



LETTY'S
SPRINGTIME
HELEN SHERMAN GRIFFITH



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“ I ’ LL READ ”

Letty's Springtime

BY HELEN SHERMAN GRIFFITH

AUTHOR OF

"LETTY OF THE CIRCUS"
"LETTY AND THE TWINS"
"LETTY'S NEW HOME"
"LETTY'S SISTER"
"LETTY'S TREASURE"
"LETTY'S GOOD LUCK"
"LETTY AT THE CONSERVATORY"

Illustrated by Paula B. Himmelsbach



THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
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Letty's Springtime



\$0.50

16-13745

MAY 31 1916

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no 1.

Introduction

As a small child Letty Grey has helped earn her share of the family income by taking part with her brother Ben in an acrobatic act, as told in "Letty of the Circus." After the death of her mother and brother, Letty is adopted by a well-to-do author, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, who cultivates the girl's voice and brings her up amidst happy surroundings and loving, admiring friends. This appears in two books, "Letty and the Twins" and "Letty's New Home." By a happy accident, during a summer in England, described in "Letty's Sister," Letty makes friends with "a little lame lacemaker," who turns out to be Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's own daughter, lost as a baby in shipwreck.

The united family live happily, but Mrs. Hartwell-Jones loses some of her money. However, old papers, supposedly valueless, which the circus manager had been guarding for Letty, a bequest from her brother—see

“Letty’s Treasure”—fortunately materialize into a sufficient income to allow Letty to pursue her musical studies at the Conservatory, where she passes a somewhat discouraging winter among uncongenial people, but with enough kindness from Mr. Jack Beckwith and other old friends to prevent her from becoming too downcast. She sings at a Conservatory concert and scores a great success. These school-days are described in “Letty’s Good Luck” and “Letty at the Conservatory.”

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Letty’s Springtime

Letty's Springtime

CHAPTER I

LEILA HUNTINGTON'S COUSIN

LEILA HUNTINGTON had always shown a tendency to make friends with people older than herself, and this tendency was increased after her Western cousin, Ross Gilchrist, came to Princeton College as a student. He had entered the autumn before, but it had taken nearly the whole winter to become properly acquainted with his Eastern relatives, whom he had never met before.

Not that Ross was shy, but he did not realize at first how valuable to a student relatives living close at hand can be made. Ross was a tall, blond, good-looking boy, with a wide smile and breezy manners, a great favorite among his classmates and a skilful athlete. He had come to call upon his aunt and uncle

very promptly upon his arrival at Princeton—and was very careful to write the fact home to his mother. He seemed to think that that duty visit ended his obligations, and promptly forgot them.

At Thanksgiving time Mrs. Huntington reflected that her sister's boy might feel lonely and perhaps homesick on his first holiday away from home, and invited him, in a cordial, affectionate note, to come and dine with them, and to stay the whole three days of his vacation. But Ross had accepted the invitation of his roommate to go to Philadelphia for the week-end, and it was nearly Christmas time before his mother succeeded in impressing upon him, through innumerable letters, that good manners compelled him to pay a "bread-and-butter visit" to his aunt.

Ross went and had a pleasant Sunday afternoon. Leila, who upon the occasion of his first visit had impressed him merely as an overgrown girl with a cold in her head, seemed more wide awake this time, and flattered Ross by her genuine interest in his college life. She giggled appreciatively at his rehearsal of experiences at Commons, and

sympathized with his miseries when ragged by the sophomores.

Mrs. Huntington was quite horrified by his accounts of the food served the freshmen in Commons, and begged him to come to dinner every Sunday, and get at least one good and sufficient meal a week. Ross remained for Sunday night supper with the family and decided, if that were a sample of their regular menus, it would pay to accept his aunt's invitation.

"They certainly can feed a fellow," he reported afterward to Jim Freeman, his roommate. "As soon as I get a little more used to the family, I'll ask Aunt Laura if I may bring you around, too."

"Thanks, but I don't believe I'll go, old man."

"Why not, I'd like to know? I never knew a chap so fond of good eats as you."

"But isn't there a girl? You said something about ——"

"Ho, Leila! You needn't be afraid of her. She's only a kid. And a pretty nice one, too. Of course you've got to go, Jim, you idiot. Think of being sure of one good filling meal

a week! Why, it makes Commons seem almost bearable."

"But won't your aunt think it cheeky, ringing me in on her?"

"Don't you suppose I'll know how to manage it? Of course you'll have to go around and call with me some day, first, and we'll lead the talk around to Commons—it won't be hard to do—and you might let on that you had a weak digestion or something——"

"That wouldn't do," objected Jim. "If I gave that song and dance I'd have to live up to it and not eat much."

"No, that wouldn't do. And it wouldn't please my uncle, either."

"Why? Does he object to people with weak digestions?"

"I should just guess he does. He likes to see folks eat heartily and enjoy themselves, he says. You just ought to see my uncle, Jim. I guess he weighs most three hundred, and he's jolly to match; you know the style."

"Sounds promising. And you're sure the girl's only a kid?"

"Sure thing, with two pig-tails, just right

to pull. They're a pretty jolly family, Jim. You'll miss it by not going."

"Well, trot me around some time, old man, if you don't mind."

"I'll tell you what I'll do. They've invited me there for the Christmas vacation. I'll work your name in then, and right afterward we can begin our Sunday feeds."

Ross carried out this programme faithfully, but felt a little like a traitor when he found how easily his aunt fell in with his scheme. He was sorry he had not gone straight to her, told her that he wanted to bring his chum, and explain frankly how both of them longed for home cooking. Instead, he hemmed and hawed, brought up Jim's name again and again, remarked how kind Jim had been and how indebted to him Ross felt for various favors and, when his aunt suggested bringing the young man to call, assumed an air of gratified surprise for which he hated himself.

Ross became very well acquainted with his relatives during the Christmas holidays. The resemblance of his Aunt Laura to his mother, in speech and manner as well as looks, made him feel very much at home, and he found

Leila very companionable, after the first shyness had worn off, very companionable in spite of the pig-tails.

"Say, kid, why don't you turn those up in some way?" he suggested one day, after Leila had endured more of his tweakings than usual. "You'd not get teased so much by the fellows, when I bring 'em here to call."

"Will Jim Freeman pull my braids?" asked Leila in trepidation.

"Sure thing, if he gets a chance. It wouldn't be human nature not to."

"Well, if he does he may expect to be well slapped for it."

"Oh, come, you aren't going to make a stranger of Jim, are you? Aunt Laura promised to treat him like one of the family. Why, he—I—want Jim to feel that he can come here every once in a while—say every Sunday, maybe—and get a jolly big feed, just like you give me. If you make him feel like a stranger he won't feel like hustling the grub—I mean, like eating so much. He'd have to have his company manners with him, and behave like a gentleman. That's not the way to treat a member of the family, you know."

Leila pondered his words, and decided to take his advice about her braids, rather to her mother's dismay, for Mrs. Huntington considered that her little girl was already too old in her ways. But she had to admit that the change was very becoming, and permitted Miss Brown, the dressmaker who had made Leila's clothes since she was a baby, to lengthen her skirts another inch.

Leila also conveyed to her mother a hint of the manner in which Ross wished his chum treated by the Huntington family, a mode of treatment for which it was unnecessary to sue, since they were a most informal and hospitable family, Mr. Huntington's social motto being, "the more the merrier."

So, when Jim made his first call, under the patronizing wing of Ross, he found the experience very far indeed removed from an ordeal, and Mrs. Huntington's motherly insistence that they should stay for supper so sincere that Jim accepted with alacrity. The one embarrassing moment of the whole charming visit was his introduction to Leila who, with her upturned braids and bashful reserve, appeared quite the young lady. The only

revenge Jim took at the moment was to affect an unconsciousness of Ross's close proximity behind him and give a backward step that bruised that young gentleman's toes most unmercifully.

"That isn't the way to treat a friend who's letting you in on a good thing," Ross accused him on the way home.

"But you told me she was only a kid."

"So she is."

"With two pig-tails."

"So she had—until to-day. I never saw her with 'em turned up like that," replied Ross virtuously, refraining from telling his friend at whose suggestion Leila had turned up the pig-tails.

Ross's mother was delighted at the cordial way in which her sister had taken her boy into the bosom of the family, and wrote at length upon the subject and begged her sister to keep a strict eye upon Ross and his associates.

"I am sure he has good sense and good taste both, in the matter of selecting friends," she wrote, "but it is so easy for a boy to fall under bad influences so far away from home

and home training. It would be a great comfort to me to know that you are in touch, not only with Ross himself, but his friends. I am glad he and Leila hit it off so nicely. Perhaps it would amuse her, as well as be good for Ross, if you could have an occasional gathering of young people at the house. Am I imposing too far on a sister's prerogative? But you see I am so far away, and it is so hard for me to do anything myself. When you bring Leila out here I promise to give her a better time than she could dream of—these Western people are so warm-hearted and hospitable. If any one in the town has a guest, the whole town feels it necessary to give that guest a good time. So if you and Leila befriend Ross during these next four winters, and then will come out here for your reward, I hope to make it up to you."

There was much more in the letter, of course, but this paragraph Mrs. Huntington read aloud to Leila, and was secretly astonished, as well as rather amused, to see how eagerly she took to the idea of some sort of a party.

"But I thought you always hated parties," exclaimed her mother. "I can remember a

time when you actually cried when I said you must accept an invitation."

"But that was ages ago, and at some one's else house. I have Ross to back me up now."

"And your hair turned up, to add to your sense of dignity," teased her mother.

But she understood Leila's meaning; the relief of having some one else to think of to take away any sense of self-consciousness, and she was glad that her shy, lonely little girl was beginning to take an interest and enjoyment in the people about her.

The project of a party was put before the boys at the next Sunday dinner and was hailed with hurrahs of delight.

"Bully for you, Aunt Laura!" cried Ross. "That kind of a hallelujah will just be the saving of us fellows. February and March are the dickens to get through, aren't they, Jim? What with the exams and the beastly weather, we nearly go out of our minds."

"That's right," agreed Jim. "We haven't any way of blowing off steam. The skating's over and the field practice hasn't begun yet. Gee, it's fierce sometimes—I beg your pardon,"

he stammered, overcome by sudden embarrassment at Mrs. Huntington's expression.

But she only burst out laughing and Mr. Huntington said heartily :

"Never mind, my boy, we want you to have 'all the comforts of home' here. Only just remember you have a young lady to whom must be held up the chivalry of gentlemen. Now, how about this party?"

"I'm afraid it can't be a dancing party," observed Mrs. Huntington. "We must remember that Lent begins next week."

Leila's face fell, for how could she entertain without dancing?

"What can we do, then?" she asked a little helplessly.

"Oh, lots of things," Ross assured her. "We can have charades, or things to guess, or a 'stunts' party."

"What is a 'stunts' party?"

"Why, each person has to do a stunt—speak a piece, or sing or do a fancy dance, you know. Lots of the fellows know fine stunts. Alfred Harrison, one of the fellows in our class, is a prime prestidigitator."

"And Jack Lenox is a ventriloquist,"

chimed in Jim. "Don't you remember the night he fooled all us fellows into thinking Professor Jenks was coming?"

"Oh, what fun; tell me about it," laughed Leila.

Jack Lenox and his accomplishment were discussed for a few moments, and then the question arose as to who should be asked to the party.

Leila looked dismayed. She knew so few girls.

"Who was that girl you had out in the automobile one day—some time ago?" asked Ross, in what he vainly endeavored to make a casual tone.

He endeavored to elucidate, in answer to a shower of questions as to time, place and appearance, and he and Jim exchanged sheepish grins.

"It was—well, pretty long ago," he said slowly, as if trying to remember, and at last was obliged to admit that it had been before the holidays.

"How long before, Jim?" he referred Leila's question to his friend, determined to bring him into the controversy.

“Well—ah—it was before the game—I guess it was the Thanksgiving holidays, Ross.”

“Who could it have been, Leila?” asked her father with a twinkle in his eyes. “She must have been a particularly attractive young lady to have remained in their memory so long—after a single look, as it were.”

“It was a good long stare, sir—at least at the whole party,” Ross declared in self-defense. “You see, there was an empty seat in the car, and I was feeling a bit homesick and—and Aunt Laura looked uncommonly like mother in her fur coat and—well, it was like my own folks passing me by.”

“Poor boy! With all those sentiments to contend against, how did you have a chance to—to see the young lady?” teased Mr. Huntington, but his wife was touched.

“You poor child,” she exclaimed pityingly. “Why didn’t you call out to us, and come along?”

“I was too bashful, ma’am,” declared Ross coolly. “So I just stared.”

“No wonder you stared,” put in the matter-of-fact Leila, “for it must have been Letty Grey with us. Don’t you remember, Mother,

the day she and Mademoiselle La Grange spent with us just before Thanksgiving time?"

"Of course we remember," agreed her father promptly, "and we have all of us looked forward to her coming again. We're still hoping, too, aren't we, boys?"

"You bet, sir," agreed Ross and Jim enthusiastically, responding with delighted grins to Mr. Huntington's comprehensive wink.

"Letty Grey would be the very one for the party," Leila said, "if we could only get her to come, but I know she won't. She never has any day but Sunday free."

"Good gracious, what does she do?" ejaculated Ross. "She didn't look old enough to—to be a stenographer or anything like that."

"She sings," replied Leila solemnly. "She is studying at the Conservatory of Music in New York, and works awfully hard. She's trying for some sort of a scholarship in which attendance counts for a lot, and she can't be induced to miss a single day," and Leila sighed, for Letty's presence at a party would have been a great feather in her cap.

"There's no harm in trying," Ross assured

her hopefully. "Perhaps a bit later she may come up. Tell her what an inducement you have to offer her, hey, Jim? We'll trot up all the best lookers in the class, won't we?"

"Sure thing, with yours truly in the front row."

Every one laughed and Leila said, as they all followed Mrs. Huntington into the other room:

"I'll write to Letty Grey to-night."

CHAPTER II

SORE THROAT

LETTY GREY sat straight up in bed with an exceedingly startled expression. She gave an odd, gurgling sort of gasp and stared about her as if she thought herself in strange surroundings. Then she scrambled into a wrapper and knocked at Mademoiselle La Grange's door, with whom Letty lived. Mademoiselle, herself nearly dressed, opened the door in surprise.

"Why, Letty, ma chère, what is it? You look as if you had seen a—what is it—a ghost!"

"I have, Mademoiselle," replied Letty in a sepulchral whisper, and Mademoiselle stared, not knowing whether she was in fun or earnest.

Letty solved her doubts by suddenly bursting into tears, and Katy the maid, who was setting the breakfast table, came running into the small corridor to see what had happened.

In a sobbing, croaking whisper, Letty explained her trouble.

“Oh, Mademoiselle, I have lost my voice! Isn't it terrible! Whatever in the world shall I do! Do you think it's—gone forever? I——” A violent fit of coughing interrupted her.

For one frightened, dismayed moment, Mademoiselle La Grange and the maid stared at each other, then Mademoiselle set herself to the task of soothing Letty's fears.

“Ma chère, it is nothing so terrible as you would suggest. It is a touch of laryngitis, *n'est ce pas?* Very uncomfortable and disagreeable, but not—not serious, Letty.”

“Not serious!” echoed Letty in an indignant croak that would have been funny if she had not been in such tragic earnest. “Oh, what shall I do! What shall I do!” And she fell to sobbing again.

“Why, I'd send for the doctor, sure and that's what I'd do, mem,” remarked Katy practically.

Katy, who had lived for several years with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, Letty Grey's “adopted mother,” and was a devoted servant, could not

bear to see her beloved young mistress in such grievous trouble. She stood in the doorway, wrapping her hands in and out of her apron nervously, and striving to check her own impulsive Irish flow of tears.

“Dr. Heywood is out of town!” exclaimed Mademoiselle with a fresh pang of dismay. “Whatever shall we do, Letty chère?”

Letty's sobbing was checked by a second violent fit of coughing.

“Oh, oh,” she choked, “if only it could have happened yesterday, while Aunt Mary was still here. Whatever shall I do! I am so miserable! Oh, oh!” And she sobbed and coughed wretchedly.

The Saturday evening previous Letty had sung in one of the periodic concerts given by the Conservatory of Music, of which she was a student. She had worked hard and long in preparation for that concert, and had been on a nervous strain for several weeks. Her mother by adoption, whom Letty called “Aunt Mary,” and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's own daughter, Violet, had come up from their cottage in Lakewood to be present at the concert, and Letty had spent the night with them at their

hotel. Mr. Jack Beckwith, a great friend of the family, had given a very delightful, merry supper party after the concert and although Letty had been one of the merriest guests present, she had looked very tired.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Violet had taken on Sunday a somewhat earlier train back to Lakewood than they had originally planned, because Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had thought Letty looking over-tired, and was anxious that she should have a good rest before returning to her Conservatory work on Monday. She had noticed Letty's feverish look, and marked the slight huskiness of voice, but had believed it entirely due to her extreme fatigue, which nothing but complete rest could cure.

In reality, it had been the beginning of the attack of laryngitis, within the clutches of which Letty woke on that memorable Monday morning to find herself. Mademoiselle La Grange, whose French nature took every responsibility heavily, soon recovered from her panic of helplessness, and telephoned the doctor. Although Dr. Heywood himself was out of town, his assistant, she knew, was very able, and within half an hour Letty was un-

der his charge, inhaling steam of benzoin tincture, holding ice bags to her throat and obeying strictly every instruction.

Mademoiselle had to hurry off to her own duties, but Katy made a most faithful nurse, and did her best to prevent her young mistress from worrying over her condition.

"I suppose it is fate, Katy," Letty whispered ruefully. "It is what Madame Henri always feared for me, you know. I'll never forget the time I got buried in the snow-drift, out at Sunnycrest, and her horror when I told her about it."

"Yes, I remember," responded Katy with a reminiscent giggle. "But please, Miss Letty, the doctor said as how you mustn't try to talk."

"Oh, Katy, if only I could talk, I wouldn't try. But I didn't lose my voice the time I got wet in the drift; why do you suppose I have lost it now? I didn't take cold anywhere."

"Sure and the doctor said you must have got a bit of a cold somewhere," urged Katy reasonably. "Does the ice bag want re-fillin'?"

Letty shook her head, resolving to obey the

doctor's mandate in regard to talking. Indeed, it made her throat ache to attempt to make any sound at all. But she had to give vent to one more moan.

"It's all up with the scholarship now," she choked, winking back the tears of disappointment that would overflow.

During all the uncomfortable week that followed this was the affliction that tormented her most, and nothing any one said could convince her to the contrary. Letty had got the impression so firmly fixed in her mind that uninterrupted attendance was one of the conditions of winning a certain scholarship for which she was competing, that she felt that a day's absence imperilled her chances. What hope was there, then, after missing a whole week?

Of course there were compensations. The chief of these was the prompt return of Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, who installed herself as chief nurse.

"Oh, Aunt Mary, Aunt Mary, how glad I am to see you! How thankful! I was just feeling as if the bottom had dropped out of everything," sobbed Letty in her choking whis-

per. "But Aunt Mary, ought you to have come?"

"Of course I ought. Why, Letty mine, how could you ask such a question! To think of my precious daughter being ill and me not by to do what I can to help her!"

"But what about Violet-Mary?"

"She is perfectly safe and happy with Miss Emerson. Now, Letty darling, you remember what the doctor said about talking. See, I have brought a small pad and pencil, which are to stay on this table beside your bed, and you must write everything you want to say. It is a bit of a nuisance, perhaps, but will be much better in the end. The doctor says your voice will come back much more quickly the less you use it now. You run a risk of straining it, you know."

Letty took the pad and wrote on it, in a rebellious spirit:

"I don't see that it matters much now. I can't go on with my work at the Conservatory for ages."

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones read the little message and restrained a smile. She knew just what bitterness of spirit Letty was experiencing.

"Yes, but even 'ages' will pass, you know, darling, and there is all the 'after that' to work in."

"But I shall have no chance now for the scholarship."

"Don't lose heart so easily, dear. You have until May."

"But attendance is one of the conditions."

"But not every condition, Letty mine. I doubt if you'll find any pupil who has attended every lesson, and your record has been wonderful, so far. You must make up for this temporary absence by better work."

"I can't do better work than those pupils who give their whole time to it," Letty wrote dismally. "And I'll have all my lessons at Miss Sims's to make up, too." She put down her pencil and began to cry nervously. Then the foolishness of this mode of conversation, her written messages and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's spoken replies, appealed to her sense of humor, and she laughed instead. Taking the pad again, she wrote:

"This looks exactly like a conversation over the telephone sounds."

The laughter did her good and she tried to take a more cheerful view of her situation.

As she grew better, visitors were allowed to drop in for short calls, always with the proviso that Letty write every word of her side of the conversation. Mary Beckwith came, bringing news of school, and countless messages from all the girls, and Martha Simmons dropped in occasionally on her way home from the Conservatory. Martha could never stay long, she was so busy, and never had much news, but her visits pleased Letty. It is always pleasant to have one's friends remember one, but it is sweetest of all to have them thoughtful and attentive when one is ill.

Another faithful visitor was Mr. Jack Beckwith, Mary's older brother, but his coming did not bring the atmosphere of gayety that Letty had been accustomed to associate with "Mr. Jack." The fact was that that gentleman was laboring under heavy cares of his own, which he could not always shake off. He always came laden down with gifts—mostly books, and Letty declared that she would have to buy a new bookcase to hold them all. Whereupon Mr. Jack replied with

perfect gravity that next time he would have to bring a bookcase.

But though he sat down beside Letty's couch and scribbled nonsensical messages on her pad, and pretended that he, too, was dumb, just to see what it felt like, it was easy to see that he was not in his usual good spirits, and Letty wondered. She could hear him and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones in the other room, talking long and earnestly, and while she was still feeling depressed about her illness, suffered qualms of nervous terror lest her condition was more serious than she had been allowed to believe, and they were discussing the probable chances of her never regaining her voice.

As she grew better, and her voice began to strengthen gradually, Letty lost most of her apprehensions, but she did not wonder the less what was the subject of those long, grave talks between Mr. Jack and her dear Aunt Mary. Sometimes she was afraid it was money matters that worried them. But Mrs. Hartwell-Jones never alluded to the private interviews, and of course Letty never asked.

One afternoon, when Letty was so much

better that she thought she ought to begin persuading her Aunt Mary to go back home, Mr. Jack came in again after his talk with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and sitting down beside Letty's couch, said he had an announcement to make.

"I have been telling 'Aunt Mary,' Letty, that it is necessary for me to go out West again on that tiresome business, and I have been urging upon her the kindness of granting me one last big favor. I want to have a house party, but it won't be successful unless I can have all the guests I particularly want. I have, after a great deal of persuasion and some argument—but all, I hope, of a friendly nature," he added, smiling across at Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, "succeeded in convincing her how really essential this little plan is to my whole future happiness."

"You do manage to talk a good deal of nonsense, one way or another, Jack," she said with a smile, but with a little sigh as well.

"Nonsense is the spice of life, isn't it, Letty? Which reminds me, how did you like that last book?"

"'The Madness of Philip'?"

"Isn't that a bit of delightful nonsense?"

I'm glad you had not read it before. I like to pass along my favorites. Peg away at the reading, Letty; it will help keep your mind off your larynx. I think illness should be treated as a busy man treats the unmitigated bore who persists in calling during office hours—the less attention paid it, the sooner it will go away.”

Letty laughed—or rather grinned, she could still make no sound that approached a real laugh—but her curiosity about the house party “loomed so high in her eyes,” as Mr. Jack said, that he was obliged without further loss of time to gratify it.

“You see, Washington's Birthday comes next week,” he said, “and the holiday is considerate enough to arrive on a Monday. So that if a certain jolly party I have in mind assemble at ‘The Rubber Band,’ as Mary persists in calling our dear old Sea Side house, on a Friday afternoon, we could have three great big, glorious days of fun and frolic, as the vaudeville advertisements say.”

“And who is to be in the party?” croaked Letty eagerly, too excited to remember her pad and pencil.

Mr. Jack gravely took her hand and made a pretense of feeling her pulse, then taking her pad he began to write down a list of names, sitting so that Letty, propped on one elbow, could look over his shoulder.

“The names I put a question-mark after are those we are not quite sure yet are coming,” he explained. “Those with the underscoring are *surely* coming, and those with the check alongside—we haven’t decided yet whether they are worthy to be invited on such a gala occasion. Now, remember, no talking.”

Laying his finger across his lips to emphasize this last injunction, Mr. Jack began to write, with tantalizing slowness, Letty thought, a list of names.

“Mrs. Beckwith — ?

“Mrs. Somers.

“Mary Beckwith—✓; perhaps she would make too much family?”

Letty took the pencil and wrote a positive “No, indeed,” alongside this entry; then Mr. Jack went on:

“Two or three other Beckwiths and Somerses, if they can be collected.

“Clara Markham — ?

“Molly Wilson — ?” Mr. Jack paused a moment, after writing this last name, as though considering, then glancing at Letty’s face, decided that he had teased enough and wrote rapidly :

“Mrs. Hartwell-Jones,

“Violet-Mary Hartwell-Jones, and

“Miss Letty Grey !”

Then he laid down his pencil and sat back to await the effect of his surprise. Letty clasped her hands and gazed at him in a delight too deep for any expression, and then suddenly, to his and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones’s dismay, burst into tears.

“The poor dear child, I’ve excited her too much !” exclaimed Mr. Jack in compunction. “I ought to have let you break it to her as you wanted.”

But Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was as concerned as he. She had wanted to be the one to tell Letty about the house party, not for fear of over-exciting her, but because she was afraid the girl might refuse to go ; that, influenced by an overgrown sense of duty, she might insist upon returning to her studies at the first possible moment. And Mrs. Hartwell-Jones

agreed that some sort of change, both of scene and air, was necessary. Indeed, Mr. Jack's plan had germinated from the doctor's own orders.

Mr. Jack made his adieux and hastened away to invite the rest of his guests, while Mrs. Hartwell-Jones soothed her patient.

"I know I'm silly and weak to give way like this," Letty apologized, "and it isn't nervousness or weakness, as you and Mr. Jack suppose, Aunt Mary. It is just—just that I've been so foolish to give up for a simple little illness the way I have, and it makes me so ashamed to think how you are all planning to help me. Why, Aunt Mary, it scares me to think, if I give up so quickly for the little worries, whatever should I do if a real trouble, something big and terrible, should confront me!"

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones caught her in her arms and held her close.

"My precious child, I hope and pray nothing big and terrible will ever threaten the happiness of one I love so dearly. But if such a trouble should arise, Letty mine, the best preparation you can have will be learning

how to meet and overcome the petty, every-day worries and sorrows."

"I know, Aunt Mary, and I have tried so hard," she whispered, and sat erect on her couch. "There is nothing for it, is there, but to 'try, try again.'" And bravely she winked back the tears and smiled.

CHAPTER III

A HOUSE PARTY

It was agreed by every one that the house party at Sea Side was the very best thing that could have happened to Letty Grey. She could not possibly return to her singing lessons for another week, at least, and if left at home, would have moped dismally over the delay of enforced idleness. And the change to sea air would do more good, the doctor said, than any medicine he could prescribe.

To be surrounded by loving, devoted friends was also a wonderful tonic to Letty. She needed affection, encouragement, faith. In spite of her own courage and steadfastness of purpose, in spite of the hardships of her early childhood, Letty's was a somewhat exotic nature, that thrived best in the warm glow of admiration and praise.

Letty herself would have been the first to deny that such was the case—to repudiate indignantly such an opinion, and to express

scorn for that type of character. Nevertheless, it was true, and perhaps Miss Terlowe, the actress, and a shrewd student of human nature, had perceived that fact when she advised Letty's friends to put the girl through a hardening process.

But certainly the present was no time for following out a hardening process, and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones welcomed the excellent opportunity offered to bring Letty simultaneously out of her illness and her discouragement. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones herself cheerfully put aside her own concerns and arranged for Violet and herself to join the house party, although just then it was rather inconvenient, and would necessitate the burning of midnight oil to satisfy the demands of her publishers.

Needless to say, the invitation was hailed with delight by all whom it concerned, and was accepted unanimously. Some little pressure had to be brought to bear upon Miss Sims to induce her to allow Molly Wilson to go, since the rule of the boarding-school required girls to be back at their post the afternoon before the reopening of school after any holiday, and Monday was to be the gala day

at Sea Side. But Mrs. Somers promised that Molly would be there, either that evening, or, if they reached home late from Sea Side, Molly should telephone Miss Sims, stay all night with Mary Beckwith and be back at school bright and early on Tuesday morning.

The plan was to go down by motor, Mrs. Somers to take her big limousine and Mr. Jack Beckwith to drive his own car. He had completed the party by inviting two of Mary's friends, Harold Clarke and Teddy Warde, students at Columbia, and the only youths accessible for such a short vacation. Mr. Jack's two brothers, Maxwell and Alex, were away at college and Seth, the youngest of the large Beckwith family, to his great indignation, was voted too young to attend the present party. At the last moment, however, Letty pleaded for him and he was allowed to go, though Mr. Jack threatened him with the fate of eating at a separate table, since he would make the traditional unlucky thirteenth.

"I'm not the thirteenth, except going down in the motors," Seth denied indignantly. "You'd better learn how to count, Jack Beckwith. You're only trying to make an excuse."

“Well, remember this is my party, young man, and if you’re not respectful to your elders, you’ll get left at home.”

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones arranged to have Miss Emerson bring Violet to town, and they spent the night with Mrs. Somers, as the flat Letty shared with Mademoiselle La Grange was entirely too tiny to entertain two visitors. The two automobiles were to go about, collecting the various passengers, early in the afternoon of Friday.

It was a day of cold, brilliant sunshine. There had been a slight fall of snow the night before, but not enough to make the roads hard to travel over, and the pure white crystals, sparkling in the sunlight as the two motors sped through the open country, was a lovely spectacle.

“It is so nice and clean after the brownish, ugly stuff in town,” sighed Letty contentedly.

“You are a real country girl, aren’t you, ‘little Miss Grey,’” laughed Mr. Jack. “I love it too, better than the crowded, pushing, selfish town. One can be one’s own self in the country. There is never any need to remember one’s ‘p’s’ and ‘q’s.’ And I wish you

could see the great Western prairies, Letty; so broad and magnificent. A man dwindles into complete insignificance in the midst of such glorious vastness."

"I never could imagine you sinking into insignificance anywhere," remarked Letty seriously, and Mr. Jack looked pleased even while he laughed.

"Flatterer!" he exclaimed. "Some day I hope to stand on the edge of one of those great prairies with you, and see your face as you gaze about you. I'll risk your having to revoke that pretty speech."

"You know I almost went West once when I was a little girl—just after my mother died. Mr. Goldberg wanted my brother Ben to go out there with him in some vaudeville troupe, and Mrs. Goldberg was to take care of me. But Ben had already signed a contract with Mr. Drake. Leila Huntington has an aunt living out there, too, and she talks a great deal about it. I should love to go there."

"Should you? Do you think you would care enough to—to live there—some time?" asked Mr. Jack slowly.

Letty looked around at him in surprise, and some alarm. Mr. Jack was driving his own car and Letty, well wrapped up, her throat muffled in a great, wide piece of fur, was sitting beside him in the place she loved best of all.

“Oh, Mr. Jack,” she exclaimed, “you aren’t thinking—you don’t mean—I have sometimes wondered if Aunt Mary didn’t think she ought to go out to California to try the climate for Violet. You don’t think Violet-Mary is any worse, do you?”

At the beginning of Letty’s impulsive little speech Mr. Jack had looked eager, interested, almost excited; but his expression changed suddenly; a cloud of actual disappointment crossed his face. Letty began to cough suddenly, and Mr. Jack reproached himself for having let her talk in the cold air.

“You must not say another word until we get there, child,” he said anxiously. “For once I shall have a chance to do all the talking.” And he began a lively account of his experiences in the West.

A warm welcome was awaiting the motorists at Mr. Beckwith’s big summer cottage at

Sea Side. The old caretaker and his wife were delighted to have company to break the monotony of their long, lonely winter, and had followed Mrs. Beckwith's instructions as to warming and preparing the house with zest. In the big living-room a great fire was crackling on the hearth and every one gathered around it with cries of delight.

Letty was established upon a couch in the warmest corner, and an easy chair drawn up alongside for Mrs. Beckwith. Violet, who hated the cold, tucked herself up on the fur rug close to the fire—a veritable moth hovering around the flame, as Mr. Jack said, and the others grouped themselves near by while Mrs. Somers doled out hot tea and chocolate to counteract any ill effects of the long, cold drive.

