospective motor trip :

"I should go, by all means. If this man Drake has got the idea fixed firmly in his head that he won't give up those papers except into Letty's own hands, why, I'm sure he will keep his resolve ; for that ignorant, obstinate kind of people never listens to reason, you know. And it will make an awfully jolly trip. How I wish I could go with you all !"

"How I wish you could. Partings are very melancholy affairs, even when they are only for a short time."

Mr. Jack rose regretfully to take his leave.

"You're right there, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. But then, I needn't say good-bye just yet. We've all of the rest of to-day and the whole of to-morrow. And as Letty says, time flies so fast that I'll be back before you know I'm gone. Why, sister Ellen is working on her

Christmas presents. Doesn't that make the time seem short until the holidays?"

"Must you be gone so long as that?"

"I may be able to return by Thanksgiving, and that is really a very short time."

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones sighed involuntarily as she shook hands. Mr. Jack was convinced that she was more worried than she had acknowledged.

"Such a great deal can happen in a short time, can't it?" she said gravely.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LOST RING

“WHAT do you suppose all that crowd is looking at over there?” observed Molly Wilson to Violet one morning about ten days later, as the two girls, inseparable as ever, came down the path to the bathing beach, arm in arm.

“I hope nothing has happened,” exclaimed Violet apprehensively. “I do hope nobody has been hurt.”

Molly studied the crowd and then gave a reassuring laugh.

“No, they’re just reading a notice on the bulletin-board. Come on, let’s see what it is,” and Molly dropped Violet’s arm to run ahead, her curiosity roused.

She wormed her way through the crowd, calling to Violet to follow, and was soon close enough to see what had caused the general curiosity. Tacked to the bulletin-board, be-

low the notice telling the temperature of the water and air, was a half sheet of note paper on which was written, in a clear, rather small handwriting, the words :

*LOST*

*A valuable ring, presumably while in bathing.  
Aqua marine, with diamond setting. Reward if  
found and returned to Miss Terlowe, the Inn.*

The girls read the notice and then looked at each other with ready sympathy.

“What hard luck,” exclaimed Molly. “I certainly do hate to lose anything, and I don’t believe she’ll ever get it back.”

“Whatever in the world possessed her to wear it in bathing?” commented Violet. “She should have known better. I remember the ring perfectly. She had it on the day Letty and I drove her home with Punch and Judy. It was a beauty.”

“Well, I certainly hope she gets it back, but it looks perfectly hopeless to me,” said Molly. “It probably fell off in the water and farewell ring!”

By this time the crowd was beginning to disperse. Apparently most people shared

Molly's opinion that any recovery of the ring was hopeless. Violet and Molly turned to continue their way to the beach when Letty appeared in her bathing dress, wet and rosy from her dip in the sea.

"Hello, girls," she called briskly. "What's up?"

"Oh, look here, Letty, read this," replied Violet eagerly, and added: "Don't you remember the ring? She had it on the day we rescued her, when her motor had broken down."

Letty read the "lost" notice and then turned to the others with shining eyes.

"Girls," she exclaimed, clasping her hands in the way she had whenever she was very much in earnest, "I am going to find that ring! It will open a sure path to Miss Terlowe's friendship."

"But, Letty, it's impossible," remonstrated Molly. "She no doubt lost it in the sea, and how can you get it back?"

"I can try, anyhow. It will be an adventure. Indeed, I think I shall begin trying this minute. I'll run down and take a dive or two."

And quite indifferent to the serious difficulties in her way, and the extreme improbability of picking up a small ring out of the shifting expanse of rolling sand and rolling waters, Letty turned and ran gaily back to the bathing beach.

"Of course she doesn't expect to find it," Molly observed to Violet. "She's just taking an excuse to go in for another dip."

But Violet looked after Letty with an eager, awed gaze.

"I don't know about that, Molly," she replied softly. "Letty's wonderful! Whenever she sets out to do a thing she generally gets what she's after. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if she did find Miss Terlowe's ring."

"But, Violet, think of it reasonably. Even if the ring isn't lost forever, which is the most probable thing, think of the loads of people who will start in hunting, for the sake of the reward offered. They'll no doubt rake up the whole beach, and I shouldn't be surprised if they hired a professional diver to come."

"Well, Letty dives pretty well, and I think her courage is splendid even to want to try



to find it, with the odds so great against her," said Violet, persisting in her admiration. "There comes Letty back now. Just think how glorious and triumphant it would be, Molly, if she really had found the ring. She would be such a heroine!"

Molly regarded her friend with good-natured scorn.

"You dear little goose," she laughed affectionately. "You are always up in the clouds. You aren't here with us at all, you know, Violet. At least, not very often. You have a cozy, sweet little world of your own, that you inhabit, called 'Wouldn't-it-be-nice-if——.'" "

They both laughed and ran forward to meet Letty.

Of course she had not recovered the ring, but that did not in the least change her determination to try again; nor was her ardor damped by the multitudinous obstacles which Molly relentlessly heaped in her path.

One obstacle in particular did not loom very high. There was no great show of a wide or exhaustive search being made. No army of men with rakes, such as Molly had

depicted, came to comb the beach; nor did a professional diver appear on the scene. People discussed the loss, the possible value of the ring, and expressed their sympathy for Miss Terlowe. Some poked about in the sand here and there with their canes or parasols and the nurse-maids expressed the wish among one another that one of their charges might be lucky enough to turn up the lost jewel in the course of their building of sand castles. But nearly everybody appeared to have taken Molly's view of the situation, that a recovery of the ring was beyond the limits of possibility.

Letty held her peace and formulated a plan in the secrecy of her own thoughts. Late that afternoon she slipped away from the group of young people on the veranda and, taking a book, went down to the beach. She wanted to be on hand when Miss Terlowe came down to take her solitary sea-bath. Letty did not mean to address the actress; she merely wanted to mark, if she could, the exact spot Miss Terlowe chose for her swim. She knew about the hour Miss Terlowe could be expected, for she had often seen her in the

distance, and she read with one eye on her wrist watch.

Miss Terlowe appeared at the expected hour, her bathing costume covered by a long coat, and followed at a short distance by her maid. To Letty's surprise, however, she did not go down to the regulation bathing beach, a small, semicircular stretch of smooth sand, but left the narrow board walk that led down from the bath-houses and walked away to the right. At each end of the graceful crescent of sand a line of rocks ran out into the sea, so far out almost as to form a little harbor. The rocks were neither very big nor rough, being indeed for the most part nicely rounded boulders, very picturesque with their purplish-brown tints half covered with seaweed. But the girls were never allowed to swim there because, particularly if the tide were in, there were apt to be strong cross-currents and sharp eddies.

Letty felt a bit startled when she saw Miss Terlowe walk over toward the rocks. The first thought that occurred to her was that Miss Terlowe, having met with a misfortune on the regular beach, had consequently taken

a dislike to it and wished to try a new bathing place. But she soon realized, from the matter-of-fact manner in which Miss Terlowe's maid followed her mistress, that this was the actress's customary procedure.

"Oh, I hope she'll be safe out there," was her next thought. "But then she must know all about it, and she's a good swimmer, of course. I remember hearing some men at the hotel one night praising her swimming."

Letty followed the actress and her maid at a short distance and perched herself unobtrusively upon one of the rocks. She opened her book and pretended to read, so that it might not seem as if she were spying upon the actress. She marked out of the corner of her eye how the actress paused before stepping into the water, and, bending over, examined closely the large, loose stones at her feet.

"That is where she lost the ring!" whispered Letty to herself excitedly. "Oh, I wish she might find it, even if it took the glory away from me. I know it would make her so happy to find the ring."

But Miss Terlowe's search was evidently vain, and in another moment she stepped



SHE OPENED HER BOOK



quickly into the water, feeling her way deftly among the boulders, until she had gained a sufficient depth to swim. Then Letty forgot about her book and gave up all pretense of not watching, in her admiration of the long, smooth strokes of the swimmer.

“How wonderfully she does it!” she sighed. “No wonder the men praised her. I am sure she could outswim most of them. How splendid to be able to do so many things well! I have an awful lot to learn, and between myself and me, I think I’ve been growing into a conceited little ninny. Aunt Mary, Violet-Mary, Madame Henri, Mr. Jack, so many have spoiled me. But there, I’m not going to lay the blame on them,” she caught herself up with a grim little nod. “What I mean to do in the future is to try to deserve a part, at any rate, of their good opinion of me.”

Her thoughts went back to the lost ring, and it seemed to her that there was a much better chance of finding it among the big, loose stones than in the soft, much-trodden sand of the regular beach.

“How I wish I had on my bathing suit and could jump right in now,” she thought. The

afternoon was very hot, and she envied Miss Terlowe her cool, delicious bath.

She watched with admiring gaze until Miss Terlowe turned and made her way inshore; then Letty picked up her forgotten book and hurried away. She had found out what she wanted to know, but while no doubt there would be a better chance of finding the ring among the rocks, provided her surmise was right that the ring had been lost there, there was a greater difficulty than ever in the way of Letty becoming the lucky finder. For she was forbidden absolutely to bathe near the rocks.

She hurried home and went at once to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's room. That lady was sitting at her desk and bending over—not a sheet of manuscript paper but over a long column of figures. She hurried them out of sight as Letty entered, and tried to greet her daughter with her customary tranquil smile.

“Why, how hot you look, Letty mine! And worried, too. Has anything gone wrong?”

“Oh, no, nothing is a bit wrong, Aunt Mary, only it is terribly hot. I suppose you wouldn't want me to go in for another dip in the sea?”



Mrs. Hartwell-Jones glanced at the clock.

“I’m afraid it’s too late in the day, dear. You would not have time before dressing for dinner. Have you forgotten that we are all to dine at the Beckwiths’?”

“Oh, I had forgotten, and there wouldn’t be time, I suppose. But Aunt Mary dear, may I go in bathing, all by myself, to-morrow morning before breakfast? It would be glorious fun, and I should feel so fresh and fine for the day. And Aunt Mary,” Letty assumed her most wheedling tone and knelt on the low stool at Mrs. Hartwell-Jones’s side, “I want to ask a favor of you—a very, very, very great favor!”

“Go on, little artful dodger. Out with it! I’m afraid I shall have to say yes beforehand if you go on looking at me that way.”

“Which is exactly what I want you to say,” ejaculated Letty eagerly. “I want to know if you will—will let me disobey one of your rules for just one little wee time, without asking me which rule it is?”

“Without asking you which rule it is?” repeated Mrs. Hartwell-Jones doubtfully.

Letty nodded emphatically, keeping her

gaze fixed steadily upon her mother's face in an eager, expectant stare. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones returned her look with one equally steadfast, that spoke of unbounded faith, and then said, smiling and rumpling the short, curly hair:

"I am sure that I can trust my precious daughter. Only don't be too rash or impulsive, dear child."

"Oh, thank you, thank you! I won't, I promise. And I'll tell you everything just as soon as it's over and I've tried my experiment. Now I'll run along and dress to go to the 'Rubber Band.' Thank you a million times, you dearest dear, both for saying yes, and for trusting me so sweetly. I won't forget it in a hurry. Shall I wear my pink muslin to dinner?"

Very early next morning Letty, clad in her pretty, simple bathing costume, crept out of the house and ran down the short country lane that led to the beach. A milkman, entirely engrossed in his own business, was the only human being in sight. Letty felt a sudden great thrill of freedom and independence. How glorious it was to be out, alone,

in the midst of this glowing, waking world! She felt like shouting—no, like singing, sending her heart out through her throat, up, up to the heaven as the lark did. Ah, if she could feel like that and sing for an audience, she would surely make her mark! She would remember this feeling, she told herself, and give it out again, in the years to come, through her voice.

She ran swiftly down the lane—it was not a time for sedate walking—and came to a pause on the brink of the great, flat, opalescent sea, that lay still and shimmering, as if it slept. She felt her way cautiously in among the boulders and the touch of the stinging cold sent a thrill through her. She waded out quickly to the deeper water and began to swim, taking long, slow strokes as she had seen Miss Terlowe do. She told herself that she intended to practice steadily and carefully until she was as expert as the great actress.

So enthralled was she with her new sensations, that Letty completely forgot the reason that had brought her down to this early bath. She swam and sported in the waves like a young mermaid until the rays of the mount-

ing sun reminded her that she must hurry if she did not intend to be late for breakfast. She took a last jolly tumble in the surf, bobbed up and treaded water while shaking the spray out of her eyes and was about to wade inshore when something caught her eye. A sunbeam glinted on a small object before her. At first Letty thought it a gleaming bit of mica in the stone, but curiosity took her closer, and to her utter amazement she saw that the glint was of gold. Bending, she untangled the shining speck from a long twist of seaweed and revealed—Miss Terlowe's lost ring! It had slipped off the actress's finger while she was resting against the rock, and by a marvelous bit of good fortune had become entangled in the seaweed instead of sinking to the bottom.

Letty's joy knew no bounds. Her recent exaltation of spirit was all forgotten. Rushing to the shore, unmindful of the loose stones in her path, she ran breathlessly home, eager to carry the surprising and delightful news.

## CHAPTER IX

### AN INTERVIEW WITH MISS TERLOWE

“MISS TERLOWE’S room is number ten, third door to the right,” said the hotel clerk. “Go right up.”

Mounting the stairs, Letty walked swiftly, breathlessly, down the corridor that led to Miss Terlowe’s room. She was excited, happy and a little afraid. What would Miss Terlowe say to her? Would she be cold and distant, thank Letty prettily for the returned ring and then gently and politely close her door? Or would she, as Letty fervently hoped, be so thankful to recover her property that she would regard Letty in the light of a benefactor? Letty paused before the door upon which was inscribed the mystic number. She felt that it was a fateful moment.

Miss Terlowe’s maid responded to her timid summons and in a very matter-of-fact way invited her to enter. Miss Terlowe apparently was expecting her. It was all turning out

very commonplace and every-day. Letty's excitement died a natural death.

"You have found my ring," exclaimed Miss Terlowe, with quite as much eagerness and delight in her voice as Letty could desire. "They telephoned me from the office that you were coming up with it."

"Yes," replied Letty simply. "I found it." And she produced the small box in which her Aunt Mary had placed the ring.

"Oh, I am so glad," cried Miss Terlowe, opening the box and bending to kiss Letty impulsively. "Tell me all about it, won't you?"

The whole little episode had taken place so naturally and simply that Letty could hardly realize that it had happened. What she had been dreaming of, longing for—never really hoping to experience, had come to pass. And it was all "just like real life" as she told Mrs. Hartwell-Jones afterward. Miss Terlowe, in the flesh, was just like anybody else—a very charming anybody else, that is.

"Sit down," Miss Terlowe continued hospitably, "and tell me how you ever found it? I had quite given it up for lost."

"Well, at the end, it really was rather by

accident," admitted Letty. "When I saw the notice on the bulletin-board, I told the girls I intended to find the ring. I don't believe I was really in earnest, for it did seem pretty hopeless, you know, and the girls discouraged me awfully. Especially Molly Wilson, and I'm dying to see her face when she hears I've succeeded."

"I should like to see it too," said Miss Terlowe, and they both laughed.

"Do tell me about the lucky accident," urged Miss Terlowe, as eagerly as a girl.

"Well, when I read that notice I did have a queer feeling inside me that I might find it as I have sometimes when Madame Henri gives me a new exercise that she thinks I won't get true, and ——"

"Oh, you are the little girl who sings," interjected the actress. "Ah! Well, we'll talk about that afterward. Then what happened?"

"Well, I—I followed you down to the beach yesterday afternoon to see just where you took your bath ——"

"I saw you," commented Miss Terlowe blithely, "but I thought you were absorbed

in your book. My vanity was a wee bit pricked," she added and they both laughed again, understandingly, like old comrades.

"But I was watching hard, all the time," declared Letty with shining eyes. "Only I was so afraid you would think me an intruder that I pretended I wasn't. That is, until I forgot everything but watching you swim. You do do it so beautifully!"

"Bless the child's heart, she knows how to give a true compliment! And then?"

"Well, of course my plan was to go in after you and dive all about the spot, but I wasn't sure what to do about it, for Aunt Mary doesn't allow us to go in bathing up by the rocks. By the time I had got home and asked her permission it was too late, but I went this morning, and oh, it was so beautiful! I mean the whole morning—the sunrise—or just after sunrise when everything was still soft and pearly and milky white; and nobody was around—just me." Letty clasped her hands and lost herself for a moment in a revery of the morning's sensations.

"I know," said Miss Terlowe softly. "It makes you want to do big things, that feeling.



If only we could have it oftener!" And she sighed, a little wistfully.

"But you needn't wish for that feeling, when you are so great all the time," exclaimed Letty impulsively, and then blushed and hung her head.

She felt that she had been crude and gushing again and a recollection of Miss Terlowe's amused, tolerant glance the day the girls had brought her home in the pony carriage pierced Letty's heart like a stab. She would not look up to encounter another such look.

But Miss Terlowe felt the earnestness of her words and patted the girl's clasped hands gently.

"Thank you, my dear. I won't forget those words in a hurry. I know you mean them."

Then Letty raised her head and revealed her brown eyes full of tears.

"I went in swimming where I had seen you the afternoon before," she continued abruptly, resolved not to spoil that heavenly moment by any sentimentality. "And when I got in the water, it was all so thrilling—so cold and big and fresh—that I forgot everything else. And then, just as I was coming out, I saw a

tiny gleam of light on one of the rocks. I swam over to see what it was, and there was your ring, all tangled in the seaweed. Wasn't it wonderful?"

"It was indeed, you sweet child, and I can't begin to express my gratitude. To be perfectly frank, I am superstitious enough to feel a presentiment about this ring. I have always called it my talisman, and am never without it, except at night. Generally, I take it off just before going into the water, and give it to Justine to hold; but that afternoon I was absent-minded, or careless, and forgot. I am a bit thinner than usual this summer, and the ring slips on my finger, you see." She put on the ring and held up the hand to show. The ring slipped off and fell into her lap.

"Oh, it isn't safe a moment without a guard," exclaimed Letty impulsively, her eyes watching eagerly the actress's long, slender fingers.

Miss Terlowe had beautiful hands, large, but exquisitely shaped, with long, tapering fingers, and a grace of motion that made her gestures almost the most expressive part of her acting.

Miss Terlowe's eyes in turn were fixed on Letty's thin, restless brown hands, clasped so tensely in her lap. On the ring finger of the right hand was an odd, twisted little circlet of gold, set at intervals with tiny moonstones. A ring of no intrinsic value but quaint and unusual.

"I do need a guard," the actress agreed whimsically, "but all my rings are too large for me, except one that is too small. Isn't that hard luck? That is a pretty ring you are wearing; may I see it?"

Letty slipped it off without hesitation and handed it to her.

"It looks as if it might bring 'luck,' too. Has it any associations?"

"Oh, no. I'm only fond of it because Clara Markham gave it to me. She brought it to me the last time she came over from England. Aunt Mary doesn't care particularly to have me wear rings."

"I've an idea," Miss Terlowe exclaimed, jumping to her feet, "that is, if you consent. Excuse me a moment." She hurried into the next room where Letty could hear her talking to the maid. When she re-

turned she was carrying a small, red morocco case.

“How would you like to exchange—well, not rings, but something to wear?” she asked. “I am sure that ring you wear would just fit me, and it would make a charming guard for my ring. Then in exchange I will offer you this.”

As she spoke, Miss Terlowe opened the case and revealed, on a cushion of white velvet, a pendent consisting of an oval aqua marine of unusual brilliancy and cutting, suspended from a fine chain of platinum.

“Oh,” cried Letty, “how perfectly exquisite!”

“It is pretty, isn't it? Try it on.”

“On me?”

“Certainly. It is for you.”

“You surely don't mean that you want to exchange that lovely thing for my poor little ring!”

“Of course I mean it,” laughed Miss Terlowe. “Your ring will be most useful to me, whereas this pretty bauble I never wear. Besides, if it comes to the question of value, I owe you a reward, you know.”

Miss Terlowe fastened the chain around Letty's neck without further parley. Miss Terlowe generally did what pleased her.

"Now," she said, lightly kissing the girl's hot, excited cheek, "tell me all about the singing. Do you mean to 'make good,' as the modern slang expresses it?"

"Yes, I do," answered Letty, and something in the quiet directness of her answer made the great actress look at her with more interest.

With very little encouragement, Letty poured forth her story of the concert and the suffering she had experienced from her failure to impress Miss Terlowe with her singing.

"But I see now it did me good," she concluded. "It—it woke me up, I think, and where I've been playing and imagining greatness, now I'm going to earn it, if hard work and perseverance can succeed."

"They will, my child, they will. But don't lose sight of the fact that perseverance doesn't mean making a good resolution. It means a fight. Oh, such a fight! Not only against odds old and new, anticipated and unexpected, great and small; but a fight against yourself—against the temptation of laziness,

good times and even ill-health. Nothing must stop you, dear little girl, if once you start to climb the ladder, nothing.

“And it’s a hard, long climb, remember that. No matter how much praise you have had, and how well you deserve it, to succeed you will have to start at the bottom. I did, and oh, so many times I wanted to turn back!”

“But you didn’t! And you have reached the top!”

“It is not a very high top, dear, and yet a tipply eminence to me. So often I have turned and looked back at the peaceful, pleasant valley of comfort and commonplace.

“This summer has been specially hard,” she went on, as if, once started, she found talking about herself a relief. “I have often envied you girls when I’ve passed you at your play.”

“Envied us girls!” ejaculated Letty. “How—how funny! When we were all eating our hearts out with longing to meet and know you!”

Miss Terlowe sighed.

“Have I seemed terribly selfish and un-

sociable? It is only because it was the doctor's orders. We workers have to reserve our strength for our work, you know, and sometimes we haven't enough left for play. I have not had, this summer, and it has been hard to forego the companionship of my fellow creatures. I have almost yielded to the temptation sometimes of——” She paused and eyed Letty thoughtfully. “Perhaps now that I know you I shall have the courage——”

“To what?” asked Letty breathlessly.

“Why, to stop and invite you to get in with me, when I am motoring off alone and lonely over these roads I have learned to know so well.”

“And you have thought of doing that—actually wanted to? We all thought you didn't even see us when you passed by.”

“Do you remember the day you and—your sister was she?—picked me up in the road in your cunning little pony carriage and brought me home? That was a great adventure to me, and I talked to Justine about it all the afternoon. But I was too tired to continue the acquaintanceship. What a charm-

ing girl your sister is. I hope I shall know her better some time."

Letty jumped to her feet with a sudden realization of the length her visit must have assumed.

"I am afraid I have tired you to death now. Please forgive me."

