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ELIZABETH M. DUFFIELD



TREDITION CLASSICS

Lucile Triumphant

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Title: Lucile Triumphant

Author: Elizabeth M. Duffield

Release date: December 28, 2008 [eBook #27643]
Most recently updated: February 1, 2009

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/27643

Credits: Produced by Roger Frank, Darleen Dove and the Online
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LUCILE TRIUMPHANT ***

LUCILE
TRIUMPHANT

BY

ELIZABETH M. DUFFIELD
AUTHOR OF
"LUCILE ON THE HEIGHTS," "LUCILE, BRINGER OF JOY,"
"LUCILE, THE TORCH BEARER"

WHITMAN PUBLISHING CO.
RACINE, WISCONSIN

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Printed and Published
By
Western Printing & Lithographing Company
Racine, Wisconsin

Printed in U. S. A.

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Transcriber's Notes:

The Table of Contents was not present in the original publication.

Archaic and variable spelling has been preserved as printed, along w
author's punctuation style, except as noted in the text with a dotted
the correction. Hover the mouse over the word and the original text
appear.

Minor punctuation errors have been corrected without note.

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CHAPTER I

"GREETINGS, FELLOW-TRAVELERS"

The great news was out! Two girls regarded their companion in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Europe!" cried Jessie. "Lucy, will you please say that all over again and say it slowly," she begged leaning forward tensely.

Lucile's eyes danced as she repeated slowly and with great emphasis, "I said just this—Dad is going to Europe and he intends to take me with him."

The girls were incredulous.

"But, wh-when are you going?" stammered Evelyn, dazedly.

"In three weeks at the outside, maybe sooner," Lucile answered, then added, with feigned reproach, "you

don't, either of you, seem a bit glad."

"Oh, we are, we are," they protested, and Evelyn added, "It just took our breath away, that's all."

"Lucile, it's the finest thing that ever happened to you," said Jessie, impulsively throwing her arms about her friend.

The latter returned the embrace with equal fervor, but her eyes were retrospective as she answered, "Oh, it's wonderful, of course, and I haven't even begun to get used to it yet, but I don't think it's any greater than——"

"Oh, I know what you mean," Evelyn broke in. "You mean Mayaro River and Aloea and ranks and things like that——" 8

"Exactly," laughed Lucile, her face flushing with the memory, "and honors and guardians and races and ——"

"Oh, stop her, someone, quick," begged Jessie gayly. "If you don't she'll keep it up all day," then more gravely, "It was wonderful and none of us will ever forget it—but, Lucy, do, oh, do tell us more about Europe before I die of curiosity!"

"Oh, yes, please go on," urged Evelyn; "we want to hear all about how it happened, and just when you're going to start and how long you expect to stay and ——"

"Slow up a little," begged Lucile, in dismay. "I'll tell you everything in time, but I must have time!"

"Come out, time, you're wanted," cried Evelyn, pushing aside the bushes as though in search of the runaway.

"I suppose you think you're funny," sniffed Jessie,

disdainfully. “But I feel obliged to tell you as a friend ——”

“Cease!” commanded Lucile, sternly. “If you don’t stop at once and listen respectfully and attentively to what I have to say, I’ll——”

“Well, what will you do,” Evelyn challenged, with an heroic air of braving the worst. “Tell us, now—what will you do?”

Lucile paused to consider for a moment, then announced, gravely, “There is only one punishment great enough for such a crime——”

“And that——” they breathed.

“That,” repeated Lucile, sternly, “would be to remove the light of my presence——”

“Oh if that’s all you needn’t mind about us,” said Jessie, evidently relieved.

“Go on, Lucy,” urged Evelyn, virtuously. “I won’t interrupt again.” 9

“Better get started before she repents,” advised Jessie.

“Sound advice,” Lucile agreed, ironically, though her eyes snapped with fun. “I don’t see why two people can’t get along without throwing hatchets at each other’s heads all the time. But never mind that,” she added, hastily, seeing signs of more “hatchets.”

“All I have to say is, it isn’t my fault,” murmured Jessie.

“The only way to treat the lower classes is to ignore them absolutely,” Evelyn retorted, turning her back on Jessie. “Now, Lucy, what were you saying?”

“I was *trying* to say something about my trip——”

she began.

“Oh, yes, how long are you going to stay?”

“All summer.”

“Oh, you lucky, lucky girl,” cried Jessie. “You do certainly have the most wonderful luck. Not but what you deserve every bit of it and more,” she added, warmly.

“There’s just one thing in the world on which we both agree,” laughed Evelyn, “and that’s it!”

They looked with fond and justified pride upon the laughing recipient of their praise. From anybody’s point of view, Lucile was good to look upon. Mischief sparkled in her eyes and bubbled over from lips always curved in a merry smile. “Just to look at Lucile is enough to chase away the blues,” Jessie had once declared in a loving eulogy on her friend. “But when you need sympathy, there is no one quicker to give it than Lucy.” From her mass of wind-blown curls to the tips of her neat little tennis shoes she was the spirit incarnate of the sport-loving, fun-seeking summer girl.

Then there was their summer at camp the year before, when Lucile had led them undauntedly and as a matter 10 of course through experiences and dangers that would have dazed the other girls.

And then had come the crowning glory, the climax of their wonderful summer—the race! They felt again the straining of that moment when, with half a length to make up and scant twenty yards from the goal, she had led them in the glorious, madcap dash to victory! From that day on she had reigned supreme in the girls’ warm hearts, and there was not one of them but felt “that nothing was too good for

her."

"Let's be thankful for small blessings," laughed Lucile, referring to Evelyn's last remark. "By the way, girls, have you heard about Margaret?"

"No; what is it?" They were all eager interest at once.

"Why, Judge Stillman called a consultation yesterday and the doctors pronounced Margaret absolutely cured!"

"Hurrah!" cried Jessie, springing up from the rock she had been using as a seat. "We knew she was better, but—oh, say, isn't it great?"

"Rather; but that isn't all," said Lucile. "The Judge insists that we have done it all—and the camp-fire, too, of course."

"Oh, nonsense," Evelyn exclaimed. "It was the woods and the air and the water that did it. That was all she needed."

"Humph, speak for yourself," Jessie interposed. "I admit she could have done without you very well; I could myself, but——"

"Do I hear a gentle murmur as of buzz-saws buzzing?" quoth Evelyn, dreamy eyes fixed on space. "Methinks it grows more rasping of late——"

"For goodness sake, girls, stop it," begged Lucile, despairingly. "If you are going to be like this all summer, 11 how on earth can I take you with me? I don't want to live in a hive of hornets."

"Take us with you?" they cried, bewildered. "What do you mean?" and Jessie added, tragically, "Tell me quickly or I die!"

"Oh, I just thought I might." It was Lucile's turn to

regard the heavens fixedly.