The two boys, Hal and Teddy, made themselves so generally useful that Mr. Jack settled himself to be waited upon with the ladies and thoroughly enjoyed ordering the youngsters about.

“Now, Jack, what are we to do next?” demanded Mrs. Somers briskly, when every one had eaten as much as possible.

“Mercy me,” responded her brother lazily, “you speak as if I had a programme all mapped out, with something scheduled to happen every minute. We came down here to be lazy and enjoy ourselves.”

“Let’s play charades,” suggested Teddy.

“Or have tableaux, with Letty for the sleeping beauty,” added Hal audaciously, his eyes on Letty, reclining amidst her loosened furs on the couch.

“Cheeky young beggar,” murmured Mr. Jack under his breath.

The tableau suggestion was turned down as involving too much preparation, and a game of forfeits was started in which the most absurd penalties were inflicted. These gave Mrs. Somers an idea, and she clapped her hands to attract attention.

“You know old Esau and Lizzie are our only servants here,” she began, “and we shall have to do a great deal to keep such a big party warmed and fed. I had planned to organize a house committee of waitresses, chambermaids and the like, but as you all persist in working so hard over your game, why not turn your energies to good account? For ex-

ample, Teddy, instead of racing from garret to cellar fifteen times, might utilize that good muscle in pumping the tank full of water for all our baths. You know our big pump is electric, and the electricity is turned off here at Sea Side except in the summer. Then I dare say there is wood to be carried ——”

“Oh, a capital idea, Ellen,” interrupted Mary, who was assigning the penalties. “Go on, Clara, fine or superfine?”

“Superfine; what shall the owner do to redeem it?”

“Turn down all the beds,” was Mary’s practical rejoinder, and Molly Wilson departed good-naturedly, although Mrs. Beckwith was a trifle shocked and considered that her daughter Mary had committed a breach of the etiquette of hospitality.

Mrs. Somers had declared that the caretaker and his wife were the only servants, but Mr. Jack had engaged a competent cook for the occasion, and the result of her efforts was fully appreciated at the dinner table.

In the games that followed every one shared, even Mrs. Beckwith, who in some respects was as young as her youngest son, Seth.

But, although none of the young people perceived it, there was a faint cloud of sadness over the occasion, a sort of reminiscent atmosphere, as if some change were impending. And the "grown-ups," as Letty still persisted in calling them, although Mr. Jack, with a fine assumption of indignation, warned her that she had almost reached their confines herself, sat up long around the companionable fire, discussing the pros and cons of the possible event.

Mr. Beckwith's business in the West, which had kept his son Jack out there for all the autumn and part of the winter, required a new manager, and Mr. Jack was to return within a few weeks. The question at issue was whether he should assume the entire permanent control of the Western branch.

From a business point of view it was an excellent proposition. Mr. Jack had become deeply interested in the concern and the possibilities of increasing the business. But it would take him entirely away from all his friends and early associations; it would mean an adjustment to a life quite different from all to which he had been accustomed. In a word,

it would mean beginning over. The query which Mr. Jack put to himself, and to his family was, was the game worth the candle? He had not much ambition, and had always been perfectly satisfied with the conditions of his life; he had never had any craving to reach out for broader fields. In fact, he had always been conscious that his was a bed of roses and so far he had been fortunate enough never to experience even a crumpled leaf.

Under these changed circumstances, if he accepted them, he would have ample opportunity to exert his talent for business, and it would be a triumph to build up the business which he knew had suffered merely from neglect and lost opportunities; yet it certainly would be far from a bed of roses.

Mr. Jack had almost made up his mind to accept the proposition, but not quite. He was already experiencing, in anticipation, the pangs of loneliness and isolation which the cutting off from his present circle of friends would bring.

The conference around the fire broke up at length, without any apparent conclusion having been reached. His friends hesitated to

express an opinion that might have the effect of driving their dear companion from their midst. His mother would say nothing either way, merely smiling serenely and declaring with that infinite faith which made her children cling to her so loyally :

“ My boy will do what is right, I know.”

And her son, knowing his mother's creed of doing what the hand findeth, resolved then upon his course.

When they went up-stairs, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones tiptoed into the room which her two precious daughters shared and stood between the two beds, looking long and tenderly at each sweet, youthful face. But she lingered longer over Letty's.

CHAPTER IV

“OUT FOR WHALES”

AGAINST her own will, Letty was made to play the part of invalid next morning to the extent of breakfasting in her own room. She was partly dressed, sitting cozily in front of a crackling fire, sipping hot chocolate and reading, when a soft knock on her door was followed by Mr. Jack's voice, speaking quickly:

“Letty, Letty,” he called, “do you feel well enough to wrap up warmly and come down to the beach? I'd like you to see something interesting.”

Curious and excited, Letty hastily completed her toilet, put her fur coat on over a thick sweater and hurried down-stairs. Almost the entire house party, dressed for out-of-doors, was gathered around one of the windows looking toward the village.

“What is it?” asked Letty. “What has happened?”

She ran to the group, and Teddy Warde

made room for her, pointing out a quaint, home-made looking signal flag displayed on one of the native houses.

“See Captain Samson’s flag out?” he explained. “That means that he’s sighted a whale. All the old sea dogs are going out after it. Come along, and see the fun.”

“Come on, Letty,” echoed Mary; “we’ve been waiting for you,” and she led the way to the beach, every one following in a laughing, chattering group.

“Letty, Letty mine,” Mrs. Hartwell-Jones called after her, “are you warmly enough wrapped, and have you on your goloshes?”

“Yes, indeedy,” laughed Letty, hurrying out with Teddy, who had waited for her.

Hal, too, had been waiting, under pretense of finding his cap, but Teddy sent him about his business with a frank assertion of his own claims.

“You had your innings last night, Hal,” he exclaimed; “you go off and find a back seat this morning. It’s my turn.”

Hal laughed a bit sheepishly, walked with them part way down the path and then with a parting warning that he was to “come to the

bat" again at lunch time, ran ahead to join the others, who were gathered about Mr. Jack and listening with keen interest to something he was telling them.

Letty experienced a faint desire to join Mr. Beckwith's group, but she was also well satisfied with her new rôle. Letty had never before been in the position of having the delight of her company disputed by two boys—and such nice, good-looking boys, and she felt rather flattered by the attention. However, Mr. Jack, glancing over his shoulder, saw them coming and waited until they had joined the larger group. Then he went on with his explanation.

"That funny little tower arrangement on top of Captain Samson's house is his lookout. He still keeps a watch up there for whales. You don't often see this custom nowadays. It has died out in nearly all these villages, for whales seldom visit these waters now. I suppose they have been driven away, partly because of so much traffic in these waters, and partly because the menhaden fisheries clean up most of the small fish they used to feed upon.

“But now and then a stray old fellow comes cruising round, and then the old fishermen go out after him, as much for the sport as anything else, I fancy.”

“And you mean there is a whale now out in the ocean near here?” demanded Letty curiously.

“Yes, Mr. Jack says we’ll probably see him blow,” answered Violet.

Violet had forgotten her aversion to cold and chilly winds in the excitement of the moment.

By the time they reached the beach, one boat was already being launched through the surf and another was being got ready. Men in oilskin coats came running up from all directions, talking and gesticulating. Most of them were old, grizzled fishermen who had spent the better part of their days at sea. There were two or three younger ones, but these youths could not excel their elders in strength and agility.

Mr. Jack and his group stopped as near the edge of the surf as was safe, and watched in breathless silence the launching of the boat. It was a ticklish business, for the waves were

running high and more than once the boat was capsized. They were off at last, however, the high sided craft riding the waves with the precision if not the grace of a yacht.

Then for the first time they bethought themselves of looking out to sea, in search of a sight of that for which the fishermen were in quest. And in a moment Hal gave an excited whoop and pointed out to the others a faint, thin stream of white ascending from the crest of a curling wave. At the same instant one of the fishermen shouted: "There she blows," and work on the boats was suspended while every one gazed raptly out to sea.

The boat already launched made direct for the spouting monster, while every one lent a hand to get out the other boats. Three in all put out with eight men each in two of them and ten in the other. In the bow of the second boat out sat a man with three harpoons guarded carefully between his knees, and these Mr. Jack pointed out to Letty.

"Are you sure you are warm enough?" he asked her in an anxious aside. "Will you promise to return the moment you feel the slightest chill?"

But Letty was far too excited to feel the cold, and nodded with her eyes on the boats, which were manœuvering so as to drive the whale inshore, if possible. Two of them rowed out to sea, separating at a wide angle, while the third, the boat with the harpoons, hovered in the middle distance, the point of the V, so to speak, awaiting developments.

It was some time before the whale was seen to blow again, and then it seemed to be a little farther out to sea. However, the two boats were closing in between it and the open sea and it looked probable that the whale would be outgeneraled. The leviathan seemed unaware of his danger and wallowed lazily about as if he were having a very good time all by himself.

“He’s a young one,” hazarded one of the party of watchers. “See him playing—like a lamb in a pasture.”

“Oh, what a shame to kill him, if he’s only a baby,” cried Clara Markham.

“Dear itty, tootsey-wootsie whaley,” teased Teddy. “Would the big naughty men try to catch and hurt the teensy, weentsy!”

“Silly!” exclaimed all the girls in chorus,

but they could not help laughing, and Teddy cavorted across the sands, pretending to be a baby whale, while Hal pursued him with an imaginary harpoon.

Their attention was recalled to the boats, which were circling about and closing in, while the harpoon man rose expectantly in his place. But the whale evidently eluded them, and the manœuvering was continued, and Teddy went back to his game of baby whale, in the pursuit of whom all the young people gradually joined. Mary started to sing the old Alice in Wonderland song :

“ Will you walk a little faster,
Said a whiting to a snail,”

and they fell into procession, each claiming a personification of some character in the immortal song, and they had a fine quadrille which warmed the chill blood. Standing around on the sands of a Long Island beach in February, no matter how thrilling the spectacle one is witnessing, is at best a cold pleasure.

For another half or three quarters of an hour they watched the persevering fishermen, and on more than one occasion it appeared as

if the whale's moments were numbered; but he managed each time to elude his would-be captors and at last, to every one's keen disappointment—except his own—made for the open sea and freedom.

“And now me for the house and a nice bright fire,” exclaimed Mary, shivering. “Come along, Letty. Violet-Mary, you look as if you'd been put in cold storage and forgotten.”

“Oh, girls, I'm afraid I have let you stay out too long,” exclaimed Mr. Jack contritely. “Come along! We'll race back.”

Teddy, Hal and Seth elected to remain on the beach. They wanted to witness the return of the fishermen and hear their comments on the morning's sport. Mr. Jack escorted the laughing, shivering girls back to the house and returned to join the group.

“Clara and Molly, I'll give you each ten minutes to thaw out, then appoint you on the house-committee to make beds and tidy rooms,” announced Mary briskly.

“But why do you leave me out?” demanded Letty. “To wield a broom will warm me up quicker than anything else.”

"But you are an invalid."

"Invalid, fiddlesticks. The worst thing for me to do is to talk, and I'll certainly do a lot of that in arguing if you don't give in right away, Miss Superiority."

Mary laughed and yielded, and after toasting their toes and fingers around the big fire in the sitting-room, they all ran up-stairs to assist Lizzie in tidying the bedrooms. They found her nearly half through the work, with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Mrs. Somers dusting, but the gay young helpers were welcomed, as much for their fun and chatter as for the material aid they gave.

"Dearie, dearie me," sighed Lizzie wistfully. "It seems almost like summer time, it does."

"But, Lizzie, I should think you and Esau would enjoy your winters, having so little to do and so much time to yourselves."

"Ah, it isn't the havin' so much to do that counts in this world, Miss Mary. It's the cheerfulness of your surroundin's and knowin' the world is movin' along its appointed way. Sometimes, in the long, winter evenin's, it seems like the world has stopped, somehow,

say as if Providence had forgotten to wind it up, same as a big clock. And the hours won't end, no matter how busy I tries to be. It's much easier bein' busy and happy when you hear pleasant voices and bustle.”

Letty listened to this bit of philosophy with sympathetic ears. It was exactly what she had felt so often during the hard winter just past.

“I wonder how far that is true,” she pondered, “and how much is just the weakness of a sociably inclined mind which can't adjust itself to a bit of loneliness and dullness.”

But the present was too jolly and lively to permit of much indulgence in serious thought, and she shook off her momentary gravity. The boys came in at lunch time, jubilant and ravenous. They kept the tableful in a gale of laughter, repeating the comments and reminiscences of the disappointed fishermen, and rehearsed some very remarkable “fish stories.”

The afternoon passed all too quickly. For an hour or so after luncheon every one gathered around the big fire, where Mrs. Beckwith had established herself with her knitting, and

played "Consequences," with laughable results from the different points of view employed by the various types of mind. Then the assemblage broke up into small groups to pass the next interval as they pleased, the lazily inclined to take naps, the more energetic to go on walks. They met again at tea-time and lounged luxuriously until time to dress for dinner. The evening was given over to a grand taffy pulling, and from the shrieks and roars of laughter that penetrated from the kitchen Lizzie's loneliness must have been entirely banished beyond recall. Mr. Jack offered a prize for the whitest taffy, which Violet and Teddy, pulling in partnership, won.

Letty was so happy and excited that she found it hard to go to sleep, and long after Violet's regular breathing announced that she had reached the Land-of-Nod, Letty lay staring into the soft warm darkness, going comfortably over the events of the day and smiling reminiscently.

She had just reached the transition stage between sleeping and waking, which consisted chiefly of a consciousness of how very cozy

and warm she was, when a sudden faint sound caught her ear ; a sound so faint and far-away that she was not at all sure at first that she really had heard it. As she was deciding that it was merely a creaking shutter, the noise came again, a little more distinct.

Letty rested on one elbow and listened, breathlessly, still not enough awake to be willing to jump out of her warm bed and investigate, yet convinced that she had heard something.

“What a silly I am,” she told herself. “Somebody is opening a window, or closing one. I’m going to go to sleep.”

She lay down again with that intention, when a repetition of the stealthy sound sent her leaping out of bed and across the room to the window. Cautiously pushing aside the shade she peered out into the frosty night, and nearly screamed at what she saw. A man’s figure was just disappearing through one of the down-stairs windows ; as nearly as she could make out, one of the dining-room windows.

For an instant Letty stood rooted to the spot, unable to think what she ought to do.

Some sort of alarm must be raised, of course, but how? She could not bear to stand where she was and shriek until the household was roused. Yet, in order to give any sort of alarm, she must go out into the hall. And suppose she should meet the burglar! How could she have the courage to open her door?

Then she remembered that her room communicated with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's, and she was about to open it when she heard footsteps outside in the hall.

"The burglar has come up-stairs already! He will do harm to some one! Oh, how can I give warning! Poor Mrs. Beckwith will be scared out of her senses!"

Scarcely aware of what she did, Letty crossed to the door that led into the hall and softly unbolted it, glancing apprehensively toward Violet's bed as she did so. Violet was one of those who must be spared a shock. Peering out through a crack in the door, Letty, to her utmost astonishment, saw Mr. Jack Beckwith walking swiftly and silently down the hall.

Letty breathed his name and he turned with a start.

“Then you heard it too,” he whispered.

“I saw!” Letty’s voice was scarcely more than a breath. “A man crept in through one of the lower windows—I think the dining-room. Oh, be careful, Mr. Jack!”

“I must go down. Get word to Hal and Teddy. Tell Mrs. Hartwell-Jones to call them, and then waken Esau. But please make no noise. If possible, I don’t want Mother wakened.”

Letty nodded, gave him a long, beseeching glance, then hastened to do his bidding. But as Mr. Jack turned toward the stairway she saw that he carried a revolver.

It seemed hours before Letty had succeeded in making Mrs. Hartwell-Jones understand the seriousness of the situation, and before she, in turn, had succeeded in rousing the boys, healthy young sleepers. When they were fully awake, however, they regarded the incident in the light of a tremendous lark, and snatching up whatever implements lay at hand, a poker and a heavy walking stick, they tiptoed nimbly down the stairs with as little sense of fear as if they were about to join in a game of blind man’s buff.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Letty, shivering in their heavy wrappers, stood in the draughty, silent upper hall, listening with bated breath and a prey to fearful imaginings. The complete silence that ensued was harder to bear even than sounds of a conflict.

"Oh, Aunt Mary, do you think the burglar has—has—killed Mr. Jack?" moaned Letty at length. "Why is everything so quiet?"

At that moment the sound of quietly talking voices was wafted up to them, as if a door had been opened, and Hal appeared in the gloom of the lower hall. Peering up the stairway he called in a hoarse whisper:

"Anybody there?"

"Yes, oh yes! What is it, Hal? Tell us!" entreated Mrs. Hartwell-Jones.

"All's serene, but Mr. Jack says that all of you who are awake may come down if you choose. It may be interesting."

With which words he vanished again, leaving Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Letty to stare at one another in amazement.

CHAPTER V

AT MIDNIGHT

CLARA MARKHAM ran into the room occupied by Mary Beckwith and Molly Wilson and shook the sleeping girls.

“Wake up,” she whispered excitedly; “something’s up. Get into your kimonos and come along down-stairs.”

“What in the world do you mean? What time is it?” demanded Mary sleepily, sitting up in bed and yawning.

Molly bounced out of bed in the dark with a giggle, fancying herself back at Miss Sims’s school, being summoned to a midnight feast.

“I heard people whispering just now,” explained Clara, “and looked out of my door. There I saw Letty and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones going down-stairs, and leaning over the banister as if they were talking to some one down below. Come on, do, girls. If there’s any fun going on, we don’t want to miss it.”

Nothing loath, Mary and Molly pinned up their braids, folded themselves in their warm wrappers and followed Clara's lead down-stairs. The lower hall was perfectly dark, and for a moment or two they could hear nothing, and stood, forlorn and shivering, in the gloom. Then Clara put her finger to her lip and moved forward toward the door of the big living-room, pointing as she did so to a long line of light that came from under the door.

Feeling excited, curious and a little afraid, the girls advanced and cautiously opened the door. There was the sound within of an odd, snarling tone and a rough voice exclaiming :

“So, it's a trap!”

“Nothing of the sort. Put up that gun!” came in a sharp, stern retort from Mr. Jack Beckwith, and the three girls outside screamed and ran toward the stairs.

The library door swung wide and Mr. Jack called out peremptorily :

“Who is there? Come back at once.”

“Come along, girls, it's all right,” Mary said, catching the two others by the sleeve. “Jack says we are to come.”

Obediently they turned and entered the big room. A surprising sight met their eyes. The fire was burning brightly and around it were seated an odd group. Letty and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones were on the broad couch at one side of the fireplace, with Teddy and Hal lounging on the arms. Not exactly lounging, for they were watching very alertly the figure crouching, rather than sitting, on a high-backed chair on the opposite side of the hearth; the figure of a man in thin, tattered dark clothes, a ragged shirt without a collar and shoes that were broken and unlaced. The man's face and hands were red and chafed with the cold, the hands bleeding at the knuckles. Altogether, he was about as forlorn a sight as they had ever seen. Mary uttered an involuntary exclamation of pity.

"What does it mean, Jack?" she asked as her brother returned from closing the door.

"It means that we caught him breaking into the house."

"Ugh!" snarled the man contradictorily.

"Breaking into the house," repeated Mr. Jack firmly. "For what exact purpose we are yet to learn. He is to tell his own story."

“What’d I want to break inter yer house fer?” challenged the man. “Don’t yer s’pose I know there’s nothin’ worth takin’ at this here time o’ year? I come in to git warm, jest as I told you when ye nabbed me.”

“Tell your whole story, please. We are all interested and ready to think the best of it.”

“Ready to think the best of it! Humph! That’s the way with you rich guys. You think ye’re Christians when yer don’t lay it down the worst you can. You say, ‘poor feller’ and ‘give the poor cove another chance,’ all sweet an’ forgivin’ like. Thank yer.

“But there ain’t none of you as ever thinks how’d you do or be ’f you was put in my shoes. I’d just like to know how ’twould go with you, or you,” pointing accusingly at Teddy and Hal in turn. “You look like nice, good, clean boys, but why shouldn’t you be?”

“I ain’t never had a chance, never. I was born down at the bottom an’ kep’ there all my life. I tried to rise, same ’s every one else; I had my ideas of climbin’ the ladder, but—uh, climbin’ ain’t the word. It’s be’n more like

trying to sprout, to come up like some poor, smothered weed buried in the dung heap."

"I am very much interested," Mr. Jack interrupted him quietly; "we all are. But kindly remember during your narration that there are ladies present."

"Gee, I guess I fergot 't 'ladies' can't never stand any words of real plain English. I wonder what any o' you would say, or how you'd feel, if you was my sister."

Involuntarily the girls shivered and drew closer to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and to one another. The man grinned vindictively.

"Shocks ye some, don't it? Well, it's only a—a accident o' birth, so to speak, that ye ain't. Why ain't ye? Are ye any better than my sister'd be—with your chances? Have you got any more right to git to heaven than she'd have? But I thank that same heaven I ain't got any sister—not to be riz as I have.

"You want to hear my story, do ye? A nice parlor version of it," he sneered, surveying the silent circle with defiant eyes. "Well, ye can have it an' welcome. Mebbe some of you'll write it up fer the Sunday papers.

“Chapter one; no chance. I was born around here. My folks hadn't any money. The fishin'd gone out as a business, and there wa'n't anything to take its place, 'cept with the men who was lucky 'nough to own farms—poor 'nough they was, too, till the rich guys began comin' and they raised truck fer 'em.

“I worked about here 'n' there—no, never had no schoolin' to talk about. My father took to drink, o' course, an' my mother died—broken heart, I reckon. Leastways, that's what I'd 'a' died of 'f I'd be'n in her place. Then Dad cleared out 'n' I ain't laid eyes on him fer two, three years. I've jobbed round wherever I could, but it's be'n hard scratchin'.

“Then of course I got the city bee in my bonnet, an' that was the limit. Why, there's less room fer a man in that—that big place, askin' the ladies' pardon, I can't express me thoughts—than even here!” And he made an expressive gesture to indicate the village at their doors. “I tell you,” he concluded, with a sort of vicious solemnity that was not without its impressiveness, “it's a—a lot more to my credit that I ain't in prison to-night

than 'tis fer any o' *you*. An' I ain't done nothin' to be sent there, nor nowhere else fer, so help me ——” He broke off again and after an eloquent silence added, with some of the defiance burned out of his tone, “I jus' crep' in here, like a stray dog, to git warm by this here fire. Mebbe, 'f you'll look at me, you'll think p'raps I might 'a' be'n feelin' the cold some to-night—jus' *some!*”

An impressive silence fell upon the group as he finished speaking, and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones frankly wiped her eyes. Then, after an interval, Mr. Jack spoke.

“You say you tried to get work in New York?”

“By—yes, sir.”

“And you feel that—that you've never had a chance, as you express it.”

“Did it sound to you 's 'f I'd had a terrible big one?”

“Would you take a chance if it was offered you?”

“Hard labor for six months fer breakin' into a gentleman's palace?”

“Not at all. A chance to work out West—at mining or on a ranch.”

The man sat more erect in his chair and stared, rubbing his eyes as if waking from some dream.

"What's the game?" he demanded suspiciously.

"No 'game'—a job."

"Say, gov'nor, do yer mean it?"

"Don't I look as if I did?" queried Mr. Jack, smiling as he used the man's own expression.

The tramp stared at him fixedly for several moments, submitted the circle around the fire to a similar scrutiny and returned his gaze to Mr. Jack's comely, sympathetic countenance.

"Say, I think yer do," he remarked briefly, but with conviction. Then his face fell again. "But how 'm I goin' to git out there to take the job?"

"If you sign up, the money will be advanced."

"By you?"

"I'll see that you get it."

"How could you do that, mister? How'd you know I wouldn't take the money and skip out?"

"That is where my risk would lie, of



THE GIRLS CURLED UP ON THE SOFA

course. But if, upon further discussion, my conclusions remain the same as this evening, I think I am ready to assume that risk."

"Gee, you don't mean it!"

The man appeared almost stupified by this promise of help and sat ruminating, his hands deep in his pockets, trying to understand just what had befallen him. The girls curled up on the sofa with a sense of comfort in one another's close proximity. Hal and Teddy looked on in serious silence. They felt that they were learning a little lesson not in the college curriculum.

Mr. Jack sat watching this new, possible protégé and at the same time going over several practical details of the situation in his mind. At last he felt obliged to break the spell that seemed cast over the party.

"Can we arrange a place to meet in the morning?" he asked the tramp.

"Who, you 'n' me? Well, I reckon, so fer 's I'm concerned. Set yer spot, mister, an' yer time, and you can gamble a tenner that I'll be there with both feet! Say—is it really true?"

"Where are you staying?"

"Where am I what?"

"Where do you live? Where can I come to see you in the morning?"

"Nowhere, sir," answered the tramp bluntly. "D'yer think 'f I had a—a home, I'd 'a' broke in here to git warm? I was a-thinkin' of sleepin' in yer stable—'twouldn't be the first time, mister—it's real warm in the hay, but this here perfectly good fire was just goin' to waste an'—I come in."

"You mean you have nowhere to sleep?" exclaimed the girls in a chorus.

"No, ladies," answered the man with a wry smile. "I wish that was the worst o' my troubles."

"You mean ——" put in Mrs. Hartwell-Jones quickly.

"Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, may I appoint you chairman of the commissary department?" asked Mr. Jack. "Some hot soup—Mary, you know where to find things in the kitchen. And I think we'd better be a bit sharp about it," he added suddenly, rising as he spoke. "The poor man's weak with hunger."

Hal and Teddy had seen the man's change of expression, the ghastly pallor that overspread his face, and sprang forward to catch

him just as the tramp lurched forward in a fainting condition.

“It has all been too much for him,” ejaculated Mr. Jack. “What a brute I was to let him sit here, satisfying our curiosity. Here, boys, help me to carry him into that bedroom off the kitchen. Mary, do you go and see if you can rouse Lizzie without waking Mother. Go up the back stairs. And, girls, you go to the kitchen with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and see if you can start the soup heating. Lizzie’ll help you as soon as she gets some sort of bed made up. It’s my opinion that the man’s half dead with cold and hunger.”

The group broke up in a flurry, every one rushing on tiptoe to do Mr. Jack’s bidding, and exchanging excited impressions in undertones.

“What a pity the electricity is turned off,” exclaimed Letty, poking the fire as vigorously as she dared in the silence. “We could have hot water in a jiffy with the electric heater.”

“Letty, Letty,” corrected Mrs. Hartwell-Jones laughing, “you don’t poke a range. You shake it down. See, like this.”

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones set down the hot

water bottle she had gone to fetch and shaking the carefully banked fire, soon had a glow from the fresh coals.

“Now put on the lid, Letty. Has any one filled the kettle? No, use that small one, Molly; the water will boil sooner. As soon as it boils, fill this hot water bottle—no, not actually boiling, of course, but almost. See, the kettle is pretty hot already, from standing on the back of the stove. I’ll see if I can help make up the bed. Clara, you and Molly try to discover some soup stock in the refrigerator. Mary will be down in a moment, and she will know where things are kept.”

The next half hour sped by, every one absorbed in some self-imposed task. The tramp would have been amazed could he have known the sensation he had caused, and the manual labor to which these despised ladies and gentlemen were submitting themselves for his sake. It is possible, indeed, that the general eagerness to do something was because of certain conscience pricks; a desire to do something to justify their years of comfort and well-being while this poor soul struggled and starved, mentally and physically.

But the tramp was as yet quite unaware of how much or, in fact, of anything that was being done for him. His fainting fit was severe and prolonged. He was so near to starvation that the shock of his discovery by the residents of the house, however free from actual guilt he may have been, followed by the mercy shown him and the offer of help, were too great. He was overcome, and Mr. Jack, assisted to their bewildered utmost by the two boys and afterward more intelligently by old Esau, had great difficulty in reviving him.

But life flickered back at last, slowly and feebly, and Mr. Jack decided that it would be safe to wait until morning to send for the village doctor.

“If I should send Esau after him to-night,” he said, talking the situation over with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, “the story of how he came to be here would be sure to get about and the constable would doubtless come around to arrest him. But if I call him in the morning we can merely say that we took him in for the night, and he got ill. I want to give the poor beggar his chance.”

Every one retired at last, quite appalled by the lateness of the hour, and only Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Letty knew that Mr. Jack purposed sitting up, in an easy chair in front of the library fire, for the short remainder of the night, to be near at hand in case the poor waif in the groom's bedroom should be in need of human aid or sympathy.

"I must say," confided Clara Markham to Molly Wilson, as they returned, yawning and a little cross, to their own rooms, "that I think Mr. Jack is taking a risk to let a tramp—and probably a burglar—stay all night in the house like that. And he didn't even lock him into the bedroom."

CHAPTER VI

GIVING A CHANCE

IT was fortunate, at least for those members of the house party who had been concerned in the events of the previous night, that the next day was Sunday, and that every one slept late. Letty, whether overcome by excitement, or as a result of her standing about on the damp sands the morning before, had a slight return of huskiness and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, in a tremor of apprehension, made her sit in an easy chair beside the fire all day. She and Mrs. Beckwith shared the cheerful, crackling blaze and had a long, interesting talk—at least Mrs. Beckwith talked, and told such amusing stories of her girlhood that Letty was amazed when the two o'clock Sunday dinner was announced.

Of course the chief topic of conversation all day long was the midnight episode of the tramp's arrival. Mr. Jack would allow no

one to allude to the episode as an attempt at burglary.

"You know the old proverb," he said at breakfast. "'Give a dog a bad name and hang him.' We don't want to condemn the man. His name, by the way, is Sheldon—Charlie Sheldon."

"How is he, Jack?" asked Mrs. Somers, feeling much chagrined that she had slept through the night's adventure.

"Not awfully well. I'm a bit worried, and I've sent for Evans."

Evans was the village doctor, a genial, kindly old soul, remarkably up to date, considering the disadvantages under which he must labor, living so far from sources of learning and research.

"I don't think there's much the matter with him, except about twenty years of semi-starvation," he told Mr. Jack after an examination of the patient. "You might diagnose the trouble as chronic."

"You know the boy, don't you? What is his reputation here in the village?"

"Well, not very brilliant. His father's a bad lot, you know, and these people about

here are pretty hard on that kind. They say 'like father, like son,' and won't give the boy a chance."

"That is exactly what I was trying to get at, sir. Whether the boy had ever had a chance—a real chance. So many go down for that very reason and no other. It does seem hard."

"Of course I can't say if the boy would make good, even if he were given a chance," answered the doctor hastily. "He's an idle boy, at best, and this affair last night is against him."

"He said he came in only to get warm."

"He could have got warm at his aunt's, if he'd been willing to swallow a little pride. What's a boy in his condition got to do with pride, anyhow?"

"What is that story?" asked Mr. Jack interestedly.

"No story there; only a row between him and his uncle—uncle called him a bad lot and kicked him out."

"It strikes me that the boy would have to swallow a little more than mere pride to get taken back there," observed Mr. Jack dryly.

"There is such a thing as holding on to one's manhood."

"Manhood—bosh! The boy's got to live, and moreover, he's got to live down his father's reputation."

"If he stays here, yes. But suppose he should go away somewhere and begin over."

"He went up to New York last winter—was gone two months. The minister and two or three of us gave him a little to start on. But he turned up again a month or six weeks ago—like a bad penny."

"It is hard to get a start in a big city unless one has a friend somewhere to speak for one. It takes more than mere grit and the willingness to work."

"Neither of which attributes does Charlie possess in any great degree."

"Suppose he went away, far away to a new country—or new part of the country, rather—where customs, environment, everything was different. Don't you think he'd take fresh courage to go at life?"

The doctor turned and eyed him curiously.

"Are you really thinking of helping him?"

"I am considering the possibility."

“A boy you caught breaking into your house! Don't you feel any anger against him—let alone suspicion?”

“At present I can feel only pity, doctor. It seems to me, as you said in the beginning, he hasn't had a chance.”

“I guess that's true enough.”

“That is a deplorable state of affairs to me. Of course I know his is only one of many, many cases, but I'd like to help if I can. I could send him out West, to work in a mining town. It's a rough life, and a hard one, but it brings out what there is in a man.”

“The expense of the journey would be great, and I dare say he'd not earn much more than his keep for a long time.”