"But you haven't at all. Please stay longer if you have time. I haven't heard a word about your music. How very—very human it was of me to get going on my own troubles. Who teaches you?"

"Madame Henri. I had scarlet fever in the spring and had to give up all work for a while. Madame Henri won't call my work this summer lessons, but she comes every day and sits with me while I practice."

"A devoted teacher. And who is Aunt Mary? Do you know, I don't even know your name. I could not understand what they said over the telephone."

"Letty Grey."

"Letty Grey. I wonder —— Do you know Mr. Jack Beckwith?"

"Oh, yes, very well indeed!"

"Ah, then you are Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's



adopted daughter. He has spoken very often of 'little Miss Grey.'"

"That is what he calls me."

"You have a very faithful friend in him—and ardent admirer," she was tempted to add, but did not.

"Will you come again soon?"

"I should like nothing better in this whole, wide world."

"And will you sing me some of your songs?"

"Very gladly!"

"Then I'll let you go now, but you are to come again—say to-morrow at the same hour?"

Letty put out her hand.

"I wish I could ever make you understand what this morning has been to me," she said simply.

"I am sure it has meant no more to you than to me," and Miss Terlowe smilingly held up the finger that wore the recovered ring.

"Are you sure I am right to accept such a very splendid reward?" asked Letty anxiously.

"Quite sure. And if your Aunt Mary

should say anything, just send her to me. I'll make it all right." She was still holding Letty's hand and she gave it a light pat as she added hesitatingly :

"May I venture to offer a wee bit of advice?"

"Please do! About my singing?"

"Yes. When you begin work this fall, go to one of the big conservatories. Don't hurt your dear Madame Henri's feelings, but manage in some way to—to join the workaday world with your work."

Letty's eyes twinkled.

"Get away from the flattery and spoiling," she said roguishly. "I know. That is one of the things I got to understand this morning out in the bigness of things."

"Good. And don't forget that impression, my dear. It was not a mere fleeting sensation, but a real inspiration. Treasure all such and learn to appreciate them."

"Thank you. And good-bye, dear Miss Terlowe. Oh, I am so happy!"

Letty walked home with feet that never knew where they stepped; habit was kind and led her right. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones with

Violet, Molly and Mary Beckwith were waiting for her with eager curiosity and impatience.

“Where have you been all this time? Did she keep you waiting? What is she like? What did she say?” were a few of the myriad questions hurled at her as she entered.

“She was wonderful and she was—was human,” answered Letty solemnly.

Every one burst into peals of laughter.

“Bless my precious little Letty mine,” cried Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. “My little hero-worshiper! See how much happier you are now that you have lifted your idol down from her pedestal and breathed life into her. Before, you worshiped Miss Terlowe. Now, you can love her. But Letty, child, whatever is that you have around your neck?”

“My reward, Aunt Mary, and Miss Terlowe said if you did not understand, she knew how to make you.” And sitting down, Letty told them all about it.

## CHAPTER X

### VIOLET'S ADVENTURE

THE proverbial ill-wind that caused the loss of Miss Terlowe's ring blew in its train the inevitable good, and the new friendship blossomed apace. Miss Terlowe sent a note to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones that afternoon, inviting her and both Letty and Violet to lunch with her on the following day, an invitation which it is needless to say was accepted. It was a most delightful little luncheon, served in Miss Terlowe's private sitting-room. Madame Henri was invited, too. "I feel as if Letty had already introduced us," Miss Terlowe had written her, and after the simple, dainty meal was over, Madame played and Letty sang. Miss Terlowe praised Letty sincerely and was evidently impressed, but it was impossible not to see that the great actress's preference continued in favor of Violet. Violet accepted the new friendship modestly, almost deprecatingly. She could not understand how anybody—ex-

cept, perhaps, Molly Wilson—could prefer herself to Letty; clever, beautiful, brilliant Letty! But Miss Terlowe's kindness made her very happy, and she blossomed in the soft sunshine of love and admiration like a shy, sweet violet as she was.

"I think your younger daughter inexpressibly charming!" Miss Terlowe ejaculated to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones one day, when the two were sitting somewhat apart from the young people.

"You could not give me greater happiness than by saying that," replied Mrs. Hartwell-Jones earnestly. "The dear child is so diffident and retiring that most people fail to penetrate the outer crust and appreciate her true worth. But I think she is becoming more like other girls."

"Oh, but do you want her to be like other girls? It is that elusive quality about her that makes the child so adorable. Don't let her get into the general rut."

"Oh, no, not that. I think she will always keep her unusualness. Her past has molded her."

"Her past," repeated Miss Terlowe, pricking

up her ears, as Letty would have said. "You don't mean to tell me that child has anything so dramatic as a past! Would you mind telling me about it? Was it a prolonged illness, or—— Don't say anything if you'd rather not," she added quickly, marking the expression on her companion's face.

"I should be very glad to tell you. It is a sad story, but it has a happy ending which makes us all most thankful." And Mrs. Hartwell-Jones recounted the whole history of her baby's disappearance in the terrible shipwreck, and the ultimate identification of her as the little lame lace-maker of Lyme Regis in England.

"How romantic! And how interesting! That accounts for the child's character. She has suffered, and she understands. Most girls of her age are either purely skeptical of misery or else thoroughly confident of their own ability to check it. But Violet understands. She will make a wonderful woman, my dear, when she is grown. Ah, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, you are singularly blessed!"

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones sighed involuntarily, and tears sprang to her eyes.

“I hope I appreciate and am truly thankful for my blessings, but they bring a great responsibility, too. I trust I may bring up my two daughters as I wish, and can continue to give them everything they want—or need.”

“As far as I have been able to see, they both have everything in the world they could possibly want,” replied Miss Terlowe, a little dryly, for she fancied Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was entertaining worldly ambitions for her daughters.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones did not explain, and they sat for a short time in silence, watching the young people.

“And that is why Letty calls her Violet-Mary,” observed Miss Terlowe presently, following the train of her own thoughts. “I suppose the baby was named for you?”

“Yes, and the people who found her could not discover her name—the nurse never recovered sufficiently to tell them—so poor dear Mrs. Moore gave her what she considered the very prettiest name she had ever heard.”

“She is like a violet. And the combination Violet-Mary is quite delightfully quaint

enough. It suits her exactly. May I adopt it?"

The lunch party in Miss Terlowe's rooms had been followed quickly by a succession of delightful parties and short excursions. Either Miss Terlowe felt that her recovered health need no longer be closely considered, or she found continued seclusion intolerable. At any rate she sought Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and the girls frequently, and appeared to find both comfort and enjoyment in their companionship.

In the meantime, the motor trip to Narragansett Pier had not been lost sight of. On one or two occasions plans had advanced to the stage of setting a date, but something had come up unexpectedly to deter them. But at last Mr. Emlin "saw daylight," as he expressed it. In other words, he saw a speedy end to the train of several business affairs that would ensure him a two weeks' uninterrupted holiday, and it was decided to take the trip at some period during that fortnight.

"Not that it is such a very long or hard trip," laughed Molly; "you know it's only a two day run from here to Narragansett,



but we want to have all sorts of fun by the way."

"I wish Mary Beckwith could go, too," sighed Letty. "You know she could have gone if it had been this next week, but all those college boys are coming home with Max, and she has to be here to help entertain them."

"That's not a very serious obligation," answered Molly. "I hope we will get back in time to help a little with the entertaining ourselves. College boys are great fun, and there are sure to be some fine tennis players among them."

"Perhaps you'd rather give up the motor trip?" suggested Letty. "You know you proposed it first on my account, and those papers Mr. Drake has, but I am sure we can easily get the papers some other way, or they can wait."

"Dearie me, I wouldn't give up the trip for anything. Besides, aunt and uncle are very keen on it. I was just thinking that it is turning out so differently from what we first planned. When it was first talked about, Aunt Isabel was hoping Mr. Jack would go, too, in his car, and have a big party.

Wouldn't it have been fun? But of course, Aunt Isabel did not know anything about his going out West."

"Neither did any of us, until he sprang it on us just before starting," responded Letty. "By the way, I had such a jolly letter from him this morning. Would you girls care to hear it? Let's find a quiet, shady spot and I'll read it aloud."

The three girls were out driving with Punch and Judy in the pony carriage. As Letty made her suggestion they were driving past the entrance of a deserted farm, that communicated with the highroad by means of a long, meandering lane that passed between rows of sumac, so overgrown as to form a miniature thicket in the distance. The girls looked up the lane toward the promised shade with longing eyes. They generally kept very strictly to the highroads on their pony drives because any roads diverging from the main turnpike were apt to be of loose sand and dust, very difficult for the old, fat ponies to pull through. But the lane they were passing did not look in particularly bad condition. It was largely overgrown with grass, and af-

forded good footing for Punch and Judy; only at intervals did patches of sand show through the brown earth.

"Let's drive up there," suggested Molly. "It will be both quiet and shady in the clump of sumac bushes, and we could turn the ponies loose for a browse."

The others agreed and Violet, who was driving, turned the ponies' heads into the lane. None of the girls had observed a young man in a runabout who had been driving behind them down the road. No one could have accused the man of following the girls, although he had kept his horse at a walk behind their carriage, and had watched them with a keen, speculative gaze for the past two miles. But when they turned in at the deserted lane an unpleasant smile lighted his face and he pulled his horse to a halt. Glancing furtively about to see if he were observed, the man alighted and made a pretense of examining his horse's hoof while several motors whirled by, up and down the road. Then, taking advantage of a moment when no vehicle was in sight, he sprang into the carriage again and drove into the lane after

the girls, who were already almost out of sight ahead. He drove slowly, cautiously, with frequent halts and reconnoiterings.

"Dearie me," exclaimed Letty, who was sitting in the rumble and getting a good deal jostled as the carriage careened in and out of the hidden, grass-grown ruts of the road. "I don't call this much of a way."

"I didn't realize that the sumac bushes were so far off," agreed Molly. "Do you think we'd better turn back?"

"There isn't any place to turn yet," answered Violet, glancing from side to side. "See how high the banks are. We'll have to go on."

The thicket was reached by this time, but although it was a most picturesque spot, the sun was still too high in the heavens to permit the low bushes to afford any shade, while their thick foliage shut out all the breeze.

"Ugh, it's awful!" exclaimed Letty. "And mosquitoey, too. We'll have to go back, Violet-Mary."

Violet transferred the reins to one hand while she slapped her cheek violently with the other.

“I should say there are mosquitoes, and flies, too. Whoa, Punch and Judy!”

The girls stopped and held a consultation. The man behind stopped too, and guessed what would follow. Getting out of his own light carriage again, he led the horse carefully out of the road, up the slight bank and around back of the thicket of sumac. He tied the horse and, dropping to his knees, found himself very close above where the girls were sitting. By bending aside a few of the stems, he could both see and hear, without being himself seen. Behind him, his horse switched his tail and stamped to keep off the annoying flies, but the thick grass deadened the sound of his hoofs and the girls were not listening for sounds in this deserted spot.

“How can we go back, Letty?” asked Violet, looking at the banks on each side which just there were considerably higher and with the bushes growing all the way up. “We can’t back all that way, can we? At least, I know I couldn’t keep in the road. Hadn’t you better drive?”

Letty stood up in the rumble and looked

behind her. The man had got out of sight just in time. Then she looked ahead up the road, over the ponies' heads.

"I think we can go on a little way and turn," she said. "It looks as if the road broadened out into a field or something just ahead there. These banks go down again just beyond that curve in the road, I think."

"Onward, march, then," said Molly. "I, for one, am being eaten alive."

"Get up, then, Punch and Judy. Trot along, old fellows, and keep the flies off," called Violet cheerfully to the ponies, who started off willingly enough.

The man, walking on the other side of the bushes at the top of the bank, followed.

As Letty had supposed, the banks of the small hillock did go down again, and the road, which was by now a mere cart-track in the coarse grass and sand, led on across a wide, open field. The thicket of sumac bushes stopped too, and so, perforce, did the man, as he had no desire to be seen in the open.

"Here we are, all right-o," exclaimed Letty triumphantly. "Now, then, Violet-Mary,

just drive out of the road and around in a little circle and we'll be headed right in a jiffy. Look out; can you get out of that rut?"

"Look out," called Molly from her side at the same moment. "We're pretty deep in the sand on this side. Don't turn so sharp, Violet. Go ahead a little way."

Letty, who had leaned out of the rumble to look, called out a second quick warning at the same instant. Violet grew excited and confused and instead of pulling the ponies back into the road, she tugged hard at the left rein; the valiant ponies responded with cheerful alacrity, the carriage gave a tip and a lurch that nearly sent Letty out over the wheels; then there was a sudden ominous crack like the splitting of wood and the carriage settled tipsily on one side.

"Now we have done it!" ejaculated Letty in dismay, springing to the ground. "We've broken a wheel."

"Not really!" exclaimed Molly and Violet in dismay and they, too, dismounted.

Punch and Judy were not in the least disturbed. They began calmly to munch the

short, coarse grass at their feet in cheerful unconcern. In the background, behind the thicket, the strange man rubbed his hands in secret rejoicing. The affair had taken an unforeseen turn which promised to work to his advantage.

The girls stared from the broken wheel to one another in blank dismay. They were several miles from home and over a mile from the nearest village.

"Whatever in the world shall we do!" exclaimed Violet helplessly. "Oh, why did we ever leave the highroad? Mother has told us not to so often."

"Well, we haven't left it very far," answered Letty dryly, "and the walking's still good."

"But we can't go away and leave Punch and Judy!"

"We could leave them long enough to get help. Or why not unharness them and drive them home? Then send somebody back for the carriage."

"We never could walk that far, Letty, and besides, wouldn't you be afraid of walking so close to the ponies' heels?"

"Afraid of my precious old Punch and



Judy's heels!" ejaculated Letty indignantly. "Bless their dear old hearts, they wouldn't any more kick out than a baa-lamb would. But I've got the very scheme! We'll ride them! Two of us can mount the ponies and the third walk alongside for a certain distance and then take turns on horseback. Come on, that's simple."

But Violet shrank back in alarm at the very suggestion.

"I could never hold on, Letty. I was never on a horse's back in my life!"

"You don't know what you can do till you've tried. You thought you couldn't drive them until you found the reins in your hands. Come on, let's try. It will be a good deal like sitting in a rocking-chair," said Letty encouragingly, and began to unharness the ponies.

Molly had been on her knees, examining the broken wheel.

"The hub is only cracked," she announced, rising, "and I believe if we had a jack and some rope, and a man to help, we could tie it up enough to get home with. It would be pretty expensive, Letty, to leave the carriage here

and send after it. Isn't there a farm around here, where we could ask for help?"

"Oh, that would be a much better plan," agreed Violet, who dreaded the idea of riding horseback. A braver heart might have objected to a beginning without a saddle.

"I think there's a farm along here somewhere," said Letty considering. "Of course this place is deserted, but somebody has a truck farm along here, I don't remember just where. Do you remember whether we passed a white barn, girls?"

"No, I don't remember, but I don't think we did," answered Violet. "I think it's farther along."

"Well, let each of us go in a different direction," proposed Molly, "and the one who sees land—I mean a barn—first, shall signal to the others."

"But I think one of us ought to stay with the ponies," objected Letty, who could not bear to desert her pets, even for a moment.

"Then I'll stay with them," declared Violet. "I was driving when the accident happened, so I'll be the captain that doesn't desert his ship. But please don't be long, girls, because it's

pretty lonely just here," and she looked about her with a sudden apprehension.

"Well, it's out in the open and there aren't any mosquitoes, at any rate," Molly consoled her, "and here's my sun umbrella. Come on, Letty; which direction do you choose?"

"I'll go up this way, if you don't mind, because I have a sort of feeling that we did pass the barn. You go the other way, Molly. Have you your watch on?"

"Yes."

"Well, take the time and let's agree not to be gone longer than ten minutes. If we don't find a farmer, we have my suggestion to fall back on, so don't look so down-hearted, Violet-Mary; we'll get home somehow. Bye, bye. See you in ten minutes," and Letty ran cheerfully off in one direction, while Molly followed her example in the other.

Violet looked after them longingly and told herself over and over that ten minutes was a very short time. The man behind the bushes told himself the same thing and that he must act quickly. From the edge of the thicket he could hear what the girls said, and began to lay his plans.

The backs of Letty and Molly were not out of sight more than half a second, over their respective fences, before he advanced and approached the side of the pony carriage.

## CHAPTER XI

### TO THE RESCUE

VIOLET had stood up in the carriage to get a last fleeting glimpse of Letty's vanishing figure. She felt suddenly deserted and terribly alone. The sound of a man's voice, close at her side, was so unexpected and terrifying that she dropped down on the seat with a stifled scream.

"My dear young lady, don't look so alarmed. I did not mean to frighten you," exclaimed the man. "I want to help you."

He was not a nice looking young man. His clothes were too "smart," his manner too polite and deferential to ring true; but Violet was not discriminating enough to realize that. Her startled imagination had pictured a brute and she was too relieved to see a thin, young, common-looking man to be particular about his personality.

"Oh, I wish you had come up a minute

sooner," she exclaimed ingenuously. "My sister and friend have just gone for help. We broke a wheel of our carriage."

"Too bad," replied the man, bending to examine the wheel in affected interest. "I have my horse and carriage back there and could have taken you all home."

"Where?" asked Violet in surprise.

"Back of those bushes. The place looked so inviting and shady. I did get some shade, but the mosquitoes were bad. I don't know which woke me, their stinging or your voices."

"We came in to get shade too, but we stayed down in the road and it was both hot and dusty. Then we drove on up here to turn around and the wheel got caught in a rut," explained Violet. "I wish the girls would come back. Perhaps you could help us? I don't suppose you happen to have a rope?"

"No, I'm afraid not," replied the man, bending again to examine the wheel and restraining himself from pushing his advantage too quickly, "but I tell you what we could do," he added, looking up as if the idea had just occurred to him, "I could drive you to a wheelwright's shop in the next village and

fetch back a man with all his tools. He could fix this wheel up in a trice, I feel sure."

Violet listened hopefully.

"It's awfully good of you to offer to help," she said eagerly. "Are you sure it won't take too much of your time?"

"No, indeed, it will be a lark. Come on."

"Oh, I don't think I'd better go. I promised the girls I'd stay here with the ponies."

"But you must come," he urged, trying to keep a smile on his face while he ground his teeth with impatience. "Come along; my carriage is right there, behind those bushes."

Accustomed to unreasoning obedience, Violet involuntarily stepped out of the pony carriage, although it occurred to her, in the very act of following his rather peremptory directions, to ask herself why she must go too.

"I suppose it would be asking too much to send him off alone," she reflected nervously. "After all, he doesn't need to help us. It's just the kindness of his heart. Perhaps he thinks if I am along I can help to persuade the blacksmith that we really are in need of help."

Thus arguing, she walked slowly toward the thicket whither the man had hurried in

advance, always keeping an eye over his shoulder, however, to assure himself that she was following.

"I wish the girls would come back," she repeated uneasily as she mounted the high step of the vehicle. "Are you sure your horse is perfectly safe, sir?"

"Yes, yes, it is the flies that make him so restless," replied the man impatiently. "Are you in? Then off we go."

The man jumped in quickly beside her and drove—not back toward the highroad but straight on across the rough, overgrown field.

"Oh, this isn't the direction," cried Violet. "You have to turn around to get to the road."

"But this is a short cut," replied the man in a quiet, self-confident tone. "I know of a little village inland only a short drive from here, where the blacksmith-and-wheelwright is a friend of mine. It is not quite such comfortable riding, but you are in a hurry, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes, never mind the bumps," replied Violet, resenting the idea that he should think she was putting her own comfort ahead of the



need of quick action. "Drive as fast as you think safe."

With great willingness the man complied with this request and whipped up his horse, for out of the tail of his eye he had caught a glimpse of one of the returning girls in an adjacent field. He wished he had had a top to his runabout. He talked as he drove, rapidly, aimlessly, about the state of the road, the weather, any subject to keep Violet's mind from debating upon the recent incident or her own situation. He harped on the nearness of the village and the intimacy existing between himself and the mythical blacksmith.

"We'll be out on the road now as soon as a dead lamb can shake its tail, and the village isn't five minutes' drive. The blacksmith's a great chum of mine, and I'm sure he'll fix you up in no time. In fact, he's under obligations to me, and'll be only too glad to do me a good turn. All you'll need to do, miss, will be to smile your pretty smile and tell him what's happened and he and I'll do the rest."

Violet did not answer. They were going very fast and the jolting was almost unbearable. Once or twice she bounced from her

seat and the man put out his hand to hold her in. Violet shrank from his touch. She was growing more and more uneasy and the conviction that she had made a mistake took shape and rooted itself in her mind.

"I think—I've changed my mind," she stammered between jolts. "Please, sir, let me out. I want to go back to the girls. I promised them I'd wait with the ponies. Oh, sir, please stop and let me out."

"What nonsense!"

"I don't think so, sir. I want to get out. Please stop," and in the extremity of her nervous fear, Violet seized the reins and tried to bring the horse to a stop.

"Here, here, none of that. Let go at once," cried the man sharply. "Don't do that again, young lady, or we'll have a bad runaway. Here's the road and we'll have better going. Sorry I jolted you about so. I didn't know it was so rough."

"It isn't the roughness I mind," replied Violet piteously, "but oh, please, please stop the horse. I must go back, I must indeed. We are getting farther from home every minute, and what will the girls think?"

“What indeed?” laughed the man, and added hastily, “And won’t they just be doubly surprised when we get back again with a blacksmith and all his tools?”

His tone was so reassuring that for a moment Violet felt her apprehensions lulled. But her fears soon returned and redoubled.

“Oh, I am so scared,” she whispered; “please, sir, take me back. Never mind about the wheel. We can get home without it; indeed we can. We can ride the ponies home. Please, please take me back.”

The man felt more uncomfortable under this pathetic pleading than he had when witnessing her panic, and experienced a fleeting regret that he had embarked on the undertaking.

“You make it mighty hard on a fellow to be kind to you,” he said with pretended gentleness. “What if I did stop now and let you out?”

“Oh, if you only would!”

“Just as soon as you got your breath you’d say, well, there was a nice man to go part way toward helping me out of a trouble and then backing out and leaving me in the lurch,” he

argued, still keeping the horse at a good pace. "No, ma'am, I ain't that sort. When I start out to help people, I do it."

Violet looked about her with terrified gaze. They were going swiftly—much too swiftly even to consider jumping out of the high carriage—over a smooth, level road entirely unknown to her. Where were they and where was he taking her? Surely they had been driving much longer than five minutes, and yet no village was in sight. What did the man intend to do?