“Lucile, I’d like to shake you. You can be the most exasperating thing at times!” cried Jessie excitedly, and Evelyn, with an inelegance that was none the less forceful, “If you have anything up your sleeve, let’s have it!”

Lucile’s gaze came down to earth abruptly.

“You seem to be in a great hurry,” she protested. “You haven’t given me time yet, you know.”

“Oh, we’ll hunt him up for you some other time,” Evelyn wheedled, and Jessie added, sagely, “We’re only losing him this way, you know;” then added, in desperation, “If you don’t explain right away, you’ll have a corpse on your hands, Lucy.”

“Why, there’s nothing to explain; you are just going, that’s all,” said Lucile, as if the matter were definitely settled.

“Lucy, are you fooling? If you are, I’ll never, never forgive you.” It was Evelyn who spoke, her whole body quivering with excitement.

“No, she’s in earnest; can’t you see? She means, she means——” and Jessie paused before the fateful word.

It was more than Lucile could stand. She jumped up, danced a few joyous and absurd little steps, then turning, made the girls a low bow.

“Greetings, fellow-travelers,” she said.

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CHAPTER II

ECHOES OF THE CAMP-FIRE

“But whatever put it into your head to take us along?” Jessie asked, after the first wild excitement had abated a trifle.

“Well, you see, it was this way,” began Lucile, with the air of one imparting a grave secret. “When Dad came home last night, the first thing he did was to begin asking me a lot of foolish questions—or, at least, they seemed so to me. He started something like this: ‘If you had your choice, what would you want most in the world——’”

“If he had asked me that, I wouldn’t be through yet,” Jessie broke in.

“Never mind her, Lucy,” said Evelyn. “Go on, please.”

“I felt very much that way myself, Jessie,” and Lucile nodded understandingly at the ruffled Jessie. “Well,” she went on, “I began naming over several things, and when I’d finished Dad looked so sad I thought I must have done something terrible, but when I asked him what was the matter he simply shook his head despairingly and sighed, ‘Not there, not there.’”

The girls laughed merrily.

“Oh, I can just see him,” chuckled Evelyn.

“Well, what then?” Jessie urged.

“Oh, I didn’t know what to do,” Lucile continued.

"The more I asked him to explain, the more disconsolate he looked. When I couldn't stand it any longer I left the room, saying if he didn't want to tell me, he needn't. Then, when I got outside the door I could hear him chuckling to himself." 13

"Just like him," again interposed Jessie.

"Well, all the time I knew something was coming. At dinner it came when Dad calmly announced that he was going to Europe on business and that if his family wished—imagine that, *wished*—he might let us go along."

"Oh, my—wished!" murmured Evelyn.

"You should have seen Phil," Lucile went on with her story. "I never saw anyone so dumbfounded. He stopped with a piece of fish halfway to his mouth and gaped at Dad as if he were some curiosity. I must have looked funny, too, for suddenly Dad began to laugh, and he laughed and he laughed till we thought he'd die."

"'You couldn't look more dumbfounded if I had ordered your execution,' he gasped when he could get his breath. 'Of course, I can always make arrangements for you to stay behind.'"

"Oh," breathed the girls in unison, "what did you say?"

"Say? You had better ask what didn't we say. We talked and talked and talked as fast as our tongues would go till after midnight, and we wouldn't have stopped then if mother hadn't shooed us off to bed. Oh, I don't think I was ever so happy in all my life!"

"But where do we come in?" insisted Jessie.

"Right here. You see, I had been so excited and

everything, I hadn't realized what it would mean to leave you girls for the whole summer. I guess Dad saw there was something the matter, for, when I started upstairs, he drew me back and asked me to tell him what was wrong. When I told him I wished you girls were going, too, he surprised me by saying, 'Why not?' For a moment I thought he was joking—he's always doing that, you know—but when I saw he was in sober earnest I could have danced for joy."

"Don't blame you. I'd not only have felt like it; I'd have done it, too," said Evelyn. 14

"Yes, and scandalized the neighbors," Jessie sniffed.

"I fail to see how the neighbors would have known anything about it," retorted Evelyn, with dignity, "since they can't see through the walls."

"Oh, they don't have to see," said Jessie, witheringly. "Anybody within a mile of you can *hear* you dance."

"See here, Jessie Sanderson, that's not fair," Lucile broke in. "Evelyn's one of the best little dancers I know, and I won't have her maligned."

"Have her what? I wish you'd speak United States, Lucy," said Jessie, plaintively.

"Don't talk and you won't show your ignorance." It was Evelyn's turn to be scornful.

"Well, what does it mean?" Jessie returned. "*You* tell us."

"Some other time," said Evelyn, calmly. "You will have to excuse me now. I am so excited now that I really can't bring my mind down to trivial matters."

"I knew it," Jessie was declaiming tragically, when a clear whistle sounded from the foot of the hill and Lucile exclaimed:

“There’s Phil; I wonder what he wants now.”

The three girls made a pretty picture as they stood there gazing eagerly down the slope, Lucile with her vivid gypsy coloring and fair-haired, blue-eyed Jessie, exactly her opposite, yet, withal, her dearest and most loyal friend; and last, but not least, Evelyn, short and round and polly, with a happy disposition that won her friends wherever she went.

Although it is generally conceded that “three make a crowd,” the rule was certainly wide of the mark in this case. The girls were bound by a tie even stronger than friendship, and that tie was the law of the camp-fire. The latter had taught them many brave lessons in the game of life, lessons in self-denial, in sympathy and 15 loyalty, and they were ever anxious to prove that they had learned their lessons well.

Though, once in a while, besetting sins would crop out and Lucile would cry, despairingly, “Oh, why did I do it; I knew I shouldn’t,” and Jessie would stop, when plunging nobly through a box of candies, to cry penitently, “Oh, I’ve eaten too many,” and Evelyn would often be tempted to read too long and neglect her work, still, on the whole, they were infinitely helped by the wholesome teaching and precepts of the campfire.

“Oh, he’s got a letter,” cried Lucile, as Phil took a flying leap into their midst.

“Say,” said Phil, eyeing them pityingly, “don’t you fellows know it’s time to eat?”

“It’s never dinner-time yet,” said Jessie in dismay.

“Yes it is, too,” Evelyn contradicted. “Just look where the sun is.”

“Where is it?” cried Phil, and then, as his gaze

wandered to the sky, he added, with an air of relief, “Oh, it’s still there; how you frightened me!”

“Goose!” his sister commented, and then, looking at the envelope he still held in his hand, she added, “Who’s the letter from? Be sensible and tell us about it.”

“Oh, that?” said Phil. “That’s a letter from Jim. Seems to be getting along first rate.”

“What does he say?” asked Jessie, all interest.