“I shall think the matter over, but I think I'm willing to make the investment. After all, if the experiment fails, it won't have cost me much more than a season's box at the opera, and my conscience will not reproach me. Now, as to the present. We are going up to town to-morrow, and I'm going to let Charlie stay here with Lizzie and Esau until he's a little fed up. Then he can come up and stay a few days at a place I know of in

town until my arrangements are completed for sending him West."

"I think you are a noble gentleman."

"Not at all, doctor. Just trying to do my duty by humanity, as I see it. Will you keep an eye on the boy's physical health, and, when he is ready, ship him up to me? You can send your bill to my town address."

"My dear sir, there are others who try to do their duty, as they see it, and mine certainly is helping Charlie to get on his feet again."

"Thank you. I was sure you'd be willing to help. And as you've known the boy always, perhaps you could have a talk with him. He wouldn't resent advice so much from you, maybe."

"I'll do what I can, Mr. Beckwith, and I'm sure there isn't another man on earth who'd be willing to do for him what you're proposing to do."

"It is nothing, doctor. I am only going to try to give him his chance. I'll see you again to-morrow before we start. Good-morning."

The sky had been overcast all morning, but at about three o'clock the sun came out, not

brilliantly, but enough to give a sense of color and warmth to the air, and Mr. Jack invited his sister, Mrs. Somers, and Letty to go for a walk.

“Mayn’t I go too, Mr. Jack?” asked Teddy. “I was longing for a walk with Letty, but thought she wouldn’t be allowed to go out with her cold.”

“I am only taking her for a brisk constitutional,” replied Mr. Jack with his genial smile. “You would be sure to make her talk.”

“Oh, but I wouldn’t. I’d do all the talking.”

“Then you’d make her laugh, which would be worse. No, Ted, you and Hal had your innings after lunch, with the games of ‘Consequences.’ It is my turn now.”

Letty hurried up-stairs, gayly, to get ready, but when she joined Mrs. Somers and Mr. Jack, the latter seemed a trifle absent-minded and silent.

“Perhaps you would have preferred to stay with the other boys and girls, after all,” he said, a little stiffly.

Letty stared up at him in frank surprise.

"Why, Mr. Jack, you know I always want to come with you, always."

"It would be more natural to want to stay. They are nearer your own age."

"But, Mr. Jack, you know I'd rather be with you and Mrs. Somers," repeated Letty, a little helplessly. "Much rather."

She felt oddly worried by Mr. Jack's manner, and wondered what she could have done to make him fancy she did not desire his company.

"You were all having a very good time," went on Mr. Jack.

"Stop behaving like a great, spoiled baby, Jack," admonished his sister a little sharply. "Of course they were all having a very good time. What do you expect of a house party? Didn't you ask them all here to have a good time?"

"It was very funny," added Letty, beginning to talk very fast and very cheerfully, with the desire to banish any uncomfortable feeling. "We had such a ridiculous combination of things," and she repeated the nonsense which had made the group around the fireside laugh so heartily as Mr. Jack was com-

ing in. "The Honorable Emperor of China met the Bostonesque Mamie Prescott at an Aviation Meet. He said, 'That is a charming costume.' She said, 'I prefer white meat.' The world said, 'There's no smoke without some fire,' and the consequences were, they bought an old white horse."

"Very witty," commented Mr. Jack briefly, and a lump came up into Letty's throat.

She glanced at Mrs. Somers, but she, too, seemed abstracted and grave. Letty wondered what could be the matter. She longed to try to dissipate the cloud that enfolded her two dearest friends, but could think of nothing to say that would not sound flat and trivial. Moreover, the raw, sharp air hurt her throat and she realized the necessity of silence.

Their walk led them through the village, and Letty, too, fell into a reverie, going over in her mind the events of the previous summer, when she and her "precious Aunt Mary" had lived in the dear little cottage they were at the moment passing.

"I thought everything was so serene and happy then," she reflected, "and all the time

Aunt Mary was worried and anxious, afraid of losing all her money. If I had not got those papers from Mr. Drake, giving me my little bit of income, we all should have had a hard time this winter. As it is, Aunt Mary still seems bothered. I do hope things have not been going wrong again. And Mr. Jack—what can have happened to upset him? I wonder if it has anything to do with last night and that poor man.”

At this point in Letty's reflections Mrs. Somers said rather abruptly, as if following the train of her own thoughts :

“ Letty dear, whatever put Mamie Prescott's name into any one's head in your Consequences game, and who wrote it? ”

“ Why, I'm not sure, Mrs. Somers, but I think Mary did. We had been talking about her this morning and how tragic to be affected with such a terrible disease as hers—if you call it a disease, Mrs. Somers? I suppose that young man last night put us in mind of her.”

“ Poor Mamie! Jack, what Dr. Evans said about Charlie Sheldon might apply equally to Mamie Prescott.”

Mamie Prescott was a girl at the Conserva-

tory who had been caught stealing from her companions.

“ I really think she has never had a chance ; a chance, that is, of understanding fully the difference between right and wrong. So much depends upon the values set upon things.”

“ But if she is suffering from a disease, how does her knowledge of right and wrong affect her case ? ”

“ You mean the disease of kleptomania ? But I don't think it is that, Jack. I really don't. I think the child is suffering simply from—not from a lack of moral sense. That is putting it too strong ; but from the need of education of her moral sense. All she needs is training—patient, careful training, by some one who has faith in her.”

“ Where are you going to find such a teacher ? ”

“ It is somewhat difficult, I own. I have been going over a great many people in my mind, and have come to two conclusions. First, that Mamie ought to be in the country, away from the city and away, I am sorry to say, from her own people, for they give in to her wishes too much, and in their ignorant,

futile way spoil her. Secondly, the teacher ought not to be a real teacher, or try to do her training with any degree of self-consciousness, but rather let example and patience have their way with Mamie.

“And, Letty dear, I have thought of some one about whom I wish to consult you; Mrs. Parsons at Hammersmith. Do you remember? Where you and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones were staying that first time we all met.”

Did Letty remember? The events of the past rushed in swift sequence through her mind. It was at Hammersmith that she first met Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and where, after that wonderful summer together, the “lady who wrote books” had told Letty that she meant to adopt her.

“Hammersmith! That is where I got my ‘chance,’ you know, Mrs. Somers. I should think Mamie Prescott would get—entirely well in that nice old village.”

“In what capacity would Mamie go to Mrs. Parsons?” asked Mr. Jack, and again Letty glanced at him uneasily. His voice was so dry and conventional, as if he were speaking merely to make conversation; not a bit as if

he were really interested. And that was so unlike Mr. Jack that Letty was positive something was amiss. But Mrs. Somers answered brightly, as if she had noticed nothing wrong :

“Why, she would go, partly as companion to Mrs. Parsons, partly as a helper. You know the Parsons make a regular business now of taking summer boarders, and Mrs. Parsons needs more help than she can get from the countryside. Of course it would not be a servant’s position, as Mamie would live with them the year round. In winter, if she chose, she could go to the high school. There would be enough social life to keep her contented, what with the church sewing society and quilting parties. Her voice would make her tremendously popular as a member of the church choir. The life is so simple that she would have no temptation to want to dress better, and, as her moral education advances, she could be given the necessity of keeping good for Anna’s sake. Anna is just enough younger to permit Mamie’s being held up as a model.”

“You speak very positively. Is it all arranged?” asked Mr. Jack, with more interest.

“Not yet, but I am sure I shall carry my point. Mrs. Parsons understands the situation and is willing to take Mamie. And Mr. Prescott is beginning to see the advantages of the arrangement. One point that touches him most closely is that the whole business will not cost him anything. Think of taking that attitude toward your own daughter! That was why he was so unwilling to let Mamie give up her course at the Conservatory. He had the idea, I discovered, that some day she would earn enough money from her voice to place them all in comfort, if not luxury. No wonder Mamie is—well, say mercenarily inclined—with such a father.”

“Well, I hope you’ll succeed in giving Mamie her chance. It is a great thing,” said Mr. Jack gravely. “And now I guess we’d better be getting home, and give this little lady her chance again with the young people. I have an idea we have kept her too much to ourselves, now and again, Ellen.”

Letty looked up quickly. She was hurt by Mr. Jack’s words, but did not feel at liberty to resent them.

“I like walking with you and Mrs. Somers,”

she said shyly. "You must know I like it, Mr. Jack, and I have always felt flattered that you seemed to want me—I'm such a silly little thing."

Letty stopped talking, and all at once felt a sudden desire to cry. She did not know just why she was so affected. Was it something in Mr. Jack's manner, and the quick glance he exchanged with his sister? Again she was conscious of a change in the manner of her old friend.

"I was just going to suggest that I run along home, and let you and Letty finish your walk together," said Mrs. Somers. "There are several household matters that must be attended to."

"Don't hurry; we'll all go in together."

"But isn't there something you and Letty want to talk over by yourselves?"

"Nothing that will not wait."

"But you surely have something to tell Letty," urged his sister, glancing apologetically at the girl between them, and secretly resenting this discussion as if she were not present.

"Not just now, I think," answered Mr.

Jack positively and then, with his old bright smile, he added to Letty: "Perhaps to-morrow—on our way home, eh, little Miss Grey?"

Letty beamed again. All was well with her world once more. Mr. Jack's words promised a double pleasure. She was to be admitted to his confidence, and she was promised the coveted front seat beside him in the motor.

"I am terribly curious," she said eagerly, "but with such a promise to go upon, I'll try to wait until to-morrow."

And it was Letty who went indoors, leaving Mrs. Somers and her brother to finish the walk together.

"Jack, I hate to take you to task for anything just now, when you are upset and worried over the future, but you really did hurt Letty's feelings by leading her to suppose we thought her fickle in preferring young society to ours."

"It is not that, Ellen. I think it most natural that Letty should seek companionship with boys and girls of her own age. It is only—well, the preference hurt my vanity. I don't like to be made to feel that I am getting old, Ellen."

“You old, Jack? What nonsense! Be careful how you call yourself old, or you will push me along to middle age.”

“I meant old only by comparison, dear old pal. And I never minded the comparison before. I have rather enjoyed my fatherliness over Letty until—until this question of Father’s business came up. I feel, as I said last night, in doubt whether it is not too late to make a fresh start in life. When I come in contact with all these fresh, eager young minds——”

“So that is the trouble, is it? Surely, Jack, you can trust Father’s judgment. If he had wanted that raw material which you poetically call ‘fresh, eager young minds,’ he would have chosen Alex or Maxwell for this opening. But he knows you have reached years of discretion; that you are exactly the man for the place.”

“You flatter me, sister mine. Well, I have decided to have a try at it, but it is going to be a lonely business.”

“For us, left behind, as well as for you, Jack dear. Whoever is going to look after you, I’d like to know? Who will make your

coffee properly and see that you put on dry socks? What you need to do, Jack, is to fall in love and marry."

"So as to remove my personal concerns from your mind? Well, as the two ladies nearest my heart are both ineligible, the one too old, the other too young for a suitable match, what am I to do?"

"Mrs. Hartwell-Jones is not exactly old, but she is your senior, Jack, and as for Letty, it is not the years that count with her; it is her general immaturity of mind."

"Trying to jolly your poor old brother?" he teased.

"Not at all; merely considering facts. No, Jack, you must go on being ——"

"A father to Letty?"

"No, a fairy godfather. And you must find—'the girl of the golden West.'"

Mr. Jack smiled speculatively. He had not left youth entirely behind him. After all, the world was big and splendid, and full of possibilities.

"Well, you precious, match-making sister, if ever I do make such a discovery, you shall be the first to congratulate me. You must all

promise to come out to visit my golden West, however, without waiting for developments. And you must bring Letty. It will do her good to get acquainted with that great country."

"Yes," agreed his sister a bit dryly, "it might do Letty good to broaden her mental horizon. But we must go back, Jack. We have stayed away from our guests too long." She stopped in the path and took her brother's hand. "My heart feels lighter over your going since this talk," she said, "and I believe that secretly you are more than half reconciled. It is glorious to go out to fight a great battle—and win! That is what it is, Jack, the battle of winning back Father's business. Youth is alluring, but there are other and greater things in life."

CHAPTER VII

MR. JACK MAKES A BARGAIN

THE girls were awakened next morning by the sounds of an improvised band marching through the upper halls and playing "The Star Spangled Banner." The effect was somewhat marred, firstly by the quality of the instruments employed and secondly by the many interruptions in the shape of smothered laughter and audible directions and corrections on the part of Mr. Jack, the band-master.

"Oh, Seth," called out Mrs. Somers in a distressed voice, "how can you bear to abuse your violin in that manner? You will surely ruin it."

The only answer was a discordant wail on a stringed instrument, a giggle and a gruff voice saying: "Salute the flag."

The girls hurried into their clothes and ran down-stairs to join the fun. They found the hall and living-room quite metamorphosed with flags and draped bunting. Mr. Jack and

the boys were drawn up in line beside the fireplace and as the girls entered Mr. Jack shouted impressively :

“ Who was George Washington ? ” and the boys responded with one voice :

“ First in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen. ”

They stamped their feet in unison, then cheered until, to quote our good old friend Charles Dickens, “ the rafters rang again. ”

“ You are certainly patriotic this morning, ” remarked Mrs. Beckwith’s sweet old voice and Mr. Jack hurried forward to escort his mother to her chair.

The morning was given over to charades and patriotic tableaux. Mrs. Somers, Mrs. Beckwith and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones retired to an up-stairs room toward noon, and summoned the girls there in turn. As a result, when the midday dinner was announced, five young Columbias, accompanied by three Martha Washingtons, marched sedately into the dining-room, welcomed with appreciative shouts by the masculine members.

“ Mother is the one to be praised, ” declared Mrs. Somers when their costumes had been

duly admired. "It is all her idea. She knew that Jack had made special arrangements for this day, such as these"—motioning to the table decorations and favors, "and she was determined that all of us should do our share. I hope every one is prepared with a patriotic speech or recitation."

The meal passed merrily. Each course served had some special significance, and ended with ice-cream in moulds representing, for the ladies, the wonderful hero himself, and for the rest, the gentle Martha, accompanied by a certain kind of rich cake with cream filling, known as "Washington pie."

"Dear me," exclaimed Teddy, eying his plate with wistful respect. "How can I ever bring myself to eat off the head of such a sweet little old lady. Doesn't it sound cannibalistic?"

"I shall pretend that I am the Queen of Hearts and simply say: 'Off with his head,'" replied Letty, suiting the action to the word.

"It wouldn't require any pretense to make you 'Queen of Hearts,'" Hal remarked in a tender undertone, aside to Letty, next whom he was seated.

But it was hard to be sentimental in the midst of such a gay crowd, particularly a crowd with such sharp ears. Seth, on Letty's other side, heard the pretty speech and piped up:

"You mean because we are all in Wonderland, Hal? I'll be the March Hare."

"The Chessy Cat would suit you better," retorted Molly Wilson. "What is the new game?"

"Not a game at all," explained Hal sheepishly, with a warning frown at Seth. "Just wait until I catch you alone, young shaver!"

"Why, what's the matter?" inquired Seth innocently. "Didn't you want any one to hear you calling Letty 'The Queen of Hearts'? When people say what they really mean, they aren't afraid to have the whole——" He dodged a crust of bread, and the grin that had made Molly liken him to the Cheshire Cat overspread his countenance in a gratified beam.

"Seth," called Mrs. Somers from the other end of the table, as much from a desire to change the conversation as to be reassured, "did you everlastingly ruin your violin

this morning with that would-be patriotic reveille?"

"Oh, say, Ellen, you don't think I'd treat my best fiddle like that, do you!" exclaimed her young brother reproachfully. "Why, I couldn't get sounds like that out of it if I tried. That was an old thing Esau found up in the attic; came out of the Ark, I guess, and Teddy's accompaniment on the comb didn't improve its 'tone' much, I guess."

"Speaking of tone," observed Mrs. Beckwith in her low, gentle voice, "I am very much afraid I heard the tones of the hall clock striking two. It is inhospitable to hurry you all, but we have promised to be back in New York by dinner time. It grows dark early, and Jack knows I don't like to travel fast after night. We ought to start promptly at three, and I fancy some of us have a little packing to do. Certainly we all must change our clothes."

"I wish we could go just as we are," exclaimed Molly Wilson. "Wouldn't it be fun to see the people stare as we pass through the towns? They would think we were some theatrical troupe."

“They wouldn’t think anything at all,” responded Mary Beckwith practically. “Nobody could see our costumes hidden under fur coats and things.”

“True, I never thought of that. I wonder what the fashion was in cloaks in Martha Washington’s time. I suppose they did cover up their kerchiefs in some manner.”

“I am quite sure they must have, since we don’t read in history that they all died in early youth from pneumonia,” replied Mr. Jack gravely. “Suppose we all separate to do our several duties. I must visit my patient and make last arrangements. Let us all meet in the living-room at quarter to three. Will that do, Mother?”

“Quite nicely, my son. That will give us a good fifteen minutes in which to collect our belongings, say last words, and wait for the stragglers.”

Every one laughed and each indignantly denied this last insinuation. Nevertheless, Mrs. Beckwith held her own with smiling assurance. Her long experience in life had taught her that there are always stragglers; no matter how great the resolution for absolute

promptness, some delay is bound to occur to one or more members of a party.

"It is like bridge building," she explained; "there has to be allowance always for the expanding and shrinking of the metal."

"That explains a great mystery," ejaculated Teddy with a serious countenance. "I never could understand, when I am leaving any house at the end of a visit, why my wardrobe has always expanded and my dress suit case had shrunk."

Every one laughed at this and hurried away to their own rooms to overcome the very difficulty Teddy's words brought before them all.

Letty was the first to return, ready for the journey, to the living-room. She was not at all ready to have the pleasant visit at an end, but her curiosity regarding what Mr. Jack might have to say to her was all agog. Moreover, she thought, from something in his glance as he held open the dining-room door for her, that he might impart his secret without waiting for the start if she should come down to the living-room ahead of the others.

But she had scarcely entered the room before the door opened again and Teddy's voice exclaimed :

" Oh, I say, this is lucky ! It looks as if I were going to have you to myself for three or four minutes, Letty. Hal did monopolize you most awfully at dinner."

" I wasn't aware of any monopoly," laughed Letty, seating herself in a large armchair and laying her fur coat across her knees. " I am sure I had one rival in Hal's attentions."

" Who ? Who else could shine when you are about ? "

" Dear me, that suggests mixed metaphor, somehow. Well, Hal's dinner shone pretty bright in his estimation," she answered mischievously.

" Don't bring a fellow down to earth with such a thump. I was just going to make a beaut of a speech about stars and eyes and ——"

" Well, don't, please. It is much more fun to talk about ice-cream and games. Haven't we had a jolly party ? "

" I should say so ! I'm going to make my mother open up our house at Lenox and have

one just as near like it as I can. Will you come?"

"There are no more holidays now until Easter, and I always go down to Lakewood then."

"There are lots of week-ends."

"Yes, but I am far too busy to take any time off for fun between-times. Don't tempt me, please."

"I certainly shall, with all the wiles at my command. Why, a house party wouldn't be any fun at all without you, Letty, and why shouldn't we all have good times while we're young? What's the good of being young, anyhow, if we don't take advantage of it?"

"What a pearl of wisdom, Teddy," remarked Mr. Jack's voice, close to them. He had entered unheard and had stood watching Letty pensively. "How young she is," he thought sadly, "while I—sometimes I am afraid I am growing middle-aged!" He sighed and added aloud: "Letty does need rejuvenating at times. You must all combine to keep her from fulfilling the old adage of 'All work and no play.'"

"Then I do seem dull to you, Mr. Jack?"

Letty asked reproachfully, and she wished Teddy were not there, for it seemed more evident than ever that there was some vague misunderstanding between Mr. Jack and herself, which she was sure she could clear away if she had an opportunity.

But the others of the house party began to come in and there was no chance of private conversation before the start. Letty had to console herself with anticipations of the home-ward drive. Mr. Jack always operated his own car and, unless those in the tonneau leaned forward to talk, the conversation between the two in front was virtually unheard.

Even this arrangement was threatened. When the cars came around, Letty was about to step unquestioningly into the coveted seat when Hal remonstrated.

“Oh, I say, Letty, aren't you coming behind with us? I'd counted on sitting beside you. Seth don't mind going there.”

Seth, jubilant, already was at Letty's elbow. She turned and looked wistfully at Mr. Jack, who was standing, singularly unresponsive, in the background. Letty's heart sank and for a moment she was tempted to yield.

"Perhaps he doesn't want me, after all," she thought, the tears almost overflowing. "Why doesn't he say something? But then, he did ask me, yesterday, and if he doesn't positively order me out, I am going to sit there with him."

She jostled Seth a bit in climbing in and did not answer Hal until she was thoroughly settled. Then she called nonchalantly over her shoulder :

"This is the seat of honor, and I am pig-gish enough to claim it. I know both Clara and Molly are dying of envy, so be as nice to them as you can, boys, to make up."

She was delighted at the alacrity with which Mr. Jack descended the steps to tuck the fur rug about her knees, and smiled happily again as he seated himself beside her.

"How did you leave that poor man?" she asked by way of opening conversation. "Are you sure he is getting better?"

"As much better as he can be under the circumstances. The man needs an entire change of scene, for his moral as well as physical betterment. I think the Western atmosphere will tonic him."

“What you tell me of the West sounds very—well, invigorating. I have often wondered what it was like out there, ever since the time my brother Ben and I were asked to go with the Goldbergs and he couldn’t go because he had agreed to stay with Mr. Drake. Mrs. Goldberg promised me such wonders.”

Mr. Jack cast a quick, side glance at her.

“Would you like to see what it is like?” he asked.

“Indeed I should, but I doubt if I ever do. It seems very far away.”

“It is—very far,” he agreed with a sigh. “So far that it frightens me, sometimes, Letty, when I think about it.”

“Frightens you? Why, Mr. Jack, why? Do you mean that you have to go out there again, and dread the journey?”

Mr. Jack was about to respond, when the other car drew up beside with some question about the road. When they went on again, Letty’s thoughts had flown to another subject.

“Didn’t you say you are going to send Charlie Sheldon out West, Mr. Jack? I should think it would make every difference in the world to him to make a fresh start like that.

How much good you do in the world! I wonder if Mamie Prescott could start over again out in that great, new country."

"I think my sister's plan for her will be almost as great a change to Mamie as the far West, if she can carry it through."

"Oh, she will carry it through," said Letty confidently. "Mrs. Somers always succeeds. She is so wonderful."

"She is wonderful," agreed her brother. "I wish I could be as sure of my powers."

"What is it, Mr. Jack?" asked Letty impulsively. "I know something is worrying you. And you know, you promised yesterday to tell me."

"Promised you?"

"Well, half promised. I had hoped—but of course you mustn't tell me anything if you don't want to."

"Bless your heart, I'm dying to tell. I only want to be sure that you want to be bothered to listen. You asked me a little while ago if I had to go out West again, and dreaded the journey. Well, it is more than the mere journey I dread. The question has come up of my going out there to live."

“You, Mr. Jack? You going ’way out there—to live!”

“Does it sound so serious?”

“It sounds appalling. Why, whatever in the world should we all do without you?”

“All of you? Am I a sort of public property?”

Letty looked surprised and a little hurt.

“No,” she said slowly, “but you have a great many friends, you know.”

“Thank you, dear child. I am getting cross-grained, I think. I am very grateful indeed to all my friends for finding it hard to do without me. But tell me how it will be with you, yourself. How soon will you forget me?”

“Please don’t be so cruel. It has seemed these last two days as if—as if I had said or done something to hurt your feelings, Mr. Jack. I am awfully sorry, and I hope you’ll forgive me, though I can’t imagine what it was. But please don’t believe I meant to hurt you and—and—try to hurt back.”

Letty’s voice was quivering and her eyes were full of tears. She felt all at once as if the very universe were sinking away from

her. Mr. Jack going away—far away to be gone forever! Going out of her life, it seemed. How was she ever going to stand it? The world grew dark and cold. She shivered.

“Oh, Mr. Jack, I—I can't believe it—it seems too awful to be true,” she faltered, biting her lip to keep back the tears that threatened to overflow.

If Mr. Jack had been longing for sympathy, for some one to show regret over his going away, he certainly had achieved his wish. And with the gratification came swift reproach. All his accustomed gentleness of manner returned.

“My dear little girl, I had no idea you'd take it like that,” he exclaimed contritely. “If I had realized, I should have broken it more gently. But I believed—I thought—you seemed to find the company of boys and girls your own age so congenial, that I came to the conclusion that I would not be much missed.”

“You! Not much missed!”

“I am a great deal older, you know, Letty. I am quite, quite grown up.”

“Then it is you who will forget me—all us

boys and girls. Everything is so wonderful out there—you yourself have said so—that you will soon be too happy and busy to give a thought to—to us.”

Mr. Jack smiled suddenly, a smile more like his old self.

“I’ll make a bargain,” he said whimsically.

“What?”

“That I won’t forget you if you won’t forget me. And remember that I have a little the best of the bargain, because, if I suspect you of not keeping your part, I can get on a train and come choo-chooing back, as the children say, and investigate.”

Letty smiled, a little mistily.

“If I could only think you would. In that case I should pretend that I was forgetting very, very soon.”

“Would you? Well, I may put your feelings to the test some time. But don’t grow to think of me as bald headed and decrepit. There is the United States mail service, you know; not to mention the express companies for special communications to keep me young.”

Letty smiled again, and tried to be cheerful,

but she was feeling very sad indeed. The younger one is, the longer stretch the years, and it was, as she had said, too dreadful to contemplate, to think that it might be years before she saw Mr. Jack again. She was glad when at length the darkness fell and hid her face, and the increasing traffic, as they approached the city, kept her companion too absorbed by his driving to talk much.

CHAPTER VIII

LEILA'S INVITATION

DURING the next week or two life seemed pretty dreary to Letty. It was gratifying to be welcomed back to the little flat with the warmth that Mademoiselle La Grange and the devoted maid Katy gave her, of course, but she was used to the adulation of these two, and took it very much as part of her everyday life. The doctor still imposed many restrictions upon her practicing and the amount of daily exercise, and Letty grew more and more idle and out of touch with her work.

In her letters to her Aunt Mary Letty called this dallying "enforced idleness," and declared that it was worrying her extremely. Indeed, the tone of her letters was not like the usual cheery, ambitious Letty. The truth was, she had lost her grip a little. She explained her state of mind most clearly herself in talking over matters with Ethel Swain, a fellow pupil at the Conservatory.

"I'm just awfully glad to see you back, Letty," Ethel had said, with such genuine warmth of manner that Letty was touched. "My, but we've all missed you. Are you all right again?"

"Oh, yes, more or less, thank you, only the doctor won't let me practice more than fifteen minutes a day, which is scarcely better than nothing," answered Letty fretfully.

"Oh, it's lots better than nothing. It'll keep your voice limber and let you get through your scales every day. And it isn't going to last, of course."

"But the spring term is nearly here. Anyway, there's no more use in my trying for the scholarship."

"Oh, you surely aren't going to give that up!" ejaculated Ethel, who knew how deeply Letty's heart had been set upon winning that scholarship.

"It isn't a question of my giving it up. The matter has been taken out of my hands."

"You mean because you've been absent so much?"

"That and not being able to work now."

"But your voice'll get stronger every day,

and you can make up on other points, technique and such, to balance the absent marks. Do go on trying for it, Letty. It—it won't seem natural for you not to."

"You don't suppose I want to give up trying, do you?" demanded Letty, slightly nettled by Ethel's persuasions.

She felt reproached, almost as if she had been accused of neglecting her duty, yet in her heart Letty truly believed she had received ample discouragement on the scholarship question; that she actually had lost her chance. It was a severe handicap, to be sure, to have missed so many days as she had during her illness and convalescence, for attendance was to figure in the competition; and it seemed too difficult to hope to make up, as Ethel counseled, in other points, when the doctor's orders regarding the use of her voice were so strict.

Besides, Letty felt dispirited and out of sorts. The news of Mr. Jack's imminent departure had been a shock, and the knowledge that he was to go for an indefinite period—even to herself she could not say "forever"—was a very real grief to her; this calamity,

combined with the listlessness resulting from her recent illness, reduced Letty, for the time being, to a drone in the busy hive of the Conservatory.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was fully aware of the state of things, but said nothing. She could not be sure just how severely Letty's health had been affected by the sharp attack of laryngitis, and was afraid to urge a return to hard work, lest Letty was really not strong enough.

"I think the dear child overworked herself the first part of the winter," she reflected, "and I must let her have time to recover and get back all her energy."

Moreover, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones guessed that some of Letty's depression was concerned with Mr. Jack's going away. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones herself felt his going acutely. Her own business affairs were not prospering, and she had hoped that Mr. Jack could straighten them out for her. He was the only man of her acquaintance with whom she could discuss her private affairs frankly and freely, and she knew herself to be in need of such wise counsel. But realizing that Mr. Jack's time

must be completely taken up with bringing his own affairs to a satisfactory conclusion before making his change of residence, she said nothing of her private worries, and went on hoping bravely that Mr. Shoemaker would succeed in disentangling them.

Under ordinary circumstances, Letty would have received fresh stimulus from her Aunt Mary's letters, but receiving only tender sympathy and advice as to the care of her health, she easily fell into the belief that she was, if not a chronic invalid, at least far from normal, and that hard study could not be expected of her.

It was during this period of reaction that a letter came from Leila Huntington, inviting her to Princeton for a week-end. After the usual expressions of good will and inquiries as to Letty's progress in her work, the letter continued as follows :

“ When do you think you can come up to see me again, Letty? It has been such a long time since you were here. And I want you, not just for one day, as you and Mademoiselle came that nice, winter Sunday, but to

stay from Friday until Monday, or at least until Sunday night. Please choose a week-end when you don't have your choral class—you see I remember all your reasons for not coming—for I want you here particularly on a Saturday.

“I think I told you that I have a cousin, Ross Gilchrist, here at college, from California, and my Aunt Elizabeth, his mother, has written asking us to be good to Ross. He's really a nice boy, Letty, and so is his chum, Jim Freeman. They have been here several times, and I think we could have some jolly evenings, if I only knew enough girls.

“Mother wants to give a little party for the boys, and I said I'd give it if you could come and help me out, so please do come, Letty. And write as soon as you can to tell me the very earliest week-end you can spare, so we can make our plans. I am so impatient to see you again, and Mademoiselle La Grange too, if she can come.

“Mother sends love to you both and says to tell Mademoiselle she hopes she will surely come, too.

“Fondly yours,

“LEILA HUNTINGTON.”

“Oh, how I should love to go,” exclaimed Letty as she finished reading the letter.

Katy had just come into the room with fresh coal for the fire and looked around in surprise.

“Is it more invitations you’re gettin’, Miss Letty?” she asked wistfully. Katy found the little flat dull indeed with Letty away.

Letty explained and, obeying the impulse of her longing, sat down at once to write her Aunt Mary for permission to accept Leila’s invitation.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was a wee bit disappointed when she read the letter, but admitted that it was not surprising that Letty should crave a little more amusement and association with boys and girls of her own age. She realized, too, the naturalness of Letty’s abandoning hope of the scholarship for which she had striven so earnestly all winter. The competition for the scholarship was so great, and Letty had received such a setback from her illness, that her chances were indeed slim, and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones feared to make any effort to stimulate lagging ambition lest she should impel Letty to put too great a strain upon her weakened faculties, and so produce permanent harm.

Therefore, she wrote Letty a long, sympathetic letter, expressing complete understanding of the girl's state of mind, and pleasure at this new opportunity of making friends. For many reasons Mrs. Hartwell-Jones found this the wisest course to pursue, one of which reasons no one but herself was aware. The truth was that her worry and anxiety over her money affairs had begun to affect Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's health, and she realized that her nerves would not bear the strain of minor vexations and disappointments. She had told no one, not even her confidential friend, Mrs. Somers, about her symptoms, but wisely tried to readjust her habits and point of view, so as to relieve her system from nervous strain. But she did resolve, now and again, that the next time she went up to New York she would consult her doctor.

Meantime, Letty sent the welcome news to Leila of her Aunt Mary's permission to accept the delightful invitation to Princeton, and set a week from the following Friday afternoon for her coming, if that would be convenient to Mrs. Huntington.

Leila could hardly wait until Sunday after-

noon to communicate her good news to Ross and Jim, who shared in her rejoicing.

"I don't know what has come over Letty to be willing to miss such a lot of time at the Conservatory," she said; "perhaps she's beginning to realize that 'all work and no play,' and so forth, is a true saying."

"Never mind the reason, so long as she's coming," replied Ross gayly.

"'Ours not to reason why, ours but to have her nigh,'" added Jim.

"What two sillies you boys are," laughed Leila. "Are you going to fight a duel for her?"