Suddenly and convincingly the truth flashed upon her; she was being kidnapped! At the terrible realization she shrieked and again snatched madly at the reins. The horse gave his head an angry shake at the sudden twinge of pain, and with a plunge took the bit between his teeth and bolted.

But Violet was far too terrified by her own situation to be frightened by that. Indeed, she was glad the horse was running away. If they smashed up it would mean at least that the man could not go away with her any farther. Oh, if some one would only come to stop them, and then rescue her!

The horse dashed madly down the road, the frail carriage swaying perilously from side to side. They passed a farmer's cart and the driver, drawing his own team well to the side of the road, stood up and stupidly stared after them. There was nothing he could do to stop the runaway. Violet shrieked at him, and waved her arms wildly as they passed. He caught her frenzied cry of "Help," and shook his head with a fatuous grin.

Fear at length paralyzed Violet's nerves. She cowered down in her seat and stared, wild-eyed and shivering, before her. The man had no time for her. His whole attention was concentrated on bringing the horse back under control. Fortunately the road was smooth and comparatively straight, and he was a fairly good horseman. At last their mad speed lessened, and once again they were proceeding at a normal pace. The man removed his hat with one trembling hand and drew his sleeve across his forehead.

"Whew! That was a close shave!" he muttered.

But the escape gave Violet no sense of happiness nor even relief. She felt that they

must have gone a thousand miles in those few awful moments. She was in a strange, horrible land. Home and friends had ceased to exist. What was she to do? What was to become of her?

Presently houses appeared on either side of the way, and signs of a town. In the distance she saw a railroad track and the smoke of a locomotive. Hope began to revive. If they passed through a town she could call out until some one took heed and stopped them to listen to her story. The man watched her cunningly, guessing her intentions.

"We'll be there pretty soon now," he said. "Feel very bad after our scare?"

"No. I feel all right and anxious to get back to my friends."

"All right. That'll come in good time," he replied soothingly, as if addressing an unreasonable child. "Now, when ——"

They passed an elderly couple in a phaeton and Violet leaned quickly over the side and called out to them:

"This man won't let me out. Won't you please help me?"

The old couple stared after them dully.

They were both deaf and had not heard Violet's words, but her manner impressed them. But after a moment's slowing of their pace, they drove on.

"Oh, come, now, don't do that," remonstrated the man. "It won't do any good at all, and'll only make people think you're crazy."

"It will do good," answered Violet fiercely. "Those people did not understand me, but I'll repeat it until some one does."

"Say, can't we come to some sort of understanding? I'll tell you what: I own up we've come too far. This ain't the village I intended to come to. The turn was off back there where you started up the horse. I ain't blaming you, you understand, and I got the horse slowed up as soon as I could. You know that. Now, there's a railroad station here, and if you'll agree to come along peaceful, and not get excited, I'll take you back home on the train. I will, honest. Where is it you live?"

"Sea Side," mumbled Violet, wondering if he were really sincere.

"Well, we'll go along back on the train and leave your friends to get out of that broken wheel mess by themselves. I hate to

leave people in the lurch, but—you see how it is.”

“As long as you take me back to my friends, I will ask nothing more.”

“And all I ask is that you come along peaceable and don't cut up rough or get people worked up over any sort of mistake. You understand? No talking to people.”

Violet turned on the seat and eyed him steadfastly. The man reddened and moved restlessly under her close scrutiny. Violet felt uneasy and horribly afraid. The man was not to be trusted.

“I shall have to speak to some one,” she said abruptly. “I shall have to borrow money of some one to buy my ticket.”

“I'll buy our tickets.”

“I don't want you to go with me.”

“Then I'll buy your ticket,” he said, avoiding argument to soothe her fears. “Come now, that's fair enough. Will you agree?”

“I'll see when we get to the station,” replied Violet coldly.

They had entered the village by this time—quite a thriving little town—and her spirits and courage rose. Surely nothing could hap-



pen to her in the midst of a lot of people like this!

They drove up to the station and alighted. A youth who exchanged signs with Violet's escort, unseen by the girl herself, came forward and offered to hold their horse; the man bade Violet wait in the carriage while he went inside to buy the ticket and find out the hour of her train. After a moment's hesitation Violet remained seated in the carriage. But only until the man had disappeared inside the station door. Then she alighted, told the man who was holding the horse that she would return directly, and walked swiftly to the corner of the building. But the youth was at her side in an instant.

"Say, come back here, you," he said surlily. "You had orders not to leave, see?"

"How dare you speak to me like that?" cried Violet indignantly. "Go away this instant or I shall call a policeman."

"Aw, none of that. Shut up and come back, d'ye hear?"

Violet turned and walked on, but the youth put his hand on her sleeve and actually dragged her back to the side of the carriage.

"Let go my arm instantly! Oh, won't some one help me!" cried Violet piteously.

A small crowd gathered. One or two were about to interfere when the youth grinned and winked over Violet's shoulder and tapped his forehead significantly. Violet's companion, seeing the crowd, rushed out. Violet heard him call over his shoulder:

"You say the train for town leaves in five minutes?"

"What's up?" asked a policeman, shouldering his way through the crowd.

"Oh, please, please save me!" called Violet, striving to shake off the youth who clung to her roughly.

"There ain't nothing wrong," declared Violet's companion, shouldering his way between her and the officer. "This young lady is my sister and for the time being—you understand?—she thinks we're trying to ——" He shrugged his shoulders and tapped his forehead, as the youth had done.

The policeman shook his head and turned away.

"Poor young lady. Her eyes do look that wild," he commented.

When Violet saw the policeman turning his back upon her, her despair was complete.

“Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do?” she wailed. “Will nobody help me?”

Her tone was so full of terror and agony that the policeman turned back in distress.

“That sounds bad,” he said commiseratingly. “Ain’t the young lady got any female relations to stay with her? She seems afraid of you, young man.”

“Oh, that is just part of her ailment. The doctor told me to expect it. You know sick people often turn against them they’re fondest of. Don’t speak to her, boss; it’ll only make her worse.”

In his anxiety to prevent the policeman from addressing Violet, the man had raised his voice so that she heard almost all of what he said.

“Oh, sir,” she cried eagerly, breaking away from detaining hands, “I am not sick, truly and honestly, and I am not crazy. This man is stealing me! Just look at his face and see if I am not telling the truth!”

The man shook his head dismally and smiled pityingly.

"It's a bad case," he said to the policeman and the crowd generally. "And it hurts. But the doctors say it's not hopeless."

Violet faced him with flashing eyes.

"You know you are not telling the truth," she said simply.

A deep silence succeeded her few words. Plainly, the sympathy of the crowd was shifting. The silence was broken by the whistle of an approaching locomotive.

The man grasped Violet's wrist and started to run across the platform, clearing a path through the crowd with rough pushes of his free arm. Violet resisted, pulling back with all her weak strength and calling wildly for help.

"Let me go, let me go at once," she cried. "I will not go on the train. I will not, I will not!"

The crowd stood by apathetically, uncertain whether to interfere or not, and awaiting the action of the policeman. The train was approaching with a roar and a clang. Suddenly a new sound broke upon the air—the raucous honk of a motor horn. Violet, slipping, sliding, pulling back from the impelling

hand of her guide, looked over her shoulder and uttered a shriek of joy.

“Miss Terlowe! Miss Terlowe! Molly! Letty! Here I am!”

The crowd looked around; so did the policeman. The conductor of the waiting train stared curiously, glanced at his watch and called “All aboard.” Violet heard the cry and exerted a superhuman force to resist the effort she anticipated to pull her on the train. The motor was approaching swiftly, filled with frightened, excited faces. The occupants had heard her cry. Unexpectedly Violet’s hand was released and she fell backward in the crowd. A dozen hands were reached out to pick her up, the motor drew up to the platform and Molly, Letty and Miss Terlowe sprang out, laughing and crying and calling:

“Where is she? Where is she?”

Violet was on her feet before any one had time to help her up, and threw herself into Miss Terlowe’s arms. The policeman woke to a sudden consciousness of the real situation and looked around to arrest the man. The train was disappearing around a bend and the man had vanished with it.

## CHAPTER XII

### JUST IN TIME

MOLLY and Letty sped upon their different ways with nimble feet. Molly soon realized that Letty's surmise had been right, and that there was no habitation ahead of her nearer than Bear Creek Village. She scrutinized her surroundings carefully to assure herself of this fact and then turned to retrace her steps.

But Letty, recognizing landmarks at every step, hastened on and soon came upon the barn in question. A good-natured, loutish boy was sitting under the shade of a gnarled old oak tree, lazily mending a bit of harness, and whistling blithely. Letty had to speak several times to make her voice heard above his tuneful notes.

"Oh, please," she shouted, coming close to him. "We have had a breakdown over in that field and won't you help us?"

The boy looked up, stopped whistling and grinned.

“ I don’t know nothin’ about automobiles,” he said, “ and Pa’s got the hosses down the field. We’ll tow you, though, if you’ll wait till he comes up.”

“ But it isn’t an automobile; it’s a pony carriage. We’ve broken a wheel and I thought perhaps we could borrow one somewhere to get home with.”

“ Borrow what? A pony carriage or a wheel?” he grinned.

“ A wheel. Why not? A wheel is a wheel.”

“ But all wheels ain’t the same size, nor is all axles. What size is your wheel?”

“ Oh, about so big,” answered Letty, making a vague circle with her arms.

“ Sho, that don’t tell nothin’. What’s the size?”

“ I don’t know. I never measured. It’s— it’s pony carriage size.”

“ Thanks for the official information,” he mocked her, but rising as he spoke. “ Come along, let’s have a look at the rig.”

“ But haven’t you a spare wheel that you could bring along just to try?” urged Letty, who thought it a pity to waste so much time.

The boy scratched his head thoughtfully.

“ Well, there is an odd wheel or two lyin’ about. The buggy’s got her front wheel off—and there’s the wheelbarrer ! ” he added as if seized with a brilliant inspiration.

“ I’m afraid that would be too small, but can’t we take them both, and try ? ” suggested Letty. “ I’ll carry one.”

“ I dunno as Pa —— ”

“ Oh, we’ll pay you for the wheel, of course, and for your time as well,” broke in Letty, believing that to be the reason of his hesitation. “ Do come on ; my sister is waiting there in the hot sun and she’s not very strong. I’ll make it all right with your father.”

This decided the boy. It was not desire of reward, but the inability to act upon his own responsibility that had made him hesitate. As soon as some one else assumed that responsibility he was active enough.

He went into the barn, fetched two wheels slung together over a carriage jack, and thrust a heavy wrench into his pocket. He gallantly refused to let Letty carry one of the wheels, as she had offered, and together they hurried back across the rough, neglected fields, Letty



explaining as they went how the accident had come to pass.

“They are waiting just there, beyond this little hill,” she said presently. “I hope your load isn’t too heavy.”

Imagine her frightened astonishment, when they crested the slope, to see in the field beyond the pony carriage, still awry in the rut, but empty and with only one pony attached.

“Why—why, where can she have gone!” gasped Letty, “and Punch gone too! What can it mean?”

The boy scanned the horizon and pointed out a small object faint in the distance.

“Is that there your sister, riding hossback off that way?” he asked.

Letty stared after the vanishing object.

“It looks like Punch with a girl on him. I can’t tell. What should she have gone off there for? And riding so fast!”

Letty was almost stupefied with bewilderment and fright. Suddenly her eye caught a flutter of paper, and she ran swiftly across to the carriage. A note, scribbled in such violent haste as to be almost illegible, had been tucked

under Judy's collar at a conspicuous angle. It said :

" Violet has been kidnapped. I am following on Punch. Go for help. They drove toward Jenksville. Fly! Molly."

Letty finished reading the note just as the farm boy reached her side, and she let it fall from her hand as she sank, limp and faint, on the grass. The boy picked up the note and read it. He whistled his dismay.

" Hi," he exclaimed roughly, shaking Letty by the shoulder. " You ain't got no call to faint. We got to do something. Gee whiz!"

His rough words and the shaking roused Letty.

" Of course we must. Where is Jenksville?"

" It's straight down the back road. You run down to the highroad as fast as you can cut, stop the first auto you see and make 'em drive you there like lightning. There's a road across just quarter of a mile below. I'll go back home and telephone the Jenksville police. How was your sister dressed? And then I'll go fetch Pa to come after you, in case you need help."

Letty murmured a word of thanks, gave a description of Violet and her clothes over her shoulder and fairly flew down the rough lane she and the others had driven into so light-heartedly, scarcely half an hour before. A motor was whizzing past just as she gained the road, but either did not hear, or else paid no attention to her frantic shouts; and Letty burst out crying.

“Why, bless the child, whatever in the world has happened!” ejaculated a voice.

A second motor had been following the wake of the car Letty had tried vainly to stop, and its occupant was no other than Miss Terlowe, who experienced a distinct shock to see Letty there, alone, in that state. Nothing short of a runaway and Violet's sudden death could have caused such grief, she felt sure.

“Oh, I'm so thankful it's you!” ejaculated Letty and climbed into the car. “Please drive like the wind, and turn to your left at the first crossroad. Oh, don't miss the turn,” she called to the chauffeur. “Oh, Miss Terlowe, please tell him to go,” she panted as the chauffeur hesitated. “I'll explain, but we must not lose a second.”

And she did explain, as much as she herself knew. Miss Terlowe realized the gravity of the situation, and bidding her chauffeur press forward as rapidly as safety permitted, tried to soothe the almost hysterical Letty.

"It is going to turn out all right, dear child. Molly, you say, is on their track. She won't lose sight of them if she can help it, and you say that farm boy is going to warn the Jenksville police by telephone. Go faster, Pierre, faster."

Near Jenksville they overtook the two vehicles Violet and her abductor had passed. These worthies had been made to realize finally, when Molly, wild-eyed and disheveled, riding astride a pony, had stopped them to ask information concerning Violet—they had realized that something was amiss and had turned their jogging steeds. And still nearer the town they came upon Molly herself, still urging the exhausted pony onward. Punch had risen to the occasion nobly and had trotted willingly along as far as he was able; but he was old and fat and his endurance had reached its limit. As the motor drew up beside her Molly gave a joyful shout

and tumbling off the pony, was about to abandon him to his fate, but Letty, her "ruling passion strong in death," sprang out of the motor and picketed the poor blown pony to the fence rail. As the car started forward again the chauffeur called over his shoulder:

"I hear a train, ma'am; may I let her out?" And taking permission for granted he threw open the throttle, and regardless of "borough laws" they sped through the little town at breakneck speed.

What followed would always be hazy in the minds of those who lived through the experience. Indeed, everything happened together. As Miss Terlowe and the girls jumped out of the car, the station agent came running out of the building with his instructions from the police headquarters to prevent any passengers departing on the train; the police officer on hand, to whom Violet had appealed so vainly for protection, blustered about and tried to find a culpable person upon whom to perform his duty; and it was discovered in the midst of the confusion that the second man, or boy, had disappeared also with the horse and runabout.

"Never mind all that now," said Miss Terlowe impatiently, as the policeman insisted upon taking down all their names, addresses and detailed descriptions. "We have the child back and now must take her directly home to her mother."

Before they could get away Letty's new friend, the farm boy, rode up on horseback with his father, and he agreed to take charge of Punch and Judy, and to bring them back to Sea Side as soon as Punch had recovered.

"I'll give him a good rub down, miss, and lead him along slow to our house," he said. "I'm glad you got your sister back. I guess I'd better keep the ponies a day or two, 'f you don't mind, and let the little un get his wind back. I'll take good care of 'em. I like hosses, don't I, Pa?"

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had been spared suspense or even anxiety, for by the time the motor, with its exhausted, excited passengers, had reached Sea Side it was still wanting half an hour of the time she had expected the girls back.

So elastic are the spirits of youth that the girls had already recovered from the first

shock of their experience and were more excited than frightened. But Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, as may be imagined, did not take the shock so easily, and was ill the rest of the day.

Violet herself soon fell under the strain of reaction and for several days she had a violent headache and repeated nervous chills, a result, the doctor said, of overtaxed nerves. But these did not last long, and before the week was out, she was quite ready to discuss her experience and to accept the position the other girls assigned her, of a veritable heroine of romance.

Unfortunate to relate, although Violet's rescue came just in time, the Jenksville policeman did not recover his wits so opportunely. He did everything in his power to correct the foolish mistake he had made at the railway station; he was most active in corresponding with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones regarding details of description concerning the man, and he journeyed to New York more than once to inspect a suspected character. The ally, with the runabout, was traced to a large town some ten miles up the coast, and arrested. But the peculiar "honor among

thieves," which exists in the criminal class, kept him from "peaching on his pal," as he graphically expressed it, and after a short term in prison he was freed to go back to his fellows—no doubt to be welcomed with open arms. Violet's abductor was never found. It is only to be hoped that he has by this time encountered a policeman with sharper wits and is being made to suffer righteous retribution.



## CHAPTER XIII

### LETTY GOES VISITING

“Oh, Letty,” exclaimed Mary Beckwith, hurrying into the house one bright morning about a week after Violet’s adventure, “have you read your letters this morning?”

“They haven’t come yet. Why?” asked Letty with interest, guessing from Mary’s manner that something pleasant was about to happen. “What’s up?”

“Why, a letter from Meta Lowell. She has heard about your motor trip to Narragansett, and is going to invite you all to stop over with her at Watch Hill. She thinks I am going on the trip too, and she wants you and me to go on ahead of the others and have a visit with her.”

“Oh, wouldn’t it be jolly! But I don’t believe I can,” added Letty soberly. “We may give up the motor trip.”

“Oh, what hard luck! Isn’t Violet-Mary any better?”

"Oh, yes, I think she's all right, but Aunt Mary is so nervous and upset still."

"Well, then, I should think the motor trip would be the best thing for her—to get her mind off."

"Exactly what Mrs. Emlin says. But tell me more about Meta's letter."

"Here, read it for yourself, and here comes the boy with your own letters. We got ours extra early to-day because the chauffeur stopped for them on his way back from taking father to the early train."

The arrival of the morning mail was a sort of magnet to draw every one to the veranda and Violet and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones appeared on the scene together, with the conventional: "Is there anything for me?"

"Oh, Mary," exclaimed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, as Mary acquainted her with Letty's prospective invitation, "I don't see how I could ever consent to Letty's going! I feel as if I could never bear to let either of my girls out of my sight again."

"But I'm going too, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. Mother said I might. And Letty and I will stand by each other on the trip, won't

we, Letty? No harm can come to us together."

"That's what I believed when Molly, Violet and Letty all went off together the other day," answered Mrs. Hartwell-Jones with a shiver.

"But we won't separate. We'll stick as close as—as the Siamese twins," laughed Mary. "It's such a short journey and you can pick up Letty on your way to Narragansett."

"Well, we'll talk it over later. Has Letty got her letter from Meta yet?"

"Yes, Aunt Mary, right here," answered Letty herself, waving the note she had been reading. "And you have one, too. I should love to go."

"Would you, Letty mine?" asked Mrs. Hartwell-Jones wistfully. She never could bear to deny Letty anything. "Well, we'll see."

And in the end, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones consented to the proposed visit. Her own good common sense, as well as the counsel of all her friends, assured her that it would be foolish to deprive Letty of what promised to be a very interesting visit merely because of her own fears and nervous apprehension.

“I shall be utterly wretched every second of the time Letty is out of my sight,” she confided to Miss Terlowe, “but after all, I must not punish Letty for my own sore nerves. I fancy this district is safer from any attempts to molest young people than it has been for years. Violet’s experience has thoroughly roused the vigilance of the local police. Just the same, how happy I shall be when we start on our motor trip and I have Letty back at my side again.”

“I appreciate your feelings entirely, dear Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, but after all Letty must learn to look after herself if she is to follow a career in the world. Don’t make her too soft and dependent.”

“You are right,” admitted Mrs. Hartwell-Jones sadly. She was tempted to add, “But you cannot altogether understand when you have no children of your own.” She was glad that she had not said it when Miss Terlowe went on, with a wistfulness in her voice that was tragic:

“I am selfish enough to be glad that the invitation is not for Violet, but that I may have the pleasure of her presence a few days longer.

I shall be gone when you return from your motor trip. I must start rehearsals for my new play, you know."

"I hope you feel strong and well for all the work that is in store for you?"

"Yes, indeed, thank you; I am wonderfully improved. And I think a great deal of my renewed spirit is due to the happy hours spent with your sweet daughters, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. There is nothing so good for jaded spirits as contact with healthy, bright young people. And I hope the intercourse is not to cease? You will bring Violet—and Letty, too, of course—to see me when you get back to town?"

"You know well that nothing would give them greater pleasure," replied Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, smiling. "And what you say of Letty is so true," she added with a sigh. "I must help her to fit herself for standing alone in the world. She herself feels the necessity."

"I took the liberty of giving her some advice; did she tell you?"

"To study in a big conservatory? Yes, and I see the wisdom of it, Miss Terlowe."

"So does Madame Henri; she and I have

talked it over. I hope you don't think me interfering, but I have seen so many girls fail just because they had not begun in the right way. They had real talent, many of them, but got discouraged and failed merely because they started out with the idea that they were fitted to begin as stars."

Just then Letty joined them, and eyed their grave faces with concern.

"I hope you aren't reconsidering about my going to Meta?" she asked eagerly.

"No, child, and you ought to be at the packing of your trunk if you are to start to-morrow."

"It's done. I hadn't so very much to put in."

"I'm afraid you are not exactly equipped for a fashionable house party," sighed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. "I had not anticipated any such excursions into the gay world when I planned your summer wardrobe."

"But I think Letty has lovely clothes," chimed in Miss Terlowe. "That is one thing made me notice your girls in the beginning, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. I admired the simple, tasteful way in which they were dressed."

“Oh, thank you, Miss Terlowe. I feel that way, too. Aunt Mary always has the very best taste, I know. Only you see Meta Lowell’s friends are rather apt to be butterflyish, and they are a little older, so of course they dress up more.”

“Then you will have the added advantage of being distinguished among them,” replied the great actress quietly.

These few words of common sense reconciled Letty completely to her simple summer wardrobe, and she put in the last things with a light heart.

“There’s one thing I shan’t need to worry about, anyhow,” she said gayly, “and that is how I am to wear my hair. Won’t the be-curled and be-Marceled young ladies envy me when I come out of bathing, or if we have a rainy day!” And she rumped her short brown curls complacently.