Phil eyed her speculatively. “I tell you what I’ll do,” he said. “I’ll tell you about it on the way home.”

The girls laughed and Lucile explained, “You see, he’s never happy far from home and dinner.”

“You seemed to get away with a mighty generous supply of oysters yourself the other night,” Phil grumbled good-naturedly.

“Well, if I did, I was only obeying the camp-fire law, ‘Be healthy,’” Lucile defended warmly. 16

The girls laughed and Jessie murmured something about, “That’s right; keep ’em under.”

“What’s that?” Phil demanded, but Jessie evaded with another question:

“When are you going to tell us about Jim?”

“Here we are, half the way home, and you haven’t even begun,” Evelyn added.

“Well, he seems more than satisfied with his engineering, and most of his letter is taken up with praises of Mr. Wescott and his wife and how good they are to him. He says the luck he’s had almost makes him believe in fate.”

“Well, there certainly did seem to be a fate in the

way young Mr. Wescott just happened up to camp in the nick of time to find our guardian and fall in love with her, worse luck," and Lucile vindictively kicked a stone from the path as though it were the meddling Mr. Wescott himself. "And then to think he should like Jim, a poor little country boy, well enough to take him along with him to the city, where he could make something of himself."

"Well, all I have to say is that there's no one I'd rather see get along than Jim. I liked him the first minute I saw him, and he sure does improve on acquaintance—the longer you know him, the more you like him. He deserves everything he gets," and Phil's face glowed with boyish enthusiasm.

"That's the way we all felt," said Lucile with equal earnestness, while Evelyn could not repress a chuckle at the memory of their first meeting with Jim. "Has he anything else to say?"

"Only one thing," answered Phil, mysteriously.

"What is it?" the girls demanded in chorus.

"Hurry up, please, Phil," Jessie pleaded.

"Certainly, anything for you," Phil returned gallantly. "Why, he just states that Mr. and Mrs. Wescott——"

"Miss Howland!" cried Evelyn. 17

"Miss Howland that was," corrected Phil; "Mrs. Wescott that is."

"What difference does it make?" cried Lucile, impatiently. "What about her—is she sick?"

At the suggestion the girls grew pale.

"Not quite as bad as that," teased Phil, enjoying the sensation his news was making and bent on

prolonging it to the last extreme.

“Not quite? Oh, Phil, what do you mean?” cried Jessie, imploringly.

Anxiety and alarm showed so plainly on the girls’ white faces that Phil suddenly relented.

“Don’t get scared,” he continued, elegantly. “Your guardian isn’t sick. If she were, I guess she wouldn’t be making plans for visiting Burleigh.”

“Is that the truth?” Lucile demanded, seizing her brother’s arm. “Don’t play any more tricks, Phil,” she pleaded. “It means an awful lot to us, you know, if Miss—Mrs. Wescott is coming.”

“Oh, that’s on the level all right,” Phil answered with evident sincerity. “She just made up her mind a little while ago and Jim thinks she will probably write to you girls about it.”

“Oh, just think, we are really going to see her again after six months,” Jessie exclaimed, joyfully.

“And we’ll give her a reception she will never forget,” Lucile decided.

“All right; I’m with you,” Phil shouted, and was off to join a crowd of the fellows on the other side of the street.

“Don’t forget we eat soon,” Lucile called after him.

“Such a chance,” he flung back. “Bet I’ll be there before you will.”

“He thinks we’re going to talk for another couple of hours,” Jessie interpreted. 18

“No, we’d better do our talking to-morrow. Tell you what we’ll do—I have—an idea,” cried Lucile.

“Bright child, tell us about it,” said Evelyn.

"Suppose we call a special camp-fire meeting to-morrow morning to talk over plans for Miss Howland's—I mean Mrs. Wescott's reception."

"Fine—but who will let them know?"

"Come over to-night, both of you, and we can 'phone them from here."

"All right, we'll do that, Lucy," agreed Evelyn. "We'll see you about eight o'clock, then."

"Better run, Lucy," warned Jessie, with a backward glance over her shoulder. "Phil will beat you in if you don't hurry—he's coming full tilt."

"All right, I'll see you to-night," said Lucile, as she made a dash for the house.

She stopped for a moment on the doorstep to flash them a merry glance and cry triumphantly, "I won!"

"But not by much," claimed Phil, taking the steps two at a time.

As they turned away, Jessie sent one parting shot over her shoulder:

"A miss is as good as a mile," she gibed.

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CHAPTER III

A LATTER-DAY MIRACLE

Saturday dawned gloriously. The warm rain that had fallen over night had dissolved the last frail bond of winter and had set the spring world free. Trees and bushes and shrubs were frosted with clinging, glistening diamonds that shimmered and gleamed in the sun, while the moist, warm earth sent up a pungent sweetness found only in the early spring.

“Smell it, just smell it!” said Jessie, sniffling rapturously, as she and Evelyn started on their way to Lucile’s.

“Isn’t it great?” Evelyn agreed. “That rain was just what we needed.”

“It reminds me of last spring——”

“That’s strange.”

“What?” said Jessie, puzzled.

“Why, that this spring should remind you of last.”

“Don’t get flippant, young lady,” said Jessie, severely, “or I shall be obliged to give you a ducking,” the river being very convenient just there, as the girls had to walk alongside its shores for some distance before turning into Lucile’s avenue.

“Please don’t; I had enough of a ducking last year in camp when I fell off the rock. Don’t you remember?” said Evelyn, with a rueful smile.

“I should say I do, rather,” laughed Jessie. “No one who was there and saw you could ever possibly forget it.”

“Oh, I know I always make an impression,” said Evelyn, wilfully misunderstanding.

For once Jessie could find no suitable retort. “You hate yourself, don’t you?” was all she could say. 20

“Not so you could notice it,” said Evelyn, enjoying her victory. “It seems to me that you were saying something when I——”

“When you so rudely interrupted,” said Jessie, sweetly. “I’m not so sure that I will tell you now. It was nothing of any importance.”

“Oh, I knew that,” said Evelyn quickly—it was certainly her lucky day.

“You win!” cried Jessie, good-naturedly, throwing up her hands in mock despair.

Evelyn laughed merrily. “I’ll have to look out after this,” she said. “There’ll be back-fire, I’m afraid. But, seriously, Jessie, what were you going to say?”

“Oh, only that this wonderful weather reminds me of this time last year when we were just making our plans for camp.”

“Yes and even then we hadn’t begun to realize how great it was going to be.”

“I never knew what real fun was till we got way off there in the woods with the river before us and the woods all about us. And the very best thing of all was that we had only ourselves to depend on for everything.”

“And we seemed to get along pretty well, too, considering,” said Evelyn.

“Of course we did,” Jessie agreed, and then added with a laugh, “I think we would be a valuable aid to suffrage. Tell everybody we managed to get along without any man’s help.”