"No, we'll take turns," declared Jim, solemnly. "Ross, we'll draw lots to see which gets first showing, and after that it's turn about, strict, and fair play. What do you say?"

"Let me hold the straws. Are you going to have 'colors' like the knights of old?"

"That wouldn't be a bad idea, would it, Ross?" laughed Jim. "I'll have—what is Miss Grey's favorite color, Leila?"

"That is not fair," interposed Ross. "It is sure to be either pink or blue; it is with all

girls. So one of us will take pink and the other pale blue. We'll toss for choice. Which'll it be, Jim, heads or tails?"

"Heads! And I win. I'll take pink," responded Jim promptly, as Ross tossed the penny and they both bent to scrutinize it gravely.

"What sillies you both are," laughed Leila again. "And are you going to call Letty 'Miss Grey'? It sounds so funny."

"We wouldn't dare call her anything else until she gives us permission. Here, Ross, I'll bet you I'll get first say-so to call her Letty. I'll bet you a jigger."

"Done," retorted Ross promptly, "and I'll bet you a second jigger that I win the first. I don't mind winning them both. I'm fond of ice-cream soda——"

"Dear me, aren't you boys doing a good deal of betting?" exclaimed Mrs. Huntington in a mild tone of reproof as she entered the room.

"Very harmless sort of betting, Aunt Laura; just fun," explained Ross rising.

"I am sure of that, but doesn't it encourage bad habits? Habits are like any other seed. They start out such tiny, unconsidered trifles,

but take deep root and grow to enormous proportions before one realizes. We must keep the garden of our habits well weeded, boys. But bless me, I did not come in to preach, even if it is Sunday afternoon, but to ask you what sort of party you are going to have next Saturday evening, because Leila will have to send out her notes at once."

The boys had any number of suggestions to make, and decided at last upon what Jim called a Salmagundi party.

"You have tables, you know," he explained, "and play a different game at each table. 'Hearts,' say, at one, and 'tiddle-de-winks' or 'jack straws' at another, and so on. The people progress, you see, and besides the variety of games, they have a chance of showing all sorts and conditions of skill. Of course the progressing mixes people up beautifully and promotes acquaintance. It's about the best sort of party I know for getting people acquainted, better even than dancing because at a dance either the boys are stiffs and too scared to ask any partners at all, or else they're plain pigs and find out in the first dance or two which girl is the prize stepper and hang

'round her all evening, letting the others go by — Oh, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Huntington, I didn't mean to be so slangy. It just slipped out. But it is so much easier to say what I mean."

"That's true, all right, Aunt Laura," added Ross, laughing. "And I guess if that old Greek codger—who was he, Jim? Diogenes or Demosthenes, or some such guy—if he'd had a few slang phrases ready to hand out when he got stuck for a word, he wouldn't have had such a lot of hard work to make himself into a popular orator."

"It was Demosthenes, you dub," Jim corrected him cheerfully. "The other guy went around with a tub and a lantern looking for George Washington —"

"Ho!" shouted Leila, when the general burst of laughter had subsided. "Even I know better than that. It's Diogenes, and he lived just a little while before Washington," she explained with withering sarcasm.

"Well, I knew he was looking for an honest man," retorted Jim with a grin, and Leila blushed, suddenly realizing that she had been taken in.

“Never mind slang now. We won’t need either that or Greek history to make out our party list,” smiled Mrs. Huntington; “here are paper and a pencil, Leila dear, so you and the boys go to work. If you need any suggestions from me, call across. I shall be sitting in the other room.”

“I suppose we shall have to have a few others, as a sort of background,” observed Ross with a mock groan, looking over Leila’s shoulder as she wrote the date of the proposed party at the head of her paper. “I suppose just four of us couldn’t have a Salmagundi party.”

“It wouldn’t be a party at all, as far as I can see,” retorted Leila a little wistfully. “It would be a case of tableau, you and Jim in the front trying to divide Letty equally between you, with poor little me for background.”

“Oh, come now, Leila, you’re a heap more than background,” exclaimed Ross remorsefully, feeling that perhaps he and his chum had been a bit inconsiderate. “Do you suppose we’re ever going to forget all you’ve done for us? We’re just in fun about Miss Grey,

though she is a good looker. Come on, let's get busy with the list. Who are your friends? Do you know Alice Reynolds? We met her at a fellow's house last fall, and she seems a good sort."

"She's two classes above me at school," replied Leila dubiously. "I don't know whether she'd condescend to come."

"Condescend, fiddlesticks. You don't catch a sensible girl passing on a chance for a good time. Put her down, old girl, and let's get on. Who's next?"

"There's her particular chum, Gwendoline Bennett. If Alice comes, she will."

"Right-o. Now we're making a fine start. Who's the pretty girl that sits behind you in church?"

"And the girl who was having sodas with you the other day," added Jim. "We ought to have between twenty and thirty to make things hum. Ross, shall we start on the fellows?"

They worked over the list until Mrs. Huntington sent the maid to summon them to supper, when the paper was submitted to her for amendment and correction. She approved,

though with a slight sinking of the heart as she read some of the names, which were of girls two or three years older than Leila.

"I do hate to see my little girl growing up so fast," she reflected, "but of course Letty Grey is older and it is natural to ask Alice and her set." And she suggested to Leila, after the boys had gone home, that she give a small luncheon party for Letty on Saturday.

"Just three or four of the girls," she said; "it will be such an easy way for Letty to make their acquaintance, and it will be a help to you, too, won't it, dear? When we have entertained people more or less informally, we always feel infinitely better acquainted at once. It is the next best thing I know for promoting intimacy."

"And what is *the* best, Mother?"

"Shipboard, my dear," laughed Mrs. Huntington, "but as we can't take all these girls off on a voyage, simply to get acquainted, we'll try the lunch party."

"And how popular I'll be at school, when the invitations go out. I'm glad I can do so much for Letty, Mother, and I'm sure she'll like it, but it is going to help me, too."

CHAPTER IX

PRINCETON

LETTY looked around her with interest, mingled with a little shyness. It was very nice of Leila to give this luncheon in her honor, but Letty felt surprised at the character of the guests. She knew Leila's age, and what class she attended at school, and had expected to meet girls of her friend's own age. But these luncheon guests were all at least as old as Letty and one or two of them looked even older. One, Claudia Thorpe, reminded her unpleasantly of Grace Howard.

Mrs. Huntington had decided that the young people would get on with less awkwardness if she left them to their own devices, so she and Mademoiselle La Grange, who had accompanied Letty, had a cozy, gossipy little lunch served to them in Mrs. Huntington's up-stairs sitting-room. This left Leila to preside at the head of the table, and she filled

her position with a mixture of dignity and self-consciousness that was amusing.

But if Leila and her guest of honor, seated opposite at the foot of the table, felt strange, the guests all knew one another so well that the ice of shyness was very quickly melted and a lively chatter was started, punctuated with gay laughter as the different girls recounted various "scrapes" and larks.

Letty contributed her full share to these anecdotes and soon had the rest wishing that they, too, attended Miss Sims's school.

"I wish all the good times weren't happening just in the upper classes," sighed Leila during a pause in the conversation. "I find it awfully stupid at school."

"It's your own fault—or your class's, then," Alice Reynolds admonished her. "We make our own good times, don't we, girls?"

"Of course, silly child. You don't think the upper school teachers sit up nights contriving things for our amusement, I hope?" Claudia addressed Leila and her tone was irritatingly patronizing, and Letty was tempted to make a sharp retort in defense of her friend.

She checked her hasty speech in time and Alice went on :

“ All your class needs is a little waking up, Leila. Why don't you give them a jolt of some kind? Perhaps they are like all stupid crowds—waiting for a leader ; it may be your chance to step into a generalship.”

Leila's eyes shone with a new sense of power.

“ Do you suppose I'd dare ? ” she asked a little breathlessly. She had always looked upon class leadership as a wonderful thing, but to be achieved only by a peculiar genius. Class leaders, in Leila's eyes, were born, not made.

“ ‘ He either fears his fate too much, or his deserts
are small,
Who dares not put it to the touch, to win or
lose it all, ’ ”

quoted Gwendoline Bennett tritely.

“ My deserts would never be too small, if I could win them,” exclaimed Leila, feeling with a thrill that she was in very learned company indeed, and secretly proud that she could rise to the opportunity of an apt reply ;

“so I guess it must be that I fear my fate too much.”

“Rubbish, childie,” Claudia’s superior drawl sounded again, “all that is necessary is a bit of cheek. Think up a good scheme first, then call the girls together in a matter-of-course way and give out your orders. I guess we could cook up a lark for her to start on, couldn’t we, girls?”

“I think perhaps it would be safer to take one of Letty’s used-up scrapes,” ventured Leila. “Then, if we’re caught, the teachers won’t think any of you girls put us up to it.”

“Oh, of course we wouldn’t let you use a ‘dodge’ we had already practiced ourselves. That would be too risky. We’ll think up something and pass it along before the week,” promised Gwendoline. “Do the boarders at Miss Sims’s ever invite the day scholars in for their feasts, Letty?”

“No, I don’t believe so. At least I’ve never been invited to one. But smuggling in girls to feasts makes me think of the story we heard about your Aunt Elizabeth. Do you remember, Leila?”

“You mean the one that Miss—that we

heard the day we went to the matinée?" asked Leila, checking herself in the act of speaking the great actress's, Miss Terlowe's, name, lest the girls think her boastful.

"What was it? What happened to your Aunt Elizabeth?" chorused the girls curiously.

"And who was it told the story?" added Claudia, with well-bred indifference.

"It was Miss Terlowe who told Leila and me the story," answered Letty coolly, stung by Claudia's air of superiority.

"Miss Terlowe! Not Miss Terlowe the actress—the Miss Terlowe?"

"The same," Letty confirmed, nodding her head emphatically. "Go ahead and tell your story, Leila. Leila's aunt—Ross Gilchrist's mother—went to school with Miss Terlowe, you know," she added in explanation.

"And Letty herself knows Miss Terlowe awfully well," Leila put in excitedly.

"That is another story, as Kipling says," laughed Letty. "We are talking about boarding school scrapes now. Shall I tell, Leila?" And with great vivacity of manner, Letty narrated the little story which Miss Terlowe had

told to her and Leila one afternoon in her dressing-room, after the matinée performance.

“Miss Terlowe and Mrs. Ross went to the same school, Miss Terlowe as a day pupil and Mrs. Ross as boarder,” she explained. “The girls were having a feast and pulled Miss Terlowe up to their window by a rope. The principal discovered what was going on, saw the rope and started to pull it up. In order not to be caught, Miss Terlowe let go the rope and dropped a long distance. It was very plucky of her, and a good sell on the principal to haul up an empty rope. Miss Terlowe said she was never found out.”

Letty did not fail to preface her anecdote with this enviable bit of background and the girls listened and sighed wistfully. It was plain to see that both Letty and Leila rose much higher in the estimation of the luncheon guests.

“Reflected glory!” sighed Letty to herself, wistfully. “How many of us bask in it, and how little there is of the real thing, after all. I wonder if I’ll ever win a tiny bit of radiance of my own. I must work harder.”

Needless to say, this resolve was not taken

seriously by the young lady. She was much too interested in her present pleasant surroundings. And the warmth of the reflected glory was quite soothing and exalting enough for the time being.

The little party broke up early, all pleading other engagements, and promising to return early in the evening. Letty and Leila went out for a short brisk walk, and then settled cozily in front of the fire to talk for a while before arranging the tables for the evening's games. Presently they were surprised by the sound of the front door bell, followed by the sound of voices, and then Ross and Jim entered, grinning a little sheepishly.

"We thought you might need some help in getting things arranged for to-night," Ross explained glibly. "Can't we move tables or something?"

Leila smiled demurely as she presented them to Letty.

"I know perfectly well why you came," she said aside to Ross. "You needn't talk to me again about a woman's curiosity. It can't hold a candle to a boy's."

“How you disappointed me! I was hoping you would say a man’s, and I was ready to forgive any injustice for the sake of the compliment.”

“Who’s getting complimented?” broke in Jim, longing to take advantage of having Letty to himself, but feeling overwhelmed by the honor.

“I am,” returned Ross promptly. “Leila tells me I am superior to woman.”

“Oh, Leila, what disloyalty to our sex,” laughed Letty, feeling quite at her ease. Her long acquaintance with Maxwell and Alex Beckwith made her at home with boys.

The boys stayed only a short time, but they accomplished their purpose in coming, which was to break the ice in their acquaintance with Leila’s friend, so that the evening might pass off without any awkward preliminaries. It seemed to Leila that they took turns in holding Letty’s attention, very much like a game of chess, each watching for a chance to check the other. But if there was any rivalry, it was all so good-natured and understood that no harm or even discomfort could come of it, and the boys took their leave, creating

an impression of such good will and amiability that Letty found herself looking forward to the evening with considerable eagerness.

The boys returned very promptly after dinner, and in the bustle and excitement that accompanied the arrival of guests, and their introduction to one another, a sense of intimacy was established which a dozen ordinary visits might not have brought about. Ross, with the privilege of a relative, assumed the position of master of ceremonies, infinitely to Mrs. Huntington's relief, and the party was soon progressing smoothly and merrily.

The games finished, and the prizes duly awarded, refreshments were served, the boys waiting gallantly upon their partners. As Ross, carrying a plate of ice-cream, hurried past Leila on his way to Letty, he whispered:

"We tossed, Leila, to see who'd serve Letty, and I won. Hurray for first chance!"

"First chance isn't so much; 'he who laughs last, laughs best,'" chimed in Jim who, bent on a similar mission to the magnificent Claudia, had overheard Ross's sotto voce boast.

"If it's proverbs you're pinning your faith to, remember the one that goes: 'Well begun is half done,'" retorted Ross. "You may be sure I'll make a good beginning," and he ran away, laughing.

"You silly boys," smiled Leila, but she looked after them enviously, wondering how it would feel to have two good-looking boys clamoring for her favor.

"I wonder if that will ever happen to me," she thought romantically. "I'll ask Letty when we go to bed how she feels about it."

The boys and girls hurried a little over their ice-cream and cake, for some one had proposed charades, and they were anxious to perform one or two before it was time to take their leave.

Two or three were given and quickly guessed, as some among the audience had seen them before and passed the word along. Then Letty was invited to act and to suggest a word, as she might know of some new or unusual one. After some thought Letty offered the word "Bartholdi" as a word not readily thought of by the audience.

"You know what I mean," she explained,

“ the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor—the Bartholdi statue. The syllables are easily acted ; bar-told-I. And for the whole word, if they do not succeed in guessing it, one of us can be draped in a sheet and stand on a chair or table, to represent the Statue of Liberty.”

“ I only hope they won't guess it first off,” grumbled Claudia. “ We have not yet had a chance to act a whole word. If they hadn't guessed decapitate, I was to have been Mary, Queen of Scots, getting her head chopped off.”

“ And I was to have been the executioner. Oh, blessed audience, that saved me such a gruesome task ! ” added Jim, throwing Claudia a languishing glance.

“ Cut out the mush, Jimmy, and let's get busy. Bar-told-I—or eye. What shall we do for ' bar ' ? Have a saloon scene, or get somebody to sing ' Three Fishers,' where ' the harbor bar is moaning ' ? ”

“ When I acted the word before, we had a magistrate addressing the prisoner at the bar,” replied Letty, “ but I think your suggestion of some one singing ' The Three Fishers ' is capital, and it will puzzle the audience.”

“ And set them guessing, which is what we

want. Say, boys, which of you knows the song, 'Three fishers went sailing'?"

"Why, Letty will sing it, of course," cried Leila, clapping her hands. "And that will be a double surprise."

"I don't know whether I ought to, Leila. I haven't really sung at all since my illness."

"Oh, but 'The Three Fishers' is so short, and low-pitched. It won't strain your voice, Letty dear," coaxed Leila. "I'll go into the other room and find some one to play the accompaniment."

"Then get Mademoiselle La Grange, and I'll ask her if she thinks it would be all right for me to sing."

They waited, rather awkwardly, while Leila ran on her errand. None of the young people had been told about Letty's voice, and they had thought the discussion unnecessary. Claudia's manner asserted as plainly as words that she considered the whole episode a bit of affectation. She changed her mind presently.

Ross announced to the impatient audience:

"A word in three syllables. First syllable, a solo by Miss Letty Grey, entitled 'The Three Fishers.'"

The curious crowd began whispering to one another : “ So—lo—grey—miss—let—which is it, do you think ? ”

They ceased talking suddenly when, after a short prelude by Mademoiselle, Letty began to sing the simple, touching old ballad.

“ Three fishers went sailing away to the west—
 Away to the west as the sun went down ;
Each thought on the woman who loved him the
 best,
And the children stood watching them out of
 the town ;
For men must work, and women must weep ;
And there's little to earn, and many to keep,
 Though the harbor bar be moaning.”

For a moment after Letty had stopped singing the three verses, dwelling with significant cadence upon the closing line :

“ And good-bye to the *bar* and its moaning,”

there was absolute stillness in the room ; the hushed stillness that is the tribute to perfection of execution. Then burst forth a storm of applause and calls of encore and “ sing again ” until it looked as if the charade was to be forgotten for this new entertainment. Ross

had to open the folding doors at length, which made the back parlor into a stage, and remind the audience that Letty had sung the song to present the first syllable of their charade. Perhaps she would sing again later, he was not sure, but for the present he begged them to keep their minds upon the word being presented, as the second syllable was about to be rehearsed.

The second and third syllables were given accordingly, and in very simple guise.

“It is only fair to make these two easy,” Ross said, “because the word is something of a sticker, don’t you think? And that first syllable’s a puzzle.”

So Claudia condescended to instruct a very ignorant and mischievous class in history, the dunce of which coming to the conclusion that in a certain famous battle of history, the English lost so many men, *all told*. Then Ross gave an excellent imitation of an eminent oculist, abusing, terrifying and cajoling the various patients who appeared in turn before him, wearing dark glasses or conspicuous bandages over one eye.

In spite of almost “giving it away,” as Ross

expressed it, the audience failed to guess the word, however, and the actors jubilantly set about portraying the entire name. The question was, who should take the part of the goddess of liberty? It was only too plain that Claudia considered herself best qualified for that honor, and she was secretly astonished to find that every one else was not of her opinion. But Leila settled the matter by declaring firmly that Letty was to pose as the statue.

"She is the guest of honor and besides, she thought of the word, so of course she will be it," Leila said emphatically.

Letty modestly protested, and insisted that Claudia would fit the statuesque conditions much better. But after all, Leila was the hostess and her wishes must be respected.

Sheets were fetched, a small, stout-legged table placed in the center of the improvised stage and draped, and Letty, the second sheet falling in classic folds over her pretty white evening dress, was posed in the proper position. There was some difficulty in making the folds drop properly from the shoulder which held the torch.

“If only we had some way of clasping it,” exclaimed Leila; “a bracelet would be the very thing to slip over. Is any one here wearing a bracelet?”

“Letty has one on herself; use that,” replied Ross, touching the circlet of jade that clasped Letty’s slender wrist.

“The very thing,” agreed Leila. “Let’s have it, Letty.”

But Letty blushed deeply and involuntarily hid the braceleted arm behind her back.

“Oh, no, not that,” she exclaimed in sudden confusion. Then, recovering her composure, she explained awkwardly: “It is wished on. I know that is a childish trick, but I have promised not to take it off, and must keep my word.”

Smiling in her tolerant, superior manner, Claudia removed a golden, jeweled band from her own wrist and slipped the recalcitrant folds of the sheet through. Claudia felt that she was behaving very magnanimously in helping to dress her rival for the tableau, and took pride in producing as artistic an effect as possible.

Letty climbed upon her stand; a dark screen

was placed behind her and two lamps set so that their radiance was thrown fully upon her, leaving all the rest of the room in shadow. Then the lights in the front room were lowered and with the announcement, "The whole word," Ross threw open the communicating doors with a flourish.

The effect was prodigious; almost as profound as that produced by Letty's singing. Again in their interest and admiration, the audience forgot to guess until Letty, who had held her pose with admirable steadiness, at length began to waver.

"How much longer must I keep it up?" she whispered. "Do shut the doors, Ross, or I shall tumble down."

"Has any one got the word?" shouted Ross, closing the doors, but opening them again in response to the tumultuous applause, after giving Letty a moment's relaxation.

Nimble minds set to work to answer the challenge in Ross's words, and at length Jack Lenox guessed correctly. As it was very late, the party broke up soon after, with exchanges of much gay repartee and many extravagant compliments to Leila upon the success of



THE AUDIENCE FORGOT TO GUESS

the evening. Mrs. Huntington might have quoted the artless old lady who said she "knew everybody had had a good time at her party, because they had all told her so." But the expressions of Mrs. Huntington's guests had left no doubt whatever as to the sincerity of their parting thanks.

Ross and Jim contrived to secure an invitation to dinner the following day, and as they went home Jim commented generously to his chum :

"I must say you made an awfully good beginning, Rossy, old boy. I'll have to hump myself to erase your impression from the mind and heart of the charmer."

But Ross was reflective.

"I have an idea, Jimmy, that you and I aren't the only pebbles on that beach. Letty was mighty touchy about that queer green bracelet. I'll offer big odds that it was wished on by some fellow."

CHAPTER X

A BOOK-PARTY

LETTY enjoyed herself so thoroughly during her Princeton visit that she found herself agreeing, without giving the subject much thought, to come again in a fortnight.

“We must have another party,” exclaimed Leila, quite carried away with the joy of social success. “What shall it be next time, Letty?”

“Oh, let us have a book-party; they are great fun. But you must not give it so soon, Leila. It would spoil us all to have two parties so near together, and I am sure your mother would think us most unreasonable and ungrateful to ask it. A book-party takes a good deal of planning, and we can do that part of it on my next visit.”

“What is a book-party?” asked the boys curiously, and a little doubtfully. “It sounds fearfully learned.”

“It does require a bit of thinking, which I’m afraid won’t appeal to you,” retorted Letty saucily. “I can see you don’t care for the idea.”

“Oh, come now, don’t be hard on us. I love to think—if I can choose my subject,” coaxed Jim.

“And we’re dabs at picture puzzles, aren’t we, Jim?” added his chum. “Tell us about the book-party, Letty, please.”

“Why, one arranges a lot of objects or pictures or quotations in a room, each of them representing or suggesting the title of a book, and every one has to guess what the books are. Each one is supplied with a paper and pencil to write down the titles, and the one who guesses most, of course, gets the prize—if one wants to bother giving a prize.”

“What sport! I think that’s a splendid kind of a party, don’t you, boys? What books shall we have?”

“Yes, what books shall we have?” chorused Jim and Ross.

“That will be Leila’s and my secret until the party comes off. We will get up a list, and you two will come in with the other guessers.”

"Don't shut us out of the fun of getting it up, please."

"It will require a lot more thinking to invent ways of representing the books than just guessing what they are," insinuated Jim.

"And it would not be polite for me to guess; I might win the prize, and I'm one of the family," added Ross modestly.

The automobile was heard at the door to convey Letty and Mademoiselle to the station. Letty made a frantic grab for her hat. Mademoiselle La Grange and Mrs. Huntington could be seen descending the stairs, followed by the maid carrying traveling bags. It was time for good-byes.

"I wish you didn't have to go, Letty," sighed Leila. "Wouldn't it be nice if you lived right here in Princeton?"

"Oh, wouldn't it!" echoed Ross and Jim ardently.

"In that case, I'm afraid I should not get much work done," replied Letty, with a sudden sharp twinge of conscience. "I have such a lot to make up now, beside my regular hours."

"Well, don't forget about the book-party."

“And you’re going to let us help get it up, you know.”

“We’ll see, won’t we, Leila? I’ll write you about it, and every time you think of a book with a suggestive title, write it down.”

“I am afraid I don’t altogether understand about the books,” replied Leila; “do explain, or give an example.”

“Bless me, how can I think of one in such a hurry?” exclaimed Letty, as Mademoiselle called her to come. “Well, take ‘*Oliver Twist*’; lay a tangled skein of embroidery silk on a paper, ‘*All-of-a-twist.*’ And ‘*Nicholas Nickleby*’; paste a five-cent piece on a piece of paper and print a capital ‘*S*’ alongside it. Then another nickle and a capital ‘*B.*’ Do you see?”

By the time her hurried illustration was completed, Letty had reached the step and was climbing into the waiting motor, Leila and the boys following close and drinking in her words.

“There, boys,” she added laughing, “if we use those two books in the game it won’t be fair for you to guess them, you know.”

“We won’t, because we aren’t going to guess

at all," Ross called after her, as, amid a chorus of good-byes and promises to write soon, the motor drove off.

"Well, Jimmy, here's where you and I set our busy brains to work," declared Ross solemnly. "We'll think up so many books and be so useful inventing ways of representing them, that Letty will have to accept our help."

"Right-o for yours truly," responded Jim enthusiastically. "Leila, are we expected to take our leave now, with polite bows and thank-yous, or may we come back into the house and talk books?"

"That sounds very learned," observed Mrs. Huntington, overhearing the latter part of this speech; "of course you are to come in again, boys. Don't you always stay for supper on Sunday?"

"Oh, Mother, Letty has just been telling us about another kind of party, a book-party, where you guess the titles of books, you know. And if we get it up ourselves, without troubling you, could we give it when Letty comes again in two weeks?"

Privately, Mrs. Huntington thought an-

other party so soon was overdoing matters a little. But she looked at the three eager faces, remembered what Ross had said about the dull season in college, and yielded. The game to be played, as Leila described it, sounded as if it might be edifying rather than mere amusement. Anything that stimulated thought and compelled young people to use their brains could not help but be good for them.

And perhaps this innocent form of amusement would serve to keep her nephew out of mischief. Mentally, Mrs. Huntington put herself in her sister's place and realized how anxious she would feel with Leila so very far away from her mother-eyes, the whole continent dividing them.

"And boys are even more apt to get into mischief than girls, having so much more freedom and greater temptations," she reflected. "Anything that I can do for Ross is only right and fair to sister Elizabeth. It should be very easy for me to do it, since Leila herself benefits so tremendously. Jim and Ross are nice, jolly boys, and I liked all the friends they brought to the party last night."

So the new festivity was approved, and Leila issued invitations speedily, that the same boys and girls who had attended the Salmagundi party might be sure not to have any previous engagement. The form of the invitation caused a great deal of puzzled, curious comment, and, needless to say, every one accepted promptly. The boys all fairly swarmed to the house on their party-calls, in order to accept the fresh offer of hospitality with free consciences.

Arrangements for the entertainment went forward swimmingly. Letty, in her bread-and-butter letter, had jotted down half a dozen possible titles, and the means of illustrating them, which the boys felt as a challenge to their wits, for the titles were all of standard classics.

Jim cut two capital "I's" out of blue blotting paper for Hardy's novel, "A Pair of Blue Eyes," and clipping an illustration from a magazine which pictured a gentleman standing with his back to the observer, he lettered "S" and "A" on the Gibson-esque shoulders to represent Pope's immortal "Essay on Man."

He and Ross would rush in at all hours

of day and evening, between classes, before chapel, after dinner, with new ideas.

"Aunt Laura, will you lend me an old receipted coal bill, and ditto gas bill for the party?" Ross asked, popping in one afternoon where Mrs. Huntington and Leila, just returned from a motor ride, were toasting their toes over an open fire.

"Why certainly; but what in the world can you want with them?" replied his aunt, laughing.

"Oh, two grand ideas! I don't believe any one will guess the books—or plays, rather. I had the inspiration in English class this morning."

"And am I not to be enlightened as to the mystery? I am sure I can think of no play, or book either, illustrated by means of a receipted bill," declared his aunt positively.

"Nor could I, and I'm glad I don't have to try. Tell us what in the world they are to stand for, Ross," added Leila.

"The coal bill is 'A Winter's Tale,' of course, and the gas bill, 'The Charge of the Light Brigade,'" explained Ross with a roar of laughter at his own wit.

"The first is really very good, but don't you think the other a bit far-fetched?"

"Oh, no, Mother; it is terribly clever," interposed Leila eagerly. "Good for you, Ross. Of course it will be a bit of a puzzle—they both will; but we have a great many easy ones to balance the few posers, such as 'Four Feathers,' the date 'March 15th' for 'Middlemarch,' and so forth."

"A coffee mill on a skein of embroidery floss is, obviously, 'The Mill on the Floss,'" continued Ross. "I wanted to put two men boxing on the skein, but Leila thought the girls would not know about that kind of a 'mill.'"

"No, I don't believe they would," agreed his aunt with a smile. "You really seem to be getting on very well, children. Can I do anything to help? I have an old red driving glove up-stairs, part of a costume, that you might use for 'Red Gauntlet.'"

"Good for you, Mother; thanks awfully. All contributions and suggestions gratefully received. And may we have your photograph of Perth, and paste a 'fair maid' in the corner? By the way, Ross, I had a letter

from Letty to-day with two more 'thought gems.' One is a couplet from an old musical comedy that goes :

“ ‘In fourteen hundred and ninety-two
Columbus sailed the ocean blue,’

for ‘The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner,’ and a paper doll stuck in a bowl of flour for ‘The Woman in White.’ ”

“ Fine, and easy to fix. Jim does such nice fancy lettering ; we’ll get him to copy the rhyme, shall we ? And we’ve got almost enough books, haven’t we ? ”

“ Almost. Won’t Letty be astonished when she comes and finds the whole thing settled ? ” replied Leila, gleefully, for it had been agreed to keep the time of the party as a surprise to Letty.

She was to arrive for her week-end, anticipating only a pleasant visit, with the prospect of completing arrangements for some future entertainment. The two boys, put upon their mettle, had really worked hard, and quite an ingenious collection of small articles, quotations neatly printed in Jim’s most elegant manner, and decorated pictures of various

sorts, lay in the big box on the hall closet shelf.

The boys had asked to be allowed to furnish the two prizes, choosing most appropriately a book for first prize and a catalogue of standard works, recently issued by a prominent publishing house under the title "What to Read and Why," for a booby prize, to be presented, with suitable remarks, to that unfortunate individual who guessed the least number of books represented or illustrated.

"We must number each of the 'books,' Leila, as they are laid out in the room," said the systematic Ross, "and make out numbered blank lists, one for each guesser, so that they will surely put the proper title in its right place."

Letty was not to arrive until Saturday afternoon, as she had certain work to do in the morning. Leila had written something about bringing an evening dress because Ross had asked if he might bring over some of the boys after dinner. Leila dropped this hint because she knew that Letty would have the edge taken off her pleasure if she had not the proper frock to wear. Surprises are all very

well in their way, but they can be the cause of some awkward situations, and more often than not are far from being the perfect joy their perpetrators fondly intend.

As a matter of fact, Leila's hint was fruitless, for Letty took her meaning very literally and packed merely the simple frock she was accustomed to slipping on at home for dinner. She was secretly disappointed when, after an hilarious greeting at the station by Leila and the boys, and a cozy cup of tea over the fire, for the weather had turned suddenly cold again, the three escorted her mysteriously and triumphantly into the drawing-room and exhibited proudly the fruits of their labor.

Letty admired everything enthusiastically and exclaimed over Jim's clever penmanship and Ross's systematic arrangement, considering meanwhile a certain freshly laundered, but somewhat faded pink muslin frock which she had brought as her evening costume.

But Letty was not prone to worry over her appearance, or to give undue thought to clothes. If she had a pretty dress, no one enjoyed wearing it better than she, but if none was to be had, she wore her old clothes and en-

joyed herself just the same. A sudden recollection came to her of a former occasion when she had not had the proper dress to wear—the never-to-be-forgotten occasion of a visit she and Mary Beckwith had paid Grace Howard at her fashionable seaside home, where Letty had had to descend upon a circle of exquisitely gowned and coiffed young ladies, with her short curly hair brushed boy fashion and wearing a white Peter Thomson jumper.

Letty recollected Grace Howard's outraged glances, and reflected that no doubt, when Claudia Thorpe caught sight of her that evening, a certain bit of history would repeat itself, and the resemblance between that young lady and the aforementioned Grace Howard would be more marked than ever. Letty's hair was long enough now for the curly ends to be pinned under, in the semblance of "doing up," but she still wore very simple, girlish clothes.

The memory of that past experience restored all of Letty's good humor, and she bent her thoughts upon the exhibition before her, demonstrated so proudly by Leila and the two boys.

“I think you’ve done wonders,” she exclaimed, “and I am sure no one will be able to guess some of these. What fun to be having another party so soon!”