The journey was to be very simple and easy. John, the Beckwiths’ long-tried and true chauffeur, was to motor Letty and Mary down to Sag Harbor, and himself see them actually on board the boat for New London. Mary had taken that trip at least once a summer

ever since she was a baby, and was a particular friend of the captain. He, in turn, was to put the girls on board the train, in care of the conductor, as far as Westerly, where Mrs. Lowell's automobile would meet and convey them to Watch Hill.

These plans were all carried out to the letter, the unexpected did not happen, and Letty sent an enthusiastic, comprehensive telegram to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones from Westerly.

Meta was delighted to see them and declared that she had parties and excursions enough planned to keep them busy the rest of the summer.

"Can you stay only two days?" was her first speech after greetings and introductions were over. "There is so much to do. And some of the girls I asked can't get down until Monday. They had other week-end engagements."

"Some of the girls," echoed Letty, thinking of her trunk full of plain white "jumpers" and simple muslin dresses. "How many have you asked?"

"Oh, there are only four here besides your-





“RUN UPSTAIRS AND GET READY”



self, counting Grace Howard. You both know her?"

"Yes," answered Mary without enthusiasm, and went on quickly, to hide her feelings on that subject, "You know I have to go back on Monday, Meta, because Max is bringing down all those boys of his class for a week. Life is going to be strenuous."

"I wish you could side-track them off to us," replied Meta enviously. "The male element is sadly lacking here. It's the one drawback. But we girls pretend we don't care. We call ourselves suffragettes."

"What for?"

"To seem independent. It makes us feel less wall-flowery when we haven't enough partners to go 'round at the dances. But run up-stairs and get ready for tea; it'll be in in a minute now, and I want you to meet all the girls."

"But mayn't we say how-do-you-do to your mother first?" objected Mary, who had old-fashioned ideas of politeness.

"Oh, you'll see her at the tea tray," answered Meta carelessly; "she is probably dressing now, or beautifying. Do come along

up. I hope you girls don't mind rooming together," she added as they reached the upper hall. "I thought you'd like that better than each going in with a strange girl."

"Mercy, yes; we'll take great comfort in each other, won't we, Letty?" answered Mary, with more frankness than tact.

"Well, Letty, what do you think of it?" she asked, confronting her friend as the door was closed. "I suppose we are expected to do 'beautifying,' too."

"Whatever shall I do?" asked Letty with a groan. "I believe I'll get a sick headache. Did you see Meta's dress? My very best bib and tucker will look old-fashioned and shabby beside it, let alone the dress I had expected to wear in the evenings when there was no party."

"Well, let's not dress at all now. Our trunks haven't been brought up, anyhow, and I haven't a thing in my bag, have you? We'll just wash up and brush our hair like tidy little girls and go down," and going into the bathroom adjoining, Mary began to suit her action to her word.

"I'd no idea Meta was such an elegant

young lady," commented Letty, going to the dressing-table and beginning to brush her hair. "This house isn't a bit bigger than the Rubber Band, Mary—I doubt if there are as many rooms. And yet it gives me a terrible feeling of magnificence. That short trip up the stairs was like a processional and the very way Meta said 'we'll meet at tea' sounded like a great function."

"Oh, it's just their way. I mean the way of the so-called fashionable world. They like to put on lots of lugs. Pardon the slang, my dear, but nothing else will describe it. Don't let them bluff you into thinking they're a superior order of beings. Let's just wear our plainest clothes and grandest manner. With a little management and good acting we can make those silly girls feel that they are cheap and out of taste—if they are all like Grace Howard," she added vindictively. "Meta didn't tell me she was going to be here."

"Gracious, I hope they aren't all as old as she," added Letty fervently. "Why, she's coming out this winter, isn't she?"

"Yes; and you'd think, from the way she

talks about it, that she was to be presented at Court at the very least. But come along; we don't want to be late, anyhow. Are you ready?"

"Yes, as soon as I get a clean handkerchief. Oh, I wish I had worn my suit to travel in, as Aunt Mary wanted me to, instead of this jumper. The jumper is lots cooler, but I feel like a kid in it," replied Letty nervously.

"Rubbish! Just carry it off in a free and easy way, as if you were dressed in the latest scream. Follow my lead," answered Mary reassuringly. "Come along."

As they were about to leave the room, they were arrested by a deprecatory knock on the door.

"Your trunks, miss," explained a pretty chambermaid, dressed like a soubrette. "Mrs. Lowell says to tell you she is sorry they were not sent up sooner, and she will wait tea if you wish to change."

"Perhaps I'd better," said Letty doubtfully, and wondering, if she did change, whether she would be expected to make still another toilet for dinner.

"Of course not; it's too much bother," an-

swered Mary, positively. "Besides, it would take too long. I'm as hungry as a bear."

"Very well, miss," spoke up the maid who had been listening with secret amusement. "Might I have your keys?"

Letty resented this personal attention. She would infinitely have preferred unpacking her own trunk, but she surrendered her key meekly, as did Mary, whose independence could not cope with every phase of the new customs, and then they went down-stairs to seek their hostess and be introduced to the other guests.

The hall and drawing-room were empty, but the girls followed the sound of talk and laughter to an awninged terrace at the back of the house. On their progress thither, they encountered a footman, who turned and piloted them gravely.

Mary, in a simple suit of dark blue linen, with her neat braids pinned up, looked quite grown up and equal to any emergency, but Letty looked absurdly childish and overgrown in her white Peter Thomson frock and short, curly hair. She was quick to see and feel the little pause that followed their entrance upon

the terrace, and the exchange of swift, amused glances among the three or four exquisitely gowned young ladies who sat or semi-reclined about a Lucullus-laden tea table. Meta ran forward to meet them, and Mrs. Lowell's greeting was hearty and natural, in spite of an ultra elegant tea gown of pink chiffon and very evident "beautifying." It is possible Letty might have felt at her ease again if it had not been for Grace Howard, who suddenly caught both her hands and exclaimed:

"What an adorable child! Do give me a kiss."

Letty blushed and turned away furiously. She bit her lip to keep back an angry retort and Mary, indignant at the unnecessary remark, took up the cudgels for her friend.

"Hello, Gracie," she said with easy familiarity. "Have you got over your disappointment about not getting asked to the 'Mid-Summer' club? My sister said all the good words she could, and the Prom. was great fun, they tell me. I'll probably go next year."

This was mean revenge, perhaps, but Mary's blood was up in Letty's defense. The "Mid-



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Summer" club was a very exclusive series of summer dances, the privileged guests being entertained in turn by various country clubs and Casinos. To be invited was a great honor, not very easily obtained, as Grace Howard had discovered to her sorrow.

"Oh, the Mid-Summer is quite out of date, they tell me," drawled Grace in her most grown-up voice. "When I asked your sister for an invitation I did not know who was on the Board. Only old fogies, I've found out since."

"Thanks, since sister Ellen is one of them," laughed Mary good-naturedly, and changing the subject. She knew that she had scored, and did not want to be rude.

Letty slipped into a hard, uncomfortable seat behind Mrs. Lowell, refused all her favorite cakes and nibbled at a stale macaroon, overcome with embarrassment and self-abasement.

"If this is what Meta calls having a good time, I wish I had never been included in it," she thought miserably.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A WEEK-END

WHEN Mary and Letty went up to dress for dinner that evening they held a council of war.

“I do think it was pretty mean of Meta to get us here with all those dressy, would-be grown-ups, when she knows what sort of clothes we have for Sea Side,” scolded Mary. “How many best dresses have you brought, Letty?”

“Only one best-best, for a possible party,” admitted Letty. “I thought my pink muslin and white dotted swiss would be plenty good enough for ordinary nights, just as they are at home.”

“So they are, and we’ll show these girls we think so. I was going to suggest that we shine out in our best, to dazzle them. But we couldn’t keep it up, could we?”

“Not unless we went home to-morrow,” answered Letty ruefully.

“ Well, that would be foolish and would be putting ourselves down to their level, anyway. Let’s show them that we’re not afraid to be simple and girlish. After all, Letty, we are only children, and so are they under all their aping. Grace Howard is older, of course, but not the world-wise and weary creature she would have us believe her.”

“ Do you remember,” answered Letty, “ how in ‘ Little Women ’ Meg went to visit Sally Gardner, and found just this sort of fashionable gathering? We won’t make the mistake she did, of getting furbished up and feeling silly and unnatural. I am going to put on my pink muslin, so here goes.”

Dinner was a long, magnificent affair. Indeed, rather longer than usual, for Meta had planned no particular entertainment for her friends and was inclined to delay the return to the drawing-room and terrace. Letty had rather a good time, on the whole, for she was hungry and enjoyed her dinner, and as Grace Howard, on her left side, let her completely alone, as too young to notice, and Mr. Lowell, around the corner at the foot of the table, was too absorbed in his own meal to converse, she

did not have to exert her conversational powers. By the time dessert was on the table, however, he found time to attend to his daughter's guests, and asked Letty abstractedly where she was spending the summer. When she told him, he looked more interested and asked if that were not the place where Miss Terlowe, the actress, was spending the summer.

"I have money invested in the management that stars Miss Terlowe," he explained, "and I am interested in her health."

"Well, she is very much better," replied Letty coolly, who thought this a very cold-blooded reason for being interested in anybody's health.

Grace Howard pricked up her ears and turned.

"How do you know she's better—except from seeing her in the distance, I suppose," she said. "Of course you don't know her at all."

"Oh, but I do, very well indeed," answered Letty demurely. "It was only last week that she was of the greatest help to us," she added, her face softening and growing serious at the recollection.

"What is it, Letty? Do let us all in on it, if it's a good story," called Meta from the other end of the table, and as she spoke, every one rose and Mrs. Lowell led the way to the terrace, where coffee was to be served.

It was a beautiful night; the moonlight glimmered radiantly upon a sea of silver, and a soft west breeze lent coolness to the air. But the sea appeared to be a very secondary consideration in this perfectly regulated household. It was a background, perhaps, but nothing more.

"Now for the story, Letty," said Meta, knowing that the most trite anecdote about so celebrated a personage as Miss Terlowe would hold the attention of her guests for an interval.

"And tell it all, Letty," added Mary, wanting Letty to come in for her own glory. "Begin with finding the ring."

"How romantic that sounds," murmured Grace Howard, adjusting her scant draperies in an artistic outline as she semi-reclined in a chaise-longue.

So Letty told, simply and quietly, the tale of her finding of Miss Terlowe's ring, the resulting friendship and the exciting rescue

of Violet from the hands of the kidnapper. It was easy to see that she rose several notches in the esteem of her listeners.

Presently three or four young men strolled nonchalantly out, Mr. and Mrs. Lowell retired indoors to play bridge with neighbors, and the company broke up into little groups. Letty and Mary felt decidedly *de trop* and presently, pretending fatigue after their journey, they excused themselves and went up to their own room.

"Oh, must you go up so early?" exclaimed Meta, detaching herself from a group and joining them. She felt a little guilty. "Come on over here and talk. Perhaps we'll dance later, to the phonograph, if the rest don't think it too hot. Well, then, if you really are tired, I suppose you'll be happiest in bed; and oh, girls, just ring when you want your breakfast and it will be brought up to you. We don't appear, generally, until about ten or eleven. Good-night, and be sure to ring if you haven't everything you want."

"Ugh, breakfast in bed!" ejaculated Letty when they were safe in the privacy of their

own room. "It will make me feel like an invalid again. No wonder all these people have a sort of depressed look."

The girls undressed and stayed awake quite late, chattering and comparing their impressions.

"I was dying to suggest a good rousing game of hide-and-seek in the garden. The moonlight was plenty bright enough," said Mary, "or, if that would spoil the girls' clothes, 'Up-Jenkins' around the dining-room table. Do you suppose they do this every night, all summer long?"

"Imagine sitting around in tight, last winter's cast-off finery, and thinking you are enjoying life! Meta says to-morrow night is going to be very gay, with a hop at the Casino or hotel or somewhere. I don't know whether they have a Casino here, but a dance will be fun."

"Why didn't you show them the aquamarine Miss Terlowe gave you?" asked Mary presently.

"Oh, a bit of vanity on my part. I'm going to wear it to the party to-morrow night, and when any one admires it it will be such

a joy to say carelessly, 'Oh, you think that pretty? It's a little thing Miss Terlowe gave me the other day.'" And the girls both laughed, for Letty had hit off Grace Howard's blasé tones to the life.

Mary climbed into bed with a yawn.

"Hark, there goes the phonograph. I'm glad I'm not down there doing the one-step with those tailors' dummies. I hope they'll have some real boys to-morrow night."

"Goodness, I hope so! Did you try talking to any of them to-night? The one I said a few words to could hardly pronounce his own name."

"They think it's fashionable to talk that way," responded Mary. "Yes, I'm ready; put out the light. Hark, some one is singing! I wonder Meta didn't ask you to sing, Letty."

"I was half expecting it myself," admitted Letty ruefully. "That's the phonograph again, singing—a rag-time song."

The girls sat up in bed a few minutes, listening to the faint sounds that floated up to them from below; then Mary turned over and said good-night. But Letty lay for hours,



tossing and turning. The bed was deliciously soft, and the embroidered sheets gave a sensation of elegance, but somehow it lacked comfort. The moonlight stole away from the open casement, and the eastern sky was paling for the early summer dawn before she settled into anything like a restful slumber, and consequently it was late when she awoke.

The down pillows and linen sheets felt more cozy by daylight and she found it very luxurious to lie there, curled up and half dozing, knowing that it did not matter when she roused herself or dressed. Mary, coming out of the adjoining bathroom partly dressed, waked her at length.

“You lazy thing,” she laughed. “It’s nine o’clock. Are you being demoralized already? Trot along into your bath; I’ve started it for you. Shall I ring for breakfast?”

When Letty emerged, fresh and rosy from her cold tub, she found a low table, set with a most delectable breakfast, drawn up before the window and Mary, in her wrapper, already pouring chocolate.

“Sit down, Miss Sybarite. This isn’t much like ‘late for breakfast again, my dear; fine,

two sheets to hem,' is it? I'm going to dwell on this part of my visit to my precious, old-fashioned mother."

"It is pretty nice for a change, isn't it?" admitted Letty, yawning. She did not want to mention her bad night because she would have to own up to homesickness. "And really, Mary, if fashionable people always live like this, do you wonder that they never accomplish anything really worth while? It is demoralizing, isn't it?"

"It sure is, but it's boresome too," answered Mary, who was feeling very well and energetic after a long night's sleep. "Let's go for a walk, just by our two selves, when you've dressed. I dare say it'll be the only real exercise we'll get all day, except the dancing to-night."

"And that depends upon whether any one asks us to dance," laughed Letty. "I need a walk to help me shake off the enchantment of all this laziness."

Mary was wrong about the exercise, for tennis was having a revival among fashionable circles and as Mary and Letty both played well, they were kept busy practically all day.

“I have an invitation for lunch at the Randalls’ with a limited number,” Meta announced as the house party assembled on the terrace about mid-morning. “Who wants to go?”

Every one hung back at first with murmurs of excuse or indifference, but it developed that Mary and Letty were the only ones who did not really want to go, and they saw the others off with no feeling of envy or regret.

Mrs. Lowell was a woman of naturally simple tastes, and she and Mary and Letty gathered around a lunch table much more simply served and dressed than would have been the case had Meta and her fashionable guests been present; “much more homelike,” as Mary confided to Letty afterward, and then she left the girls to their own devices until tea-time. The time was most pleasantly spent, for Meta had privately telephoned to two of the younger boys to come around for tennis. They were jolly, wholesome youths, the court a good one, and it was with real regret that the girls saw the lunchers returning and were summoned to tea.

Thanks to their new friends, they had a very good time at the dance in the evening, and in their simple, but daintily made frocks, looked very distinguished among the overdressed, over-curled damsels of Meta's set. Letty enjoyed her little triumph about the jewel and also had the gratification of hearing her hair admired and envied, as the heat and exertion of the evening took their toll from patiently waved heads.

To Letty's surprise, Sunday was treated like any other day. Those who wished could go to church, but very few seemed to entertain that wish, and when Mary and Letty returned from morning service they found the entire house party assembled on the terrace, looking sleepy and dull.

They motored that afternoon, and went as far as Wakefield, a town a few miles below Narragansett Pier.

"We could easily run on to Narragansett, get your papers and be back home in time for dinner, Letty," said Meta. "Would you like to?"

"Are we really so near as that? But no, please, because that would take out all the

point of Mr. and Mrs. Emlin's motor trip. But I did not realize the distance was so short. I shall have to read up my geography." She laughed. "It makes me think of the time Aunt Mary and I were staying at Hammer-smith and talked of going to Edgebrook to buy paper. I planned and talked, and it seemed like a long, important excursion and when we asked Mr. Parsons, our landlord, about it, we found it was less than twenty miles away."

The arrangement had been that Mr. and Mrs. Emlin, with their guests, were to get an early start from Sea Side on Monday morning, and reach Westerly that same afternoon, where Letty was to be motored to meet them. Meta and Mrs. Lowell both had written very urgently inviting the entire party to spend Monday night with them, but Mr. Emlin, who preferred the independence of a hotel when touring, insisted that they would make too many guests for one household. Mary, meanwhile, was to return home on Monday, as her mother wished her to be on hand before the avalanche of college boys descended.

Letty was dismayed, therefore, to receive a

telegram on Monday morning saying that the motor party had decided to put off their start until later in the day, and would sleep at New London that night, picking up Letty en route Tuesday morning. The telegram came just as Mary was leaving, and Letty was strongly tempted to accompany her as far as New London and await the motorists there. She even suggested the plan to Mary.

"But that wouldn't do at all. Why, in the first place, you don't even know the name of the hotel in New London they are going to, and in the second place, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones would never forgive me if I went off and left you sitting alone in a strange hotel."

"I couldn't fail to meet them if I went down to the boat landing, but you are right about my being alone in the hotel. Aunt Mary would not approve, I know, especially after her scare about Violet-Mary. No, I'll have to stick it out, but, Mary, when you grow up and marry, please don't go in for a fashionable existence or I shall never visit you."

"You visited Lady Anvers and enjoyed

yourself, and they are screamingly more fashionable than the Lowells."

"I know, but that was so different—more real. This sort of life—but there, I'm still Meta's guest, so mum's the word, but a phrase from my literature sticks in my mind. What was Bacon talking about when he said it was 'stale, flat and unprofitable'? He must have been just back from a fashionable week-end party."

"You poor child, is it as bad as that?" laughed Mary. "I wish I could stay and cheer you up a bit, as Aunty Doleful says, but remember that my dear friend Gracie is going this morning, too, having used up all her toilettes on this stand, so perhaps the atmosphere will clear. Tell Meta to ask those nice boys over again for tennis."

Which advice Letty took, and the day did not pass so dully, after all. Nevertheless she was thankful when bedtime came and she could retire to count the hours until the motorists should arrive.

"And, oh, how glad I shall be to see Aunt Mary again!" she sighed. "I hope I am not ungrateful to feel so disagreeable about a

visit. I suppose Meta felt obliged to ask me, to pay back her visit to me, but I was not obliged to accept and as long as I am her guest I must act as if I enjoyed it. I guess I've been a little homesick."



## CHAPTER XV

### AN EPISODE

BUT Letty was doomed to another disappointment. Meta accompanied her in the motor to Westerly, which the Emlins expected to reach at about noon, and they found the motorists awaiting them, but an incomplete party.

“Where is Aunt Mary?” asked Letty, when greetings had been exchanged.

“Oh, Letty, it is such a disappointment! Mother had to go to New York.”

“Had to go to New York!” exclaimed Letty in astonishment. “Whatever could take Aunt Mary to New York at this time of year?”

“Oh, some business or other. I don’t know.”

“Wouldn’t it wait?”

“Mother didn’t seem to think so. She got a letter from Mr. Shoemaker yesterday morn-

ing, just as we were ready to start, which made her change all her plans."

"And is that why you didn't start as early yesterday?"

"Yes, Letty dear," put in Mrs. Emlin. "We waited, hoping that Mrs. Hartwell-Jones could telephone her lawyer and settle everything that way, but she thought it wiser to go up to town herself. She asked me to tell you not to be too disappointed, and she is going to try to arrange her plans so as to meet us in New London on our way back and go across with us from there."

"It's too bad, when she loves motoring so," sighed Letty, greatly disappointed, "and I'm afraid it's awfully hot in New York."

"I'm afraid so, too," sighed Mrs. Emlin, "but it can't be helped. We did everything in our power to persuade her. Meta, dear, of course you are going to stop and have lunch with us? It was very good of you to bring Letty down. Ask your chauffeur to go back to the garage and get his lunch with our man. If you are all ready, girls, I think we'll go in."

Luncheon was quickly over, Letty thanked

Meta politely and with as much heartiness as she could express, and they all started off together, Meta alone in her car, waving a farewell at the turning half a mile out of town, and Mr. and Mrs. Emlin, Violet, Molly and Letty in Mr. Emlin's big touring car.

Letty had looked forward to this moment with eager intensity for the past three days, and yet, like so many ardent wishes tardily fulfilled, it did not gratify her. She still felt aloof, alone, *de trop*.

"Mr. and Mrs. Emlin have their own affairs to talk about, and Molly and Violet-Mary are all in all to each other," she told herself dismally. "I am not really needed or wanted at all. Oh, why did not Aunt Mary come? She and I would have paired off so nicely. I hope she isn't really worried about anything."

The fact was that Letty was suffering from a bad headache. She never would have taken so mournful a view of things if it were not for that. She admitted as much presently, and Mrs. Emlin patted her hand sympathetically.

"Too much rich food and late hours, my dear. I know exactly how you feel. But the rush through this cool, salt air will fix you

up in no time. Don't try to talk, but just sit back and enjoy yourself."

They reached Narragansett in about an hour and a half, but although Letty had taken Mrs. Emlin's advice about not talking, the headache still persisted, so she declared her intention of lying down to sleep it off.

"Will you mind if the rest of us go off and leave you, then, for a couple of hours or so?" asked Mrs. Emlin. "We have been told of an interesting old house a few miles above here, built in pre-revolutionary times, that I'd like to visit."

"Oh, please go, dear Mrs. Emlin, and don't have me on your mind."

"I won't, dear, only I promised your Aunt Mary that I wouldn't let either of you out of my sight. But you will certainly be safe locked up here, won't you?"

"Quite safe, and as comfortable as possible, thank you."

"Well, I'll hurry off then, for Mr. Emlin is waiting. You have everything you want, have you? And we'll be back before dark. Good-bye, dear child."

Letty closed the shutters to shut out the

glare, but with the slats open to let in the stiff sea breeze, and laid her head on the cool pillow with a thankful sigh. She fell asleep almost at once, for she was really tired. There is nothing quite so fatiguing as continued disappointment.