“Oh, but we didn’t,” Evelyn objected. “How about Mr. Wescott?”

“It seems to me we could have gotten along very well

without any of his help," retorted Jessie, vindictively.

"Perhaps we could, but—our guardian would tell a different story," said Evelyn, meaningly.

As she spoke the door of Lucile's house opened violently and Lucile herself came flying to meet them. She 21 was dressed all in white and she seemed to the girls the very spirit of spring.

"Oh, girls, I'm so glad you came early," she cried, joyfully. "I was hoping you would, so we could talk things over by ourselves before the others came." She threw an arm about each of the girls and ran them up on the porch.

"We are the first, then?" said Jessie, perching on the railing.

"I told Jessie you would think we had come to breakfast," remarked Evelyn, flinging her hat carelessly into a chair.

"That's the way to do it," said Lucile, sarcastically. "It would serve you right if somebody should sit on it."

"Put it on, Lucy, and let's see how you look in it," Jessie suggested.

Lucile laughingly obliged, and the girls gave an involuntary gasp of delight.

"Oh, you darling," cried Evelyn, hugging Lucile so ecstatically that in her enthusiasm she almost lost her balance and nearly fell to the ground beneath. Lucile clutched her and brought her back to safety.

"A chair is the safest place for you," said her rescuer, laughingly.

"Take off the hat and everything will be all right,"

said Jessie. “That was what nearly caused your undoing.”

“Oh, very well,” Lucile agreed. “For such a little thing why quarrel?” and disappeared within the house.

“Remember,” said Evelyn, warningly, “remember, that hat is mine, and if you dare to put a slur upon it I’ll——”

“Lucy, Lucy,” cried Jessie in a frightened voice, “come quick; she is threatening me!”

“All right; wait a minute,” came the voice from inside.

“But I can’t wait a minute,” wailed Jessie; “she may have killed me by that time.” 22

“Well, what——” began Jessie, and Evelyn, glancing at her astonished face, broke into a shout of laughter.

“Oh, Lucy, come and see what you’ve done,” she gasped. “Oh, Jessie, I never saw you look so funny, and that’s saying a good deal.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed it,” said Jessie, icily, though there was a twinkle in her eye. “Not having a mirror, I’m afraid I can’t join in the joke.”

“No, you are the joke,” countered Evelyn.

Jessie’s natural sweet temper was fast becoming ruffled by this rapid fire and she had opened her mouth for a sharp retort when Lucile came running out.

“What’s the matter?” she cried, gaily, and then, at sight of Jessie’s face, she stopped.

“Overdose of hammers,” she diagnosed, then wisely changed the subject.

“If we don’t hurry up, the girls will be here before we have a chance to say anything at all about Mrs. Wescott.”

She perched herself upon the railing beside Jessie and soon they had forgotten all momentary animosity in an animated discussion.

Five minutes later Lucile exclaimed, “Here come Marj., Ruth and Margaret now. I wonder where the rest of them are.”

“Welcome to our city,” said Jessie. “We have great news for you strangers.”

“So we imagined.” It was Marjorie Hanlan, a tall, dark, good-looking girl, who answered.

“I couldn’t sleep, wondering what you wanted,” chimed in Margaret, the little girl who had been lame, but now was just like other girls.

“And we have all been so happy about you, Margaret, since Lucy told us the specialist said you were cured,” broke in Evelyn.

“Isn’t it great?” said Marjorie. “Margaret was telling us about it on the way up. It seems almost miraculous.” 23

Margaret flushed happily. “Oh, the doctors say there is nothing miraculous about it. They say all I wanted was the exercise and healthy outdoor life. But I know who really did it,” she added, putting her arm about Lucile. “It was you girls—yes it was,” she insisted, as they started to protest. “You were the first I can remember—except father, of course—who treated me like a human being and not a curiosity. And, oh I’m so grateful and happy,” she ended.

Lucile patted the brown head on her shoulder.

"You give us altogether too much credit, Margaret, dear," she said, unsteadily. "It was Miss Howland that thought of it in the first place, and after we knew you we just couldn't help loving you for yourself and wanting to help."

"That's right," cried the girls, heartily.

Margaret glanced around at the sober faces of her friends and, although her eyes were still wet, there was a little hint of raillery in her voice:

"Well, I did think you girls had something to do with it, but since you say you didn't, we'll have to call it a miracle, after all."

The girls laughed a trifle shakily and Evelyn added, "But there's our guardian, you know."

"Oh, yes," said Margaret, and her voice was very tender. "Of course, there's our guardian. I don't know what we'd ever do without her."

"Well, we've had to get along without her for almost six months," Ruth broke in, a trifle pettishly.

"Yes; I wonder if we'll ever see her again," said Marjorie. "We were getting along so splendidly when that Mr. Wescott——"

"Oh, don't be too hard on him," cautioned Lucile. "If we loved her so much, we couldn't blame him for doing the same thing." 24

"I know, but if he'd only waited two or three years," mourned Marjorie. "He came a good deal too soon, and now I don't suppose we'll ever see her again."

The three conspirators exchanged significant glances and Lucile cried, merrily, "Perhaps you'll change your tune in a little while," and just as the girls were about to demand the meaning of this strange remark,

she added, “Here come the rest of them now,” and flew down to welcome them.

“What on earth——” began Marjorie, and then stopped as the remaining girls of the camp-fire Aloea, six in all, for they had added two to their number since the spring before, ran up on the porch, all talking at once and making such a noise that her voice was drowned.

It was quite some time before order was restored and Marjorie could again demand an explanation.

“Now that we are all here, Lucy,” she said, “suppose you tell us what you meant by that speech of yours.”

“What speech?” said Lucile, for she had forgotten it in the excitement of welcoming the new arrivals. “I’ll explain anything, but I have to know what it is first.”

“Naturally,” Marjorie agreed. “Perhaps you will remember that just before the girls came you spoke of our changing our tune, or something to that effect, in regard to Miss Howland.”

“Mrs. Wescott, I suppose you mean?” Lucile inquired, blandly, “It seems to me I did say something like that. What would you like to know?”

“What you meant by it,” shouted Marjorie, and Margaret added, “Go ahead, give it to us, Lucy. I have an idea that’s what you called us here for.”

“Smart child,” approved Jessie, with an approving pat and nod of the head. “You’re coming right along.”

Margaret thrilled with a pleasure that was almost pain. “She never would have dared say that to me before,” she cried to herself, exultantly. “She would have been too afraid of hurting me. Now I know I’m

just like all the rest!”

25

CHAPTER IV

COUNTING THE HOURS

“You’re right, Margaret,” Lucile was saying. “I did call you all together just to speak of our guardian.”

The girls leaned forward eagerly. “What about her?” they demanded.