The entertainment, like its predecessor, was a complete success, and the novelty of the game won universal praise. Every one was curious, excited, absorbed, and all acquitted themselves more or less brilliantly. To be sure, some of the girls showed a greater knowledge of the light literature of the day than of the classics, and several guessed “March 15th” as “The Ides of March,” a light novel of very passing fame. Ross’s invention of a copy of “City Subjects” representing “A School for Scandal” had nearly caused a rupture in the peaceful preparations, for Mrs. Huntington was unwilling to have the paper brought into the house.

Letty looked so fresh and girlish in her ruffled muslin that the boys and girls alike forgot that her frock was not of the finest silk—all but Claudia, who attempted to patronize her hostess’s friend, but soon found that this attitude set her so apart from the rest that she was in danger of complete isolation, and

not wishing to lose her evening's fun, she followed the sentiments of the majority.

Leila was jubilant alike over the success of her parties and of her friend, and Letty was not allowed to depart the next day without a definite promise of return—a promise Letty found very easy to give, for who finds it difficult to accept popularity and adulation?

Letty was obliged to return by an earlier train than that she had taken the previous week for she was traveling alone this time, and it was necessary to reach New York by daylight in case Katy, the maid, who was to meet her at the station, should by any chance fail to be at the appointed place.

Leila and the two boys escorted her to the train, and as they were leaving her, comfortably settled with a book, Ross awkwardly thrust a white-wrapped package into her lap and said, with a new, odd shyness:

“Just something to help pass the time,” and ran, actually blushing, from the car.

Letty opened the package and exclaimed with delight when she saw its contents—chocolates of a particularly delicious and rich variety. She was pleased and flattered by

Ross's attention, but could not understand his embarrassment in tendering the offering, until a bit of paper fluttered out of the lid of the box. Letty picked it up and read it wonderingly.

“Sweets to the sweet.”

A trivial, foolish, but world-old sentiment, never losing its significance or fragrance to the particular one to whom it may be addressed. Letty blushed, in her turn, and forgetting all about her book, sat gazing out of the window with sparkling eyes, lost in a happy revery.

CHAPTER XI

OLD FRIENDS FOR NEW

CERTAIN weeds have very pretty flowers, and it is a temptation to let them grow, the effect being so simply and easily gained without the labor of cultivation. But the experiment is dangerous, for their roots grow strong and deep, and they soon overpower the more precious plants. So with habits; the bad ones, if not rooted out, soon choke the frail flowers of good habits, so painfully and carefully cultivated.

Unconsciously, Letty was falling into the bad habit of neglecting not only her work, but her friends, under the guise of those frequent visits to Princeton. She really felt the need, at first, of relaxation and outside interest to rouse her from the lassitude that had followed her illness; she knew that her visits pleased Leila and helped that rather lonely child to make new friends.

Her return from each visit was marked by an attack of conscience, a resolve not to leave her work again, but to remain constant to her duties until at least the end of the term. But a few days of hard, steady work usually sufficed to bring her up to her class—in her own opinion at least, and when the next invitation from Leila came, it was either so tinged with loneliness and the longing for Letty's society, or else offered a new diversion so attractive, that Letty could not resist.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was secretly a good deal worried by Letty's sudden lack of ambition, and the consequent neglect of her lessons and music. She wrote privately to the doctor and ascertained from him that Letty's voice had not yet altogether regained its full strength and flexibility, and he advised a certain amount of leniency as to study and practicing. Acting upon this advice, there was nothing Mrs. Hartwell-Jones could say except to express pleasure in Letty's diversions which, to be sure, sounded very mild and harmless.

Indeed, Mrs. Huntington had written a grateful letter to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, tell-

ing her how much good Letty's visits were doing Leila; how the child had developed and blossomed under Letty's example and companionship and had grown from a lonely, isolated child into a happy, light-hearted girl, surrounded by friends and comrades.

But Letty had other friends who felt her newly developed friendship to be at their expense. Mary Beckwith declared that it mounted to actual desertion, and she went to the length, finally, of telling Letty how she felt upon the subject.

She called on Letty one afternoon at the hour she knew the latter would be returning from her afternoon session at the Conservatory. She found Letty in conversation with Ethel Swain, one of the other students at the Conservatory, a girl of poor parentage and meager up-bringing, but who had won Letty's loyalty by standing up for her during some hard weeks of misunderstanding at the Conservatory the previous winter. Mamie Prescott, to save herself, had accused Letty of taking the money the girls missed.

Ethel did not stay long after Mary's arrival, feeling shy and awkward in the presence of

what she was pleased to term "one of Letty's grand young lady friends," and as soon as the two girls found themselves alone together, Mary opened her subject. Mary, while possessed of the fine tact that goes with a truly kind heart, was yet very honest and outspoken, and whenever any subject was under debate, invariably came directly to her point.

"Well, Letty Grey, and what have you to say for yourself?" she demanded, helping herself to another of the delicious small cakes it was Katy's joy to prepare for her mistress's afternoon tea. "Do you realize that we have scarcely laid eyes on you since the house party at the Rubber Band?"

"I know," replied Letty contritely. "Scarcely a day passes that I don't intend to run up and see you all, but it is amazing how the time passes. Now that the doctor won't let me practice as long as usual, I thought I'd have oceans of time on my hands, but so far I've been so busy making up all the lessons I missed at school while I was ill. Miss Sims has had me come back two afternoons, after my work at the Conservatory, to catch up in the history of Art, and Mademoiselle is so

kind about giving me every spare minute she has for my French."

All this sounded very reasonable and virtuous, and Letty said it bravely, feeling her friend's keen eyes upon her all the while.

"And how about the week-ends?" she asked quietly. "Surely you don't work Saturdays and Sundays too?"

Letty's cheeks suddenly went very red, and the proposal she made did not accord with her look of heat and embarrassment.

"Suppose we light the fire," she said. "Don't you think the evenings are still very chilly? It is an awfully late spring, it seems to me."

"Go ahead, if you like," Mary agreed amiably; "a fire always makes one feel so much more cozy and chummy. We can talk better with it going."

Letty got a box of matches and lighted the fire, not without some inward trepidation as to the subject Mary would choose for her confidential talk. It must be acknowledged that Letty realized that she had not treated her old friends with all the consideration they deserved, but Mary's attitude put her on the

defense, and she affected an air of unconsciousness and virtuous innocence.

“There, when it gets started I’ll put on a bit of driftwood,” she said; “it makes such pretty blue green flames—the copper in the wood, you know.”

“I know,” replied Mary briefly, but she could not help smiling at Letty’s effort to make conversation. “Go ahead, and tell me all about it, Lettykins. What do they do up in Princeton that makes you forget old friends?”

“I don’t forget old friends! How can you suggest such a thing, Mary?”

“But you have time for visits to Princeton.”

“But I get invited to Princeton,” Letty answered crossly, and then had the grace to blush at her own unreasonableness. “The truth is, Mary, that Leila Huntington begs me so, and—well, seems to need me, that I can’t bear to disappoint her.”

Then Letty gave a brief sketch of the visit she had paid Leila in the autumn, and how forlorn and friendless the child had been, not finding companionship among girls of her own

age, and yet not knowing how to cultivate other friends.

"She uses me as a sort of excuse," Letty finished, "and of course those girls, Alice Reynolds and the rest, are older than Leila, but they have such good times at her parties, and have learned to know how nice and jolly Leila is, that they don't mind her age now, and make her just one of their own set."

"And it is you who have accomplished all that for her," exclaimed Mary gravely.

Letty looked up quickly to see if Mary were speaking sarcastically. There was nothing in her friend's serious face to indicate any such attitude, but Letty did not answer her last remark, and a short silence fell between them. Then Mary sat erect and said, in her customary, hearty manner :

"It is like you, Letty Grey, to be doing something for somebody else, and I'm sure Leila always appreciates anything you do for her ; but please don't sacrifice yourself entirely. You know Jack is leaving for the West before long."

"Oh, how soon?" asked Letty with a catch in her voice. She had not realized that the

time for Mr. Jack's departure was a settled thing. "I—I did not know he was going until summer."

"It will be summer in another six weeks or so, and that is not so far away for one who is going to be gone an indefinite time—perhaps forever."

"Don't use that word ; it is—sort of dismal," exclaimed Letty with a little shiver. "He will be back now and again."

"But only for visits. All his interests and, before long, most of his friends will be out there. Ellen and I have several little parties planned for him, but we need you to make them complete, only you are such an elusive being. I've telephoned over and over again, but Katy always gave the same message—gone to Princeton for the week-end, until I felt positively jealous, and made up my mind to come and tell you so." Mary ended with a little laugh that took any sting of reproach out of her words.

Letty was feeling very remorseful, and smiled mistily as she said :

"Mary, you are a trump, and I am a selfish goose. I really and truly didn't know Mr.

Jack was going so dreadfully soon, but I hadn't forgotten, as you seem to think. See, I am making this for a good-bye present," and opening her work-bag, she produced a knitted tie, half made, of the particular shade of blue that was Mr. Jack's favorite color.

"How jolly; let's do a bit now. I brought my work, too," responded Mary, taking a piece of embroidery out of her bag. "Am I keeping you from your lessons by staying so long? Mother was to go to a tea and pick me up on the way home."

The girls worked and chatted industriously until Katy came to tell them the motor was waiting below for Miss Mary, and an engagement was made for Letty to dine at the Beckwiths' on the following Friday evening, after which Mr. Jack would escort her home. Mary could not resist saying, with a twinkle in her eye:

"I am glad to know it is to help Leila Huntington with her social career that takes you to Princeton so much. We—I was afraid that it was a certain boy—or boys—who formed the attraction. There must be such quantities of nice ones at the University."

“There are, perfect loads of sweet ones,” replied Letty calmly, refusing to be teased. “I’ll get Leila to invite you up some time with me, and you can judge for yourself.”

“Thanks awfully. Are there any already bespoken, or may I take my choice? How about the young Lochinvar cousin who ‘comes out of the west’?”

Entirely without reason, and furious with herself for so doing, Letty blushed, and tried to disguise her confusion with an audacious remark.

“Oh, he is the choice of the whole bunch; you may have him—if you can get him.”

“Does that mean that you have him already pinned in your own buttonhole?” asked Mary slyly, and pinching Letty’s crimsoning cheek, she ran laughing down the hall.

Letty went back to her seat by the fireside in a very sober frame of mind. Was it true that she was neglecting old friends for new? She went over in her mind all the events of the past two or three years, and all that the Beckwith family had done for her comfort and happiness. She remembered, with tears in her eyes, that first home-coming, so long ago,

when Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had brought Letty, so recently an unloved, undesired, homeless waif, into her own circle, and introduced her as her own beloved daughter. How those friends had embraced Letty, and welcomed her among them, lavishing love and tenderness upon her that was all the more precious to the lonely heart, deprived of affection for so many years.

She recalled the festive nature of that home-coming, and all the beautiful flowers that had been sent to welcome Mrs. Hartwell-Jones back. And among those flowers there had been a bunch for her, for Letty, the shy, lonely stranger! Who but Mr. Jack Beckwith would have thought of such a kind attention? A little thing in itself, but the one incident that made Letty feel herself really a part in this strange new life that was then just opening before her.

Mr. Jack's kindness and thoughtfulness had remained the same ever since, enveloping Letty wherever she went. So faithful was Mr. Jack that Letty had grown to take his acts of thoughtfulness rather for granted, and no doubt would have secretly resented the fact

had he at any time appeared remiss. Thus is constancy apt to be rewarded.

Letty's conscience, for the time being at least, was thoroughly roused, and she resolved that nothing should make her seem neglectful of old, dear friends. Besides the promised dinner engagement on Friday night, Mary had said something about a shopping expedition for Saturday morning. She wanted Letty to help her choose the materials and style for her new spring suit, and added that perhaps, if Mr. Jack were not too busy, he would take them to the *matinée*. Letty had promised to go to Princeton for the week-end, but with her new resolve firmly in mind, she wrote to Leila that very evening to put off her visit.

Leila was disappointed, of course, but very reasonable. She answered by return mail that Ross said Letty must be sure to come the week following, *without fail*, as the seniors were to begin singing on the steps of Nassau Hall, and it was quite the thing for every one to gather on the campus to hear them.

CHAPTER XII

A FAMILY DINNER

THE week dragged to Letty, and more than once she found herself contemplating with impatience her engagement with Mary that had prevented the pleasant trip to Princeton. It was hard to give up the jolly walks and drives that Leila had planned for a mere family dinner party. Still, she must not be accused of neglecting old friends; Letty had always prided herself upon her loyalty.

When Friday evening finally arrived, and she found herself seated in her accustomed place at the Beckwith table, with the genial, friendly faces that until a short time—such a very short time—ago she had believed she loved better than any in the world, Letty experienced all the former glow of pleasure and contentment. Every one was immensely interested in her new friends at Princeton, and almost before she was aware, Letty was chat-

tering eagerly, describing the different parties which Leila had given in her honor, and some of the absurd guesses made at the book-party.

"What is a book-party?" asked Seth, and when Letty explained Mr. Jack said: "Why, we could have one of those without any rehearsing. Let us each think up a book. I have one already—'Retrospection.'"

The name was repeated around the table once or twice and every one set his brains to work.

"I have it," exclaimed Mrs. Somers, Jack's sister Ellen, at length. "'Looking Backward,' by Edward Bellamy, isn't it?"

"Right you are," acknowledged her brother. "Any one else got one?"

"I have," replied Letty, who it must be admitted had been expending her thinking powers upon that instead of guessing the title already propounded. "'June, July, and August.'"

This one puzzled every one but Mary, who had recently read the book and pounced upon it almost immediately.

"'One Summer,' by Blanche Willis Howard," she exclaimed triumphantly.

Mrs. Somers had her inspiration, and astonished the family and the maid by making a sudden inroad upon the baked potatoes. She nearly upset the entire dish, and also the maid's gravity, by seizing two of the crusty vegetables and balancing them adroitly upon her brother's shoulders, giving a clue to her object by remarking: "You are the only one present with a Biblical name."

The entire Beckwith family, strictly brought up as to Bible history, shouted with one voice: "Commentators on John."

This sally was greeted with peals of laughter by every one except Mrs. Beckwith, who was inclined to be a trifle shocked at the liberty taken with so solemn a subject. The game was about to be abandoned when Seth unexpectedly piped up with: "Charlie Ross," and was terrifically set up when no one could divine his meaning and he was permitted the joy of explaining: "'Kidnapped,' of course, by Stevenson."

Mr. Beckwith asked a question just then about Charlie Sheldon, Mr. Jack's ex-tramp and protégé, and during the quiet talk that followed, Letty admitted to herself that this

improvised book-game had been cleverer than the thought-out one at Princeton.

After dinner, while Mr. Jack and his father were discussing business, Mrs. Somers took possession of Letty, and seated her beside herself in a corner of the wide, comfortable davenport.

“Letty, the most surprising development has occurred concerning Mamie Prescott. As ‘Alice in Wonderland’ says, ‘it grows curiouser and curiouser.’ You remember my scheme of sending her up to Mrs. Parsons at Hammersmith for a year or two of quiet country living? Well, she was taken ill about a week ago, and seemed so miserable that I had Dr. Heywood go down to see her. The Settlement doctor had diagnosed her case as tonsilitis, and we had quarantined her. Dr. Heywood says her tonsils are regularly poisoning her whole system, and must be taken out at once, so as soon as Mamie is over this attack, she is going up to the hospital and have the operation.

“But the curious part is coming. I had a long, confidential talk with the doctor about her, and he tells me that perhaps all Mamie’s

—unfortunate propensity—kleptomania—call it what you will—that it may indeed all be the result of her state of health; that he has known the condition of poisoned tonsils to produce actual criminal minds. Think of it!”

“How extraordinary! Do you mean that Dr. Heywood thinks that when Mamie has had her tonsils out, and is well again, that she will be cured of—of this other thing?”

“Precisely. Of course he may be mistaken; time only will prove that. But it is certainly a very interesting development, and oh, Letty, I am so thankful I did not let them send Mamie to one of those institutions where she would have gone on being in worse health physically and so as a matter of course degenerating mentally, too. It is just another case of being given a chance.”

“And how many, many opportunities you have of giving people chances,” sighed Letty wistfully. “No, it is not fair to call them opportunities, since you create them yourself. Mamie’s case was not an opportunity but a case of your not being willing to give up hope until every means had been tried.”

“That is what all of life is, after all, Letty.

What makes my heart ache is to think of the hundreds and hundreds who could be improved by just such simple remedies as this, if only they could have their chance."

Mrs. Somers fell into a revery upon the unevenness of things in this world, and Letty pondered upon the odd bit of news she had just heard.

"Mrs. Somers, I think—I hope, anyway, that I have been helping to give some one a chance this spring. It sounds absurd to call visiting Leila Huntington helping her, but my going there really has done her good. Ask Mademoiselle La Grange. There really is the greatest change in Leila. She used to be mopish and dull, with a perpetual cold in her head and no playmates. Now she is a pretty, jolly girl with a quantity of boy and girl friends; and her house is one of the most popular, I think, in the whole of Princeton."

"It is easy enough to understand how you have worked such a metamorphosis as that, Letty," Mary broke in teasingly, and Mr. Jack, who had come into the room in time to hear these last two speeches, sighed while he smiled.

They talked for a little while and then Mr. Jack asked if it were possible to have some music.

"My chances for home musicales are getting few now," he said.

His mother looked up with that expression of suffering, which is such a frequent expression in mothers' eyes as to be almost their natural look.

"Ah, my boy, how am I ever going to do without you?" she sighed wistfully.

Her son crossed the room and sat down on the low chair that stood beside his mother's. He patted her hand as it rested in his, white and slender as a girl's, and talked aside to her in low, loving tones, painting his future in the West in such bright, glowing colors, and reducing the distance across the continent to such an inconsiderable space that he almost won her to the belief that before long he could run home for occasional week-ends.

Presently, at a sign from Mrs. Somers, Seth slipped out of the room and returned with his violin. Mrs. Somers crossed to the piano where Mr. Jack joined them, and Seth began to play, quietly, simply and easily, the family

settling themselves in their characteristic attitudes to listen. These little intimate concerts were of frequent occurrence and enjoyed by all.

When Seth had played all his brother's favorite pieces, Mr. Jack turned to Letty and asked if her voice permitted her to sing.

"It seems a very long time since we have had a song, but of course we don't want you to run any risk," he said, smiling across at her.

"Oh, I can sing—one or two songs, anyhow," declared Letty eagerly, rising and coming to the piano. "I sang in Princeton, a song to illustrate a charade, and it did not tire me a bit."

"You sang in Princeton?" Mr. Jack exclaimed anxiously. "I wonder if your voice was strong enough?"

"But they liked it, Mr. Jack," Letty responded, and rose to go to the piano.

Mr. Jack fell into a short reverie from which he roused himself at sound of Letty's voice and suddenly a new anxiety shot through his heart like a physical pain. Were his ears deceiving him, or was some quality missing from her voice, the dear, sweet, wonderful

voice that they all admired! He listened gravely until the end of the song, and then joined the group at the piano.

"Thank you very much, Letty dear, for giving us a treat—and for choosing my favorite song; but we must not let you run the risk of tiring your voice. I dare not be selfish enough to ask for another song to-night."

As he spoke, Mr. Jack glanced down at his sister, still seated at the piano. She looked up as he spoke and their glances met. Mr. Jack's heart sank. Mrs. Somers, too, had marked the change.

"Deary me!" ejaculated Letty, glancing at the clock on the mantel, "I had no idea it was so late! I am afraid I must go home."

"I am to accompany you," responded Mr. Jack, putting aside the music he was fingering. "Ellen, has the motor been ordered?"

"I ordered it for ten, and it is only half-past nine," interposed Mary. "Surely you don't have to go home so early, Letty."

"I've been going to bed at nine," laughed Letty, "and you know Saturday morning is like every other morning to me, so far as early rising is concerned, for I have my practice."

And if I am to spend the day with you, Mary, I shall have to do some studying before breakfast."

"As industrious as ever," laughed Mr. Jack. "In that case, Mary, I think we'll have to let the busy bee go home to her hive. As the motor is not here, Letty, how would you like to walk? Is it too far?"

"Oh, I should love it! And I am sorry not to sing any more to-night, but my voice is a bit tired. Did it sound tired to you, Mrs. Somers?"

"It sounded as if you needed to go on humoring it for a bit. A bronchial cold is sometimes very tedious in its after-effects," replied Mrs. Somers, a bit evasively.

Letty sighed with relief.

"Then you don't think I've been neglecting my work? Sometimes I have been afraid I was getting careless and lazy, and yet the very thought of doing vocal exercises would make my throat ache."

"Then don't do them," interposed Mr. Jack hastily. "You have been so very industrious all winter that a little vacation won't do any harm. 'All work and no play makes Jack a

dull boy.' I always took that as a personal warning and have striven all my life not to be dull."

Every one laughed, and Letty went with Mary to put on her hat and coat.

"I am so glad the motor did not come," she confided to Mr. Jack, as they started down the quiet street together. "The dark has always had a mystery and fascination to me; and the electric lights only make the dark corners more mysterious, more impenetrable. Do you think we could walk down Broadway, Mr. Jack? I can see some of the big electric signs from our sitting-room window, but I'd love to look at them all, and the few times we have gone to the theater at night we have always driven past so rapidly."

"Of course we shall walk down Broadway, as slowly as you like. And as we walk, let us talk over some of the many schemes I have for some last good times. Your little attack of—shall we call it spring fever?—will give you plenty of chance to—to keep from being a 'dull boy.'"

"You know I always love good times," Letty was beginning, when they turned into

Broadway and her speech trailed off into a long-drawn-out, ecstatic "Ah!"

She was so taken up with the lights, the crowds, the ever-changing flashes of electric signs in the ingenious advertisements, that Mr. Jack found it very difficult to talk about anything else, and waited at length until they had again quitted the brilliant, fascinating scene and turned into the quiet side street that led to the apartment house where Letty and Mademoiselle La Grange lived. Then it was Letty who opened the subject.

"I know of one good time that is coming very soon," she said. "Mary tells me you have invited her and me to go to the *matinée* to-morrow; you know how I shall love that. Do you remember my first *matinée*? When you took me to see 'Peter Pan'?"

"What a dear, enthusiastic child you were. I hope you aren't losing your enthusiasms?"

"None of them," she declared positively.

"Not even for motoring?"

"Indeed no; there is nothing like it for genuine, pure enjoyment."

"Then perhaps you will approve of my scheme of a motor trip. I'll find two other

people to join us, and we'll motor down to Lakewood to pay a surprise visit to your beloved Aunt Mary. We'll go on a Saturday and carry her and Violet-Mary off to a hotel to spend the week-end. How does the proposition strike you?"

"It strikes me—well, like something that nobody in the world but Mr. Jack Beckwith could have planned!" exclaimed Letty breathlessly. "It is really *too* glorious!"

"I wish it need not be always 'Mr.' Jack," sighed her companion parenthetically. "Do I seem terribly old to you, little Miss Grey?"

"Not 'terribly,'" she answered demurely, "especially when you call me that. It swells my bump of importance so that I feel quite your equal in every way. But ——"

He did not press the argument. There must always be a "but" to the realization of one's dreams.

"How will next Saturday do for the excursion?" he suggested.

Letty's face fell. For the moment she had forgotten her other friends.

"I'm so sorry; I'm afraid I can't go next Saturday," she said. "I promised Leila to go

to Princeton. I was to have gone this week, you know, and put it off for Mary's party. But I have promised surely for next week, to hear the students sing on the college steps."

"That sounds very delightful, particularly as it is to be moonlight. I should like to hear the students sing on a moonlight night—with you, Letty."

"Why don't you come? We'd love to have you, and I should like you to know all my friends."

"I should like to meet them, but not this time. Perhaps later. As to the Lakewood trip, shall we say Saturday two weeks?"

"I should love it, and it is to be a surprise to Aunt Mary?"

"Yes, please; can you keep the secret?"

"Haven't you learned by this time that I can?"

"Of course; I only wish I could confide a greater secret—— But here we are at your door-step. Good-night, little Miss Grey."

CHAPTER XIII

A SHADOW OF THE PAST

ON the train to Princeton the following Saturday, Letty found the chair car empty save for an old gentleman asleep in the forward part, and two girls, somewhat older than Letty, whose seats adjoined hers. Their conversation was distinctly audible to her. Either they had not observed her when they took their seats, or else considered her as of no importance.

Letty turned over the pages of her magazine without discovering anything of particular interest, and entertained herself by listening to the conversation beside her. The girls evidently were indifferent as to who overheard them, and Letty felt none of the compunction of an eavesdropper, as she followed odd bits of their animated conversation. She did not actually listen, being rather absorbed in her own thoughts, but now and then a detached sen-

tence amused or attracted her, as a character index, and she was tempted to turn her chair so that she could look at the pair, to see if their type matched their talk.

It was not until the train had almost reached Princeton Junction that her attention was really roused. One of the girls had taken out a letter, the contents of which evidently had been discussed at a previous time.

"I can't see that it makes such a lot of difference," one girl exclaimed and the one with the letter replied :

"I suppose it wouldn't if she were a different sort of girl. But you know she never would fight for her rights. They must be given her unquestionably or she just steps back and waits."

"Plays 'the haughty Lady Imogen' act, eh?"

"Not at all, only she won't dispute."

"I always thought her rather overbearing, myself."

"Oh, that's just her manner. Claudia is really very magnanimous."

Letty started in surprise. "Claudia!" What an odd coincidence. Claudia was rather

an unusual name, and this girl's description of her friend suited the Claudia Letty knew, too. She longed to turn around and tell them so. What if it were the same Claudia? But of course that was too unlikely. She listened now with more interest, wondering how far the similarity would tally.

"She has always been used to being the Queen of her set, as you know," the speaker went on, "and naturally found it a bit hard to bear to be calmly set aside by this newcomer—this little upstart."

"Upstart?" interpolated the second girl. "This grows interesting, as the novelette heroine remarks when the villain removes his disguise. Where does the upstart-ness come in?"

"Well, that is Claudia's own deduction. The girl is only adopted, you know, and adopted children always are just nobodies, you know."

"Naturally. Nobody that is anybody would let his children be adopted. I didn't know she was that."

"Oh, yes, and perhaps she isn't even regularly adopted. Anyhow, Claudia says she

doesn't even call the woman who adopted her 'Mother,' but Aunt something."

Letty sat erect and her heart skipped a beat. It was the same Claudia, after all! And that was the way she talked of Letty behind her back, telling her friends cruel untruths and making horrid insinuations!

"So that is the sort of friend Claudia is," she reflected furiously. "It is lucky I have found her out in time. And her friend calls her magnanimous. Well, she can't know the meaning of the word."

Overwhelmed by a wave of unreasonable rage and contempt, Letty made no effort to disguise the fact that she was listening, now, with all her might. Her unconscious neighbors went on serenely with their discussion.

"Isn't that funny?" exclaimed the girl to whom the fact of the adoption was news. "I wonder who she was, in the beginning. She couldn't have been such a fearfully ordinary person, because every one who has met her says she's really nice. And the Beckwiths wouldn't have taken her up. They're so particular, you know."

"Particular as to what? They're always

doing queer things, my dear. Do you remember that girl who played for one of their dances in the winter? Simmons or something? Well, she's just an ordinary country girl they picked up somewhere—earns her living painting place cards and such, and lives at the Settlement House. And yet Grace Howard told me she—the piano player, not Grace—had dined at the Beckwiths' just like one of the family. Oh, they are awfully eccentric."

"Well, they can afford to be, with their position and money," sighed her companion. "Go on, and tell me more about Claudia's troubles."

"Oh, she wouldn't mind so much if the girls weren't so much younger. It exasperates her to play around with a lot of kids. And the boys are fairly daffy, and Claudia won't wiggle her finger to bring them back, of course."

"She'll have to redouble her fascinations," giggled the other. "Why doesn't she get the older girls together and start a rival group? Boys are such vain animals that it always tickles them to be run after by older girls."

“But that is just what Claudia won’t do. She refuses to ‘run after’ anybody. And I think she is right. She’d only be putting herself on a level with the little up-start ——”

Letty sat immovable, fairly dazed by what she had heard. Her anger increased until it was an actual physical suffering. She felt suffocated, numb. She could hardly take in what was being said beyond the great unfairness of it all. She longed to turn and snatch the letter from her neighbor’s lap, denouncing its writer and all her friends.

Seldom in her life had Letty suffered such a rage. All the pent-up irritations and disappointments of the past winter and spring seemed to have culminated. And her anger was directed against Claudia as the direct cause of it all. She remembered the night of the charades, when she, instead of Claudia, had been chosen to pose as the goddess of liberty.

“That was the beginning, I suppose,” she considered hotly. “I remember how foolish and childish she made me feel about my bracelet being wished on. She was jealous,

of course. But as to the other—oh, the meanness, the cruelty of it! Every one knows who I am, and was. I am not trying to impose upon any one. And if Claudia thinks she can make enemies for me on those grounds, she'll find herself most mistaken. What a mean-spirited, hateful girl she must be! But, oh, dear! I'm afraid I'm in for a miserable time of it."

So immersed was Letty in her own angry, indignant thoughts, that she lost track of the train's rapid movement and was startled by the porter's nasal call, "Next stop Princeton Junction!" Hastily gathering together her belongings, Letty slipped on her coat and gloves, and motioned the porter to take her bag. As she rose, she could not resist one long, contemptuous stare at the girls behind which was entirely lost, however, since they had turned their backs upon the aisle and were absorbed in their talk.

"Why, Letty, Letty, what's the matter?" cried Leila, running down the platform to greet her friend, whose white face and strained look startled her.

Letty smiled in a bewildered way and

climbed into the waiting motor. She found it hard to collect her thoughts and appear natural.

“I—I have a little headache,” she said. “The car was awfully stuffy and—and the bright sunlight hurts.”

“You poor old dear, you’ve been working too hard. Shut your eyes and we won’t say a word all the way home. You must be all right to enjoy this evening. It’s lucky none of the girls could come over with me to meet you; they all had something on. I saw Claudia on the street and called out to her to come along but she was on her way to Louise’s or somewhere—but there,” as Letty winced, “I’m tiring you out and I promised not to talk. Shut your eyes, do; it will make you feel lots better.”

Grateful for the little respite, Letty did close her eyes, and endeavored to calm her excited nerves. She realized that she could say nothing of what had occurred on the train, and that she must meet all of Leila’s friends, yes all, even Claudia for the time being at least, as if nothing had happened. Later, when she had had a chance to talk it

over with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, there would be time to decide what she ought to do.

They reached Princeton and the Huntington house all too soon. Leila had informed her that no plans had been made for the afternoon as dinner was to be early in order to be prompt at the campus for the singing and Letty secretly hoped there would be no chance of a meeting with Claudia before evening, at any rate. But Leila added that probably several of the girls would drop in in the afternoon, and with a sigh, Letty prepared herself for the ordeal of meeting Claudia.

The girls, five of them, came in a body, and they were so absorbed in discussing the approaching boat races that Letty's aloofness passed unnoticed. Alice Reynolds had brought her pet kitten, Snooks, and Letty made the playful creature an excuse for not entering the general conversation. She was considerably startled, therefore, by hearing Claudia's voice say close to her :

“Whatever in the world do you remind me of, Letty? Seeing you playing with that kitten puts me vaguely in mind of something which I can't recollect. I don't suppose I

ever met you before you came to visit Leila, did I?"

"Not that I am aware of," answered Letty stiffly. "Unless it was too long ago to remember."

"Letty—Letty Grey, whatever is the brown study that is shutting you off from us all?" called Gwendoline Bennett. "A penny—no, a 'jigger' for your thoughts."

"Let's all have jiggers," suggested Alice, rising. "Come along down to the drug store. I'll stand treat."

"Oh, it'll spoil all your appetites, and dinner is to be early, you know," objected Leila.

"Too true, and we ought all to go home this minute to dress," exclaimed Gwendoline. "Come along, Alice, we have farthest to go. Where is Snooks?"

"Why, where is she?" cried Alice, starting up in alarm. "Oh, my precious Snooksy, how could I have forgotten her?"

"Oh, dear, I forgot her too," exclaimed Leila, "and I saw that horrid Stewart dog around here a few minutes ago. He hates dogs."

This was cheering news! Alice ran down the steps and around the corner of the house, calling her pet and using all the coaxing, endearing terms she could think of. The others followed, calling "Kitty, kitty, kitty," near and far.

"Hush," exclaimed Leila suddenly. "I hear her."

"I thought I heard her, too. Where can she be?"

"Be quiet a moment, everybody, and let's listen."