She slept for several hours and woke, feeling much refreshed. Glancing at her watch she found it was after six o'clock and she wondered with a start if the motorists had returned. She knocked at the door of the room adjoining, which Molly and Violet shared, and receiving no answer, opened it and found the room empty. Then she heard a bell ring and returning to her own room, answered the telephone, fearful lest some accident had befallen the excursionists.

"Hello, Letty," said Molly's voice at the other end of the wire. "We are stuck, away up the road here, with a blow-out, and Aunt Isabel wants me to tell you that we'll be pretty late for dinner. Are you all right?"

"As right as right can be, thank you. I'm sorry for your trouble. Are you in a comfortable stopping-place?"

"Oh, yes, we are all right, but Aunt Isa-

bel felt anxious about leaving you alone so long."

"Well, please tell her not to worry. I've got an interesting book, my headache is gone, and I'm as cozy as can be."

"I'll tell her. We'll be home about eight o'clock. There's a box of chocolates in Violet's bag, and she says you're to help yourself. Good-bye."

Letty laughed, hung up the receiver, and went in search of the chocolates. Life was looking more cheerful again.

"I wonder how Violet reconciled her conscience with the 'N. O. E. S.' when she bought these," she laughed, fishing the big candy box out of Violet's bag and carrying it back to her own room. She got out her book and curled herself up in an easy-chair beside the window, quite content to munch and read in peace.

But the busy scene beneath her soon engrossed her attention and she put aside the book to look out of the window, which overlooked the broad ocean drive and promenade. A constant procession of fashionably dressed people moved back and forth, walking, riding in carriages, automobiles and a

few on horseback, talking, smiling, eagerly animated, or listlessly bored. Almost every type of human countenance known to man—or at any rate to society—was depicted and Letty felt as if she were in a box at a pantomime.

Away to the left she could see a low building with a broad terrace set with innumerable small tables, crowded with people, and beyond, a still greater crowd surging up and down past cheap-looking frame buildings. It was along there, she guessed, that Mr. Drake had his moving picture show.

“We’ll have to put off our visit to the Drakes until to-morrow morning,” she thought. “By the time the others get back and we’ve had dinner, it will be too late to go to-night. But I don’t mind. I wonder why Mr. Drake has been so cranky about not sending the papers. Of course it’s been fun to speculate about them but I do think he’s rather silly. How glad I shall be to see the letters my own precious mother wrote to Ben! I wonder if there will be anything about me in them.”

She fell to dreaming about her dear mother,

who had died so many years ago, and of her early life, when presently her attention was caught by the sight of a poor woman, scantily clothed in dingy, ragged garments, standing in the crowd below. Two ragged children were clinging, bewildered and frightened, to her skirts, and she held a third in her arms. The background of handsome stonework that bordered the board promenade made a grotesque setting for the forlorn creature, and she stood out, alien and shunned, among those prosperous, chattering, well-dressed people. Clearly she had wandered far from her own station at the lower, poorer end of the town.

But she had come with a purpose; she was begging, and Letty watched with increasing indignation how the crowd brushed by, some ignoring, the others drawing their skirts aside, but no one heeding her appeal.

“Oh, the poor woman looks half starved. She is as thin and pitiable looking as Mrs. Smith at Bear Creek,” sighed Letty. “And not a soul giving her a penny. I wonder if I could attract her attention and toss her some money from here.”

She got up, took a coin from her purse, and



returned to the window. But the woman had moved farther along, the street between was wide, and Letty realized that she could not possibly attract her attention without making enough noise to attract the attention of every one else in the immediate neighborhood as well.

“I’ll take it down to her,” she resolved, and left the window again when a sudden idea occurred to her. “Why not?” she exclaimed aloud. “It would be great fun, and get her more money than I could possibly afford to give her. I’ll do it.”

Letty was in the mood for adventure, and did not stop for a moment to question the wisdom or prudence of her new thought. Crossing to her dress-suit case, she took out the white Peter Thomson jumper that had caused her such anguish upon her arrival at Meta Lowell’s house. She put it on and fastened a dark skirt over, tucking the white blouse inside, both to make her costume as plain and inconspicuous as possible, and also to furnish something of a disguise. Then she went into the adjoining room and took the liberty of opening Violet’s traveling bag again.

She rummaged about and finally found what she sought, a gray tweed traveling cap which Violet carried about with her and sometimes wore if the wind blew too strongly. This Letty put on, and laughed at the sight she represented in the mirror. The cap was too large for her head, smaller than its ordinary size under the short crop of hair, and it came down over her eyes in a grotesque fashion. She tucked a narrow band of paper around the inside of the crown, and it fitted better.

"I don't mind its coming down over my eyes a little way," she thought, "for I don't want to be recognized. Not that I know any one here, but the hotel people might think me queer."

She put her head out of the window again to assure herself that the beggar had not gone; her dressing had taken longer than she had anticipated. The poor woman was still there, a little farther down on the promenade, and still receiving no response to her pleas.

Letty opened her door and tiptoed down the corridor. The August dusk was already settling down, and it was quite dark in the passage. She did not take the elevator but ran

down the two short flights of stairs that led to the lobby of the hotel. This lobby seemed to Letty's eyes terribly full of people, mostly men, but they were all absorbed in their own concerns and no one even looked up as Letty went by. She emerged, a little breathless, upon the darkening street, where electric lights were already beginning to gleam. There were not so many people passing now, she was sorry to see, but she hoped there would be enough to form an audience. She crossed to the opposite side of the way and ran up to where the poor woman was standing. She had given up her begging for the moment and was soothing the whimpering child in her arms. She looked up with dull lack of interest as Letty paused before her. Certainly she did not expect to be addressed, or even given money, but her hand, palm upward, went out mechanically at sight of the silver coin Letty held out. But Letty did not pass on, as had all the others.

“I am going to help you,” said Letty gently. “I have been watching you from an upper window of that hotel and I am so sorry. Are you an Italian? Do you understand English?”

“Ah, yes, yes, me lika the English. I don't do this—no-a. Not alway. My man he blacka the boot and make-a much mon. But he hurt his han'—ah, dis t'ree, four day pass—he no canna work-a the han'. The bambino an' me, we hunger—yes. T'ank-a kindly for the help, pretty lady. The *Sanc-tissimo Bambino* will bless your pretty face—ah, yes.”

“But I am going to help you more than that,” replied Letty quickly. “At least, I am going to try. Stand right there a moment, please, and listen.”

Stepping forward to the edge of the pavement, she drew in her breath to get courage—it was not so easy as she had fancied, now that she was actually down here among all these people—and then she began to sing.

She had chosen a very simple, old-fashioned melody, and her voice was a little shaky at first, but a low, rapt “Ah-h-h!” from the music-worshiping Italian behind her was a sufficient stimulus, and putting her mind wholly on the kind impulse that had brought her there, Letty sang on, her voice rich and

full and immeasurably sweet in the summer twilight.

A crowd gathered. Automobiles stopped and people came hurrying up from all directions, those nearest attracted and held by the singing, those behind curious to know what was going on and pushing close until they, too, got within sound of the voice and remained, charmed and delighted.

"Here, quick, make the little boy pass his cap," whispered Letty to the woman between songs. "Tell him to go to every one—those automobiles out there, too. Quick, while I sing another song."

She sang again, her eye on the success of the ragged, scared little boy, who held up his hat timidly to the listening throng, and who, in a very few moments, had to take both hands to his work, the cap had grown so heavy with its load.

When Letty saw this, she knew that her mission had been successful, and she ended her song with a gay, triumphant little trill.

"There, it is enough to keep you until your husband's hand is well," she whispered to the woman. "Good-bye," and taking advantage

of the surging forward of the crowd, she slipped behind a broad back and mingled with the crowd itself.

Taking off her cap, she ran quickly down the walk and across to the haven of her hotel without once being noticed or recognized. Breathlessly she mounted the stairs to her own room and ran to the window to see what had become of the woman and her children.

The automobiles and carriages had moved away, and the crowd on the pavement was beginning to break up ; but a good many still lingered, and peered about curiously, evidently hoping for another song from the mysterious street singer. Letty saw several of them questioning the beggar woman, but she could only shrug her shoulders and signify that a good angel had come to do the singing. They all left her presently, and then Letty had the satisfaction of seeing the woman approach an electric light and kneeling on the pavement (the now sleeping baby placed in the arms of its scarcely bigger brother) and, emptying the coins in her lap, begin to count them eagerly. Letty fancied she could almost hear the clink of the money as it fell, and she knew how like

music that poor sound must be in the ears of the hungry woman.

“She can feed her children on it for a little while, at any rate,” she thought, “until her husband’s hand gets well, or he can find other work to do. Goodness, how late it is. I must get dressed before Mrs. Emlin and the others get back.”

Then she began to question, with many and growing misgivings, her recent action.

“I wonder if I ought to have done it? What would Mrs. Emlin say if she knew I had been out on the streets alone, almost at dark, singing to crowds of people? Oh, dear, it sounds rather dreadful when I put it that way. But I did it for a good cause. I wonder if I need to tell Mrs. Emlin? I practically gave her my promise that I would stay right here until they all got back. Oh, dear, did I do wrong? That poor woman looked so hungry and forlorn! I don’t believe I need tell Mrs. Emlin. I’ll make a clean breast of it to Aunt Mary the minute I get hold of her alone. Oh, my precious Aunt Mary, if she were only here now, she’d understand. I don’t believe she’ll scold.

“And what if they recognize me down in the hotel office? Well, even if they do, they don't know I am the one who sang. They may think I only went out to listen. No, I won't tell Mrs. Emlin, and even if my conscience does hurt, I've made one poor woman happy to-night.”



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE OLD ROBINSON HOUSE

THE motorists, meanwhile, were having a very enjoyable time. The old house they had come to see was very picturesque. Tall, gaunt, gambrel-roofed, it stood within its traditional New England dooryard, clean and furbished as a room. A huge clump of lilac bushes grew beside the front door-step—lilac bushes with a history, the smiling, white-haired woman who let them in told Molly and Violet.

“Of course there is a story,” she said, as they all stopped in the hall to admire and examine the wonderfully carved staircase of blackened oak. “Come into this room and see the funny old tiles with Scriptural tales, and I will tell you the story of Hannah Robinson. This room has been kept as nearly like as possible to the state it was in when the house was built, back in seventeen forty-nine. Sit down,

ma'am. And won't the young ladies be seated? Perhaps the gentleman would be more interested in the farmyard? My husband makes chickens his hobby, and has some prize ones."

Mr. Emlin agreed that poultry would be more in his line, perhaps, than a love-story, and went off, while the rest settled down to the delightfully feminine enjoyment of a real romance.

"It happened this way," began the old lady complacently. She had told the story so often that she had got quite a professional, once-upon-a-time style. "Young Hannah was a beauty, and the beaux all about the countryside courted her, but she had set her heart on a young Frenchman who had drifted somehow to this neighborhood. He lived in Wickford—that's a village about six miles up the road. And Hannah she was fair enthralled by him. I don't know whether it was his foreign ways, or the dandified clothes he wore. Anyhow, Hannah was daft over him, and he, seemingly, over her. But her father would hear nothing of the affair, and at last forbade the young man his house.

There was a great to-do over this and the young folk met in secret. Hannah's mother helped her. Not that she cared any more than her husband for the Frenchman, but she could not stand it to see her daughter pining away. So nights, when her father was busy, Hannah would creep out to the lilac bushes—the same as you saw when you came in, young ladies, only they weren't so big then, of course—and her mother would keep guard and give the signal if she saw her husband approaching.

“ One night, when it was raining and sore disagreeable to be out, she had the young ones meet in the parlor—the room across the hall—and her husband coming in unexpected like, they had to hide the Frenchman in a closet—and a big come-down it must have been to his dignity, I think, for the closet's not large. Yes, I'll show it to you—surely. And Hannah's own room, up above. It was my daughter's room, too, until she married—happily, I'm proud to say.

“ Well, the upshot of it was, of course, that they ran away and were married. Hannah and her mother both believed that, when the

deed was really done, her father would come round and forgive them, and everything would be serene and happy. The young man was thinking the same, I make no doubt, and counting that the father would support them into the bargain. Leastways, he made no arrangements toward supporting his bride, and they were in a sore way.

“Hannah’s father was in a fearful way when he heard the story, and would pronounce nary a word of forgiveness. He hired a house in Wickford for the couple to live in—they point it out to you this very day—but he vowed he’d never see his daughter again.

“Well, things went from bad to worse. The mother did what she could, but she had no means of her own and her husband kept a close eye on all she spent. She could barely keep the couple in food. Then one day the young husband ran away. To be sure, it was no worse than people had feared and expected, when they saw that Hannah’s father was implacable. Poor Hannah could not rally from this blow. She drooped and pined, and folks talked of the shocking way her father was treating her, until at last he came to hear

what was being said, and his heart was melted toward his abandoned daughter. He went to Wickford and brought her home, but it was too late. The poor girl died almost as soon as she reached her home again; the home where she had been so happy and then so miserable. And they say her repentant father didn't long outlast her.

"And now, if the young ladies are ready, we'll look at the house. I am sorry my story ended so sadly."

"Poor young thing! She wanted so to be happy," murmured Mrs. Emlin, rising to follow their hostess.

They rambled for some time around the quaint old interior, admiring the paneled rooms, the odd and beautiful carvings and the funny old Dutch tiles in the fireplace. Then Mr. Emlin came in to say that he had learned of another interesting locality to visit in the neighborhood.

"An old weaver lives not so very far from here, they tell me, and rather on our way home. He is a queer old character and weaves things by hand, Isabel. I am sure that will attract you."

The weaver was indeed a queer character, and they all lingered longer than they should have, perhaps. Mrs. Emlin bought two or three squares of quaint blue and white cloth, and ordered a counterpane of the same weave and design. Letty and Violet together bought one of the squares to take to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, and at last Mr. Emlin succeeded in making a start for home. The weaver's house was on the way home, in the sense that it was nearer Narragansett than the old Robinson house, but it was on a back road that was composed chiefly of loose stones and sand, never intended for an automobile.

The chauffeur was a clever driver and coaxed the car patiently through the ruts and hummocks. More than once they feared they were fast in a wilderness of sand. But they had nearly reached the highroad again when the tires, red hot with friction, suddenly rebelled and one of them blew out with a grand explosion that brought a farmer's boy running.

There was nothing for it, of course, but to wait while another tire was put on, and the girls climbed out and sat on the rail fence,

talking of their afternoon's experience and Hannah Robinson's romantic, sad love-story.

"Girls," called Mrs. Emlin from the car where she had remained seated, "do ask that boy if he has a telephone in his house. I should like to get word to Letty that we'll be late."

The girls ran off, telephoned Letty, as has been seen, and came back to their fence and their talk of Hannah Robinson and her lover.

"I don't believe I should ever fall in love with a Frenchman," declared Molly practically. "Madame Henri is dear, of course, and so is Mademoiselle, but I don't believe I should like so much—well, emotion, in a man. Not that I've ever met a Frenchman, but in books they are always embracing and even kissing each other when they are deeply affected."

"I suppose the French women don't mind; they are used to it," answered Violet.

"Yes, but Hannah Robinson wasn't French, and I imagine, from the sort of man her father was, that she'd been brought up very strictly, and that it was not considered good form to show her emotions. Perhaps that

was why she fell in love with the Frenchman," she added thoughtfully.

"I wonder how the poor thing felt when he ran away and left her. No wonder she pined away and died."

"Pooh, he wasn't worth dying for. It is very plain that he only married her for her money and when he found her father really wasn't going to forgive them, he just pulled up stakes and went."

"I wonder if those people who live there now are any relation to the Robinsons."

"No, they aren't. Aunt Isabel asked. But the woman had the story of Hannah Robinson printed in a little book, and Aunt Isabel bought a copy to give your mother. She thought she might use it in one of her stories."

"Mother will be interested in the story, but I'm afraid she wouldn't use it. She doesn't like sad stories."

"But she could make it have a happy ending."

"Oh, I wish it could have had a happy ending—the real story, I mean. Just think how perfect it would have been if the Frenchman



had turned out to be a great count or duke, with a vast estate to which he took his bride and forgave the cross father and had him over to visit them in their castle," sighed Violet.

"Another 'what if.' Did you used to inhabit that cozy little world of yours—the 'wouldn't-it-be-nice-if' world—before your mother found you again? When you were the 'little lame lace-maker' of Lyme Regis?"

"Oh, yes, of course. But I never dreamed anything one thousandth as wonderful as what really happened to me. And you know it was all through Letty that my mother found me. Just think, if Letty hadn't been so generous and interested, coming to see me, and telling mother about me and all, why, mother might have gone on living there within a mile of me the whole summer long, and gone away without either of us having been the wiser."

"It certainly was a 'happy ending,' and you both of you deserve it. I think you inherit your love of happy endings from your mother, Violet. Did it ever occur to you to dream another 'wouldn't-it-be-nice-if' about her?"

"Wouldn't it be nice if—what?" asked Violet, genuinely puzzled. "What can you be talking about, Molly?"

"I mean a happy ending to all her troubles—her husband being killed in that tragic way at sea, and you being lost to her for so long."

"But she has me back, now—and Letty, too."

"But she hasn't her husband."

"No—of course not. And I haven't any father."

"Would you like to have one?"

Violet turned two large, startled eyes upon her friend.

"Molly Wilson, you are talking in an awfully funny way. What do you mean? Have you heard that my father was not killed in that shipwreck, as my mother believed, but is about to be restored to us in some mysterious way?"

"Gracious, no! Who but you would ever think I meant such a thing as that? I mean—have you ever thought—has it ever occurred to you that your mother might marry again?"

"Mercy me, no! Who's being fanciful and 'what-if-y' now!" laughed Violet.

“It isn’t so improbable. Your mother isn’t at all an old woman, even if her hair is white. That came from shock, you know. I don’t believe she’s a bit over five years older than he—or maybe six. Lots of women marry men ten and even twelve years older than they and ‘live happily ever after.’”

“And all this from the practical Molly Wilson, who teases me for being romantic,” scoffed Violet. “You’ve even chosen the husband. May I ask whom you have destined for my future stepfather?”

“You needn’t make fun of me about it, or I won’t say another word.”

“But you must tell me who you think!”

“Not unless you tell me first whether you’d mind very much.”

“But if I said I did mind, you would refuse to tell me.”

“If you don’t say anything I shall think you mind a whole lot more.”

Violet considered. She was still inclined to take the matter as a jest, but could not help feeling a little uneasy.

“Well, then,” she said finally, “I don’t believe I should like it exactly. I can’t get

used to such an idea, even in fun. I suppose it would make some difference if I knew who he was."

"All the difference in the world," laughed Molly. "You like him awfully, I'll tell you that much."

"If you mean that you want me to guess whom you're thinking of, I just can't, so you'd better tell me first off. Why, the only two men mother knows at all well that aren't already married are Mr. Shoemaker and Mr. Jack Beckwith. And you surely wouldn't think of Mr. Shoemaker in that way."

"But why not the other? I told you he was a wee bit younger than Mrs. Hartwell-Jones."

"Not Mr. Jack, surely!"

"Why so 'surely'? I say, with the March Hare, 'Why not?'"

"But, Molly—he's so—so young! He's our friend—and specially Letty's."

"I know, but he's your mother's friend, too. Why, don't you remember, when Letty was so ill and you were all down at Lakewood, how he came clear down there after Mrs. Hartwell-Jones in his motor, so she

wouldn't have to wait for a train? If that isn't devotion, I don't know what is!"

"But it was for Letty's sake."

"Rubbish! It was for Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's sake!"

"Why, Molly, I just can't believe such a thing possible! What makes you think so?"

"Putting two and two together."

"Has any one else said anything?"

"No, but I think Aunt Isabel thinks as I do. But I'm not sure, so don't go saying anything. And above everything, don't say anything to Letty! Promise me, Violet. I wouldn't have said anything about it if I hadn't thought it was so—so evident. Why, for example, think how badly your mother has felt this summer; worried and absent-minded—not a bit like her usual self."

"That's true," admitted Violet. "I've been afraid mother has had something on her mind. And when she decided so suddenly to go up to New York, I felt sure it was business."

"Not at all; it's Mr. Jack going away—so far and for so long," declared Molly triumphantly.

Just then Mr. Emlin called out "All aboard"

to them, and the girls climbed down off the fence.

"Mind you are not to say a word to Letty," Molly cautioned as they ran to the car. "Not until your mother says something herself."

Violet nodded and sat looking very thoughtful all the way back to Narragansett. Mrs. Emlin concluded that she was overtired, and felt worried that they had had to make the day so long.

"We must not try to do anything to-night, girlies," she said. "Letty won't feel like it after her headache, and you can all go straight to bed. Mr. Drake and his papers must wait until to-morrow."

"We don't mind, if Letty doesn't," replied Molly, watching her friend a little uneasily and wondering if she had said too much. "Cheer up, Violet-Mary. Let's talk some 'what-ifs.'"

They got back to the hotel after dark and found Letty dressed and waiting for them, a little anxiously. She said that her head was much better and that she had had a very comfortable afternoon. She said nothing about the little episode of the singing.

## CHAPTER XVII

### MR. DRAKE'S EXPLANATION

LETTY and Violet were delighted to receive a letter from their mother the next morning, written from New York and saying that she would meet the motorists in New London that evening, as had been arranged beforehand with Mr. and Mrs. Emlin, and go the rest of the way home with them.

“That means that we must have an early luncheon, so as to reach New London by the time Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's train is due there,” said Mr. Emlin, and went to interview the manager about ordering an early meal.

“And we must go to see your friend Mrs. Drake at once, Letty dear. Mr. Emlin has two or three people he wants to see here, and some arrangements to make about the car, so we will all go off independently of him.”

“Did Aunt Mary give you the address, Mrs. Emlin? I have it in my pocketbook, but I

thought she might have given it to you, too, in case I lost mine."

"Yes, she gave me the addresses of their residence and of the moving picture theater. Suppose we try the theater first, as it is very near here."

They left the hotel and turned to the left, down toward the shabbier, more crowded part of the promenade which Letty had glimpsed from her window the day before. Letty looked about her a little uneasily at first, for it had occurred to her that her protégée of the night before might be abroad, and it would be very awkward should she see and recognize Letty. But although they passed a great many foreigners of almost every country, none took the slightest notice of the little party, except the proprietor of a shop where they stopped to admire the pretty lacework in the window.