“Oh, Lucy, don’t keep us waiting,” begged Marjorie. “Is she coming to Burleigh?”

“Not so fast,” cried Lucile. “Give me half a chance. I haven’t heard from our guardian personally, but Phil got a letter from Jim the other day and he said——” Lucile paused dramatically.

“Yes, yes; go on,” they demanded, excitedly.

“And she said that Mr. and Mrs. Wescott were going to visit Burleigh very soon.”

“Soon,” cried Margaret. “That sounds good. Always before it’s been something that was going to happen in the dim future.”

“Did she say any special time, Lucy?” Ruth broke in, impatiently.

“No, there was nothing definite about it,” said Lucile,

"but I expect to hear from her almost any minute now."

"There comes the postman—perhaps he will bring you a letter," suggested Evelyn.

"Oh, what's the use of raising our hopes?" admonished Jessie. "There's just about one chance in a thousand that the letter will come when we want it."

"All we can do is wait," said Lucile, philosophically. "In the meantime, suppose we all suggest something that 26 we can do to welcome her—make her feel how truly glad we are to see her. Somebody suggest something."

"For goodness' sake, Lucy," Marjorie exclaimed, "you might better have left me out of this. I'm no good at all when it comes to using any imagination."

"You have probably as much as any of us, and you can't get out of helping that way," said Lucile, decidedly.

"From things she has said, I should give her credit for a good deal of imagination," quoth Jessie, slyly.

"Oh, I'll get even for all those awful things you have said to me and about me, Jessie Sanderson," Marjorie threatened, good-naturedly. "I'd do it now, only I'm too busy trying to think up a plan."

"Good girl; keep it up," commended Lucile, and then, as she caught a murmured "That's just an excuse" from Jessie's direction, she cried, with a scarcely suppressed laugh, "Perhaps you would be doing a little more good in the world, Jessie, if you would follow her example."

"Bravo!" cried Evelyn. "That's one for you, Jessie,"

and promptly received a withering glance from that young lady, which said as plainly as words, “You just wait; there’ll be a day of reckoning, and then——”

“Here comes the postman,” cried Margaret. “Shall I take the mail, Lucy?”

“Please,” she answered, and a moment later Margaret handed her half a dozen envelopes, while the girls looked on in eager silence.

“Is it there?” cried one of the girls, at last.

“Not yet,” said Lucile, but as she turned over the last letter, she uttered a cry of amazement and delight that sent all the girls crowding about her.

“That is her handwriting,” exclaimed Evelyn, and then there ensued such a babble of wonder and delight and excited speculation as to its contents that Lucile was finally 27 obliged to shout, “If you will only sit down, girls. I’ll see what’s inside, and please stop making such an unearthly noise—we’ll have the reserves out to quell the riot before we know it.”

The girls laughed and distributed themselves about the porch, as many as could possibly get there crowding the rail on either side of Lucile, while they all listened with bated breath to what their guardian had to say.

“To Lucile and all my dear camp-fire girls,” read Lucile. “I planned to come to Burleigh long ago, as you all know, and was bitterly disappointed when I was forced at the last minute to change my plans.”

“So were we,” said Evelyn, and was greeted by a chorus of impatient “sh-sh” as Lucile went on:

“But this time I am as sure as I can ever be of anything that my plans won’t fall through. I expect

to be in Burleigh by the twenty-fifth."

"Oh, think of it! That's day after to-morrow!" Margaret exclaimed, rapturously.

"That's what it is," Jessie agreed.

"Go on, Lucy; what more has she to say?" demanded another of the girls, and Lucile went on with her reading.

The rest of the letter contained descriptions of her travels and all she had seen, ending up with: "When I see my girls, I will tell you all I have been writing now, and a great deal more, and will expect to hear more fully than they have been able to write me all that has happened to them during the last six months. I am counting the hours till I see you all again. Good-by till then, dear girls. Your own loving guardian."

"That's all," Lucile finished. "Now we know when she's coming."

"Isn't she dear, and didn't the whole thing sound just like her?" cried Jessie.

"Exactly," agreed Evelyn, and then added, "If she is counting the hours till she sees us, I wonder what we'll be doing." 28

"We'll be making the hours count," said Lucile.

"Good for you, Lucy; that's what I call efficiency," cried Marjorie. "Make time work for us."

"Yes, but how are we going to do it?" said Ruth, distrustfully.

"I'll tell you," Lucile answered. "I thought that we ought to give our guardian a surprise when she comes. She hasn't been here for so long, and we ought to make it something she will remember."

"You've thought of something, Lucy; I can tell that," cried Jessie. "Suppose you let us know about it."

"Go ahead, Lucy—we'll let you think for all the rest of us," Marjorie suggested. "You can do it better, anyway."

"How very kind of you!" mocked Lucile. "I appreciate your generosity immensely."

"Go on; tell us your idea, Lucy," urged Margaret. "Never mind her."

"Well, it was only this, and if any one has anything better to offer, I'm only too glad to hear about it. I thought that you girls could all dress up in your ceremonial costumes. In the meantime, I'll have a fire made in the living-room fireplace and then I'll go to meet her."

"And leave us home?" Evelyn interrupted.

"Exactly," said Lucile, firmly. "As I said before, I'll go to meet her and bring her here. Then I'll take her upstairs to get her things off and tell her you girls will be here right away."

"And we're to be hidden in some other room, I suppose," Marjorie ventured.

"Uh-huh. Then I'll get her down into the living-room and make her comfortable in front of the fire——"

"Let us hope it's a cool day," Margaret interjected.

"We'll hope so," agreed Lucile. "We will have plenty of cool days yet, anyway, before spring sets in in earnest, 29 and maybe the day after to-morrow will be one of them. I'll get her to sit there, even if it is warm."

"What then, Lucile?" asked one of the girls. "I have a feeling that the most interesting part is yet to come."

"It is," said Lucile. "You see, I'll be talking to her so hard that she won't notice what's going on around her much—that is, if you are careful. Then you come in, one by one, on your tip-toes and sit in a semicircle behind her."

"Oh, that will be a lark," cried Evelyn. "And are we to wait till she finds us out?"

"That's what I was going to tell you," said Lucile. "When you all get settled, I'll put my hand up to my hair like this, and then you begin to sing, very softly, 'Oh, fire——'"

"That will be splendid, Lucy; it will seem almost like old times," cried Margaret. "How did you manage to think it all out so beautifully?"

"Oh, it was simple enough," said Lucile. "The only thing is, do you all like it?"

Lucile was very well satisfied with the reception of her plan a moment later. The girls were enthusiastic and overwhelmed her with questions until she was obliged for the second time that morning, to say, "One at a time, please."

When, finally, all the arrangements were complete and satisfactory, one of the girls discovered it was after noon.

"Girls," exclaimed Evelyn, dismayed, "we've used up the whole morning just talking."