In the silence that followed a series of faint, pitiful mews were distinctly heard, but no one could be sure from where they came. Then Leila said:

"There's that Stewart dog again, down there by the arbor. See, he's watching something. I believe Snooks is on the arbor, Alice."

They all ran down the path, and drove off the watching dog. Then the kitten was coaxed, commanded and besought to come down. The poor little thing was entirely too frightened to leave its refuge and refused to budge, responding to its mistress's entreaties merely with mournful cries.

"She's afraid to come down, poor little thing," exclaimed Alice. "How in the world can we get her? I wish one of the boys was here to climb up."

"I'll get her down for you," volunteered Letty. "I used to be a good climber, and it won't be hard."

"But, Letty, the arbor's awfully steep and high; you'll surely fall," remonstrated Leila.

"No, I won't. You'll see. Here, somebody hold my coat, please. Mind the gloves in the pocket. Now then."

The girls dropped back into a curious, admiring group and Letty proceeded upon her mission. The arbor was a narrow, tall erection of fine lattice work, built at the entrance to Mrs. Huntington's flower garden, and with a climbing rose trained over it. It was very difficult to find foothold, and the thorns had an unpleasant way of pricking fingers and ankles that came in contact with them. Letty was careful to avoid the vine as much as possible, both for this reason and because she did not wish to spoil Mrs. Huntington's favorite rose.

For the first step or two Letty's footing was

uncertain, hesitating. Then, all at once, her old steadiness of eye and hand returned, and she mounted quickly, surely, with all her former agility and grace. The girls stood looking on with mingled feelings of admiration and dread.

The top reached at length, Letty put out one cautious hand to grasp her prize. The kitten, terrified and suspicious, withdrew along the top. Letty crept cautiously nearer, coaxing the trembling creature with soothing words and whispers. The girls watched with bated breath. At last, steadying herself with one hand and bracing her feet, Letty swooped down upon the quivering beastie, and caught it up gently. Turning, she looked down with a gay smile, and waved the captured kitten triumphantly. Then tucking it tenderly in the crook of one elbow, she set about her descent.

Suddenly an illuminating vision flashed across Claudia's brain. A distinct picture formed before her memory; that of a small auditorium and a set of acrobats performing mildly astonishing feats. Afterward, a pair of trained bears were led upon the diminutive



SHE MOUNTED QUICKLY

stage, one of which was obstinate and cross. Suddenly this bear leaped easily down from the low platform and forged across the narrow margin, directly down upon a panic-stricken audience. Instantly from behind the scenes rushed the child in pink gauze who had performed with the acrobats. She dragged a heavy cloth cover which she flung over the bear's head, and thus enabled the keeper to capture the maddened animal and drive it into its cage. Claudia recalled the incident as clearly as if it had but just taken place, although it had occurred several years before, when she was quite a little girl, during a visit with her mother to friends in Philadelphia. And Letty Grey was the child in pink gauze!

“Well, of all astonishing things!” Claudia ejaculated to herself. “I supposed Letty couldn't have much of an ancestry—adopted children never do—but I never dreamed she was anything like that! I wonder if Leila's mother knows? Just a little circus girl! Well, I certainly won't be the one to tell, but I'd give a good deal to know who else is in the secret!” And as the other girls crowded

around Letty, praising her clever feat and caressing the rescued kitten, Claudia made the tying of a loosened shoe-lace her excuse for not joining them.

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE CAMPUS

THE young people were inclined to make a heroine of Letty over her feat of the afternoon, but she put the incident aside as of no consequence, declared that she did not intend to be celebrated as the rescuer of Snooks, and changed the subject.

"Besides, I could never live up to the part," she concluded. "Can any one picture a heroine with a headache? I think I shall stay home with Mr. Huntington."

Of course this suggestion brought down a perfect storm of objections.

"Letty doesn't really mean it," exclaimed Leila. "She is only teasing. And I hope Father doesn't mean to stay home, either. You'll go, won't you, Father? Please?"

"Oh, do, do," chorused the young people. Mr. Huntington was a very general favorite.

"What, me go and sit down on that damp grass for an hour or more?" he protested with

affected indignation. "Why, to begin with, I couldn't. If I should manage to lower myself, when the time came to get up again you'd have to get a derrick to lift me." In the midst of the laughter that followed he added: "It is as much as my life is worth to sit on a low chair, let alone the ground. Wait until you get as old and fat as I am, boys, and you will realize how far down the ground looks."

"But we're going to take a camp chair for Mother; we'll take one for you, too."

"No, that would hurt my pride. If I went with the boys, I'd want to do as the boys do. I'd rather stay at home and pretend I don't want to go."

Mrs. Huntington interrupted the coaxings that followed by rising, with the warning that they must all start in ten minutes. The girls hurried up-stairs to get their wraps. Letty fancied that Claudia was watching her with mocking eyes, and she hastened down again, telling Leila that the lights hurt her eyes and she would wait outside.

She slipped out upon a small side veranda, expecting to have the place to herself, and was surprised to find Ross Gilchrist there.

"Hello, Letty; this is luck. I was hanging around until we got started so I could fall in with you."

"Oh, you mustn't," declared Letty hurriedly. "You must go with the others. I'm—I'm going to walk with Mrs. Huntington."

"Then I'll walk with her, too. I promise not to bother you if your head aches."

"No, you must not," she repeated positively. "You must—you must walk with Claudia."

"With Claudia? Why Claudia?" demanded Ross in surprise.

"Oh, because—because she is a charming girl and should have lots of attention."

"She gets enough."

"Not as much as she used to."

"What do you mean?" asked Ross, turning to stare at Letty, and coloring slightly in the dusk.

"Nothing," answered Letty, feeling that she had given herself away.

Ross insisted upon a more definite answer and Letty said, a bit defiantly:

"Weren't you—all you boys—very attentive to Claudia before—before I came?"

"Oh, we all 'rushed' her a bit, I dare say, back in the fall term. She was about the only girl we knew, at first, you know, and she is moderately good-looking."

"She is very handsome," replied Letty with conviction. "And I think you boys have neglected her shamefully. She—she looks on me as a horrid outsider who ——" Letty stopped, ashamed of her moment of betrayal.

"Whatever has Claudia been saying to you? Has she been playing the cat?"

"Mercy, no. She hasn't said a thing. Do go in to the others, Ross. I'm just tired and—and cross." Letty winked hard and turned her back. A passing motor gave her an excuse for changing the subject. "Aren't you crazy over automobiling?" she asked in a cool voice that gave Ross to understand the other subject was closed.

"Are you? I wish I had my car here, to take you out. Or Dad's, rather. He let me drive it at home, but wouldn't give me one of my own. Said it was bad form for a freshman to own a motor. But I'd just love to take you motoring."

"I do love it dearly—better than any sport,

I think. Mr. Jack Beckwith, the older brother of a dear friend, takes us often. He is very kind."

"Lucky beggar, to be able to give you what you like best in the world!"

"Oh, I didn't say that!"

"Well, what do you like best in the world?"

"How could I answer such a big question without thinking it over? Why do you want to know?"

"So I could give it to you, if possible. Why do you laugh?"

"Because what I want most is to make a name for myself, with my singing, and that no one can do but myself."

"All you need do is to sing, and your fame is there. I'll never forget the night you sang 'Three Fishers.' Why, it nearly bowled me over; honestly, it did."

"It is a very affecting song."

"No, it isn't; it's sentimental twaddle. Or I always thought it was, before."

"You really thought I sang it well?"

"Come, come. You needn't fish for compliments. You get enough without that."

"I am not fishing," Letty retorted indig-

nantly. "I am asking you for your honest opinion. You know I had a nasty cold two or three months ago; all the 'itises' that can happen to a throat, and it left my voice queer and husky for a long time. And sometimes," Letty's voice sank to a whisper as she uttered the dreadful thought, "sometimes a cold wave of fright would come over me that my voice was injured."

Letty shivered at the very thought. It was the first time she had given voice to her dread but it had been there, cold, terrifying, haunting. Impulsively, Ross caught her hand and gave it a sympathetic squeeze.

"I have never told any one else that," she added with a sigh, "and I suppose I'm a goose to have thought it at all. All I have needed is a bit of rest. That is why I have been able to visit Leila so often this spring," she explained.

"Then the saints bless all the 'itises,'" responded Ross fervently. "I remember when we—when Leila first spoke of inviting you, she was awfully afraid you wouldn't come. She said you worked like a—a Trojan."

"Well, I did, all winter," Letty admitted

complacently. "I was trying for a scholarship, you know; then my illness came and knocked out all my chances."

"Hard luck, but it gave us poor duffers our chance. It has been a bully spring, hasn't it?"

"Indeed it has, thanks to Leila and her dear mother."

"I wish I could think it was going on."

"Why, isn't it?" asked Letty in surprise. "Are the Huntingtons going away?"

"No, but Jim and I've decided to try for the crew, and I guess we'll be kept on the jump for a while, what with that and the field sports. But we'll squeeze some fun in on the side; never worry."

"Hark, the girls are coming down. We must go in. Remember what I said about Claudia."

"Do you mean that? Oh, Letty, wait a minute," he exclaimed, and caught her hand to detain her. His fingers touched the carved jade bracelet. "Letty, tell me, who wished that on?"

Letty glanced from the bracelet to his earnest, rather tense face, and felt disposed to tease.

"Don't you wish you knew?" she demanded with a demure, tantalizing smile.

"I must know. Letty, tell me, please. Here's a bargain. Tell me who wished on your bracelet, and I'll be polite to Claudia all evening."

"In that way satisfying your curiosity and insuring a good time for yourself at the same time."

"Not at all; immolating myself on the altar of friendship."

"I've an idea I've heard that phrase before. It is splendid!"

"Don't tease. Tell me."

"Why do you want to know?"

"Because—because I'm jealous."

"Silly! Now I shan't tell you," and with a backward glance, half indignation and half challenge, she ran indoors.

The mention of the bracelet had been unfortunate, however, for the thought of it brought back to Letty's mind the evening of the charades, when Claudia's condescending manner had made her feel so young and insignificant. Letty would have preferred Claudia's open scorn to her private condem-

nation. She kept to her resolve of sitting with Mrs. Huntington all evening. The campus lawn was dotted with groups of quiet, appreciative listeners while the singers, thronging the venerable steps of "Old Nassau," made the air sweet with melody. The fresh, boyish voices were very pleasing, and Letty's love of music made her forget everything for the time being.

But between songs, as she glanced at the animated faces of her companions, she sighed. Most often of all she glanced at Ross and Claudia, sitting a little apart from the rest.

As a matter of fact, Claudia had not received Ross's advances very cordially, considering herself merely second fiddle, and the boy was put upon his mettle. To break the ice, he launched forth upon his favorite topic, the great, glorious West, and soon had won Claudia's interest even against her will.

"What amuses me most, here in the East," he said presently, "is the value you all set upon name and ancestry. Why, most of these boasted old ancestors were dreadful scalawags. Out with us, it is what a man is, not what his grandfather was. And what he can do counts

more than all his relatives, dead or living. We go by real worth."

Claudia looked at him quickly.

"And does birth count for nothing? Doesn't it even matter whether a man has been born a gentleman?"

"My Dad says a gentleman is judged by his deeds, and not his family records. He says gentleness comes from inside."

"But birth, family tradition, must count for something."

"I met a man out home last summer who had been a common miner, and I don't think you could find a finer gentleman anywhere."

"That is hard to—to understand."

"Oh, he did not have all the fine touches, perhaps, that go to make up the 'smart set.' I doubt if he'd ever had on an evening suit, and if you put him at a dinner party, he surely wouldn't know which fork to use first. But he was chivalry itself, and wouldn't have said a rude or stinging word to save his life."

"One of 'Nature's Gentlemen,'" Claudia observed, rather scornfully.

"And the kind that wear longest and best, believe me."

Claudia pondered a moment and then said impulsively :

“ Well, if that is your teaching, it easily accounts for your present taste.”

She repented the little speech the moment it was made, and bit her lip in annoyance.

“ Why, what do you mean ? ” demanded Ross in astonishment. “ Whatever can you mean ? ”

“ Nothing. Nothing at all, really. I did not mean to say that.”

“ Well, now that you have said it, please make your meaning clear,” replied Ross quietly. “ It is evident that you have some particular person on your mind, and you must tell me.”

Claudia saw that she had committed herself and parried.

“ You mean that you don't know ? ”

“ Know what ? ”

“ Know about whom I was thinking.”

“ Of course I don't. Why should I ? ”

“ Have you never had any suspicions about — about — Oh, Ross, don't ask me. I never meant to speak of it.”

“ Go on,” he prompted relentlessly.

"Well, then, about Letty."

"Letty! Letty Grey? Well, she is a true lady if ever there was one."

"Yes—according to your convictions."

"What are you driving at? Tell me, Claudia."

"Nothing—only—well, you know she is only Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's adopted daughter——"

"A relative, no doubt. Letty calls her 'Aunt Mary.'"

"I happen to know that she isn't a relative. She is—— Ross, promise me faithfully you won't tell. I don't want the tale to get about through me, but I know that"—she lowered her voice mysteriously—"that Letty Grey was once just a common little circus girl. I saw her once," she added as Ross stared at her incredulously, "once in a sort of amusement park, with a lot of acrobats. Acrobats, Ross. That is why she climbed the arbor so well this afternoon," she ended triumphantly.

Ross was speechless for the moment, but from surprise, not disgust. The singing started again just then and gave him a few moments to collect his thoughts.

“What you tell me may be true, or it may not,” he said at the close of the song—“pardon me if that sounds rude. I mean, you may have been mistaken as to identity. But if Letty Grey ever was—what you say, it doesn’t make a bit of difference. There was no doubt some very good reason for it.”

“Well, I think it rather bad of her to masquerade as ——”

“Oh, come now; Letty has never masqueraded as anything.”

“But she has never told us ——”

“Of course not—us. Why should she? What business is it of ours? But I’ll bet a gold dollar Aunt Laura knows—and everybody who needs. I’ll ask Aunt Laura this very night ——”

“You’ll do nothing of the kind,” she interrupted sharply. “You promised you’d not tell. You promised.”

“But ——”

“You must keep your promise. I shall never have it said that such a story got about through me, never. Letty does not like me very much, anyhow, and I don’t want her to suppose I am a mischief-maker.”

She was obliged to stop talking again as the final song was started, and in the general mingling at the close she could only whisper to Ross :

“ Remember, you promised.”

“ I'll keep my promise, but I'll find out, somehow, and you'll see that I am right,” he answered gravely.

CHAPTER XV

THE HUT IN THE WOODS

LETTY was not allowed to leave Princeton without a binding promise to come back the following Friday. Leila felt that her little party had not been a success, and wanted to make up for it. The unseasonably warm weather roused a desire for picnics, and Leila and Alice Reynolds planned one for the ensuing Saturday, weather permitting.

The weather permitted. It was really a glorious day, but a disappointment of another sort had to be borne. The boys could not go. Ross telephoned the sorry news before the girls were dressed on Saturday morning, and Letty and Leila discussed the situation over their late breakfast.

Ross had given field practice as the reason for having to miss the fun. But although he was frankly disappointed to miss the first picnic of the season, Leila thought him a bit

vague in his excuses. The truth was, that Ross and Jim had been having too many good times lately, to the detriment of their studies, and had received a notice that their presence was desired by a certain professor that same Saturday morning. This news they were unwilling to give to the girls, so they made a long task of field practice.

"All right," said Leila resignedly, "if you really and truly can't come, please tell the other boys it is off—put off. We don't want a picnic to be short of boys, and we couldn't possibly scrape up any substitutes now."

"Oh, well," observed Letty philosophically, "there are plenty of other days for picnics. The warm weather is just beginning. But we might go by ourselves; just the girls. Would your mother let us? These woods around here are surely safe?"

"Oh, Mother will let us, surely. And I think it would be fun. Let's ask the others."

"Call Alice first."

Alice responded heartily.

"A sort of 'bachelor maid' affair?" she said. "Yes, I'd love it. What do the other girls say?"

“I haven’t asked them yet. We wanted your opinion first. Can’t you come over here to talk it over? In the meantime I’ll call the others.”

“All right. I’ll be over in about fifteen minutes, and—Leila, I’ll bet an ice-cream soda that Claudia won’t go.”

Alice was right. Claudia refused candidly to go without the boys, admitting frankly that she would be bored to death.

“Well, I like her better for coming out with it, flat, instead of scraping up some ridiculous excuse,” was Leila’s comment as she looked up the next number on her list.

“You think absolute honesty the very best policy always?” asked Letty doubtfully.

Letty was secretly relieved that Claudia had declined to join their party. She was still feeling very sore and angry over Claudia’s supposed treachery, and had not yet made up her mind how to treat the situation. Of course she knew that the straightforward thing to do was to go direct to Claudia, tell her of the conversation on the train, and give her the true facts of the case. An explanation would be so simple, so easy.

But Letty's pride would not let her condescend. It seemed so mean to her, so underhanded, that Claudia should discuss another's private affairs so openly, and with such severe criticism, that she held herself above the necessity of any explanation.

So Letty did nothing, and the hurt grew and rankled, as all hurts, whether mental or physical, are bound to do if they are not promptly soothed and healed.

Leila's telephoning did not accomplish much. Gwendoline was ill in bed with a sick headache, and the new idea met with such faint approval from the other girls who were to have attended that Leila did not urge them. Alice had arrived by that time and details were discussed.

"Oh, let us go, by all means," declared Alice. "We can have a perfectly lovely time."

"Yes," agreed Letty. "We'll take a book and our fancy work along and take turns reading aloud. It will be as cozy and jolly as possible."

"Well, shall I call up Ethel and Louise again? They did not seem a bit keen about

going, but hadn't the honesty to say so, as Claudia did."

"Then don't bother with them. We three can have more fun by ourselves, anyhow. I'm sorry Gwen can't go, because she likes the sort of things we do. But Ethel and Louise don't embroider and would be sure to be bored by whatever story we chose to read. And don't you think we'd better be starting?" she added, looking at her watch. "If we don't hurry, it'll be lunch time before we get anywhere."

"Where have you decided to go?" asked Mrs. Huntington, joining them on the veranda. "You must not go very far by yourselves."

"We thought we'd go into the woods toward Kingston, Mother. It is very pretty there, and we can be out of the way of people without being far off the beaten track."

"I suppose it is safe enough. But as it is so late, why not have some lunch here and go right afterward? You could take afternoon tea with you."

"Oh, no, Mother, please let us take our picnic. The sandwiches are all made, and we'd only be in your way here, with your

luncheon party going on. Could John drive us up the Kingston road to the woods, as long as we haven't the boys to carry our things?"

"Yes, and will you want him to meet you anywhere this afternoon, to bring you home?"

"No, thanks. We wouldn't know where to tell him to meet us, and the baskets won't be so heavy coming back," she added.

Preparations were soon complete and the three girls set off, each armed with her work-bag. Leila chose a story by Mary E. Wilkins to read aloud and the automobile swung out of sight up the Kingston road. Louise Amherst, on her way to Leila's house to find out what had been decided upon about the picnic, saw them go and stood looking after the passing motor with disappointed glance.

"Why, they've actually gone off without me," she thought angrily. "How mean! I didn't say I didn't want to go—not positively. They might have given me another chance, it seems to me."

The faces in the motor had beamed so happily, and the baskets on the front seat had looked so comfortably filled, that Louise's regret was poignant. She stopped in to talk the

matter over with Claudia, but was told that that young lady had gone "down-town." She followed suit, aimlessly, not knowing what to do with herself, and felt that luck at last was turned in her direction when she met Claudia returning home.

"Hello," called that young lady blithely, "come back and have lunch with me. I know what you want to talk about."

Louise was delighted. To be invited for lunch with Claudia in that offhand, intimate manner almost made up for the lost picnic, and she turned back at once.

"Aren't those three girls sillies to go off by themselves, thinking they are going to have a good time?" chaffed Claudia. "It is only bluff, Louise, to take the boys down a peg or two. But it won't work. I tried it once myself, and it was quite the flattest thing I ever did in my life. You'll see them all come trailing home about the middle of the afternoon. Suppose we get up a party for to-night, Louise, to offset to-day's 'frost.' We'll have a 'hearts' party here; Mother won't mind. You come back late this afternoon and help me make a freezer of ice-cream, will you?"

And perhaps we can get up some tennis this afternoon. I met Ross and Jim down-town, and if they don't have to go out with the crew they're ripe for anything."

"Will they come if Letty Grey isn't here?" asked Louise doubtfully.

"Oh, Letty Grey!" Claudia laughed—and then checked herself. "I am not going to say anything about Letty, Louise. I am not very popular in that region as it is."

"I wonder why? You are both such stunners and ——"

"Please don't class me with Letty Grey," Claudia interrupted sharply, then frowned, shrugged, and changed the subject.

Meantime, contrary to prophecy, the three picnickers were having a very good time indeed.

They had found a very shady place in the grove, and selected a bare spot in which it would be safe to start a fire. The eggs were broken and the bacon sliced. It was discovered that the frying-pan had been forgotten, but a little thing like that did not daunt the three, and they took the lid of the tin sandwich box. The bacon they speared

on long twigs and held over the flames until it gave forth the most appetizing odors.

When every one had eaten more than she really wanted, the lunch things were packed away and the loose papers burned, very tidily.

"I think it's rather lucky, on the whole, that we didn't bring the frying-pan," observed Leila philosophically. "For we should have had to wash it. This thing we can just throw away."

"We have lots left over," added Alice, who was repacking the basket; "we can have afternoon tea later on."

"Oh, dear, don't talk about anything more to eat just yet," laughed Letty, affecting to groan, and stretching herself prone upon the soft, velvety turf. "How sleepy I am! Isn't it fun, girls, to be here just by ourselves this way, so that we can sit up or lie down as we please and no company manners."

"I'll read," volunteered Alice, taking up the book. "It is comfy, isn't it, girls? Now, Letty, don't go to sleep in the middle of the story."

For an hour the girls sat in a quiet group, listening to the story which Alice read very

pleasingly, having a rare gift of expression, and discussing it afterward. Then Leila suggested that they start to walk back toward Princeton through the woods.

"We'll come out somewhere back of the lake, I think," she said, "and we can get across by one of the roads. It will be so much pleasanter than walking down the highroad."

"And we can stop in some 'dusky dell' and have tea," Letty added blithely, having already forgotten her spoken antipathy to food of an hour before. "It is the province of youth to follow Shakespeare's bidding to 'let good digestion wait on appetite.'"

They gathered up their things and rambled away, finding the grove deeper as they penetrated farther, but delightfully cleared of undergrowth and making a charming walk. They strolled along, all three abreast whenever the path permitted, arms twined about one another's waists in true girl fashion, and deep in confidential talk.

In fact, they were so engrossed that they failed to give any thought or sight to the weather, until they were suddenly startled by

a clap of thunder, and stopping short gazed about them in dismay.

“There’s going to be a thunder-storm,” observed Leila, rather unnecessarily.

“Whatever shall we do?” added Letty. “Do you suppose these trees are thick enough to keep off the rain?”

“They’re pretty thick, but they’re also dangerous. Haven’t you been told never to stand under a tree during a lightning storm?”

“I don’t see anywhere else to stand during this one for—here it is!” replied Letty, as a vivid flash startled them all.

The girls instinctively caught hold of hands and stood looking about them helplessly. Then Alice suddenly bethought herself of a small dilapidated house she had noticed a week or so before when walking through the wood.

“I think we are almost there,” she said, looking about her for some landmark. “It was a tumble-down old hut, as I remember it, but it would give us shelter, and it stood in a clearing, away from trees.”

“Are you sure it is near by? Let’s hurry,”

urged Leila nervously, as another flash, followed closely by a resounding peal, illumined the increasing gloom about them.

The girls walked rapidly forward, Alice a little in front, looking keenly about her for familiar signs. At length she gave an exclamation of relief and hastened her steps.

"I know where we are," she called back reassuringly; "the hut is just ahead and a little on our left. I remember perfectly passing that tall, oddly twisted tree."

As Alice spoke the first drops began to fall, spattering through the heavy foliage. The girls broke into a run and in about three minutes came within sight of the small ruin Alice had described. It was certainly in a dilapidated condition and was not very inviting. The door had long since fallen away, there was no glass in the windows, and the roof sagged dangerously. But it was better than remaining out in the fury of the storm, which promised to be severe, and the girls rushed in, pell-mell, shrieking and laughing.

The interior was as deserted and forlorn as the outward appearance. A weather-beaten bench, which looked as if at some remote

period it had been dragged in from outside, was the only article of furniture, and on it the three girls seated themselves, watching the storm through the open doorway, and speculating upon how soon the wind-swept rain would be driven in upon them.

The flashes of lightning grew less brilliant, and the thunder fainter and less menacing. But the rain fell unabated, and the sky remained a uniform leaden gray. The storm showed no promise of passing over.

“Why not be having our tea, to help while away the time?” suggested Letty at length. “We can spread things out on this bench, and there is a whole thermos bottle full of tea.”

“All right, if the rest of you say so,” agreed Alice. “I thought I should never want anything to eat again, after lunch, but our walk has made me almost hungry.”

Letty and Leila laughed at her qualifying “almost,” and began to unpack the basket, setting it between them. As there was nothing for Alice to do, she rose and began a tour of inspection.

“What do you suppose this place was ever

built for, in the beginning," she said, "just one room like this? Do you suppose it is a wood-cutter's house? Oh, here's a door; where does it go? Only into a little lean-to—was a kitchen once, I suppose," she explained, coming back. "Why, did you ever, here's a funny little ladder-like stair! I didn't suppose there was room enough under the roof for a second story, did you, girls? I'm going up."

"Don't fall," cautioned Letty over her shoulder, not paying much attention to Alice's words or movements. "Goody, Leila, here are some of those luscious cucumber sandwiches left. Your cook makes such good lettuce and cucumber sandwiches; nice and moist, with plenty of mayonnaise."

"Yes, it took Mother a long time to train——" Leila was beginning, when both girls were startled by a warning "Hush!" from Alice, who came scuttling down the tippling ladder as fast as possible. Indeed, she slipped on the next to the last round and came rolling across the floor at the feet of the others.

"Oh," cried Letty, dropping her packages

of sandwiches and springing to Alice's side. "Are you hurt? What happened?"

"Don't talk, please—I beg of you!" gasped Alice in a strangled whisper, and scrambling to her feet. "Come, we must go away from here."

"Go away?" echoed Leila stupidly, instinctively lowering her own voice. "But why, Alice? It is still raining hard."

Without answering, Alice rushed to the bench, and gathered up a miscellaneous armful of their belongings, glancing the while toward the opening of the loft. Her face was white, her lips trembling.

Letty followed her glance and her face, too, whitened in vague apprehension.

"What is it, Alice? What did you see up there?" she whispered, but Alice shook her head, and forming her lips into the word, "Come," ran out into the storm.

Catching the panic of her fear, Letty and Leila, trembling and silent, swept jackets, sandwich boxes and baskets into their arms, Leila caught up the case of thermos bottles and, in a nervous tremor of unknown terror, followed Alice into the rain.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TRAMP

BLINDLY, unreasoningly, the girls ran for some distance through the heavy downpour; then Letty, going close to Alice's side, shouted:

"What was it? You must tell us, Alice."

"And do stop a moment," added Leila, scarcely able to draw breath. "I'll just drop down dead if I have to run another step."

Reluctantly Alice slackened her pace to a fast walk, looking apprehensively over her shoulder.

"It was a man!" she gasped, making an effort to send her voice above the splash of the rain and howl of the wind. "Such a terrible looking man! Dirty and ugly and evil looking. He was asleep, but restless, as if about to wake up. I think our talking had disturbed him. I was so afraid he would wake before we could leave the place. Oh, girls, you don't know how *awful* it was! I was simply paralyzed with fright, and could hardly make my legs carry me down that ladder."

Unconsciously the three girls had stopped to listen to Alice's story. They were all breathing hard with their recent exertion, and Alice's fear was still very apparent in her face and manner. As she finished speaking they turned to look back at the hut they had quitted in so unceremonious a fashion, and simultaneously the three shrieked.

In the doorway of the shanty stood a man, a tall, powerful looking man, with tousled black hair and a beard. He was ugly and brutal looking, and his mouth wore a horrid leer. As the echo of the girls' scream was carried to him he laughed, a hateful, gloating laugh, and moved forward toward them.

For one awful moment the three girls stood rooted to the spot, absolutely frozen with fear. Then, with another scream, they turned and ran, ran as they had not believed they could, gasping, stumbling, clinging to one another's arms or skirts, thus checking in a measure their advance, but finding mutual comfort in the contact.

At length, growing calmer with the very desperation of their plight, Letty ventured a glance over her shoulder. The man was cer-

tainly gaining on them. He had a powerful, loping stride and was unhampered by either skirts or packages.

"We must go faster," she breathed to the others. "Leila, your breath has *got* to last." She put her hand under Leila's elbow for assistance. Leila was entirely unused to any such exertion, and her breath was coming in short, painful gasps. She felt as if she could not go another step, and yet the horror of what was behind gave her power. There was a gleam of water in the distance.

The lake! If they could reach the lake they might find a boat there; there might even be people, students out rowing and detained by the storm. Yes, the lake would be their salvation. She pointed toward it, turned Leila's stumbling footsteps in that direction and followed Alice, who was again in the lead. Alice had understood the significance of Letty's gesture at once, and renewed hope gave her fresh powers.

The man must have guessed their intentions and he, too, spurred to fresh effort. A moment later the girls were thrown into a fresh panic by the sound of a hoarse shout be-

hind them. He had gained indeed, to be within hailing distance! Their hearts sank. What should they do? Alice turned and cast a look of dumb entreaty at Letty.

“There are three of us,” she moaned; “can we fight him?”

Leila was beyond speaking, but the idea of stopping, of facing that terrible creature, gave her footsteps a feeble impulse onward. Oh, if help would only come!

The voice accosted them again. They could not hear what the man said, but his voice sounded closer, more threatening. He was gaining with alarming rapidity.

Just then Letty caught sight of a figure moving through the trees—two figures. She pointed them out to the others, and loosing her hold on Leila’s arm, forged ahead in a desperate energy. The figures were moving quickly, half hidden by the intervening trees, and Letty had no breath left to call. It looked for a moment as if the chance of rescue would fade under her very eyes. She lurched dizzily, caught at a tree to save herself from falling, and sped on again.

That misstep was actually her salvation, for

in regaining her footing she trod on a heap of dry twigs that snapped and crackled under her thick boot. The phantom figures flitting beyond her sight and aid stopped suddenly, attracted by the noise, and turned.

Leila and Alice, laboring for breath, arm in arm for mutual help, staggered to Letty's side and with a scream that was half a sob, they stood at bay, facing the foe.

It so happened that the tutoring which Ross and Jim had had to attend that morning was over by noon, and the afternoon session put off, so that after all their day, or the better part of it, was free. Ross called up his aunt's house on the telephone and learned, to his disappointment, that the girls had gone on their picnic without him.

"What is it?" asked Jim, who had been waiting near by.

"The girls have gone on a dove party. Isn't that awful luck! We could have had a bully picnic this afternoon, supper and home by moonlight; more fun than an all-day thing, but their going off like this spoils it."

"Where did they go?"

"I don't know; Aunt Laura didn't say. Her chauffeur drove them. I know, because she asked me, if I met him coming back, to send him home quickly as she needed him."

"The very thing, Ross. Let's go out and intercept the chauffeur, find out where he drove them, and play the Messrs. Buttinskis. What do you say?"

Ross hesitated.

"I'm not sure I want to—with all those girls. If it was just Leila and Letty ——"

"With me to take Leila off your hands while you have Letty to yourself," grumbled Jim. "Thanks awfully, old chap."

"Thanks yourself for scorning my cousin," Ross retorted crossly.

"Don't be touchy. Leila is a nice little girl, but you know yourself she's a bit young to travel in our class."

"So you prefer the haughty Lady Claudia, eh?"

"When I can't get the best, I know how to console myself. And you're such a hog. You don't even play fair, old man. I thought we were to have Letty turn and turn about."

"That wouldn't be a game. We tossed for

first turn and the loser took second. After that it was up to each player to win or lose."

"Well, you certainly had your innings last night, and I mean to make a move to-day—or did; had the whole campaign planned out, even to the 'he saids' and 'she saids,' and now it looks like it was all spoiled."

"It is a beastly shame. Say, how about getting some of the other fellows to go along? Jack Lenox and Alfie were to have been on the picnic."

"They've gone down to Trenton—saw them take the trolley while you were at the telephone. But say, we're forgetting about the chauffeur. There's no harm in finding out where the girls have gone, and besides, didn't your aunt give you a message for him?"