"Here we are," cried Molly gleefully at length and they all paused in front of a conspicuous sign reading:—Baily & Drake—Moving Picture Aerodrome—Three Performances Daily. Come in and Get Your Money's Worth. Around the entrance were pasted large



posters, advertising and illustrating a "three-reel drama of gripping power" which looked rather sensational. A brisk, black-haired man with waxed mustaches approached and invited them to enter.

"The show will begin in a very few minutes, ma'am; step right in. Price ten cents—children half price," he said in a voice of habit, and laughed heartily over the closing phrase as he looked at the three tall, slender girls. His manner was so frankly familiar, without any of the veiled impertinence one is apt to encounter with people of his profession, that Mrs. Emlin could only be amused.

"We hadn't thought of attending the show," she said quietly; "we are here to see Mrs. Drake, the wife of one of the proprietors. Is she, by any chance, here or shall we call upon her at her lodgings?"

"Oh, you've come to the right place to find her all right, all right; her kid hands out programmes when there is any, and sells pa'm leaf fans, and let me tell you, Mrs. Drake is always where that kid is. And here's the kid now," he added, "so his Ma can't be far behind."

He turned and beckoned to a chubby child of between four and five, who appeared from behind the glaring posters. Letty eyed the child with interest. He was chunky, tow-headed and dimpled; quite an adorable child if he had been a little cleaner. But Letty could see no resemblance to the baby she had once loved so dearly.

"Hi, kid, where's your Ma?" called the black-haired man; "trot along and tell her there's a lady here to see her—four ladies," he added gallantly. "Excuse me, madam. I forgot to present myself. I'm Baily—Harry C. Baily, esquire, part owner and proprietor of the and so forth, at your service. But say, won't you all step into the office to wait for Mrs. Drake—that is, if you can all get in. 'Tain't the biggest office on record."

He led the way back of the posters, which revealed a narrow entrance, the center of which was blocked by a gaudily decorated ticket office.

"Here we are," he said, opening a narrow door at the right. "I guess you can all squeeze in. If you'll excuse me, I'll go back to my duties. I'll just make sure the kid

told his mother." He started to go out and turned to speak a last word :

" I sure do hope you'll take in the show. It's a corker. We had such crowds that we've started a mornin' exhibit. We calls it a aerodrome, but that's 'cause we bought the sign from the other man that ran it before us. He just had a sort of tent screen and could only show at night. And rainy nights he didn't have enough of an audience to pay gate receipts, so to speak. But we're all roofed in and electric lighted. It's payin' fine. I hope you'll drop in on us."

" Thank you," replied Mrs. Emlin graciously, " perhaps we will. I am glad you are so successful."

Mr. Baily bowed himself out and the four sat waiting in the tiny, stuffy little box of an office, studying the posters with which the walls were papered and wondering when Mrs. Drake would appear.

They had scarcely expressed their wonder, however, when the sound of voices from without appraised them that not only Mrs. Drake, but her husband as well, were coming. And when they entered, the reason for the short

delay was apparent to them all. Mrs. Drake had waited to wash up her small son, and she appeared, carrying him in her arms, her face wreathed in proud smiles at the honor done her.

"I'm sure we're pleased to see you," she exclaimed. "My, my, Letty, but you've growed! And you don't mean to tell me that this here young lady is the sweet, sick young thing I saw that time at that party you gave, Letty—Miss Letty, I should say! We've never forgotten that party, have we, Mr. Drake? I'm pleased to meet you, ma'am," she added, as Letty succeeded in murmuring Mrs. Emlin's name between Mrs. Drake's rapid exclamations. "Where's Mrs. Hartwell-Jones? Didn't she come too?"

"She was detained at the last moment by business, I am sorry to say," explained Mrs. Emlin.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I was hoping to have the pleasure of meeting her again. And so was Mr. Drake, wasn't you, Mr. Drake? This is my husband, ma'am," she added to Mrs. Emlin, whose name she had not caught. "Letty, would you have knowed the baby?"

"No, I never should in the wide world,

Mrs. Drake. He has grown so tremendously," replied Letty, holding out her arms. "Will you come to me? What a beauty he is," she said aside to the mother.

But the baby would not respond to her overtures. His manliness had been insulted, first by the vigorous face-washing, and secondly by being carried in his mother's arms and called "baby." He kicked and wriggled until he succeeded in getting out of his mother's arms, and on his own legs once more. Then he thrust his chubby hands into diminutive pockets, and exclaimed, in a droll imitation of Mr. Baily's brisk manner:

"Say, Pa, ain't it time for the show? You'd better get back on your job."

At this every one laughed so heartily that his brief assumption of manliness deserted him as speedily as he had acquired it, and he hid his abashed face in his mother's skirts.

"I guess the kid's about right," Mr. Drake observed when the laughter had subsided. "Would you ladies mind if I put off handin' over the papers? We are hopin', my wife an' I, to have the pleasure of havin' you as our guests for the performance. 'Tain't so bad," he

ended lamely, "and it's to begin right off. Wife, you show the ladies to good seats while I go back and get things started." And he bowed himself awkwardly out.

There was nothing for it but to accept his cordial if somewhat clumsily expressed invitation, and Mrs. Emlin and the girls followed Mrs. Drake, who was still talking volubly to Letty, Violet and any one whose attention she could secure for the moment.

"We didn't use to have a mornin' performance," she explained proudly, as she conducted them out of the office and into the narrow entrance way, now blocked by a goodly crowd of people, mostly children. "But we found we could make it pay, so here we are. It's a real payin' business, I tell you."

Their passage through the turnstile without the ceremony of buying tickets caused a mild sensation among the crowd, and Mrs. Emlin overheard one boy bluster :

"Gee, look at the nobs dead-beatin' the comp'ny. They could afford to pay a darn sight more'n us, too."

Which criticism Mrs. Emlin felt to be perfectly just.

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The "three-reel drama" was fully as thrilling as the posters promised and the three girls enjoyed it thoroughly. But Mrs. Emlin grew a little restless toward the end, for she was thinking about the early luncheon that had been ordered at the hotel, and she guessed that Mr. Drake's explanation about the papers, which was still to come, would be a trifle long drawn out.

It was over in due time, however, and they found Mrs. Drake waiting for them at the door. As every one pushed and squeezed toward the narrow exit in good-natured haste to be outside, Mrs. Emlin shuddered at the frightful picture that flashed across her mind of this same situation and an alarm of fire.

"Mr. Drake says will you come along back; there's more room for us all there; the office's so small," said Mrs. Drake, and they stepped aside to let the crowd pass.

When the little auditorium was emptied, Mrs. Drake took them back into it again and through to a large room at the back. The room was rough finished, with hoardings, and a flimsy, rough floor. But it was comparatively cool and shady after the heat and glare

of the tiny theater; and there were enough chairs for every one to be seated.

"Now then, ladies," said Mr. Drake, feeling that he was the center of attraction for the moment, and the confidence of the successful impression of his "show" giving him additional assurance, "here's this here precious bundle, and right glad I am to be rid of it. Miss Letty, I certainly owe you a 'pology f'r keepin' it back so long; but you see, it happened this-a-way—you've time for a bit of explanation, I hope, ma'am," he interrupted himself to say, as he caught Mrs. Emlin consulting her watch.

"Oh, yes, we'll wait. You see, we have to start early in order to get down to New London in time," explained Mrs. Emlin. "Pray go on, Mr. Drake."

"I won't be long, ma'am, but you see I owe it to Miss Letty here to tell her why I never gave her the papers right after her big brother died. I sure am sorry it all happened."

"But nothing much has happened, Mr. Drake. Don't have it so heavily on your conscience," said Letty encouragingly. "These are some old letters from my mother to Ben.



I shall be, oh, so thankful to see them, and I am so grateful to you for preserving them for me."

"Well, I guess your mother's letters ain't exactly the only treasure," answered Mr. Drake cannily, "and it was 'cause I kept 'em so careful that you didn't have 'em sooner. Didn't you ever put anything away so careful you couldn't find it again, ma'am?" he asked, appealing again to Mrs. Emlin.

"Often. I am sure we all have," replied Mrs. Emlin, smiling patiently.

"Well, then, to go back to the whys and wherefores. When I took on my circus—the one you and Ben was with me on, and Punch and Judy—but before you and him come to us; when I took on the circus it was in partnership with a man called Anderson, who wasn't much of a man. Well, soon after, he disappeared—just seemed like he was wiped off the face of the earth, with never a word left behind to say where he'd gone or why. Well, that was a little hard on me, but I went on runnin' the circus alone as well as I could until bimeby hard times caught up with us, as Letty here will remember.

“Then I saw that most likely I'd have to sell out before so very long, and that there partnership worried me. Not that I wanted Anderson cheated out of his share, if I did sell out, although I'd done all the work in the business; but I was afraid there would come up a question of signing partnership deeds, and if Anderson wasn't around to put his fist to a sale, why, you see, I was kinder afraid there couldn't be no sale.

“Of course I didn't want to tear up the papers; I didn't know what sort of trouble that might land me into, and I couldn't afford to talk to a lawyer. They tell me a lawyer will take your last dollar, just to tell you to come again next mornin'!

“Well, thinks I to myself, why say anything about the partnership, one way or t'other? By that time we'd heard that Anderson had gone to South Ameriky and I thought it more'n likely he was dead by that time from jungle fever or snake bite or one of the other unpleasantnesses you always get in South Ameriky, you know. So I just goes to the bank in the little town where our circus was showin' an' I asks the man how much

he'd charge f'r a box in his locked room. I told him as I had some vallyble papers to take care of for a little girl whose big brother had 'trusted 'em to me—I hope you don't mind my usin' your name in the business, Miss Letty—not that I give your name out an' out, you understan', but you was the little girl I was referrin' to. I seen it would make the man more interested like, if he knew that I wanted the box for that use—and if he ever come to hear of any sellin' out, he wouldn't think I'd been concealin' papers unlawful—which of course it wasn't, you all understand. Only that seemed the easiest way to explain it.

“Well, the upshot was, I got the box f'r a real reasonable sum, an' put in all my papers, Letty's bundle included. And the joke of the whole business was that I clean fergot 't I'd put Letty's papers in there, too. I told Ben 't I'd done it, an' he said he was glad, for then they'd be safe. Then—well, he died an' there wasn't time to remind me of anything, and so I went on clean forgettin' about 'em. I paid the bank for the box reg'lar—'twasn't much—and only a little time back we heard

sure and true that Anderson had died out there in South Ameriky, and he'd sent a message back to me by his chum, to say he was sorry he'd left me in the lurch, but it couldn't be helped at the time—an' makin' over to me any interest there might be left in the circus business.

“In course I sent a line to the bank, sayin' as how I didn't need the box no longer; and they sent me the papers I'd be'n keepin' there. I went over 'em, meanin' to burn the partnership ones, of course, and there—well, if there wasn't Letty's bundle, all as safe and secure as the day Ben give it to me!

“I'd worried over the disappearance of that there bundle somethin' sore, an' my wife an' me hunted for it many an' many a time, always hopin', with each new packin' up or unpackin' of our belongin's, that it would turn up sooner or later; and there it was. I declare, my wife she cried when she saw it, she was so relieved—and I near did myself.

“And so,” he went on, raising a finger toward his wife, who threatened to break forth into speech—a flow which only a strong stopper of restraint could check from emulating

the traditional brook—"and so, I made up my mind, then an' there, that that package wasn't ever goin' to leave my hands till I could put it right into Letty's own hands, which I have just done, with all to witness, and I tell you, ma'am, an' all, it's a load off'n my mind, and that's a fact."

He stopped at last, a little breathless, and mopping his brow with his handkerchief. Letty expressed again her thanks, and the assurance that no harm had been done, and Mrs. Drake was in the midst of describing her own emotions and sensations upon the finding of the package, when an interruption occurred in the discovery of what it was that had kept the "baby" so quiet during the long recital. He had come across a can of baked beans, doubtless designed for the modest luncheon of the whole Drake family, had pried off the top and had eaten most of the contents. He was now licking his chubby fingers, which had served him as pre-historic fork—with the beatific smile of a full stomach.

Mrs. Emlin was secretly alarmed over this gastronomic accomplishment, but she took quick advantage of the opening it gave

her to propose something she had had in her mind.

After the exclamations and laughter caused by this diversion were over she said to Mrs. Drake :

“I'm afraid he has emptied the family larder for the time being, and so, instead of bothering to send out for fresh supplies, won't you accept an invitation to lunch as our guests? I can't ask you to lunch with us, I am afraid, as we shall be in such a hurry, but if you will choose any hotel or restaurant it will give me such pleasure to tell the manager you are my guests. I am sure Mrs. Hartwell-Jones would wish it, too,” she added quickly.

“Oh, of course you will,” exclaimed Letty, delighted that Mrs. Emlin had thought of a way in which to offer hospitality. “And, Mr. Drake, Aunt Mary told me I must surely pay you the rent on that deposit box, because I profited by it as much as you, you know.”

On this point, however, Mr. Drake's refusal was instant and firm. He would not even accept half, nor give Letty an inkling of what the amount had been.

“The idea of such a thing,” he exclaimed

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at last. "Why, if it hadn't been for that—that darn old safety box, you'd 'a' had your papers long years ago, when you should have had 'em. No sirree—that there's my funeral, Miss Letty."

After this Letty was obliged to desist, but the arrangement for luncheon—or dinner, rather—at a near-by restaurant was made, and Mrs. Emlin, recommending paregoric in case of troublesome results of the baked-beans episode, and with the suggestion that the family dinner be put off for an hour or so, to allow the beans time to digest, bade the kindly souls good-bye, and she and the girls hurried back to their hotel to a belated meal and an impatient gentleman, who liked punctuality.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A BUSINESS TRIP

VIOLET and Molly could hardly wait to reach the hotel to see Letty open the package. The little bundle, very modest looking in its long, sealed envelope, had been talked of for so long that it had acquired a considerable importance and even mystery in the eyes of the girls, a mystery they were all impatience to solve.

But Letty announced calmly that she did not intend to open the package until her Aunt Mary could be present to assist at the ceremony. The dismay of the other girls was almost comic. They expostulated, they coaxed, they teased; but nothing they could say or do moved Letty in the slightest degree from her resolve. She would not even peep.

“Haven’t you any curiosity at all?” demanded Violet a little crossly.

“Why, of course I have, and I want very



much to see the letters, but I don't want to see them until Aunt Mary can be with me. And I do think it's selfish of you girls to keep on teasing me. It won't do any good, so you may as well give it up first as last," retorted Letty.

"I'm not selfish, and I think you're making an awful lot of the whole silly thing. Keep your old papers as long as you like," answered Violet, and flung out of the room.

Letty stared after her in dismay. She had never seen Violet in such an ill-temper before.

"Why, Violet-Mary," she ejaculated, running after her. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. Please forgive me. And do tell me what's the matter? What is it, Molly?" she appealed to the latter, who was brushing her hair at the dressing-table and who looked around, as astonished as any one at Violet's abrupt entrance.

The fact was that Violet's small supply of strength had been overtaxed by the traveling and events of the past two or three days, and the excitement into which Molly's astonishing surmises about her mother had thrown her was telling on Violet's nerves. But she

was over her little tempest in a moment, and heartily sorry.

"You are right, Letty, of course, and it wouldn't be any fun opening the package without mother. What a silly I was to fly off the handle like that. Does anybody know where I put my traveling cap? I think I'll wear it this afternoon; the wind is blowing so."

"Oh," exclaimed Letty guiltily, "I'm afraid I left it in my room. I borrowed it for a few minutes yesterday, Violet-Mary. I saw it there when I was getting your chocolates, and thought you wouldn't mind. I'll get it for you at once."

"But what in the world did you want my cap for yesterday?" asked Violet puzzled, when Letty had returned the borrowed property. "You surely didn't need it to lie down in."

"Mercy, no," laughed Letty. "I was looking out of the window and saw a beggar woman with a lot of children; she looked ill and half starved and made me think of poor Mrs. Smith, and I just had to give her some money. It was too far to throw it to her, so I just ran down. I'm sure Mrs. Emlin

wouldn't mind. Thanks for the cap; but, Violet-Mary, where did you get the chocolates? They must have cost a week's allowance!"

Violet laughed and was about to explain when Mrs. Emlin's voice at the door summoned them to lunch, and for the next hour all was bustle and haste, getting their lunch, putting forgotten articles into hand-bags and pinning on hats. Just as the automobile rolled away from the hotel door at length, Mr. Emlin noticed a ragged, thin woman standing near by watching them with eager eyes, and he pointed her out to Mrs. Emlin and the girls. When Letty turned she nodded and smiled and waved her hand, then turned quickly and walked away before Mr. Emlin had time to pull from his pocket the coin he had meant to bestow upon her.

"Is that your beggar of yesterday, Letty?" asked Violet. "She seems terribly grateful. Did you give her such a lot of money?"

"Oh, no, very little—but I—I talked to her and told her how sorry I was, and she told me how her husband had hurt his hand or she wouldn't have had to beg, and I guess

it all made her feel—feel friendly toward me,” answered Letty hastily, and blushing in what Mr. Emlin thought a very engaging modesty at her charity. “But, Violet, you were going to tell me about the chocolates,” she added, more as if desiring to change the subject than with any real curiosity to hear.

“Well, Miss Terlowe gave them to me, and, Letty, she’s joined the ‘N. O. E. S.’”

“Bully for her! How did you get her into it?”

“Oh, when she gave me the box of chocolates I was just tickled to death, and said we girls hadn’t had any for so long that I was starved for them, and, without thinking, we told her about the ‘N. O. E. S.’ and the Smith family and all, didn’t we, Molly? and she asked to join. And she’s subscribed to Mrs. Smith’s garden fund, too.”

“Oh, I am glad to hear that. And by the way, girls, Aunt Mary told me just as I was leaving to go to Meta’s that she’d had an anonymous contribution for our fund. Did she tell you girls about it?”

“Not a word,” exclaimed Violet eagerly. “Who’s it from?”

They all laughed, and Violet, seeing her mistake, added with embarrassment: "I mean, whom do you suppose it's from?"

"I can give a pretty good guess," put in Molly shrewdly. "How about Mr. Jack Beckwith?" Whereupon she and Violet exchanged such knowing looks that Letty thought they must know more about the matter than she herself, in spite of Violet's disclaimer.

"I wonder if Mr. Jack told Violet he was going to do it," she thought a little dismally. "It would be only natural, because he knew she was the most interested. He might have let me into the secret, though."

Aloud she said:

"Most likely it is Mr. Jack. I thought perhaps it was Miss Terlowe, but as you say she has just given you something, it wouldn't be she. Mr. Jack gave me something, you remember, before he went away, but I guess he wanted to do more without being thanked. Anyhow, we've got the money, Violet-Mary; that's the main thing, and I guess, with Miss Terlowe's, you will have about enough to start the work on Mrs. Smith's garden, won't you?"

Oh, here is Wakefield, where we motored to on Sunday with Meta."

Then Letty recounted in more detail the experiences of her fashionable week-end party, the other girls related their experiences of the journey to Westerly, and so the hours slipped comfortably by until New London was reached.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had arrived at New London first, and awaited her two daughters with eager impatience. She had not had a happy time in New York, but her mind was relieved in one respect. She no longer had to face uncertainty and suspense.

The letter from Mr. Shoemaker, which had so suddenly determined her to give up the motor trip and go to New York, had been more disquieting than any she had received all summer. While it hinted at a worse state of affairs than she had hitherto been led to suppose, it told her nothing definite, but on the contrary was full of vague promises of a happy ending.

"I wish I knew just how bad it all is," she sighed. "Why does he not tell me, instead of writing about this, that and the other fail-

ing to pay dividends this time, but we are to hope for better luck next time. How can there be better luck if these concerns have failed, as his letter seems to imply?"

So she took the bag, packed so happily for the motor trip and a reunion with Letty, and caught the early train for New York. She delayed only long enough to engage a room in a certain small, quiet hotel, where she had stopped occasionally to eat a hasty lunch, and then was driven directly to Mr. Shoemaker's offices. To her great disappointment he had already gone for the day.

"Was he expecting you?" asked a kindly young clerk, seeing her look of keen disappointment. "Did you write ahead for an appointment?"

"No, there was no time. I got his letter only this morning, and left at once. I could have telegraphed from the station, but it never occurred to me, as I was coming directly here. I am so disappointed."

"I am sorry. Mr. Shoemaker has not been at the office very regularly this hot weather. There's not much doing at this time of year, you know," the clerk added apologetically,

“so he comes down, opens his letters and generally goes home about noon, if there is nothing especial to detain him.”

“Can I reach him by telephone anywhere?”

“He is pretty sure to be at his apartment. Shall I get the number for you?”

Mr. Shoemaker's man servant answered the telephone, said that his master was lying down and could not be disturbed. But when he understood who wished to speak to him, he asked the clerk to wait. In a moment his voice was heard asking Mrs. Hartwell-Jones where and when she would like to meet Mr. Shoemaker, and after a moment's consideration, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones asked that he come to her hotel that evening as soon after dinner as possible.

Then she returned to her hotel and forced herself to lie down for a much-needed rest. The clerk's observation that Mr. Shoemaker was not well was strangely disquieting. Had Mr. Shoemaker allowed illness—perhaps overstrained nerves—to warp his judgment and business discretion? And had she, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, made a mistake in entrusting her affairs so entirely to one man, even a man of



such unquestioned integrity as Mr. Shoemaker had always been considered ?

“Perhaps a firm of several partners could have managed better,” she reflected anxiously. “Then, when one member became incapacitated by illness or for any other reason, there would be others to take up his work. I do hope things have not got into a hopeless muddle. I do wish Mr. Jack Beckwith were at hand. He is the only man I know in whom I should care to confide.”

With these and other troubled reflections she fretted herself until evening came. She tried seriously to control her irritated nerves, to face the impending situation with her usual serene common sense, and so successful were her efforts that when Mr. Shoemaker's name was announced she was ready to bear patiently whatever blow he had to inflict.

“At least I shall know,” she said to herself as she descended in the elevator to the hotel parlor, “and that is better than tormenting my mind with fears and uncertainties.”

The interview was brief, and confirmed her

worst fears. Mr. Shoemaker, undermined by ill-health and increasing personal responsibilities, had made one mistake in judgment after another, by each new step hoping to retrieve a fault. In a word, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's income had been reduced to less than half.

The lawyer's feeble distress, his sudden attitude of helplessness and despondency, aroused her pity to such an extent that she could not speak one word of reproach. Naturally, under the circumstances, she could not leave her affairs any longer in his hands, and told him so as gently as possible.

"It is not that I don't trust you, Mr. Shoemaker. Surely you understand that? It is that you are in such a state of ill-health that it would be cruel of any one to impose the slightest care upon you at present. You ought to give up everything and take a long, long rest and vacation."