"Why, what time is it?" asked Margaret, feeling for her watch.

"It's twelve fifteen," announced Evelyn, impressively.

"Time I was going home," Marjorie declared, jumping up. "Where's my hat?"

"It's inside with Evelyn's," Lucile answered. "If I

hadn't taken care of them there would have been nothing 30 left resembling a hat. I'll get them," she added, and ran into the house.

In a moment she returned with a hat in each hand.

"What did you want to wear them for, anyway?" she said, as they started off. "You didn't really need them, and just think of all the work you made me."

"Oh, they just wanted to show them off," laughed Gertrude Church.

"Humph, we know why they pretend to criticize us, don't we Marjorie?" queried Evelyn, with a knowing wink.

"Sure; they're jealous," was the laconic reply, at which all the girls laughed scornfully.

"We'd have to have something better than that to be jealous of," scoffed one.

"Then we'll see you Monday, Lucy," called Jessie, as they started off down the street. "Maybe before," she added.

"I can stand it," laughed Lucile. "Come early Monday, anyway, all of you, and don't forget what I told you."

"We won't," they called; "don't worry!" And, indeed, she had no need for anxiety, for the thought that filled the girls' minds to the exclusion of everything else was:

"Our guardian is coming Monday—oh, why is it so far away?"

31

CHAPTER V

AS THOUGH ON WINGS

The eventful day had come at last over a wait that seemed an eternity to the impatient girls. The long school-day was endless and, in spite of all good resolutions, they could not keep their thoughts from wandering to the alluring picture they had conjured up. A picture wherein figured an open-grate fire, Miss Howland—for so they had thought of her even after her marriage—their own dear guardian, turning suddenly to see her camp-fire girls in their old familiar costume waiting to welcome her. How would she look? What would she say? These were the thoughts that persisted in haunting them through the long school-day and refused to be shaken off.

At last it was three o'clock and the girls gathered on the campus, books in hand, eagerly anxious to be off.

"Are we all here?" said Jessie, looking about.

"All but Grace; she'll be here any minute, I guess."

The prophecy proved correct, and soon the whole of camp-fire Aloea, except the one who was to play the most important part, was swinging at a great rate down the road to their meeting-place. Lucile had been excused a few minutes earlier on the plea that she was to meet her guardian. The few minutes' grace would give her time to see that the fire was lighted and attend to the hundred and one minor details that would set things running smoothly.

Rain had been threatening all day, but now the welcome sun burst through the clouds so suddenly that the girls were surprised.

“Say, that came in a hurry, didn’t it?” remarked Marjorie. “Oh, I’m so glad.” 32

“Who isn’t?” Jessie rejoined. “The rain would have made everything so gloomy, just when we wanted it brightest.”

“It seems as if the sun knew Miss Howland was coming and just couldn’t help shining,” said Margaret, with a face so like the sun itself in its radiant brightness that Marjorie, who was near her, threw her arm about the slight form, saying, lovingly, “Even if the sun hadn’t come out, Margaret, I don’t think we’d have missed it much with you around.”

“Don’t you remember what Miss Howland always used to say about there being a great deal more credit in being happy and sunny on a gloomy day than a bright one?” put in Eleanor.

“Yes; but, though I’ve tried very hard to look cheerful when the rain has spoiled all my chances for a good time, I’m very much afraid I don’t often succeed,” said Evelyn, with a rueful smile.

“I can’t imagine you in the doleful dumps for very long, Evelyn,” said Ruth. “I’ve never seen you anything but happy yet.”

“Oh, you don’t have to live with her, Ruth,” said Jessie. “If you did, and I’m glad for your sake you don’t, you would soon change your opinion.”

“I’d like to know what you know about it, anyway,” Evelyn retorted, gaily. “You’ve never lived with me—that I know of, at any rate.”

“To change the subject,” Marjorie broke in, “there’s Lucile waving to us to hurry. I guess she has something to tell us before she goes to the station.”

They broke into a run and in another minute had surrounded Lucile.

“I’m glad you came just as you did,” she was saying. “It seemed as if you would never get here, and I was afraid I would have to go without seeing you.” 33

“We hurried just as fast as we could, Lucy, as you see,” said Jessie, panting from the quick run.

“Of course you did, but it seemed an age to me. Listen, girls,” she went on, “everything’s all ready. Your dresses are laid out on the bed in my room, and you’d better get them on as soon as you possibly can.”

“You’re going to the station now, Lucy, aren’t you?” asked one of the girls.

“Yes, right away. I suppose we’ll be back again in about half an hour. Good-by; I’m off!” and she ran down the steps, only to turn at the bottom to add, “Don’t forget any of the directions, girls, and don’t make the least noise when you come into the room, or it will spoil everything. Good-by; I’m off now for good.”

“We’ll do everything just right,” Jessie promised.

“Good luck!” they called after her as she hurried along.

“She almost seems to be walking on air, doesn’t she?” one of them remarked, as she turned for a last wave.

“No wonder,” said Evelyn, gloomily. “She’s going to our guardian.”

“Lucy said they would be back in half an hour,” sighed Marjorie. “How can we wait that long?”

“Nobody knows,” Jessie answered, cheerily; “but as long as we have to get ready, we might as well begin now. Come on; let’s see who’ll be dressed first girls ——” which precipitated a general stampede for the door.

As Lucile hurried along toward the station it really seemed as though her feet had wings. The thought of meeting her guardian again, of talking to her in the old familiar way of the old familiar things—all this made her say to herself over and over again, “Oh, I don’t believe anybody was ever so happy before.” She could see in her mind’s eye that old bright, cheery smile of her guardian flash out as she said, as she had said so many times before, “Well, how are my girls to-day?” 34

To-ot! The shrill wail of the locomotive whistle broke rudely through her revery and brought her to a sudden realization that if she didn’t bestir herself, Mrs. Wescott would be at the station with no one to meet her.

“Oh,” cried Lucile to herself, “and I thought I was hurrying just as fast as I could. Well, I’m in for a race with the train, it seems. I wonder what the girls would say,” she chuckled as she ran. “This is almost as good as a canoe race.”

Either the train had been farther off than she thought when Lucile heard the whistle or she had run faster than she had ever run in her life; the result was the same—Lucile won!

Just as she breathlessly reached the station, the great locomotive came thundering around the last curve.

35

CHAPTER VI

"OH, FIRE, LONG YEARS AGO——"

Lucile's heart beat fast as the train came to a standstill and a crowd of people began to pour out.

"Where is she, where is she?" she cried, scanning one after another, speaking to those she knew, while, at the same time, looking past them with such an intent gaze that more than one turned to look back at her and remark with the shake of a head, "There's something up."

Lucile was just about in despair when, at the far end of the platform, she descried her.