The boys went out into the street just in time to see the Huntington car glide smoothly by. They hailed, and finally succeeded in stopping it, and learned the approximate destination of the young ladies. Giving John the message with which Mrs. Huntington had entrusted her nephew, Ross and Jim walked on, discussing the situation, when to their infinite surprise they encountered Claudia

Thorpe, looking particularly charming in a new spring silk frock and becoming hat.

"I always knew you were an angel," Jim exclaimed, advancing to meet her with his freshman's cap in his hand, "but this feat proves it."

Claudia simpered and accepted the compliment, but without understanding its significance until Ross's remark let light on the subject.

"Did the others fly back with you?" he asked gallantly.

"What others, and from where should we fly?"

"Why, John just this moment told us he had left you all up in the woods, along the Kingston road, picnic bound."

"Oh," replied Claudia understandingly. "But you see I did not go on the picnic. How could there be any fun without you—and you," and she smiled archly.

"Well, who did go?" asked the literal Ross, trying to keep the eagerness out of his voice. "Just Letty Grey and Leila?"

"I believe Alice went along," answered Claudia indifferently. "But how do you two

happen to be at this particular place at this particular moment? Do you mean to say you are free for the rest of the day? Then can't we plan some fun? All the girls are dying to do something; none of us has anything on, because of the picnic."

"We're not sure we're free," Ross interposed hastily. "We'll let you know later. We—we may have to do some rowing on the lake to keep up our training. If that doesn't come off, we'll call you up. So long," and the impetuous Ross hurried his chum away before the latter had time to make a remonstrance.

"What do you mean by saying we didn't have the afternoon free?" demanded Jim indignantly, as soon as they were out of hearing.

"I've got such a bully scheme—or a bully way of carrying out your scheme," Ross explained. "We'll have an early lunch and row up to the head of the lake, fasten the boat there, and walk through the grove until we find the girls. There are only three of them, Claudia says, and we can all row back together. Or, two of us can row back and carry the things."

“Namely, Ross Gilchrist and Letty Grey.”

“Well, you others may have the boat, and we’ll walk,” replied Ross imperturbably. “It’s a lovely walk along that path by the lake. Come along, let’s get going.”

The two changed into flannels, partook of a hasty meal and set out.

“We forgot to telephone Claudia,” Ross observed as they walked down the street on their way to the lake, “but if she sees us in these togs, she’ll know we’re off for boat practice; here’s our turn.”

The boys got their boat and rowed the length of the lovely, winding lake. The afternoon was mild and warm, and the programme would have been carried out, no doubt, in the most delightful and satisfactory manner if it had not been for the suddenness and violence of the thunder-storm.

When it broke, the boys beached their boat, no doubt very near the point where, some quarter of a mile inland, the three girls were running to the tumble-down hut for shelter. They waited in vain, as the girls had done, for the rain to cease, and at last decided that they were in for a wet afternoon. After some

slight discussion it was determined to leave the boat and return for it the next day, as the path was more or less sheltered from the rain, whereas on the open water they would be at the mercy of the elements.

They shouldered the oars, therefore, and started off, single file, to tramp back to town, feeling flat and a bit irritable over the sudden failure of their scheme. They felt vaguely anxious too as to the welfare of the three girls who must also have got caught in the storm unless they had taken the precaution to start home in time. Perhaps they had taken shelter in one of the farmhouses near the main road, and Ross was just picturing them sitting cozily in a warm, dry parlor, playing games or eating tea and bread and butter, when he heard a crackling of dry twigs and looked around in time to catch sight of a flutter of white skirts and to hear a faint sound, half cry, half moan.

"What's that!" he and Jim exclaimed at the same moment, and without waiting to hear anything more, they ran in the direction of the sound.

The tramp had caught up with the girls at

last, and stopping to regain his breath, stood grinning at them with a hateful leer.

“You must hev somethin’ mighty precious in them there packages to hang on to ’em in all yer rush,” he said with mock politeness. “Say, where was yer goin’ in such a hurry?” and he put one dirty finger familiarly on Alice’s sleeve, who stood nearest.

She shook off the hand as if it had been a reptile, and stepped back with a strangled cry.

“Ho, I ain’t good enough to come near the likes of yer, ain’t I!” exclaimed the man, stepping nearer with a threatening gesture, when they were all startled by the trampling of feet and a voice shouted out :

“Stop there, you !”

Every one looked around, and Leila gave an hysterical scream :

“Ross, Ross, save me, save me !”

She would have run into her cousin’s arms if it had not been that the tramp stood between her and her rescuer. When the vagabond saw that his assailants were only two boys, he sneered again, and stood his ground.

“Hello, little ’uns; you’d best run along

home to yer mammas 'fore yer gits wet. These here young ladies is my company."

"Say, look here—you'd better clear out before we murder you," cried Ross indignantly.

"Murder, is it? I just guess not, little boy. Make yourselves scarce, an' leave what ain't yer business." As he spoke, the tramp gave Ross a vigorous push with one dirty, brawny hand, and with the other actually presumed to catch at Letty, who sprang back with a shudder.

This piece of insolence was too much for Jim, who raised his oar and dealt the tramp a swinging blow across the chest. The man staggered back, then recovered and leaped upon Jim savagely. The oar was cumbersome, and before Jim could swing it again, the man would have been on him if Ross had not followed Jim's example with his oar, which cut the man's shoulder a glancing blow. The tramp turned upon him, and a sharp, quick battle ensued, the girls shrinking back in a frightened group. Jim had his oar raised to strike when suddenly a sharp cry from Alice startled him.

"The man is ill," she exclaimed. "Don't strike, Jim."

But the boy's arm had already begun to descend, and the weight of the long oar could not be checked. The flat end caught the tramp in a ringing blow across the forehead, under which he went down like a stone, and lay, an inert, huddled mass, on the wet clay at their feet.

For one awful moment the group stood staring down at the still figure.

"Is he dead?" whispered Jim hoarsely.

"No deader than you," declared Ross; "he had a fit or something."

"Yes, I saw him," corroborated Alice. "He got all white, and his eyes rolled. Oh, it was horrible!" And she hid her face in her hands.

"Ross, we must get the girls away from here and"—Jim drew Ross aside, "we'll have to telephone the police."

They conferred a moment, and then Ross returned to the girls and asked them to come with him. There was a house not very far away, he said, where they could telephone for help. It was still raining, but they had all

forgotten that commonplace fact in the excitement of events. But as the girls moved down the path in Ross's wake, they suddenly realized that they were wet, cold, and very tired.

"Mother will be so scared about us," Leila exclaimed, suddenly beginning to cry. "Oh, what a terrible experience it was, Letty!"

"Hush, child; it was pretty bad, but we're all right now. Ross and Jim are going to take care of us."

"And all's well that ends well, you know," added Alice, in a voice which chattering teeth refused to make cheerful. "What sights we all are!"

"I've kept the thermos bottles," Leila sobbed; "they aren't broken or hurt a bit, except the wet case."

This touch of the practical set them laughing nervously, and in another moment they had reached the road and the house to which Ross was conducting them.

CHAPTER XVII

MRS. PERKINS

MRS. OLIVER PERKINS was a person whom Fate had chosen either to discipline or vex. Of a most sociably inclined nature, she lived alone in a big house remote from neighbors. The most motherly soul in the world, she had no children, not even a small niece or nephew to coddle. Her husband, a stern, cold man, never permitted demonstrations of affection, or such foolishness. She had not even been granted the melancholy privilege of nursing him through his last, lingering illness, for he was killed by a fall from his own hay-rick a good fifteen years before.

Mrs. Perkins devoted herself to her six hens and rooster, two pigs and a cow.

On this particular spring afternoon she had been feeling unusually lonely, and as forlorn as her naturally cheerful disposition would permit. She had spent a happy afternoon in her budding garden until the thunder-storm

drove her indoors. She had lived alone too long to feel afraid, but her loneliness seemed emphasized by the very coziness of her cheerful sitting-room. It was a favorite amusement to imagine some accident—never serious—that would bring wayfarers to her door for shelter or help, and to pass the rainy afternoon Mrs. Perkins settled herself with her knitting to play this harmless, rather pathetic form of solitaire.

“Let’s suppose,” she told herself, “that two very fine ladies, attired in their very best new spring toilettes, should be out driving in their victoria. Suppose the thunder-storm overtook them just outside my modest dwelling, what joy it would give me to take them in and give them hospitality and shelter.”

At the above point of the story she had let her mind relax a bit to consider the homely but fascinating question of what refreshment she should offer her imaginary guests, when she was immensely astounded by a prolonged ringing of the front door-bell. That bell rang only four times a year when the postman, who usually dropped the few letters he brought in a box by the gate, brought, by registered

mail, the widow's quarterly stipend from her husband's small estate. No such letter was expected now and Mrs. Perkins sat erect in her chair with a gasp.

"What if one of my stories is comin' true!" she ejaculated, and dropping her knitting unheeded on the floor, she fairly scampered to the front door. Three very bedraggled maidens, one weeping, and a no less bedraggled boy, stood dripping on the door-step.

"Well, I do declare!" exclaimed Mrs. Perkins, almost too surprised and delighted for the moment to speak. "Walk right in, ladies and gentleman, quick. No need to ask if you was caught in the storm. Come right through to the kitchen and stand in front of the stove till I can get my sittin'-room fire goin'. Well, if this isn't luck—for me, of course," she added quickly, seeing the look of surprised wonder on the faces of her unexpected guests. "I was just wishin' for some company. This way, please. Goodness, how wet you are. I'd better git you young ladies some dry clothes. Come up-stairs first, and change 'fore you catch your death o' cold, then we can have something hot to drink while you tell me all about

how you got caught. The storm did come up rather sudden, didn't it?"

"While the young ladies are getting dry, may I telephone, please?" asked Ross Gilchrist. It was the first chance any of the four had had to speak, and Ross had only managed to squeeze in his request between breaths, so to speak.

"Oh, yes, you must telephone Mother," exclaimed Leila. "And we ought to introduce ourselves, oughtn't we? I am Leila Huntington, and these are Letty Grey and Alice Reynolds."

"Leila and I live in Princeton," Alice put in, "and Letty Grey is visiting Leila. She comes from New York."

"From New York! Oh, my land!" ejaculated the excited Mrs. Perkins. "Isn't this just like a story! The telephone is there in the sittin'-room, young man——"

"Ross Gilchrist, at your service, madam," interpolated Ross with a gallant bow.

"It's in the sittin'-room, behind the door, Mr. Ross Gilchrist, and you just make yourself to home with it. I reckon you're a Princeton student, aren't you?"

"I surely am, and a lucky one, to have found you to take care of my friends. May they wait here until Leila's mother can send for them?"

"I'd like to see you get 'em away any quicker 'n they have to go," was Mrs. Perkins's hospitable retort, as she bustled up-stairs after the girls.

Ross telephoned his aunt first, to allay her anxiety and to ask her to send the automobile to Mrs. Perkins's house. He had to call his hostess to ask her name, which she was overwhelmed to find she had forgotten to mention, and she remained in the room, lighting the fire and tidying the hearth, while Ross made his second telephone call. She was naturally startled to hear him ask for the police station, and stood, open-mouthed, while Ross made known his errand.

"Can you send a patrol wagon to fetch a man out on the path, on the north side of the lake, near the upper end?" Ross asked. "He is a tramp, of some sort of bad character. A friend and myself found him on the point of attacking some young ladies—he had chased them a long distance. We beat him off with

our oars and he fell in a fit. Yes, I'll be on the lookout for you. My name is Ross Gilchrist—Princeton. In about fifteen minutes, you say? All right; good-bye."

Ross almost laughed as he hung up the receiver and turning, saw Mrs. Perkins's expression. "Absolutely flabbergasted," he described it to Jim afterward.

"I'll leave the young ladies to explain," he said. "I must go back to my friend. Please tell them the automobile will be here in a very few minutes, and I'll call them up at home later. Thank you very much for your hospitality and good-bye for the present."

"But you're all wet," remonstrated Mrs. Perkins, following him to the door. "You mustn't go out in the rain again like that."

"I must, thank you. My friend is out there in the woods with that—that horrible man. He might come to any minute, and Jim need help. I'll soon dry out. Don't worry about me," and he ran off, waving good-bye to the girls who, costumed in various garments of Mrs. Perkins's well—but long—preserved wardrobe, were just filing down-stairs, feeling already greatly cheered and comforted,

not to say vastly amused at their own appearance.

Mrs. Perkins bustled hospitably about. Assembling the girls in front of a roaring fire, she served them with great cups of steaming hot tea, accompanied by bread and butter and doughnuts.

"There, young ladies, I'm sure you're both cold and hungry, but this will fix you up. I'll take a cup myself, for sociability's sake, and now I'd like to hear all about it. I'm near dead with curiosity."

The girls laughed, and delighted with the warmth, the comfort and their hostess's frank manner, broke into excited talk, each giving her version of the horrid story, with long parenthetical descriptions of feelings and sensations at various periods of the adventure.

"My lands sakes! And to think such a dreadful critter was stayin' so near the town! Why, the police had oughter look after things better," exclaimed Mrs. Perkins, looking about her apprehensively, for she lived alone. "Why, I might expect to be murdered in my bed 'most any night."

The girls reassured her as well as they could,

declaring that the man was not that sort of character.

"He did not look like a burglar at all," declared Alice with such positiveness that they all laughed again.

"Judging from others you have met, I suppose," suggested Letty. "In what way did this one differ, please?"

Alice would not be laughed out of her statement.

"I saw him first," she claimed, "so my opinion ought to have some value. He looked too—too—well, too slip-shod for a burglar, if you know what I mean. He did not have a crafty or alert manner at all. I should say he was a mere tramp, living from hand to mouth; the kind that likes to bully lone women and children, and who would take an overcoat or such, if he found it lying about handy, but who wouldn't have brains or gumption enough really to break into a house and steal."

"He had gumption enough to chase us," protested Leila with a shudder.

"Yes, and rather enjoyed it, until he saw we were outdistancing him. But I dare say that

if we'd left the sandwiches behind us, instead of clutching them in that crazy way, he would have paid us no further attention. He regarded those sandwiches as his right, and no doubt considered we were trying to make way with his lawful property."

"I wish we had left them, goodness knows; how clammy and sticky they got in the rain!" sighed Letty.

Their hostess listened to their talk with unabated interest, but she found more consolation in the knowledge that the police were already on their way to capture the malefactor than in all Alice's theories concerning his character or calling.

"My lands sakes," she exclaimed at length, "there's an automobile stopping in front. I guess it's for you young ladies. Who could 'a' believed the time could pass so quick. But I never can get used to automobiles. I rode in one oncet—my brother-in-law up to Rocky Hill has one an' he took us all over to the Trenton Fair; it seemed to me we was there 'fore we'd got well started. There, that young man's got out of the car and is tryin' to find the front door-bell. I'll just run out an' tell

him you won't keep him waitin' more'n a minute."

The girls departed with many repeated thanks, and promises of coming to call.

"It ain't often I'm allowed the privilege of aidin' 'fair maidens in distress,'" she said at parting, quoting from one of her favorite novels. "Good-bye, good-bye, young ladies. Don't forget your promise to come an' see me. My name's Perkins, an' you know I've got a telephone, so 'f you and that nice spoken young man, an' his friend, 'll do me the honor to come out here some time of a Saturday, I'll cook you up a real good chicken dinner."

"That would be perfectly lovely, Mrs. Perkins. And we'll return the stockings very soon; thank you so much for everything," chorused the girls. "Good-bye, good-bye."

Mrs. Huntington had felt no particular concern over the girls' safety. But when they reached home, and she heard the story of the whole adventure, her blood ran cold.

"My precious children—oh, my little daughter!" she cried. "What if the boys had not got there at that very moment!"

"You mean what if we had not got to the

boys, Mother. Letty helped me or I should never have had the courage to keep up. I thought my lungs would burst."

"How splendidly the boys behaved! I must write Ross's mother about him," said Mrs. Huntington, drying her eyes.

"They just happened to be on the spot," commented Leila literally. "Any of the students would have done the same. And Jim did as much as Ross—more, I think," she added, turning white at the recollection. "It was Jim who knocked the man down and then stayed with him while Ross took us to Mrs. Perkins's. I think it took an awful lot of nerve to stay there alone with that horrible creature."

"Of course it did," agreed Letty, "and I am only too thankful the boys came to our rescue; but as a matter of fact, Mrs. Huntington, if we girls had held out two or three minutes longer, that man would have tumbled over in his fit anyhow; it must have been coming on when he caught up to us; and we should have escaped with a dreadful scare."

"And perhaps, if you had not been quite

so solicitous about the sandwiches and thermos bottles, he might not have chased you at all," added a voice from the door, as Ross entered, followed by Jim.

"We came to report that the man's all right, and safe in a cell," he explained. "And what do you suppose? The police say he's wanted for burglary; they've been on his tracks for six weeks and more, and are mighty glad to have nabbed him."

"For what?" asked Leila.

"For burglary—and for half killing a man who found him in his house."

Leila and Letty burst out laughing.

"What's the joke?"

"Alice's skill as a judge of character. In her estimation a burglar was the very last thing in the world our tramp resembled. Thank goodness he is safe behind prison bars. Let us call up Mrs. Perkins and relieve her fears."

Mrs. Perkins was very grateful, both for the reassuring news that her night's rest need not be broken by terrifying apprehensions, and for their consideration of her. She reminded them of the proposed chicken dinner and

begged them to set an early date for the party.

"Did the man come to before Ross got back to you this afternoon?" Letty asked Jim.

"No," he replied, turning a little pale. "Not until after we got in town to the police station. I was some scared, I tell you. I was horribly afraid my oar had done the business after all. I was about to give myself up when the man groaned. Then the doctor examined him and said it was a heart attack—angina pectoris, I believe—brought on by the running."

As he spoke, Jim shivered, for the experience had been painful. It is a terrible thing to face the dread that one has taken a human life, even in some one's defense.

"It was dreadful for you—perfectly dreadful!" murmured Letty sympathetically, and for one jealous moment Ross found himself wishing that the dreadful experience had happened to himself, instead of to Jim.

Of course Claudia's "hearts" party was entirely forgotten in the new excitement. Good-naturedly, she offered the ice-cream and

two of the boys carried the freezer to Leila's house. Claudia had heard the whole story, of course, and considered that the girls, Letty as well as the rest, had behaved with great presence of mind and courage. For her part she would have been willing to let bygones be bygones and make friends with Letty; but the latter's cool manner prevented any warmer demonstration than a formal expression of congratulation.

Letty's resentment was growing keener with repression. If only she had gone to Claudia at once, many heart-burnings would have been saved.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONFIDENCES

LETTY was experiencing a "blue Monday." She came back from Princeton tired and cross. The reaction from Saturday's shock and excitement was greater than she realized, and she blamed circumstances, her masters, everything but herself, for the wrong way affairs seemed to be going. At school none of her lessons were properly prepared, and she received what all the girls knew and dreaded as a "warning" in history. At the Conservatory her voice was too tired and husky to take more than the simplest exercises, she had forgotten to do a most important exercise in technique, and was reprimanded for missing choral class the previous Saturday evening. Altogether, it was a day of gloom for Letty. Even the weather was against her, being sultry, hot and overcast.

Letty remembered with a conscience-prick

that she had not gone to visit Mamie Prescott at the hospital, as she had promised Mrs. Somers to do, so on Tuesday afternoon she hurried to the given address, only to be told that Mamie had gone home the previous Thursday.

“But she was to be here three weeks,” remonstrated Letty. “Surely it has not been three weeks yet?”

The head nurse assured her smilingly that it had been nearly four weeks since Mamie's arrival, and told herself, with a wistful little sigh, that time sped fleetly on the heels of youth!

On Wednesday, neither the weather nor Letty's spirits had improved, and she reflected dismally, on her way home from a dreary session at the Conservatory, that things were about at their very worst, and something good ought to happen soon. But she had no hope that anything good would happen; she was in too pessimistic a mood for that.

When Katy let her in at the door of the tiny flat the jubilant expression on the maid's face irritated Letty. Why should other people feel glad and cheerful when she was in

the dumps? She soon discovered the reason for Katy's smile. Sitting cozily in front of the open fire, chatting with Mademoiselle La Grange and sipping a cup of tea, was Mrs. Hartwell-Jones.

"Oh, oh, Aunt Mary! You precious Aunt Mary!" cried Letty, rushing in and flinging her arms impetuously around Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's neck, nearly strangling that good lady and imperiling the tea. "How perfectly lovely!"

"My dear child, stand still a moment and let me look at you. Are you all right? You wrote me such a mystifying account of your experience last Saturday that I was all up in the air, so to speak, and felt I just had to come and see for myself just what had happened and how you had survived the shock."

"I am sorry I scared you; that is exactly what I tried to avoid doing," replied Letty meekly.

"I appreciated your intentions, but in glossing over the affair you left so terribly much to my imagination. Please take off your things, Letty mine, and let us have the whole story at once. Unless the unforeseen happens,

to call me back to Lakewood, I am going to stay two or three days, so we shall have plenty of time to talk about other things. Your story first, please."

"Mademoiselle will be bored to death to hear it all over again," remonstrated Letty, nothing loth to be made the central figure. "She has heard little else since I got back."

"Mademoiselle would be very thrilled if she could stay to hear it again," responded that lady, "but you know I have my pupil, Letty dear. I shall see you both at dinner." She started to go and turned back at the door to say: "Letty, chérie, if Mrs. Hartwell-Jones is to be here to-morrow, you will not mind if I accept a little invitation to dinner? It will not leave you alone."

"Oh, Mademoiselle," exclaimed Letty, "how often have I told you that you must always accept invitations without considering me. You really must, Mademoiselle, or you will make my conscience prick dreadfully, for I go off for whole week-ends without finding out whether you are going to have company or some way of amusing yourself." And Letty looked a bit uncomfortable. "But you

know," she added, "Mrs. Huntington always wants you to go with me. She always asks you, too."

"I know, *chérie*, and it is very sweet to be wanted, but I seem always so busy," replied Mademoiselle gratefully.

She went away to write her note, and then departed for her lesson. Letty was inclined to reproach herself, but Mrs. Hartwell-Jones took another view of the matter.

"I was wondering," she said thoughtfully, "whether Mademoiselle did not invent that dinner invitation in order to give you and me more time together."

"Oh, do you suppose she did? Mademoiselle is always doing little thoughtful things that no one else would think of. But if she really is dining out to-morrow, we could ask Mr. Jack and Mrs. Somers to dinner, couldn't we? The dining-room will seat only four comfortably. And don't you think it would be fun to have a teensy weensy tea in the afternoon? Just old friends?"

"That sounds very attractive, but your story first, Letty. I am both curious and concerned."

Letty tucked herself on the stool it was her habit to sit upon beside her mother, and gave a dramatic rehearsal of the whole event, the storm, the broken down hut, Alice's tour of inspection with its startling revelation, the race, the rescue. So vividly did she picture the scene in which the girls had looked back and seen the tramp staring after them from the open doorway with his evil leer, that Mrs. Hartwell-Jones could fairly see the man's hateful face before her, and she shuddered in sympathy. But Letty wound up with such a comical account of Mrs. Perkins's amazement, and the misfit of her clothes on the different girls, that they both laughed away the bad impression.

But Letty soon grew grave again, and her face took on that expression which Mrs. Hartwell-Jones knew meant that the girl needed help and good counsel. She waited for the confidence she felt sure would come.

"Aunt Mary," said Letty after a short silence, "does Mrs. Huntington know who I really am? I mean, does she know the whole story about—about my being with Mr. Drake's circus and your adopting me—and all?"

“Everything there is to know, Letty. Why do you ask?” Mrs. Hartwell-Jones sighed as she spoke. Who had been worrying Letty about her past?

Coming at once to the point, Letty repeated the conversation she had overheard on the train, and her consequent resentment against Claudia.

“You should have gone straight to Claudia, of course,” said her mother positively.

“I didn’t want to. I thought it would look as if I were ashamed of something, and offering an apology. But I did want to tell Mrs. Huntington and Leila if they didn’t know.”

“Yes, they know, dear. It is always safer to let the whole truth be known, and then there is never room for doubt. I think you ought to take the first opportunity that offers to explain to Claudia. Naturally there is nothing to be ashamed of—quite the contrary. But there are always wagging tongues to twist and distort facts.”

This opened the way for one of those long, delightful, confidential talks which Letty loved and prized so dearly, and it was only when they heard Katy setting the table that

they were reminded of their own proposed dinner party.

"Do you think Mrs. Somers and Mr. Jack would care to come?" asked Letty. "It will be only a family dinner."

"The intimacy of a family dinner is one of the greatest compliments one can offer. Real friends never want one to express one's affections by means of made dishes and expensive desserts. I am sure Mr. Jack would appreciate eggs scrambled in a chafing-dish, if offered in the right spirit. Oh, Letty mine, I wonder if we realize how much we are going to miss Jack Beckwith! We have got so used to him, and all he does for us, that he is like—well, the city water supply. We never appreciate its importance unless the supply is unexpectedly shut off."

Letty laughed at her mother's homely metaphor, but her words raised a certain curiosity. She called to mind a rumor which Molly Wilson, a friend of Violet's, had whispered into the latter's ear the summer before; a rumor that Mr. Jack Beckwith and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones were to be married. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's denial of this rumor, when the girls

confided it, was so positive, and she had seemed so amused, that Letty's suspicions were entirely lulled.

But a certain something in Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's manner reawakened them, and during the two or three days that followed, she watched her mother and Jack Beckwith together and wondered. Oddly enough, the idea of their mutual affection no longer vexed Letty, but rather soothed and satisfied. Letty had progressed far enough along the road of growing up to feel a distinct interest in anything suggesting a love story.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had a great deal to say to Mr. Jack, and although, what Letty could not know, it was only about business, there was enough of reticence to give Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's manner that diffidence which Letty interpreted so differently. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones did not want to depress her friend's remaining days with the knowledge of how really badly her own affairs were going, so she tried to content herself with getting such general advice as he could give.

The combined tea and dinner parties were

a great success. Letty and Mademoiselle had barely finished giving the finishing touches to their cozy little sitting-room when Mrs. Somers arrived, bearing a glorious bunch of roses for the tea table.

“I am very greedy, Letty,” she said. “I have come prepared to stay right through both your parties. I have not seen your precious mother for so long! Shall I wear out my welcome?”

“You could never do that, dear Mrs. Somers. Here is Aunt Mary, on tap, and we can enjoy a continuous performance. I know Miss Fleming would tell me that is mixed metaphor, but never mind. If only Aunt Mary could be made to realize how terribly we all miss her, and need her here in town, perhaps she and Violet could be induced to return.”

“I should be afraid to try living in New York again, Letty dear, because of the effect on Violet's health. But I am thinking of quitting Lakewood,” Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was beginning, when Katy's passage through the room heralded the arrival of other guests, and all confidential conversation was put an end to for the time.

Mr. Jack arrived early, even before the tea guests had gone, indeed, and when they had settled cozily about the fire after dinner Mrs. Somers brought up the interrupted topic.

“Why are you thinking of leaving Lakewood, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones?” she asked. “And what are your plans?”

Mr. Jack looked up in surprise as his sister spoke, but waited, silently, for Mrs. Hartwell-Jones to reply.

“It is not my own desire, but the result of circumstances,” Mrs. Hartwell-Jones explained. “For my own part, I have so much of the pussy-cat in my make-up that I fancy I’d stay put wherever circumstances chanced to land me, from pure love of keeping the same surroundings. But Miss Emerson, in this event, is the motive power that threatens to overcome my inertia.”

“Miss Emerson? Is she tired of Lakewood?” asked Mr. Jack, amused.

“I don’t know whether she is tired of Lakewood, but fate has directed that she take up her abode elsewhere,” answered Mrs. Hartwell-Jones whimsically. “The fact is, Miss Emerson is engaged to be married.”

“Miss Emerson?” ejaculated Letty in astonishment. “How perfectly killing! Whoever would have expected it of her? Who is the lucky man, and how did it happen?”

“I think Violet and I are responsible, or at least partly so,” laughed her mother, “and Max did the rest.”

“Max! With his ‘bonny brays’? I can see there’s a story, Aunt Mary, so please hurry and give it to us.”

“It is not much of a story, but rather amusing. Miss Emerson and Violet-Mary were out with Max one day as usual, and as usual he turned balky and refused to budge. He had stopped directly across the highroad and was blocking the traffic. Such a nice young man came by—enter the hero, Henry Bronson—in his runabout. Or rather, he did not come by, for he could not. Max was stopping the road as effectually as a steam roller.

“Several other motorists had stopped, too, in various stages of amusement and rage, and they were all giving advice, but to no avail. Mr. Bronson took in the situation, tried one or two well-known remedies without results, and then used his invention. Producing a

rope, he harnessed Max up in some mysterious way, so that pressure would be brought to bear upon Max's shoulders and forelegs. Then, if you please, he attached the other end of the rope to his car, cranked up and started off. His intention was to tow the recalcitrant Max.

"You may be sure that by this time he had a large, interested audience. Miss Emerson and Violet, who, under Mr. Bronson's direction, had remained in the donkey cart, said they nearly died of embarrassment. Max was a little bothered by the proceedings, which he evidently did not understand, and when he began to experience that slow, steadily increasing, propelling force in his front legs, his astonishment, Miss Emerson said, was really human. Planting his feet more firmly on the road, Max opened his mouth and gave utterance to the most profane, indignant brays of protest and defiance that it has ever been the necessity of donkey to utter. But the influence of the motor, like the progress of civilization, was not to be resisted, and to his intense chagrin, poor Max was for once forced to go whether he wished or not.

"The ruse was completely successful; in-

deed, too much so, for ever since, whenever a motor blows directly behind Max, he bolts, as if in terror of a second period of humiliation."

"And how about Mr. Bronson?" asked Letty when the laughter had subsided.

"They were nearly home by the time Max's power of resistance was finally overcome, and of course Miss Emerson and Violet insisted upon his coming in to have some tea and be thanked by me, and—he has been coming in pretty often ever since. He is a nice young man, practices medicine in Spring Lake, with rather a large summer practice, and I think Miss Emerson will be happy.

"But of course this ends her term as Violet's governess, and we must make other arrangements. I think Violet is strong enough now to go to school, but there is none in Lakewood, and we are thinking of going elsewhere. Letty mine, what would you say to Princeton?"

Letty was so surprised at this suggestion that she could say nothing for the moment. Mr. Jack, too, seemed rather taken aback by the proposal. But Mrs. Somers was all approval.

“What an excellent idea,” she exclaimed. “The air of Princeton is very good, and there is a splendid school there. You will be almost as near to us as in Lakewood, and I think you will find more congenial friends there. What will Letty do? Continue her course in the Conservatory and go to you for week-ends?”

“That will all have to be discussed and decided upon. I wish there was a teacher in Princeton advanced enough to take Letty, so that I could have her with me again,” answered Mrs. Hartwell-Jones wistfully, stroking her daughter’s hair tenderly, as she sat on her accustomed stool. “It is hard to be separated, isn’t it, dear?”

“Oh, Aunt Mary, I wish I could stay with you, wherever you are. I hate to be so far away from you!”

“It is amusing to hear you two talk of being ‘so far away’ from each other,” commented Mr. Jack with a sad little smile.

“Don’t, Jack,” exclaimed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones softly, knowing well upon what his thoughts were dwelling. “Your going away is one fact which I have not yet had courage to face. How about you, Ellen? You are

always so brave that when the time comes you are the one who will have to help all the rest of us."

"I'll try, you may be sure," responded Mrs. Somers huskily. "It is such a splendid opportunity for Jack that we must all look at his going from that point of view," and she patted her brother's hand affectionately.

The conversation drifted to other topics and Mrs. Somers described the progress Mamie Prescott was making since her operation.

"We are all watching the case with intensest curiosity, of course," said Mrs. Somers, "and when she goes to Hammersmith, Mrs. Parsons has promised to write detailed reports."

"Perhaps I can help you in that respect," Mrs. Hartwell-Jones said unexpectedly. "I am thinking of summering in Hammersmith again."

"In Hammersmith!" echoed Letty in astonishment. "Why, Aunt Mary, when did that idea occur to you? A second surprise sprung on us in one evening."

"I have been thinking it over for some time. There is a tiny cottage to rent, on a

pretty lane near Sunnycrest, where I think we could be very comfortable and happy," she replied quietly. "I have been waiting for an opportunity to talk the scheme over with you."