"I know I ought, dear lady. But to tell the truth, I have become so involved myself that I cannot afford it. I must hold on a little longer."

"Then why not take in a partner to help you? That young clerk in your office seems

a very nice, sensible young man. He could be made of great help, I should think."

Mr. Shoemaker brightened at this suggestion.

"I'll think of it," he said. "I wonder I never thought of it myself. Perhaps you would trust him with your affairs?" he added wistfully. "I know he is honest, and not inexperienced. A little readjustment, a little judicious reinvestment, and everything of yours will turn out all right."

"I'll think that matter over, and talk with the young man again," said Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. "At what time would you like me to be at your office, Mr. Shoemaker?"

"I am there by half-past eight, as a rule. It is easier to get through the heavy work before the intense heat. But take your own time, madam. I cannot express the contrition I feel at bringing you here on this vexatious business."

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones bade him good-night with a patient smile, but she told herself that to discover the half of one's income melted into thin air was truly a "vexatious business."

Before she went to bed, she wrote a long

letter to Mr. Jack Beckwith, giving him, as exactly as she could, the details of the whole situation and asking his advice as to continuing with Mr. Shoemaker's clerk. The next two days were tedious in the extreme, filled with going over columns of figures difficult to understand, in a close, stuffy room in one of the busiest, noisiest streets in the world. But while certain money was lost past redemption, there was still enough left to provide all necessities and some luxuries; and at the latest, a few years of prudence would no doubt restore her previous comfortable status, for the royalties of her books were a steady source of revenue.

So she packed her bag again and took the New London train, going over in her mind how and when she would tell her two precious daughters of their change of fortune and resolved to wait until the quiet of Sea Side was regained before opening the unhappy subject.

## CHAPTER XIX

### HOME AGAIN

WHEN the selection of rooms came under consideration in the hotel, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones suggested that as Molly and Violet had been roommates so far on the journey, that they should continue that arrangement and let Letty share her room. Which settlement suited Letty perfectly. It suited Violet, too, for strange as it may seem, she felt a sudden shyness with her mother, and dreaded being alone with her. She wanted to watch, and consider what Molly had said to her that afternoon on the fence, after they had visited the old Robinson house.

Of course the very wisest course would have been to go directly to her mother, repeat the whole conversation, which, after all, was innocent enough, and let Mrs. Hartwell-Jones make whatever explanation she thought necessary. But Violet held her own counsel and

brooded and speculated until she had turned over every trifling incident that connected her mother with Mr. Jack Beckwith, until she almost believed that an ardent love affair had been flourishing under her own unsuspecting nose.

But in spite of this secret feeling of awkwardness, she was very glad to see her mother again, and was also keen to take advantage of the reunion to satisfy her curiosity regarding Letty's bundle of papers. So she hurried through her preparations for dinner, and knocked at the door of her mother's room, somewhat farther down the corridor. Entering, she curled herself up on the bed in an attitude of expectancy and exhorted Letty to hurry with her dressing.

"Why? Are Mr. and Mrs. Emlin ready? I thought we weren't to have dinner until seven."

"We aren't, but we want plenty of time to look over the papers."

"Oh, so that is it! Well, 'curiosity killed a cat,'" mocked Letty, leisurely untying her shoes.

"Of course I'm curious—and no more than

you are yourself, only you're trying to tease me," responded Violet coolly. "Hurry up, do."

"We've plenty of time. Curb your inquisitiveness, my dear."

"Mother, I leave it to you if I haven't a right to be curious? Here, Letty said she wouldn't open that package until you were with us, and now she's just tantalizing us. Make her hurry."

"We aren't going to open it until we get home," answered Letty before Mrs. Hartwell-Jones could speak. "Aunt Mary has agreed that it's all right, so we can feel perfectly settled down and quiet."

"How silly! And I think it's mean to go and make plans behind my back, so there!"

"My dear!" her mother gently reproved her. "Surely Letty may do as she likes with her own. And you must bear in mind, dear," she added in a low tone as Letty disappeared into the closet in search of her pumps, "you must bear in mind that there are certain papers in the package—all of them, possibly—which Letty won't want any one but herself to see at all."

“I know, but there must be something else, or Mr. D ——”

Letty backed out into the room just then, and nothing more was said. Violet had to curb her impatience for another twenty-four hours, and to accomplish that necessity the most effectively she put the whole matter out of her mind. Letty did not speak of it again, either, but she had something else to say, and when she and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones were in their room alone for the night, she asked if they could not have a little confidential talk before going to bed.

“Oh, my dear, what have you heard!” cried Mrs. Hartwell-Jones with a little catch in her voice. Poor woman, she could not keep her own worries out of her mind.

If Violet had heard this little speech, and seen the look of self-consciousness and distress that accompanied it, she would, without doubt, have attributed it to but one cause. But Letty, fortunately not having had her suspicions roused by any kind friend, was filled with alarm and wonder.

“Why, dear Aunt Mary, I have heard nothing! What do you mean?” she cried.



“ Oh, do tell me, Aunt Mary. I know something is bothering you awfully—has been worrying you for months, and I feel sure this trip to New York has had something to do with it. Won't you tell me what it is? Can't I help you? ”

“ My precious sweet, you can help me very much, and I am worried, but I don't want to talk about it just yet. When you and Violet and I are all together, alone in our dear cottage at Sea Side, we shall have a very long, confidential talk, and I shall seek comfort and advice from my two precious daughters. But I am very tired just now, and want to rest my brain and nerves a little. I feel better to-night, just from having you both with me again. And to-morrow's peaceful little journey, with home at the end of it, will completely cure my little attack of nervous fatigue. But now, my darling, what is it you wanted to talk about? ”

“ It is partly about my visit to Meta, but we'll put that off, for it's nothing important. Indeed, looking back on it all, it seems more funny than anything else. But I do want to 'fess up' a little thing I did at Narragansett.

Don't look so frightened," she added with a reassuring laugh. "It was nothing wrong. At least I certainly did not mean to do wrong and thought only of doing good. But I did not tell Mrs. Emlin, and I won't be happy until you know all about it.

"As we told you, I had a headache when we got to Narragansett—too much fashionable life and food—and just lay down and had a nice nap while the rest went off to see historic spots.

"Well, I had a very good nap and woke up feeling lots better. I was sitting at the window, looking down at all the people, when I saw such a pathetic, half-starved woman down there begging, and nobody giving her a penny or even looking at her."

Then she told the whole little incident of the street singing and the miniature fortune it had brought to the poor Italian woman.

"Was it wrong of me, Aunt Mary?" she asked, seeing how her mother shivered a little and turned pale.

"No, no, Letty mine, it was a beautiful thing to do, and I am proud of my generous-souled, brave little daughter. But I can't help

feeling a little frightened at the thought of you out there all alone among that great crowd of strange people. What might not have happened!"

"But I think the crowd was a sort of protection, and the poor woman was so forlorn. Indeed, I did not think of anything but helping her at the time. When I began to sing, and saw how every one stopped and stared, I did feel a little queer and lonely. But I had begun, and I did not mean to give up."

"You are right, and I am pleased that you could invent some other way of helping those in misfortune besides the mere giving of money. After all, money isn't so terribly necessary to happiness, is it, Letty mine? You were happy in those old days with your mother, weren't you?"

"Oh, so happy, Aunt Mary. And it was always such an excitement when Ben came home, because then we would have beefsteak for supper. The memory of that beefsteak has a thousand times better taste than all the French cooking we had at Meta's."

"Exactly, dear. Sometimes I think that having everything one wants dulls the mental

faculties and destroys ambition. Certainly it demoralizes all keenness of appreciation."

"Which is exactly what I said to Mary Beckwith at Meta's—or words to that effect. Indeed, I think that is what Miss Terlowe had in mind when she advised me to study at a big conservatory of music, instead of taking private lessons."

"Yes, partly that, but she felt you could do better work if you had to strive against competition, too, Letty. Promise me you won't get discouraged when things go slow or wrong, Letty mine. The world is very full of kindness and love, but it is also abounding in 'envy, hatred and all uncharitableness.' But if you keep your own ambition steadily before you, and 'hitch your wagon to a star,' you will surely ascend to the heights at last."

"I will try indeed, Aunt Mary. And I am going to ask you to give me a smaller allowance this fall. It will do me good, I know, to learn to manage a little."

"Perhaps you will have a little allowance of your own before long," suggested Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, smiling archly, and touching the sealed envelope that lay in Letty's lap.

Although Letty was placidly willing to wait for the opening of her package, she liked to have it close to her, and found a soothing comfort in knowing what dearly cherished handwriting was enclosed. She answered Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's speech with a slow shake of the head.

"I really don't think so, Aunt Mary. I kept that idea in my head all the time Mr. Drake was telling how the papers had got lost, and I could not connect a single word he said with any such supposition. No, dear Aunt Mary, I must make my own fortune, and I am glad it is so. And now that my conscience is free, we must go to bed, or you won't get any benefit from this quiet little holiday." And she jumped up briskly from her stool.

For the first night in weeks, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones slept peacefully. It was really true, she told herself, that money was not entirely essential to happiness. She and her precious daughters had health and contented spirits; and all three had each other.

The journey home was as quiet and peaceful as all could ask, except for one jarring little

interruption. It was a golden, sparkling morning, hot, perhaps, but the air relieved by a stiff breeze from the sea that swept up the Sound and turned the limpid water into a myriad faceted sapphire. The car had to stand forward, near the smell and jar of the engines, so Mr. Emlin found seats for his guests in the stern, where they sat in a cozy, contented group, under their sun umbrellas, and watched the people about them with interested eyes.

Suddenly Letty was roused by a familiar voice exclaiming:

"Well, if here isn't my charming little fellow guest again. What a delightful coincidence. Are we bound for the same house party again?" and Letty looked up to see Grace Howard, more elaborately dressed than ever, standing before her.

It so happened that Grace was crossing with a party of ultra-fashionable friends. She had caught sight of Letty on first coming aboard, and had avoided recognition, for the motorists were looking very insignificant in their plain traveling costumes. But she was electrified to hear one of her friends suddenly nudge an-

other and ejaculate in an excited whisper: "Isn't that Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, the celebrated author, sitting over there? I am sure it is. Oh, isn't she beautiful and distinguished looking?"

As familiarity breeds contempt, so does old acquaintance efface greatness, and Grace had actually forgotten Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's right to fame. She saw in a flash that it would redound greatly to her credit to claim the acquaintanceship. She looked in the direction the speaker had pointed and said, in a well-feigned tone of surprise:

"Why, so it is! I must go over and speak to them."

"Oh, do you know Mrs. Hartwell-Jones?"

"To be sure I do—very well. Little Letty, the adopted daughter, you know, who confuses us all by calling her adopted mother 'Aunt Mary,' is one of my oldest friends." And Grace airily crossed the deck and bent graciously over Letty's chair.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Mrs. Emlin were next addressed and presently Grace asked permission to introduce her friends, and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had to submit politely to a

period of bald adulation and pointless conversation.

"How nice and wobbly it's getting," observed Letty presently, with great cheerfulness of manner.

She had observed that Grace's face had gone white around the lips, and that her friends were exchanging uneasy glances.

"Oh, don't say that," exclaimed Grace trying to smile, but shuddering instead. "I thought the Sound was always as calm and smooth as a river."

"Oh, dear, no," Letty assured her. "It is really very good to-day, compared to sometimes. It is always bad in the Rip, and we're coming to that now. What is it, Grace; don't you feel well?"

"Oh, yes, quite well, thank you. A little headache from the sun, but nothing more. Girls," she added to her companions, "I think I shall go and see where they put my bag. We get off at Shelter Island, and there may be a scramble."

"We'll go, too," agreed her companions hastily. "Good-bye, dear Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. May we come to call on you some time in



New York? My little sister just adores your books."

"So does my cousin," echoed her friend. "Why even I, at my age, have read them, and loved them."

"That's very condescending of you, I am sure," replied Mrs. Hartwell-Jones dryly, and responded beamingly to the wry smiles of farewell.

"Saved again!" breathed Letty thankfully, as soon as the trio had made a staggering, hasty exit down the companion stairs. "There, Aunt Mary, I had to stand that for three whole days at Meta's. 'Charming little fellow guest,' indeed! In two or three years I'll be as old as she, if not her senior. Silly thing! As if any one would be deceived by her airs and affectations."

"Never mind, Letty mine. It takes all sorts of people to make a world, you know, and we must not judge. Grace is passing through an unfortunate phase. There is no doubt much good behind those silly manners."

"There you go, always looking for the best in people," sighed Letty.

"Aside from the Christianity of it, it is my business, dear," smiled Mrs. Hartwell-Jones gently. "I could never write successful stories without that point of view."

Just then Violet and Molly, who had been making a tour of the boat, came up laughing to report Grace and her friends succumbed to one of the most unromantic ailments in the pharmacopœia, and lying limp and helpless on the saloon lounges.

"Wouldn't it be heaping coals of fire on their heads to go down and offer to relieve their misery?" suggested Letty with mischief in her eye.

"I think the consciousness that you were a witness to their downfall would scarcely be 'coals of fire,' Letty dear," replied her mother quietly. "Let us forget ——"

"And forgive ——" added Letty with a roguish smile.

The pleasant little journey was too soon over, the short motor run from Sag Harbor accomplished comfortably and soon "the lights of home" were at hand.

"Or would be, if it were night," added Letty.

"One light will be gone," sighed Violet sentimentally. "Miss Terlowe."

"And bless me, we forgot all about Mary and her college boys!" ejaculated Molly Wilson. "She's probably perched on your doorstep, girls, with a delegation."

The girls fell to chattering eagerly of the possible good times in store for them, and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones smiled and sighed as she pictured that "long, quiet, confidential evening" with her two daughters receding into the background.

"You will all stop for lunch with me?" she asked Mrs. Emlin as the car rolled into Sea Side village. "I had planned to ask you, and everything is arranged."

But Mr. Emlin preferred to go directly home and rest after his trip, so they dropped Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and the girls at their door and went on. Madame Henri had invited herself for luncheon and was standing in the doorway, waiting to welcome the returned travelers. She had persuaded Bridget to let her make the salad with her own hands and had decorated the table with fresh flowers from Mrs. Preston's garden. Mary was not

present in person, but there was a long note from her detailing the week's programme, emphasizing the fact that the girls were included in every item and that her friends, like British soldiers, were expected to do their duty.

"Oh, how nice it is to be home again!" sighed Letty, as they gathered around the table after laughing over Mary's letter. "Hello, Katy, you aren't daring to give us junket to-day, are you? Madame Henri, you look as if you had good news to tell. Or are you just flattering us with delight at seeing us home again? Oh, everything is so genuine, somehow, and I am hungry as a bear. Aren't you, girls?"

## CHAPTER XX

### GOOD LUCK AND BAD

MRS. HARTWELL-JONES was right about the postponement of their quiet evening. When Letty and Violet hurried off after luncheon, they expressed the positive intention of making no engagement for the evening, but Mary's pleas were so urgent, and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones so compliant, that the result was a rush home to change their frocks and smooth ruffled hair, and hurry back for dinner and a dance.

"You are quite sure you don't mind our putting off the opening of the bundle, Aunt Mary?" asked Letty breathlessly, running into Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's room.

"My dear child, it is you who should do the minding; the papers are yours. But if you ask my opinion I think you are much wiser to wait until all the hurry and bustle of this exciting week is over before you try to settle down to so serious a task."

"But that other confidential talk—something you were going to tell Violet and me?"

"Ah, that will wait, too, dear child. Indeed, I do not mind putting it off a little, and I may have time to receive an answer to a letter I wrote from New York bearing on the affair. Now, let me see if your sash is straight, and then run along."

"You must not call it a sash nowadays, Aunt Mary. It is a girdle. I quite horrified Meta by asking if my sash were in the middle of the back. She made me twist it around, this way, tied with one long end flopping over the other, so, and said it was 'quite the latest.' Here comes Violet-Mary to be hooked up. I'm going to put her in the fashion, too. You are sure you don't mind being left, dear Aunt Mary? Mrs. Somers said you must be sure to come over afterward to watch the dancing. There, Violet-Mary, don't you feel like a 'new woman'? You see your big sister has learned a thing or two from her journey out into the world. Oh, dear, where did I put my pocket handkerchief?"

After the girls had gone, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones settled down to her desk and began a

letter to Mr. Shoemaker. Then she realized that she had nothing to say at present. She was waiting now for an answer to the letter she had written Mr. Jack Beckwith, and she felt that she could do nothing more until she heard from him. It was a great temptation to confide in Mr. Beckwith, senior, but she felt that it would be hardly fair to worry him.

“He must have a good deal on his mind just now, with Mr. Jack away. I will wait, as patiently as I can, until Mr. Jack’s letter comes, and do as he bids. He may authorize me to put my affairs into his father’s hands. I wish he would. I should feel so much better satisfied. But whatever Mr. Jack may say or do, I am quite sure he cannot restore to me that which is already lost. Mr. Shoemaker satisfied me pretty well on that head. And I think it high time my friends should begin to understand my change of circumstances.

“Fortunately the lease on our house is up this fall. I must write at once that I do not wish to renew it. Mr. Shoemaker’s clerk can attend to that much for me, at any rate. Ah, our dear little house! How happy we were in

it. But there is no use in crying over spilt milk. We must live somewhere, of course, and I hate to think of going back to apartment life. Perhaps the houses up near the Riverside Drive have lower rents. I'll ask that young man to look up a list for me.

"How I should love to talk it all over with Ellen Somers! But she is quite too occupied just now. And there will be plenty of talking over, of all sorts, later on. But I know what I can do; write to Dr. Heywood. He knows all about the different districts and can give me a great deal of practical advice, both as to price and healthy location."

She turned to her desk and wrote the two letters at once. She had barely finished them; was, indeed, in the act of addressing Dr. Heywood's, when Madame Henri walked in. She, too, had been invited up to the Beckwith house to watch the young people dance, and had stopped in for Mrs. Hartwell-Jones.

"But how would you like to pause for a few moments here before we go?" she suggested. "I should so like to talk to you for a little."

"Then Letty was right when she said you looked as if you had good news to tell!" ex-



claimed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones quickly. "Come out on to the veranda and tell it to me, dear Madame. I feel as if I wanted to hear all the good news I can."

"Ah! I have feared me this good while you have had things on your mind," replied Madame Henri. "Perhaps we shall exchange confidences, is it not?"

"I am aching to tell my troubles to some one. But I must have your good news first."

"I know not whether to call it good or bad, *ma chère Madame*. It is this. A cousin has died at home in France, and has left me her fortune. It is not a large fortune, but it will be welcome; and I cannot mourn deeply, for I knew my cousin so little. It happened that I was next of kin; *voilà*. But it means that I am to go back to France, as soon as is possible to arrange, to attend in person upon the inheritance."

"But surely that makes you happy? To go back to your own country?"

"Ah, of that I am not so sure. My friends are scattered or gone—it will be a melancholy visit. And then, you know, as one grows

older, one becomes more and more the pussycat, attached to the place in which one is. It will be somewhat lonely, that visit. I was wishing——”

“That you had some one to go with you?” Mrs. Hartwell-Jones asked, as she paused, and her heart sank, for she guessed what was to follow.

“Exactly. I was wondering—it sounds very selfish, but I did think that if you could spare Letty for the winter—I would arrange that she have some lessons of Monsieur Blanc,” she added artfully.

“Oh, dear, dear Madame, I wish I could say yes. It would be a wonderful experience for Letty, but I cannot let her go this winter, for many reasons.”

Madame sighed patiently.

“I was afraid you would say that. It seemed quite too good to be true. Ah, well, I shall not coax, Madame. But if——”

“My chief reason for saying no,” Mrs. Hartwell-Jones hurried on, “is that I could not afford——”

“Ah, but she is to be my guest.”

“No, no. I could not accept so much, even

for my precious Letty, dear, generous friend. But I must explain. I have lost a good deal of money—a great deal, in fact.”

“ Ah, that is it? I knew something was amiss. It is much, you say? ”

“ Fully half my income, I am afraid. But it is not such a serious thing, now that I know the worst. It was the nagging fear of what was impending that has frightened me all summer. Now I have only to tell my two precious daughters, and we shall begin over again. It is not going to be very hard.”

“ You are brave, Madame. But if I had dear Letty with me, it would make only two of you to *recommencer*? ”

“ Ah, do not tempt me, Madame. Let me be frank and say that I really do not believe it would be good for Letty. The time has come when she must settle down to hard, steady work, and this change of fortune will be good for her, I believe and hope.”

“ Since you put it so, dear Madame, I admit that I agree with you. I fear me I was quite selfish in my wish to have Letty with me.”

“ But it will be lonely for you. Is there no one else you could ask? How about Molly

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Wilson? She's a nice child and thoroughly good company."

"I will think of it. For the present, we shall say nothing to any one of our little confidences, is it not so?"

"Yes; I am not quite ready to tell the world. And now I suppose we would better go or Mrs. Somers will think we have forgotten."

And so the week passed, full of rush and gayety. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones hardly saw her daughters from morning until evening, and had no chance to mark the new shyness and awkwardness with which Violet regarded her, nor the absent-mindedness on Letty's part. At last, however, the gay week was ended, Max Beckwith's friends went on to other visits, and Sea Side settled down to its normal peace and leisure.

"Now," exclaimed Letty eagerly, as she and Violet returned from the station one afternoon in late August, "it is over, and we can settle down to a peaceful life once more. How very much there is to talk about, Aunt Mary. Have we left you too much alone these days?"

“No, dear, I have enjoyed seeing you both so happy. And I have been very busy, myself.”

“Well, now perhaps we’ll have time to open your mysterious bundle, Letty,” added Violet. “I don’t believe there’s anything in it but old letters anyway,” she added peevishly. Violet was apt to grow a little cross when she was tired.

“Poor Violet-Mary’s done out, and I don’t wonder,” laughed Letty. “And you don’t look any too lively yourself, dear Aunt Mary. Is it one of your headaches?”

“No, childie, thank you. Just tired.”

“Then why can’t Katy give us a high tea instead of dinner, and we can have our cozy pow-wow and get early to bed,” suggested Letty. “Shall I tell her and Biddy?”

“And let’s make it a wrapper party, in mother’s room,” added Violet.