With a cry she ran forward and, throwing her arms about her guardian's neck with a little hysterical sob, she exclaimed, "Oh, I thought you weren't coming."

For a moment she was held close while the voice she loved said, gently, "You don't suppose I could stay away when I had made up my mind to come, do you?"

"Oh, no; I knew in my heart you would be here," drawing herself away and looking at her guardian with such happiness written on her face that Mrs. Wescott's bright eyes were dimmed as she said, "It's good to have a welcome like this!!"

"Oh, it isn't anything to what you're going to get,"

Lucile wanted to say, but she only answered, ruefully, “I’m afraid all Burleigh will be talking about how boisterous Lucile Payton is becoming. Can’t you hear?” she added, gaily: “‘I declare, that child’s terribly rude; she almost knocked me down!’”

“A very good imitation of Miss Peabody, Lucile,” laughed Mrs. Wescott. “I wonder how many times I’ve heard her talk just that way.” 36

Miss Peabody was one of the old maids that authors love to picture—straight, prim, opinionated, with a sharp tongue that wrought discord wherever it went. She dealt in other people’s shortcomings, and if Burleigh had not known her too well to give her false tales credence, she might have worked some serious mischief. As it was, everyone took her gossip with a grain of salt, remarking, with a smile and a shrug after she had gone away, “Of course, that may be true, but remember, Angela Peabody said it!”

When Lucile chose, she could mimic anyone from the young Italian at “Correlli’s” to pompous Mrs. Belmont Nevill, who owned millions that she didn’t know how to use. So now she had brought Miss Peabody before her guardian so vividly that the latter added, in surprise, “That must be a recent accomplishment, Lucy. You never did that at camp.”

“At camp I never remembered anybody at Burleigh except Mother and Dad and Phil,” said Lucile. “It seemed like a different world.”

“A rather nice kind of world it was, too, wasn’t it?” said her guardian, with a reminiscent smile.

“Nice?” cried Lucile. “It was glorious! I only wish we could do it all over again. It does seem as if one good thing comes crowding right on the heels of another ever since we decided to form a camp-fire.”

“It has meant happiness for all of us,” said Mrs. Wescott, with a far-away look that Lucile knew how to interpret.

“I know,” she said. “Here we are,” she added, a moment later. “Oh, it’s good to have you here at last.”

For answer, her guardian put her arm about Lucile and ran lightly up the steps, saying, joyfully, “And it’s good to be here, Lucy, dear; but where are the girls?”

“Oh, they’re coming,” Lucile answered, vaguely. “Come on upstairs and get your things off,” she added, guiding her guest past the living-room adroitly. 37

When Lucile ushered her into the great, airy, upstairs sitting-room, she dropped into an easy chair with a sigh of content.

“Oh, Lucy, it is good to be here,” she added. Then, for the first time, Lucile had a chance to get “a really good look at her,” as she expressed it.

The wind had loosened her guardian’s dark hair and it clung in little ringlets about her face. Her eyes, those deep, comprehending, gray eyes, sparkled with delight as she took in the familiar objects about her. The merry dimples that had always fascinated the girls, and others besides, were ever in evidence as she talked and laughed happily.

“I suppose,” she went on, as Lucile took her hat and coat. “I suppose you girls had just about made up your minds I was never coming to Burleigh; six months is such a long time; but it seemed as if I could never get started.”

“Well, you’re here now,” said Lucile, gaily, “and that

makes the six months seem like nothing at all."

"How are your mother and father and Phil and everybody?" asked Mrs. Wescott, with a comprehensive sweep of her hand. "I want to know all about everybody."

"Oh, they're all right," Lucile assured her, and then added, as an afterthought, "except, of course, Jim Keller's dog, Bull."

"What's happened to Bull?" inquired young Mrs. Wescott, with smiling interest.

Indeed, everyone in Burleigh knew and feared Bull. His ferocity was famous through the countryside, or at least, had been until he had met his downfall a few days before.

"Come downstairs and I'll tell you about it. It is still a little chilly upstairs."

"All right," agreed Mrs. Wescott. "Wait a minute; I must get my handkerchief first." 38

A moment longer and they were in the spacious living-room, with its big library table and leather-covered chairs, and, best of all, glowing fire in the grate.

Mrs. Wescott looked toward the latter in pleased surprise. "Isn't it snug here?" she said, slipping into one of the chairs before the fire. "A fire always giving the room a cheerful, homey look."

"Oh, I love it!!" said Lucile, impulsively. "Ever since we came back from camp I've been wanting to make a great big camp-fire. This seems such a poor imitation."

"I imagine it's just enough to make you camp-sick," laughed her guardian. "But tell me about Bull. I'm

interested."

"Oh, it's been the talk of Burleigh for days," said the girl. "If you will just turn your chair around so you will get a full view of the fire, I'll tell you about it."

Her guest did as she was bid and settled back comfortably to enjoy the story.

"Well," began Lucile, "the other day Bull and his master were walking down Main Street. You know, Jim Keller absolutely refuses to keep Bull tied up and the only wonder is he—the dog, I mean—hasn't been poisoned long ago, he has so many enemies. Well, Bull broke loose from Jim some way and when he tried to find him he had disappeared. Jim went raving around like a wild man, declaring that, 'if the dog wasn't found soon, he'd sure get into some mischief.'"

"He showed rare perception."

"That's what we all thought—at least, you would have judged so by the way everybody called their children in, and any one that had a pet cat or dog went almost crazy till it was out of harm's way. Oh, there was excitement in Burleigh that day!"

"I can imagine," interjected Mrs. Wescott, in huge enjoyment of the picture. "Did Jim find him?" 39

"Not for over an hour. He ran over half the town, looking everywhere for his Bull. At last a small boy came running and told him the dog was over yonder and he was gettin' a 'turrible lickin'.'"

"Licking?" exclaimed Mrs. Wescott, sitting up straight in her surprise. "Bull?"

"That was the funny part of it," Lucile went on. "Of course, Jim wouldn't believe it was his Bull the boy

was talking about, but he went with him just the same.

“When he turned the corner he came upon a spectacle that dazed him. He stood with his eyes and mouth wide open, gazing at Bull—it was his Bull, but oh, disgraced forever! There he was on his back in the dust, with a great collie making flying leaps over him. Each time he jumped those terrible nails ripped a piece of flesh from poor Bull——”

“But I never thought a collie had half a chance against a bull dog,” Mrs. Wescott interrupted, incredulously. “And such a dog as Bull, at that!”

“Well, you see, the collie’s owner explained all that afterward. He said that Bull couldn’t get at his dog’s throat because of his unusually long, thick hair—and, as a rule, that’s Bull’s first move, you know.”

“Catch him by the throat and hang on—yes, I know,” her guardian supplemented. “Then what did Jim do?”