Instead, she discussed it with Mrs. Somers and her brother, while Letty listened in secret dismay. She had counted on another happy, gay summer at Sea Side, with her friends and acquaintances about her, and the Beckwiths' big summer home, with its never ending entertainment, close at hand. And instead, they were to go to Hammersmith—that poky little country village with not a soul to talk to except the simple villagers!

There was a time when Hammersmith had been very like heaven to Letty Grey, a lonely, unhappy waif tossed by the rough waters of Chance into that quiet, kindly haven. But time had changed her outlook, and it must be confessed that the present prospect made Letty rebellious and a trifle sulky.

CHAPTER XIX

A MOTOR RIDE

MRS. HUNTINGTON, to express her appreciation of the kindness and hospitality Mrs. Perkins had shown Leila and the other girls, went very promptly to call upon that good lady, and was sorry not to find her at home.

Mrs. Perkins was still more disappointed to have missed the visit, and returned it very promptly. Mrs. Huntington and Leila were both at home, and the whole story of the escape from the tramp had to be gone over in detail. Mrs. Perkins had told the tale many times, to her intimate friends and neighbors, but it was infinitely more exciting to rehearse it with one of those who had gone through the experience.

Then the conversation turned to the party she had suggested giving.

“My heart is just set on that party,” she

declared, "and I do hope you are going to let your daughter and her friends come, Mrs. Huntington?"

"It seems like an imposition," Mrs. Huntington remonstrated.

"Imposition, ma'am? It'll be a kindness; it surely will. It did my heart good to be of assistance to all the damsels in distress, and I hope you are goin' to let 'em come again and bring a little brightness into my life."

"Why don't you move into town?" suggested Mrs. Huntington.

"Well, I did think something of it, but I'm kind of sot in my ways, I reckon. You see I own this house I live in, and I've lived there a considerable period. But about my party, you're going to let your daughter come," she added coaxingly, "and bring all her friends?"

"It is very kind of you," repeated Mrs. Huntington, "and I am sure Leila will be very glad to go."

"Well, then, let's talk business. Miss Leila, you'll have to make out the list, and help me send the invitations, you know, because I don't know the young people—least-ways by name. Some of 'em I know by sight,

watchin' them go by the house," she concluded wistfully.

Mrs. Huntington sighed sympathetically. It was such a pathetic picture, the lonely old woman looking on at the gay procession of youth and feeling shut off from it all—a stranger.

"I had one idea," Mrs. Perkins resumed eagerly, "if you think she would condescend. You said one of the young ladies was from New York, only visiting you. I've thought a lot about that, and know how little folks make nowadays of a trip to New York, and I was wonderin' if your friend could be persuaded to bring some of her New York friends to my party—a lot of 'em! Why, if I was to have people from New York to my party I—why, it would give me something to think about for *years!*"

"What a perfectly jolly idea," cried Leila, carried away by the new scheme. "Oh, mother, wouldn't that be fun! You've been meaning, all spring, to invite Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Violet here for the week-end, and now is the time. They can stay with us, and go to Mrs. Perkins's party. And I am sure

Letty would like to ask some of the Beckwiths. Mr. Jack Beckwith, that she talks about so much, is going out West to live, you know, and it would be nice to have him. You must give him a letter to Aunt Elizabeth, by the way, and Mary Beckwith and ——”

“Stop, stop, Leila dear! Don’t impose so upon Mrs. Perkins’s hospitality.”

But Mrs. Perkins was beaming.

“Go on, go on,” she cried; “this is just perfectly lovely.”

“Of course I don’t know that they can all come,” amended Leila, “but they are all dear friends of Letty Grey’s. And, Mother, don’t you think it would be nice to have Mademoiselle La Grange? She has not been here for so long.”

Mrs. Perkins clasped her hands in ecstasy.

“A French lady too! Oh, ain’t this grand!”

Mrs. Huntington saw the uselessness of trying to interfere, so she sat by with her knitting while Mrs. Perkins and Leila made out the list.

“It’ll be a chicken dinner, just as I said,” concluded Mrs. Perkins, “because chicken

dinners is my specialty, as the cook-books say. And afterward you can all dance, on the porch—piazza, I mean—if it's a fine night, or else in the house. My brother-in-law up to Rocky Hill 'll lend me his Victor. Now, I'll leave the night to you, Miss Leila—a Saturday night would be best, you say? And you write to Miss Grey and find out what Saturday night suits her best. The city people generally has the most engagements, and need to be consulted first," she added to Mrs. Huntington, proud of her knowledge of the world. "My land, I've stayed a long time. I hope I didn't wear out my welcome? You'll write to your friend and let me know, Miss Leila?"

"I'll write this very minute," responded the enthusiastic Leila, "and let us not tell the boys and girls here anything about the party until you send out the invitations, Mrs. Perkins. Only I'll tell them all to hold all their Saturday evenings open for a while. Mrs. Perkins, you are just bully, and I'm glad the tramp chased us to your house!"

Mrs. Perkins smiled delightedly, and reverted to her book vocabulary.

“It reminds me of the old saying—how true it is!—that ‘it’s an ill wind that blows nobody good.’ You can just telephone me, Miss Leila, as soon as you hear. Good-afternoon—I’m afraid I ought to say ‘good-evening,’ I’ve stayed so long.”

Leila sent off her letter to Letty by that night’s mail, and the latter found it waiting for her when she got home from the Conservatory the next afternoon. She read it aloud to Mademoiselle who was quite excited over being included, and they discussed the possibility of Mrs. Hartwell-Jones’s accepting.

“We ought to know soon,” Letty reflected, “so as not to keep Mrs. Perkins waiting to set the date of her party. I really think the matter is important enough, Mademoiselle, to justify a long-distance telephone call to Lakewood. This is a very good hour to find them home, too.”

While the call was being put through, who should come in but Mrs. Somers and Mr. Jack Beckwith, and they were immediately acquainted with the invitation that had been extended to them. Mr. Jack was immensely taken with the idea and, as usual, had formed

a very delightful plan of carrying it out while Letty talked to her mother.

Indeed, the project appeared to meet with general good favor. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was most anxious to meet Mrs. Huntington, from whom Letty had received so much kindness, and Violet was delighted with the prospect of a holiday.

"Now," said Mr. Jack, when Letty had hung up the telephone and reported Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's acceptance of the invitation, "this is my proposal. You remember that I suggested, some time ago, that you and I motor down to Lakewood and capture your Aunt Mary and Violet for a holiday? Well, as my time is getting rather short, and I may not be able to squeeze in two week-ends, let us combine. You, Mademoiselle and I will motor down to Lakewood, collect Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Violet, and all go on to Princeton together."

"What glorious fun that would be," exclaimed Letty, delighted. "But how about you, Mrs. Somers? You are invited too, you know," and she referred to Leila's note.

"I am sorry, dear, but I am already engaged

for the week-end. Mary and I have promised to go with mother to visit a dear old aunt at Greenwich. But it all sounds most attractive, and I wish I could meet your new friend, Mrs. Perkins. She must be quite a character."

"She is. She talks for all the world like a 'Duchess' novel—except when she forgets. Isn't it nice of her to give us this party?"

"Ellen and I will go now," said Mr. Jack, rising, "so that you can answer Leila's note at once. I'll stop in again to make definite arrangements. You won't mind the motoring, Mademoiselle?"

"Ah, I get so little of it, it is the most wonderful of treats to me, Mr. Beckwith," replied the little French woman ardently. "I could live and die in a motor."

"Good for you; that's fine sporting blood. Au revoir, and beseech the weather man for a fine day."

The weather man must have turned an attentive ear to the various pleas that went out to him, for Saturday dawned, a day of splendor, warm enough to make motoring a joy, yet not hot enough to make one dull or languorous. Letty's heart leaped with eager anticipa-

tion and she hurried through her dressing to the accompaniment of a little song beginning:

“Oh, my heart, my heart! To be out in the woods and sing!”

Mr. Jack Beckwith was to call for Mademoiselle and Letty promptly at half-past nine in order to reach Lakewood in time for the one o'clock lunch, and Letty skimmed hastily through her practicing in order to be ready on time. She was ready, and Katy had delivered the two dress suit cases to the elevator boy to be taken down-stairs. Mr. Jack arrived on the stroke of the half hour and five minutes later Mademoiselle hurried in, returning from an early lesson she had had to give. They started off in as high spirits as the day deserved, and nobody minded when they missed the Staten Island ferry, although Mademoiselle murmured something about it being her fault.

“Nobody's fault—just the fortune of motor-ing,” declared Jack Beckwith gayly. “As a matter of fact, it was that traffic policeman's fault for holding us back at the corner. This is why I allowed plenty of time for the run, you see.”

Mademoiselle La Grange kept up her end of the conversation very creditably during the two ferry crossings and the run across the island, for she dearly loved a real holiday, as she expressed it; when she could throw off entirely her "teacher" dignity, and chatter nonsense. But when they quitted Perth Amboy she threw the burden of entertainment upon Letty's shoulders, declaring that she wished to be quiet and enjoy thoroughly the sheer bliss of motion.

"Letty," said Mr. Jack after a slight pause, "do you realize that the time is growing very short? Charlie Sheldon started off for his new life in the West last night, and I am to follow within a fortnight."

"So soon! Oh, Mr. Jack, I can't bear to think of it."

"You'll soon get used to the idea. But remember that you have promised not to forget me."

"As if I could! And how Aunt Mary will miss you! She hasn't any one else to go to for advice."

"Ah, Letty, you are rubbing it in very much."

"Whatever do you mean?" demanded Letty, wide-eyed, and wondering for a breathless second if Mr. Jack had proposed to her mother and been refused.

"I mean that you make me feel so old—so very grown-up. You know that is the real reason why I hesitated to take this position. I thought my father ought to send a younger man."

"How ridiculously you talk! As if you were sixty. Why, you aren't old at all, Mr. Jack."

"That is the biggest compliment you have paid me for some time, little Miss Grey, but it does not entirely lift my melancholy. I have a suspicion that I am not growing down to you, but that you are growing up to me. Before so many years we shall be exactly the same age."

"I thought that rule worked quite the opposite," returned Letty demurely. "A girl and boy who start the same age generally come out quite uneven at the end of ten years, with the girl behind."

Mr. Jack laughed.

"It is a poor rule that does not work both

ways—sometimes, at least. But you'll admit that I do do a childish thing now and then—take the wishing on of your jade bracelet, for instance.”

Letty flushed as instinctively she felt of the carved green band. But she did not confess her secret scorn of that form of childishness, nor the private discomfort it had given her. If Mr. Jack had enjoyed the nonsense, she ought to be content.

“As I shall be gone before the end of the term, we'd better take the bracelet off. Not just yet,” he added hastily, as Letty made a gesture; “wait until I haven't both hands full of motor, for I should like to replace the clumsy thing with something a bit more convenient to wear. But, Letty, I want to ask a favor of you—and the other youngsters. At Mrs. Perkins's party I want, in the words of the poet, to ‘be a boy again, just for to-night.’”

“What fun! If any one proposes ‘stunts’ at the table, you will have to do one, too, you know. And will you open the ball with me afterward? For Leila wrote that we are to dance after supper on Mrs. Perkins's porch. Won't it be heavenly?”

"It will, weather and all. You generally are lucky about weather, Letty."

"I am a very lucky girl, all over, only I don't half appreciate my good fortune," replied Letty with a little sigh. As she spoke, she turned to see how Mademoiselle was enjoying the drive, and if she felt left out of the conversation. "Oh," she exclaimed softly, "Mademoiselle is asleep. Think of wasting this glorious day on a nap!"

"She is probably tired out and the movement through the open air is the most restful thing she has experienced for some time. Let her sleep and she will enjoy the rest of the day much better."

Quite willing to take this advice, Letty straightened herself in her seat and she and Mr. Jack enjoyed a thoroughly confidential talk until Lakewood was reached.

There everything was excitement. Mademoiselle was as gay and lively as either of the girls, after her cozy nap in the tonneau, and kept every one laughing during lunch with accounts of stupid or inattentive pupils. Miss Emerson was not to be outdone in relating absurd experiences, and every one was as-

tonished at the lateness of the hour when they finally rose from the table.

When at length the two other dress suit cases had been strapped on, and every one tucked into the motor, Miss Emerson waved them a blithe good-bye. She was to have a few days holiday to buy wedding clothes, and Violet and Letty cast more than one curious, wistful glance in her direction, speculating half idly upon how it felt to be going to be married!

"Let's play 'roadside cribbage,'" suggested Violet as they left the town behind. "Miss Emerson and I have such fun doing it when we are out with Max. We have to have something to do to pass the time away."

"And are you likening my speed to Max's?" demanded Mr. Jack severely, at the same time opening his throttle.

"Oh, no, no; please slow down. I didn't mean it, truly," gasped Violet breathlessly.

"Served you right," chaffed Letty, as the motor slowed down again to normal.

"What is 'roadside cribbage'?" asked Mademoiselle curiously.

"Why, we take different sides of the road. Mother and Mr. Jack have the right, and you

and Letty the left. As I'm in the middle, I'll choose a side, and will take right, too, because Mr. Jack can't keep such a good lookout as the rest of us. And for that reason I think his counts should be doubled. We must keep a lookout for four-footed animals, each party on its own side, of course. Chickens aren't allowed, because there are always so many. Men count one; ordinary things, like horses, cows and dogs, two; a white horse twenty, and a cat in a window fifty. Two—four, for me. Those cows over there in the field, you see."

The game created much diversion, and Mr. Jack, in spite of being able to give divided attention, was the only one to see a cat in a window. Princeton was reached remarkably soon, but although their start had been prompt and progress rapid, Leila declared she had almost given them up.

"I was sure you had blown out a tire at the very least," she said. "Here come all the boys and girls, crazy to meet Violet. I think they've been waiting around the corner ever since lunch time."

Letty laughed and ran forward to greet the



“ I SUPPOSE THERE’S SOMETHING MORE ”

small crowd of young people, who tried to pretend that they just happened to be passing. Introductions followed and every one proceeded in a bunch to the house, where Mrs. Huntington stood waiting patiently to welcome her guests.

“Mr. Jack,” said Letty, “this is Ross Gilchrist, of whom you have heard me speak. Ross, Mr. Jack is going to adopt your country.”

“How do you do—Mr. Jack,” said Ross, heartily, holding out his hand, and looking Mr. Jack straight in the eyes. “I suppose there’s something more to the name, but that’s all Letty gave me for a handle.”

“That is all that is necessary, for all practical purposes. I was just telling Letty that I refuse to be shelved or reminded of my gray hairs.”

They all laughed and walked up the path, but it was very evident that Mr. Jack and Ross were sizing each other up, as the boy expressed it. It was equally evident that the operation was satisfactory to both concerned.

“Oh, Letty, we’re so glad to see you,” exclaimed Alice heartily. “Isn’t it all jolly!

And whoever would have supposed that our adventure with the tramp should have ended like this? Mrs. Perkins is decorating her place 'perfectly elegant,' as she says herself. And what do you suppose gloomy Claudia thinks — Oh, I'm going to tell ; you can't keep me," as Claudia ran forward and clapped a firm hand across her mouth. "She said—she told Louise that she believed—believed we got up that adventure—just for—for notoriety, and that—Leila and I make—make very queer —"

"Oh, Alice, hush, please," cried Claudia, quite red in the face from mingled confusion and the effort to keep her hand over Alice's mouth. "I don't think it very nice to repeat my confidences to another girl, in order to make me appear ridiculous," she added indignantly.

"Confidences, were they? Then you should not have made them over an ice-cream table, where you could be heard around the partition," retorted Alice good-naturedly. "So long as everybody sees the impossibility of any cooked-up scheme with the tramp, and you accept our 'queer friends,' we don't mind,

do we, girls? Claudia's promised to go to Mrs. Perkins's party to-night with the rest of the crowd."

Every one smiled at Claudia's embarrassment, Letty included. But another overheard conversation flashed through her mind, and she wondered if Claudia had not included Letty herself among Leila's "queer friends."

"I promised Aunt Mary I would make matters right between me and Claudia," she thought, "and to-night will be the very chance. I shall tell her to-night."

CHAPTER XX

CONCLUSION

MRS. PERKINS had worked very hard over the preparations for her party, but it was a work of love. It was the first real diversion she had had for years, and she threw herself heart and soul into the work.

"I do declare, Mamie," Mrs. Perkins observed as the two sat resting after the last of the lanterns had been fastened in place with candles ready for lighting, "you've grown into a real handy young woman. And you're gettin' to favor yer Ma, too," she added, surveying the comely young face critically. "I don't reckon you remember yer Ma, you were such a mite when she died."

"I was eight, and the twins two," her niece replied simply. "I remember her real well. I wish ——"

As she did not finish the "wish," Mrs. Perkins took it up for her.

"I know what I wish—that yer Pa had

somebody to look after him and Carry and the twins, so't I could have you here to live with me, Mamie. It would be real comp'ny for me."

Mamie gasped, giggled, started to speak and choked with a most unexpected sob.

"Oh, Aunt Kate," she exclaimed, "I'm afraid there is goin' to be some one to take my place at home; leastwise, I don't know whether I'm glad or sorry."

"Mamie! You don't mean yer Pa's thinkin' of marryin' again?"

Mamie nodded.

"Who is she? Do I know her?"

"I don't know. She's that widow we stopped to see on the way to the Fair last fall, down on the Trenton road, Mrs. Lawton."

"Well, I want to know! I am surprised!"

"Oh, it's all right. I like her, an' she'll be good to the children, only—only I don't know how it'll feel to have somebody else there bossin'."

"Well, now, I call that real providential," ejaculated Mrs. Perkins. "The children do need a mother over 'em, an' you need more freedom an' good times 'n you be'n gettin'."

And yer Pa needs a companion, likewise counselor. Which leaves you free to come to me. Would you like it, Mamie?"

Mamie beamed.

"I'd just love it," she replied enthusiastically, "only please don't say anything to Pa yet a while. There ain't nothin' settled, you know."

They grew so absorbed in discussing the new project and all its possibilities that they lost track of the time. Mrs. Perkins came to herself with a start.

"My land, I'd meant to rest for a minute, and I guess we've be'n sittin' here 'most an hour. It's time to set the table, Mamie. Won't it be a 'gay and festive board'?"

Mrs. Huntington had feared to overtax Mrs. Perkins's room and powers, and had suggested that the grown-ups dine at her house, and come out afterward to watch the dancing, leaving the twenty young people to eat the much-talked-of chicken dinner. Mrs. Huntington thought that if this arrangement were carried out, Mrs. Perkins would not feel obliged to set a formal dinner table, but would serve the boys and girls a buffet supper.

But Mrs. Perkins would not hear of any change. Her old-fashioned dining-room was plenty big enough, she assured Mrs. Huntington, and she was having the time of her life.

Every one arrived promptly. The girls had had the idea of dressing the part of a country party by wearing gingham dresses and sunbonnets, but Mrs. Huntington had said that as Mrs. Perkins was offering her best to them, they must return the compliment, so they were all arrayed in their very best. Mrs. Perkins, in an antiquated black silk, trimmed with bugles, was beaming, and fairly radiated hospitality.

As Mrs. Hartwell-Jones looked about her at the big, brightly-lighted rooms, and out upon the deep, picturesque orchard at the back, a sudden idea came to her. She recollected Mrs. Perkins's complaints of the loneliness of her life, and the willingness to take boarders if she had been near enough to the town, and considered the future.

The dinner was a wonder. There was not only the chicken and waffles which Mrs. Perkins had promised, but almost every variety of meat, vegetable and dessert one could think of, from sausage to mince pie. It made Letty

think of one of Huldah's feasts at Sunnycrest long ago.

"Mince pie after those waffles!" cried Mr. Jack with a groan. "My dear Mrs. Perkins, why did you not warn us? But I cannot pass by such a joy."

"I think you'll like it, sir; it is home-made."

"I have no doubt of that. I am only wondering how my doctor will diagnose the case."

"Well, it is better to eat too much of a thing you like than to have to eat something you don't like," observed Claudia. "Haven't you all heard the story of the newspaper reporter who interviewed a famous actor? He asked him: 'And what do you find the most difficult part of your new play?' To which the actor replied: 'Having to eat a banana in the last act.'"

Letty looked across the table quickly. She had promised her Aunt Mary that upon her next visit to Princeton she would set herself right in Claudia's eyes. Letty preferred an open acknowledgment rather than private explanations, and here she saw her opening.

"That puts me in mind," she began, as soon

as the laughter had subsided, "of something that happened when I was in Mr. Drake's circus."

There was a general pause, and a look of surprised uncertainty, almost of awkwardness on the part of those who did not know, swept around the table. Claudia Thorpe grew very red, coughed suddenly, as if she had swallowed a crumb, and took refuge in a glass of water.

Mrs. Perkins saved the situation. Her astonishment was genuine and outspoken. She recovered the dish which her start of amazement had caused her nearly to drop, stared at Letty a few seconds and then ejaculated:

"In a circus! My land, what won't you New Yorkers think of doin' next!"

"But I wasn't a New Yorker then," explained Letty as soon as her voice could be heard above the shouts and screams of laughter. "I lived in Philadelphia and was a very little girl. My father, who was a professor at the University, died, and he did not leave us much money. My big brother Ben and I had to do what we could to earn enough to take care of our dear sick mother."

It cost Letty an effort to make this little speech, bring up her past and spread it out before all these new friends; to make herself the center of attention—perhaps of criticism and even ridicule; but she had made it bravely, and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones smiled understandingly upon her from the other end of the table.

“Shall we get up? Every one seems to have finished,” murmured that lady aside to Mrs. Huntington, who took the hint and rose at once.

Every one appeared to have forgotten the anecdote which Letty's remarks had prefaced. The boys and girls crowded around her eagerly.

“Oh, Letty, Letty Grey, how perfectly thrilling and interesting!” they cried. “Do tell us all about it, please, please!”

“Some time, if you really want to hear, but isn't there something we can do now to help Mrs. Perkins?”

But Mrs. Perkins refused flatly to let any of her young ladies “perform a menial task.” She had a woman in the kitchen, she said, to help Mamie with the dishes and while the young people danced or walked in the orchard, she could tidy up in a jiffy.

The boys ran out with matches to light the lanterns, which bobbed and flickered and shone among the apple trees like the fruits of jewels in Aladdin's garden. Every one had enjoyed Mrs. Perkins's feast too thoroughly to feel like dancing just yet, and they stood about in groups, or took Mrs. Perkins's hint and strolled down to the orchard.

Claudia seized the opportunity of a moment when Letty was standing alone to go up to her with outstretched hand.

"Letty, I want to apologize," she said frankly. "I have been thinking some rather horrid things about you lately—and have said them too, I am afraid, to a few intimates—and I am sorry."

"I know you have said them," Letty replied with equal frankness, "and that is really why I said what I did to-night. I did not want you or any one to think I was ashamed of anything."

"How do you know I said them?" asked Claudia uncomfortably, wondering indignantly if Ross had betrayed her confidence.

Letty related the conversation she had overheard on the train several weeks before, and

how angry and resentful she had felt against Claudia.

"I felt hurt and sore," she confessed, "and mad, too, mad as hops at your talking about me so behind my back. I did not intend ever to set you right, but Aunt Mary said that was not the right spirit."

"I know it was mean of me, Letty, and I wonder if you'll ever forgive me? But I was hurt and sore, too. And I said things, as you express it, to those other girls, simply because I had to let off steam, so to speak, and I didn't want to say anything to any of your friends here. I thought I was safe in expressing my private opinions to friends who I knew would never tell—that is, mean to tell."

"I suppose I should not have eavesdropped, but I didn't know they were talking about me at first, and afterward—I guess I was too mad to care."

"Well, it's all square now, isn't it?" asked Claudia, holding out her hand again. "You behaved splendidly to-night, and I want you for a really-truly friend—even if you do win all the boys and make me frightfully jealous," she added mischievously.

“Who’s talking of jealousy?” demanded Ross, joining them. “Let’s start the phonograph and have some dancing, shall we? I say, Letty, your friend Mr. Beckwith is a dandy. I’ve been having a long, heart to heart talk with him. He’s going to get acquainted with my father out West, and he’s given me the job of making you fall in love with our big country out there. Let’s see what records there are.”

“I have already investigated,” Claudia replied, “and there is a rollicking jig. Don’t you think it would be fun to begin with a Virginia reel, Ross?”

“Perfect! Hi, boys and girls, come along, all of you. Choose partners for a good old-fashioned Virginia reel.”

Every one fell into the spirit of the dance. Mr. Huntington led out Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, and Mr. Jack took Mrs. Huntington. Mademoiselle La Grange professed too great ignorance to try, but Jack Lenox insisted and escorted her to a place. To her great delight, Mrs. Perkins was invited by several, but laughingly declined. However, one audacious youth penetrated to the kitchen and brought forth

the blushing and excited Mamie, who had put on a white dress and blue sash underneath an enveloping blue gingham apron, just to feel party-like.

The Virginia reel was a screaming success, and record after record of dance music was played for their nimble feet. They danced until the candles in the Japanese lanterns burned out, and gave the moonlight a better chance, when the elders found the peaceful outlook so delightful that they forgot to suggest going home. And then when it did occur to Mrs. Huntington that the hour was waxing late, Mrs. Perkins and Mamie served home-made cake and ice-cream.

"Oh, how good!" exclaimed Gwendoline Bennett. "When I got up from the dinner table I was absolutely convinced that I could not eat again for a month, and yet here I am, gorging."

"This ice-cream makes me feel so frisky that I could keep it up all night," declared Ross. "Say, girls, let's make a night of it—dance until daybreak and stay for breakfast."

"The musicians would not get tired," laughed Leila, "but our chaperones might."

“And your hostess,” added Mrs. Huntington.

“I’d be more’n delighted to have you,” exclaimed the excited Mrs. Perkins, “and I’d give you flapjacks and maple syrup for breakfast—only,” she added regretfully, “it’ll be Sunday morning and I’m afraid your folks wouldn’t think it seemly to dance all of Saturday night.”

“I can speak for them all very positively,” interposed Mrs. Huntington again, “and I am sure they would not think it at all seemly.”

“Mother, you are like the Greek chorus in the old plays,” laughed Leila. “Of course we didn’t expect to stay. Ross was only joking.”

“Not joking at all. We’re having such a good time, we don’t want it to end. Mrs. Perkins must have had lotuses for dinner. She has made us forget time and our homes.”

“I’m real pleased that you’ve all enjoyed it,” replied Mrs. Perkins, vainly trying to remember what she had heard about lotuses and whether they were a fruit or a vegetable, “and I hope you’ll all come again, soon and often, now that you’ve found the way.”

"Is that a speech of dismissal?" asked Ross meekly, "or may we sing a song or two? This moonlight is truly irresistible."

"Oh, yes, let's sing some college songs," exclaimed Claudia. "Sitting here on the steps. Come, Letty, you sit here beside me and lead us."

"I don't want to be a wet-blanket," Mrs. Hartwell-Jones interrupted, "but, I am very sorry to say, Letty's doctor has positively forbidden her to sing out-of-doors. I am sorry, but she will enjoy listening with us, won't you, dear?" she asked, drawing Letty to her side.

The young people gathered in a group on the steps in the moonlight, and sang the dear, melodious, familiar songs they all loved. They were accustomed to singing together and their fresh young voices made a pleasing harmony in the spring night. Letty listened quietly, perched on the arm of her precious Aunt Mary's chair, and the peace and beauty of the night entered into her soul. She was thankful she had taken her mother's advice about telling Claudia the history of her little girlhood, and that they were friends again.

The laziness and irritability of the past months slipped from her. She felt strong and brave and eager, ready to face the battle of life.

She fell into a reverie from which Mr. Jack roused her presently by tapping her arm and beckoning. She tiptoed softly to the other end of the veranda in his lead. The moon shone brilliantly, and the voices of the singers came to them softly across the sweet spring air.

“I thought you would not mind giving me a few minutes, Letty,” Mr. Jack said, “as this is likely to be about the last ‘spree’ we shall have together for some time. We have had some very jolly times together, first and last, haven’t we, little Miss Grey, and we will have the precious memory of them always.”

“Oh, I hate to think of good times ending,” cried Letty with a little catch in her voice, “but I suppose one can’t always be playing. The world seems a pretty big, workaday place, Mr. Jack.”

“And all the better for us. Work is the only thing that makes life worth while, and our good times are tonicky little holidays.

The chief thing that matters is the spirit we take to our work. If we have faith in ourselves and in our friends,—but there, I didn't mean to preach."

"Please go on. What you say always helps me."

He shook his head, smiling.

"I refuse to leave you with the impression that I am a preachy middle-aged gentleman with your ultimate good at heart, like the 'heavy father' in the old plays. Remember what I said this afternoon. Your friends here have been so nice to me, and have treated me so completely as one of themselves that I am positively rejuvenated. I like Ross Gilchrist," he added positively. "He has the making in him of a man."

They fell into a short reverie, from which Mr. Jack roused himself with a faint sigh.

"Speaking of this afternoon," he said, "suppose we transact the business of the jade bracelet."

Letty lifted her hand with a start and glanced at the quaint carved band gleaming on her wrist.

"I declare," she said with a tearful little

laugh, "now that the time comes, I can't bear the thought of taking it off, Mr. Jack."

"Perhaps if it is replaced by something else you may not miss it so much," he suggested, and took a small box out of his pocket.

Letty fingered the bracelet reluctantly. It was like giving up an old habit to remove it.

"Shall I take it off? Here goes. Shut your eyes and the operation won't seem so dreadful," he laughed, and taking her hand in one of his, with the other gently slipped the bracelet off over her slim fingers.

Then he took up the small box he had laid on the balustrade and placed it in both of Letty's own, closing her hands over it.

"Open it," he commanded.

Letty breathlessly obeyed. The wrappings revealed a white pasteboard box which in turn disclosed a small leather case. Pressing the spring Letty's eyes fell upon a tiny gold watch, attached to a linked bracelet.

"A wrist watch!" she ejaculated in a hushed voice. "What I have wanted more than anything in this world. I can't believe it possible that it is really for me!"

"It really and truly is, and now you see you

can never forget me," he replied solemnly, but with twinkling eyes, "for I shall be ticking myself out at you every second. You will have to remember me, whether you want to or not, at every hour of the day."

Letty laughed tremulously.

"It is a perfect keepsake! You are too good to me, Mr. Jack."

"Not too good, I hope. Here, let me put it on."

He slipped the bracelet over her hand and smiled into her misty eyes. Neither of them thought to mention the wish that had held the jade band in place all these months. But Mr. Jack said gently, as he put the dainty watch into place:

"I can't wish this on, since you must take it off at least every night to wind it. But I have a wish to go with it, little Miss Grey."

"Tell it to me, Mr. Jack, and I promise you it shall come true, if I can make it."

"You can, I think, if you keep your heart and soul young. The world is very big, sometimes indifferent and hard, and often cruel. Don't let it break you, Letty dear, or even embitter you. The youth of the heart will help to

carry one over the hardest places. And my wish for you is that, though there may come showers and even storms, that all your life may be springtime, Letty Gray."

The Stories in this Series are:

LETTY OF THE CIRCUS

LETTY AND THE TWINS

LETTY'S NEW HOME

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LETTY'S TREASURE

LETTY'S GOOD LUCK

LETTY AT THE CONSERVATORY

LETTY'S SPRINGTIME

HELEN SHERMAN GRIFFITH



HELLEN SHERMAN GRIFFITH was born in Des Moines, Iowa, the youngest daughter of Major Hoyt Sherman, and a niece of General Sherman. She now lives in Chestnut Hill, a suburb of Philadelphia. Her first story, at the age of ten (written with a pencil stub while reclining prone on the grass with

her legs waving skyward, like her ambition), was called "The Lost Evangeline" and concerned an abducted Princess. This fondness in her extreme youth for magnificent nomenclature has finally resulted in "Jane" and "Mary" being her favorite names, for heroines.

When she was twelve a local paper published a short story of hers and at the age of fourteen she won a prize of fifty dollars. She has written chiefly for girls, with occasional inroads upon the field of short stories of which a novelette "Incognito" that appeared in Lippincott's might be termed a long one. Twenty-four plays constitute her effort in the dramatic line with—the secret ambition of all writers—hope of more to follow.

Her juvenile books number nine. One novel, "Rosemary for Remembrance", may be added to the list which, to the author's private chagrin, was recently classed along with the juvenile.

Among her favorite authors are Dickens, Trollope and Jane Austen. Her books for girls are:

- Her Father's Legacy
- Her Wilful Way
- Letty of the Circus
- Letty and the Twins
- Letty's New Home
- Letty's Sister
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