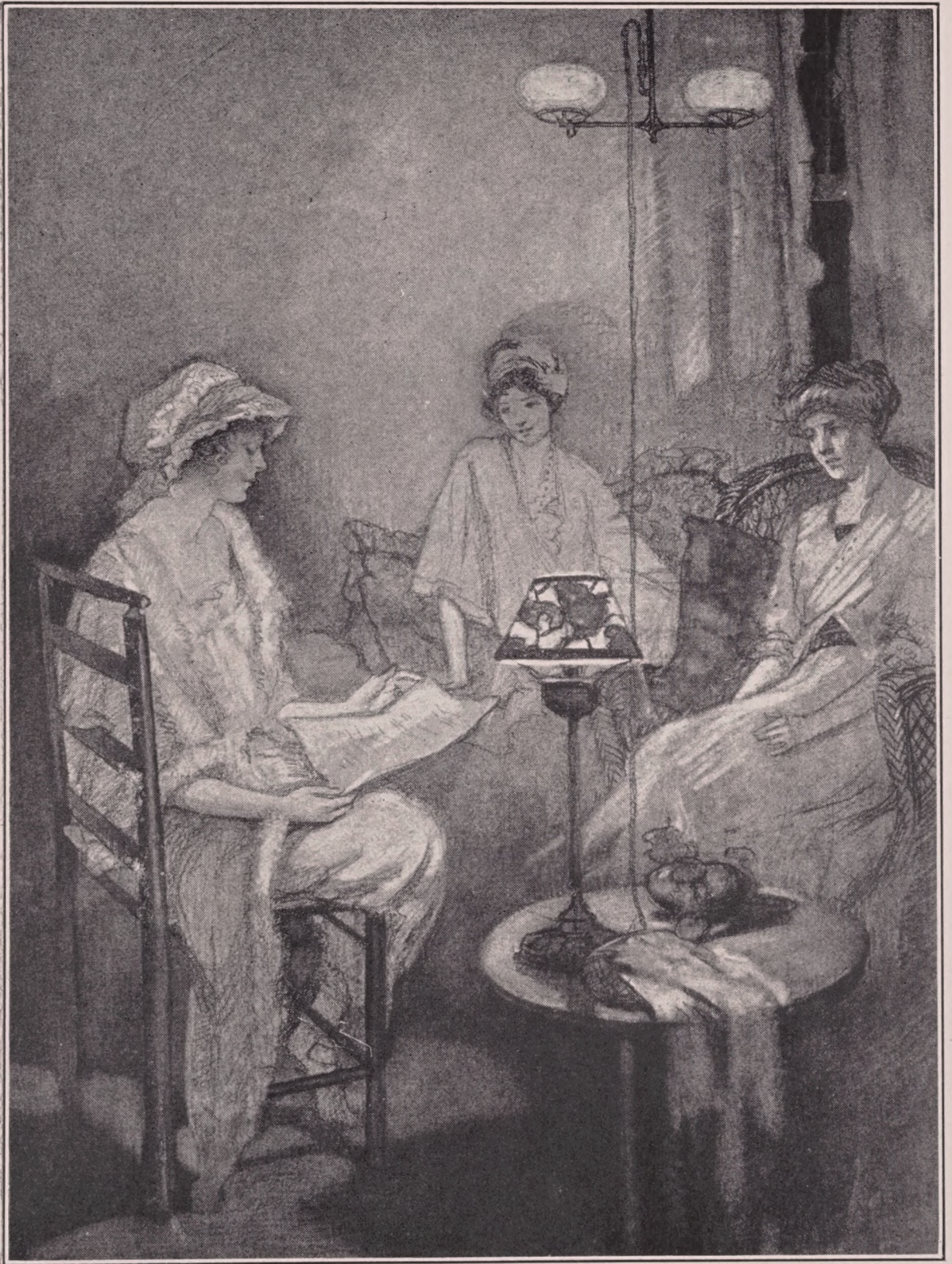
And so, a little later, the three gathered in a cozy, comfortable group in Mrs. Hartwell-Jones’s bedroom, with all the windows open wide to the sweet sea breeze, and the gas lowered to lessen the heat. There was just

enough light for Letty, sitting underneath the desk lamp, to see her letters. Violet, instead of perching on a stool at her mother's feet, made her fatigue an excuse to curl up on the bed, and the two, mother and daughter, watched Letty silently as she opened the long envelope.

A solemn hush fell over the little party as Letty broke the seal and took up the first of the precious letters. Letty began to read to herself, drying the tears that fell now and then, and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones watched her tenderly, silently. Violet watched her mother, and a vague resentment grew in her glance. She felt irritated and hostile. Why had Molly put that horrid idea into her head? And why had she not gone to her mother about it at once? Each passing day made her suspicion keener and the possibility of asking for the truth more difficult. She grew restless and oppressed by the silence and tossed restlessly.

Letty looked up quickly, smiling at them through her tears.

"They are my mother's letters," she said softly. "And she says such lovely things.



“I WONDER WHAT THIS IS?”





May I read you bits here and there? And afterward, dear Aunt Mary, I should like you to read them all to yourself, if you don't mind."

And so she read to them, in the softness of the summer night, extracts from the dear old letters, and it was not until she was gathering up the scattered contents of the big envelope that she came across a larger business-looking letter, addressed in typewriting to her brother Ben.

"Why, I wonder what this is," she exclaimed, holding up the envelope.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones gave a little gasp and sat erect. She had for the moment forgotten her speculations about Letty's package.

"Open it, my dear, and see," she said quietly.

Letty obeyed, and several long, narrow engraved papers fell out.

"What are they, Aunt Mary? Can you make them out?" she asked, and carried the package across to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones.

Violet got off the bed and joined her. Then there was a mystery, after all; something more than just old letters, at any rate.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones examined the papers carefully.

"They are certificates of stock, Letty mine," she said quietly. "But whether they are of any value or not, I cannot tell you. We will take them up to Mr. Beckwith in the morning."

Letty and Violet were filled with excitement and fell to discussing the wonderful possibilities the slips of paper might hold.

"Bless your dear hearts, any one would think you had discovered a gold mine," laughed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones at length. "And if money appears such a wonderful, powerful thing, my girlies, I am afraid you are in no mood to hear my piece of news to-night."

"Oh, but we are, we are," clamored the girls, and Letty drew up her customary stool.

But Violet hung back. She was suddenly afraid of what her mother was to tell them, and seated herself in the shadow where her face was hidden. But Mrs. Hartwell-Jones would not allow that, and pulled her daughter down to the second stool at her feet.

"I shall need the help of both my daughters

for what I am about to say," she said gravely, "for it is the opposite of good luck, like Letty's find."

Violet looked up, startled by her mother's words. This was different news from that she had expected to hear. However her mother might classify that other, she certainly would not call it bad luck.

"It is just this, dears," Mrs. Hartwell-Jones resumed briefly. "In some way a great deal of my money has been lost, and we shall have to live very simply for a year or two, at least; possibly longer. I cannot tell the extent of the loss yet, and I cannot—must not blame Mr. Shoemaker. He has been ill and overworked. It is my fault, primarily, in laying the whole burden of my affairs on his shoulders alone.

"However it came about, the result is the same. We are going to be quite poor for a long time to come. I am arranging all my affairs on a different basis. And to-day a letter has come from Mr. Jack"—Mrs. Hartwell-Jones fancied she felt Violet's shoulder stiffen suddenly under her touch—"from Mr. Jack that advises me to put everything

into his father's hands until he can get back from the West and take hold himself. So you see we have plenty of dear, kind friends to help us out, children. And we won't mind so very much, will we?"

"If Mr. Jack is in it, everything will be all right in the end," said Violet, but she spoke stiffly, coldly.

"How long have you known about this, Aunt Mary?" asked Letty, looking up.

"Almost all summer, Letty mine. That is, I have been afraid it was coming."

"And you never told us a word about it. Perhaps something could have been saved if you had told some one—say Mr. Jack, before he went away?"

"I don't know. Anyhow it is too late to think of that now. But it isn't so terribly bad, dears. Not as if we had lost everything, you know. I am going to send you both to bed now, and to-morrow we'll talk over all the practical details of it."

Letty rose obediently and kissed her mother tenderly.

"Do you know, I believe I am rather glad of it, Aunt Mary. It gives me an excited,

tingley feeling inside, as if I wanted to fight—and win.”

“That is the right spirit. But all the same, don’t lose sight of your own possible short-cut to fortune,” she laughed, picking up the stock certificates that had fallen out of Letty’s lap. “We must at least make sure of their value.”

Letty took the papers, thanked her mother and kissed her again.

“You are sure you won’t lie awake and worry, if we leave you?” she asked with a sudden pricking of the conscience as the recollection flashed across her of all the days and evenings they had left her alone.

“No, no. I sleep very well o’ nights, now that I know the worst. Violet, darling, wait a moment, will you, please?” she added, as Violet kissed her silently and was leaving the room without a word.

Letty slipped away alone, to read over her precious letters again and to speculate upon what change of fortune this new trouble was to bring upon them. But she did not speculate very long, for busy days and late hours spread their consequences over her tired body, and she soon fell into a healthy, dreamless sleep.

“What is it, Violet?” asked her mother gently, as soon as Letty had left them alone together.

“Nothing, mother, nothing at all. I’m tired. Of course I’m awfully sorry for you—for all of us—but it isn’t going to last very long; only until Mr. Jack Beckwith gets back,” she added a little sullenly. She thought that Mrs. Hartwell-Jones’s mention of Mr. Jack’s timely aid was a sort of paving the way for telling her other bit of news, and Violet resented being treated in a roundabout, childish fashion.

“Why can’t she come straight out with it?” she asked herself furiously. “I hope she isn’t ashamed.”

“Tell me what it is, darling,” her mother coaxed again. “I know there is something. Why is it you change expression and get all sort of cold and distant when I mention—Mr. Jack Beckwith?”

And as she put the very question into words, a cold thrill of dread passed across Mrs. Hartwell-Jones’s heart. Could it be that her little girl had developed a woman’s heart too soon, and that it had been touched? That she had

misunderstood Mr. Jack's brotherly thoughtfulness and tenderesses? But no, the idea was too absurd. Yet something there surely was.

She drew Violet back to the stool, and sitting down in her chair, stroked the silky brown hair, so vividly colored and like her own, and waited.

"Out with it, little girl," she said at length, with an attempt at playfulness. "Surely you are not finding it hard to tell your old mother things? I thought we were always going to tell each other everything. Letty has read her letters to us, I have told my troubles, and now it is your turn."

"Well, mother dear, it isn't anything—nothing much—just something Molly Wilson told me, and she only thought it," stammered Violet, growing very red and embarrassed. "It is all foolish—and—I'm afraid you'll laugh—and yet it may be true."

"Dear me, what can it be?" queried her mother in mock terror, but folding her lips tightly together. With what outlandish ideas had Molly been filling her precious child's head? She had surely thought Molly was to be trusted.

"Well, it's just this," Violet blurted out clumsily. "Molly said she believed you—you were going to marry Mr. Jack Beckwith. There!"

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones sat for a few seconds in petrified silence, trying to take in the full significance of Violet's unexpected words. Then she burst forth into a hearty peal of laughter, so honest and full of genuine mirth that Violet could not doubt its reality.

"There, I knew Molly was mistaken!" she ejaculated. "Oh, mother, why didn't I come to you at once?"

"Why not, indeed? When did this extraordinary communication take place?"

"The day we went to see the old Robinson house, from Narragansett. We were sitting on the fence talking while the tire was being changed."

"And who all are 'we'?"

"Oh, just Molly and me."

"And you have said nothing to any one else?"

"No, mother, of course not, not to a soul; not even to Letty."

"And Molly?"



“I don't think she has, either—unless to her Aunt Isabel.”

“Did she say anything to lead you to suppose that she had discussed the matter with her Aunt Isabel?”

“She only said that she believed her Aunt Isabel thought—thought it, too.”

“Then I shall have to see Mrs. Emlin,” sighed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones with a frown. It was an embarrassing topic. “Oh, daughter, daughter, if you children only realized the harm that can be done by that thoughtless, unintelligent jumping to conclusions, and then hastening to impart those wrong conclusions as facts!”

“Why, mother, you're rather hard on us. We only ——”

“Yes, yes, I understand. And fortunately this time very little harm, if any, has been done. But mind you never mention the subject again, darling, and I want you to promise me something; that you will always come to me at once with any sort of ‘I told you’ or ‘Have you heard this?’”

“Yes, mother dear, I always have before, and I always will again. I've been pretty

miserable now, to keep this away from you so long," and Violet broke down and wept.

"There, there, now, it's all right," said her mother cheerily, when the shower was over. "Run away to bed, for we've serious matters of business to talk over to-morrow. Good-night, my precious child. Oh, dear, oh, dear, I must laugh again!"

## CHAPTER XXI

### CONCLUSION

It took the girls several days to realize the seriousness of their change of fortune. But when they heard their mother tell Mrs. Somers that she had written to give up the New York house, they began to understand that a complete change must take place. Mr. Beckwith had already gone into matters with Mr. Shoemaker, so that end of the burden was lifted from Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's shoulders, and the domestic side of the situation became her part to solve.

"I'll go up to New York with you for a day or two and go house-hunting," volunteered Mrs. Somers. "I think it will be rather a lark."

"I'm afraid it can't be a house, unless I go up into the western part, near the Riverside Drive, and I don't even know, positively, whether rents are any lower. I shan't mind

an apartment so much, now that I have my girls with me. It was when I was living alone that it seemed a mere hotel existence."

"But there must be cunning little houses to be had without going too far away from the rest of us. We'll have a good look, anyhow."

"I don't understand why I have not had any answer to my letter to Dr. Heywood. He is back from his holiday, I know."

"Oh, I know why. He was sent for to go to Bar Harbor. One of his patients was taken ill up there and nothing would do but for him to go, post haste, and take care of her. By the time your letter is forwarded and his answer comes back you will hear. What is it you want to know?"

"I asked him about districts in New York. I thought he could give me a hint as to what was a possible part—from the point of view of health, as well as reasonably cheap."

When Dr. Heywood's letter did come, at length, it brought a very practical suggestion.

"Why not take the little cottage in Lakewood again?" he wrote. "It agreed with Violet so wonderfully last year, and unless it is im-

perative, I would rather not put her through another New York winter. I dare say there is a good enough school at Lakewood, and if Letty's education is so precious to her, let her board with Miss Sims." Mrs. Hartwell-Jones laughed over this part of the letter, which she was reading aloud to Mrs. Somers.

"Dr. Heywood is such a droll mixture," she said. "He is so very up to date and modern in his profession, and yet holds such old-fashioned ideas about women. He doesn't think education of any real importance to a girl."

"Not alongside of her health, I think he means. He considers health the very foremost consideration, and can you blame him, when you think how many nervous wrecks there are among the American women of to-day?"

"I rather like his suggestion of the Lakewood cottage," admitted Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, "if it were not for Letty. How can I let her be away from me again, after last spring's experience?"

"But, my dear Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, that would have been just as likely to happen if you had been at home. You must not

attribute her illness to her being away from you."

"No, no, I don't mean that; but I mean the constant sense of uncertainty as to how she is."

"You might suggest to Mademoiselle to take Letty again," suggested Mrs. Somers. "She and Letty were very happy together, and I think it would restore Mademoiselle's faith in herself if you were willing to make such an arrangement. She has felt so badly about Letty's illness and as if she were to blame in some way."

"Oh, I could not bear her to have any such feeling! I'll talk the matter over with Letty. Perhaps she would prefer to stay in Lakewood, too, and get what schooling she could there for a season. But—in case we should decide on Lakewood and she wants to be near her school and music—I'll ask her how she would like to go back to Mademoiselle."

When Madame Henri heard of this talked-of arrangement, she sighed profoundly.

"Alas, that I am to be gone for so many months," she exclaimed. "It would be a happiness unspeakable to me to have Letty

with me in my little house, to which I am so attach, and which I must close up and leave to moth and mice for so many month. Ah, Madame, Madame, if you could but let her come with me !”

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones knew that this proposition was impracticable, but it was a great comfort to her to reflect upon all the offers that came to her of taking Letty.

“ If we should go to Lakewood and leave Letty at her work in the city, the dear child won't feel neglected and unconsidered, that is one comfort.”

In the meantime, Mr. Beckwith, while very busy with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's own affairs, still had time to investigate the worth of the shares of stock which had been found among Letty's letters. He generally went up to New York for the week, coming down on Friday afternoon for the week-end, and returning Monday morning. When Mr. Jack had been at home, he had made a point of coming down to Sea Side in the middle of the week as well, but his father found that journey too tedious. Therefore, when Mrs. Hartwell-Jones received a very particularly worded in-

invitation for herself and the two girls to dine at the "Rubber Band" on the following Friday evening, to talk over certain matters with Mr. Beckwith, she felt confident that he had some information to impart concerning Letty's papers.

"He has found out that they are worthless, and does not want to tell me so in writing," she reflected nervously. "He thinks it will sound gentler when spoken."

And yet she was not entirely hopeless.

Mr. Beckwith very evidently had something on his mind, and was very abstracted all through dinner. But Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, watching him, did not think him depressed, as if he had bad news to impart, and once she caught him glancing at Letty with a twinkle in his eye that set her heart to pounding. To her surprise, Letty answered the look with a nod and smile. Had these two come to a private understanding already?

When what he considered a suitable amount of ice-cream and cake had been consumed, Mr. Beckwith cleared his throat and said, with mock pomposity of manner:

"I am authorized, by a certain young lady



in our midst, to invite the party here assembled to attend a—ah—business conclave on the terrace. In short, you are all invited to hear a bit of news I have to impart—good news, madam,” he added, bowing to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and setting her last fear at rest.

They adjourned forthwith and Mr. Beckwith, stirring his coffee, opened the meeting in the following informal manner :

“ My dear Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, those precious papers, that were lying serenely and securely at rest in your friend the circus manager’s safety deposit vault, have created a goodly sensation in their time. They have been advertised from one end of the country to the other—almost had a private detective on their track.

“ They are stocks in one of those mining concerns which are generally formed, I am sorry to say, for the purpose of making money for the promoters. As the law requires them to have a mine—real or apparent—to show to clients, they buy up cheap any old property that may be on the market.

“ It sometimes happens that these old mines turn out to be real, and it was so, I am glad

to inform you, in this case. The company went through the usual form of bankruptcy, but one of the stockholders was a mining engineer, and he took enough interest to investigate the property. He saw enough good to have faith in the working of it, and went to work to buy up a controlling interest.

“It happened that these very shares would have thrown the scale in his favor, and naturally he was very anxious to obtain them. In fact the whole affair nearly fell through, for he believed the other side had these shares concealed, to spring upon him at a crucial moment. But he learned enough about the shares at length to convince him that they were really lost, so he carried through his scheme—fortunately for Letty here, for, I am glad to say, as possessor of these shares of stock she will control quite a nice little income from now on. And if I can make the company pay over past dividends, she will be quite an heiress.”

Mr. Beckwith stopped speaking amidst a deafening clamor of applause and excited exclamations, and Letty was caught and hugged and kissed by every one. She took her tri-

umph so quietly that Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's suspicions that she already knew what was to happen were confirmed. But she said nothing until they were at home again, in the privacy of their own cottage—the dear little cottage that had sheltered them so happily, and which might prove the last united home they might have for some time to come.

“Letty, darling, what puzzles me about this whole delightful affair is when Mr. Beckwith got a chance to tell you all about it.”

Letty laughed.

“Wasn't it dear and thoughtful of him?” she exclaimed. “You remember when I went down to the village store this afternoon to match those hair ribbons? Well, that was a prearranged plan. Mr. Beckwith met me there, escorted me to Northup's, and under cover of a treat, gave me the great news. I've been just splitting with it ever since, but I kept the secret, didn't I?”

“Indeed you did; we never suspected a thing, did we, Violet, dear?”

“Whatever are you going to do with so much money, Letty?” asked Violet, regarding

her sister with a comical sort of awe. "Please don't get stylish and grand."

"Indeed I won't—not after what I saw and learned at Meta's. Mr. Beckwith says he isn't sure just how much money there will be yet, you know, but let's talk about what I'd like to do with it. Aunt Mary, are you sleepy?"

They sat up talking until very late, and Letty poured out such an extravaganza of luxuries, charitable endowments and expenditures generally that she would like to make with the new windfall that Mrs. Hartwell-Jones exclaimed:

"Letty mine, if you would use that output of imagination to write a story, you would make an instant success. The wealth of Cræsus could hardly finance your mad schemes. Shall we say good-night now?"

"Oh, but mother, it all sounds so delightfully comfortable—and so Arabian Nights-y," said Violet, rising and yawning prodigiously. "And one part is coming true, anyhow."

"Yes, Aunt Mary, Mr. Beckwith says there will surely be enough to pay the rent of the Lakewood cottage, and so I am going to play benefactor and send you and Violet there for

the winter. And Mademoiselle writes that there is a flat vacant in her same building, with one more room and a larger kitchen, which she will take if I am willing to come with her and go shares on the housekeeping. You can have dear old Punch and Judy.

“And one more thing,” she concluded, her cheeks red, her eyes shining and her hands clasped; “Miss Emerson is going to go to Lakewood with you, just the same as last winter. Yes, Mrs. Somers has helped me to arrange it all. She understands the circumstances and is willing to help keep the house tidy and all that. There, Aunt Mary, haven’t I planned it all nicely?”

Letty was breathless when she stopped, for she had talked very fast; she found the real plans infinitely more charming and absorbing, even in their modest simplicity, than the elaborate fairy tales she had invented of the lavish expenditure of fabulous wealth.

As for Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, she broke down and cried. She had been worried and harassed for so long, and now her troubles seemed in such bright prospect of a happy ending, that

the reaction was more than her overwrought nerves could bear.

"Why, mother darling," cried Violet in dismay, "what is the matter? Now, when everything is coming out so beautifully."

"I understand," exclaimed Letty, dropping to her knees beside Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and shedding a few tears on her own account. "She's crying for joy, Violet-Mary, and—and so am I, I guess. And oh, Aunt Mary, although this money has come to me without any work on my part, still it makes me feel very strong and independent, and I want you to promise me that you will never, never fret or worry any more, for I am going to take care of you and Violet-Mary always."

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones looked up and smiled through her tears.

"I believe it, Letty mine."

**Other Stories in the Series are :**

LETTY OF THE CIRCUS  
LETTY AND THE TWINS  
LETTY'S NEW HOME  
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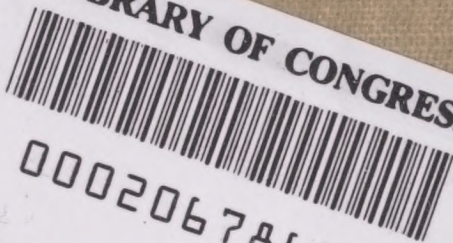








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