“He wanted to go to the rescue. I believe he would have tried to pull the collie off with his own hands, but a man held him off, crying, ‘Haven’t you any sense, man, to try to separate dogs when they’re fighting?’

“‘Fighting?’ roared Jim. ‘It isn’t a fight—it’s slaughter. If he’s your mutt, call him off. Don’t ye see he’s killin’ ’im?’

“‘He is punishing him pretty badly, I’ll admit,’ said the stranger, so calmly that Jim nearly exploded.

“‘If you don’t call that dog o’ yourn off,’ he yelled, purple with rage, ‘by all that’s holy, I will, and ’twill be with a shot-gun.’ 40

“The man saw he meant it, so he whistled softly.”

“And all this time Bull was being punished?” said Mrs. Wescott.

“Yes; he was simply down and out. He didn’t seem to have the power to move a muscle. When his master whistled, the big collie stood still, cocked one ear, and then trotted over, as if what he had done to poor Bull were just in the day’s work.

“‘You brute!’ Jim raged. ‘I don’t know which is worse, you or your dog!’

“The man only patted his dog, and said, ‘You’ve done a good day’s work, old man.’

“This last shot was lost on Jim, for he was already bending over Bull, patting his poor old mangled head and calling him all the endearing names he could think of. Finally, seeing that Bull was either too weak or too ashamed to get up and could only wag his stub of a tail, he picked him up very tenderly and started for home.

“That was anything but a triumphal journey. An army returning after overwhelming defeat could not have attracted more attention than those two old warriors. Heads popped out of every door and window, and before he was halfway home he had a train of small boys following him. I declare, when I saw the old man, he was almost crying. When I went up to him and patted the dog’s head, he said, brokenly, ‘He’s all I’ve got, and now they’ve even gone and done him up!’”

“Poor old Jim,” said Mrs. Wescott. “Everyone hated Bull, but you can’t help feeling sorry for him and his master when they’re down and out.”

“Oh, it was really pitiful,” said Lucile, “and it made

me so desperate to see all those thoughtless cruel boys following him, hooting at him, and laughing at him and calling poor old battered Bull all sorts of names. So I turned around and looked at them. I saw that little Bob Fletcher was one of the crowd. 41

"'Bob,' I said, 'suppose your Rover had been hurt—would you like to be laughed at?'

"'I'd like to see anybody that'd try,' said he, manfully.

"'Then why do you turn round and make fun of Bull when he's in trouble? It seems to me you're acting mighty like cowards!'

"The words had a magical effect. I don't suppose it had struck the boys in that light before, but it was more than their manhood could stand to be called cowards.

"'We ain't cowards,' said one, belligerently, 'and I'll fight anybody that says we are,' after which they all looked sheepish and started off in twos and threes, calling to each other that they'd better hurry and finish that game in the field—it would be getting dark soon!"

"You always did have a way with the young folks, Lucy," smiled her guardian; "but that was a real act of kindness. What did old Jim do?"

"Oh, he gave me a sort of wintry smile and said, 'Thank'ee little gal. I couldn't lick the lot of 'em myself, 'count of Bull here!' Then he stumbled on, muttering to the dog.

"Poor old Bull," Lucile concluded. "His glory had departed forever and ever——"

"Oh, Fire, long years ago——" the words came from

ten girls' hearts, low, sweet, and vibrant with feeling.

Their guardian sat as if turned to stone.

42

CHAPTER VII

THE MAGIC CITY

The last sweet note hesitated, sighed, and softly merged in the crackling of the fire, and still their guardian did not move.

For a long moment she sat upright and still, her hands clutching the arms of her chair, her gaze fixed steadily on the tiny, darting flames. Perhaps she saw there even more than the girls sensed, for when she turned to them, her eyes were bright with unshed tears.

"Girls, dear girls," she cried, unsteadily, "what a welcome you have given me! And I had begun to think you had forgotten all about your guardian," and as she spoke she held out her arms so that the girls came rushing.

Then such a hugging and kissing and asking of foolish questions and answering of them in like, but delightful manner, until Mrs. Wescott was forced to say, laughingly and in the same old tone they had heard so often in camp:

“Girls, don’t you think it would be better to hear one at a time?”

The girls laughed gaily and settled themselves so near their guardian that “they couldn’t possibly miss a word,” as Jessie explained afterward when describing the scene to her mother.

“Oh, it’s a sight for sore eyes to see all my camp-fire girls again,” said Mrs. Wescott, as her eyes traveled happily over the little group about her.

Some threw themselves on the floor at her feet, while others were curled up on the huge divan, and Marjorie and Jessie perched on the arms of her chair. But all the bright faces were turned toward her with such happy and expectant interest that a lump seemed to rise in her throat, and she had much ado to speak at all. 43

“It is wonderful to have you here after all this time,” cried Jessie, snuggling close to her guardian as she spoke. “I feel as if any minute you’re likely to fade away just as the ghosts and visions do in the moving pictures.”

There was a general laugh, and then Evelyn broke in, gallantly.

“I protest,” she said, stoutly. “I deny that our guardian is a ghost.”

“No; but she is a vision,” said a voice behind them, and Lucile slipped noiselessly into the circle.

“Goodness, Lucile, anybody would think you were the redskin you look like,” commented Dorothy, a trifle sharply, for she had started in a most undignified manner.

“See, you frightened the child, Lucile,” said Marjorie,

aggravatingly. “You should be more careful with one so young.”

“What do you call yourself?” retorted Dorothy, and Lucile saw it was high time she took a hand in the argument.

“Don’t tease, Marj,” she admonished. “And don’t get mad about nothing, Dotty—I mean Dot,” she corrected quickly, as Dorothy eyed her menacingly.

“I don’t wonder she draws the line at Dotty,” laughed Jessie. “I haven’t called you that for two weeks, Dot; I’ve kept track.”

“When you haven’t called me that for two years,” said Dorothy, graciously, “I’ll begin to think you’re improving.”

“That’s right, Dot,” cried one of the girls, with a merry laugh. “Never refuse a helping hand to the wicked!”

“Encourage them once in a while and some time, soon or late, you will be rewarded,” chanted Marjorie in a solemn tone that brought a laugh from every one.

“Lucy was right, just the same,” said Margaret, with apparent irrelevance, and the girls turned inquiring eyes on the speaker as she sat, chin in hand, gazing into the fire. 44

Somehow the girls’ faces always sobered when they looked at Margaret, and when they spoke to her their voices softened to an undernote of tenderness never used among themselves. She had won her way steadily to every girl’s heart. They had marveled at her invariable sweetness of temper; they had laughed at her quaint, naive sayings, and, most of all, they had loved her for the warm, grateful heart that found

room and to spare for them all.

So now Evelyn, merry, irresponsible Evelyn, said, with a gentleness that caused Mrs. Wescott to look at her in surprise:

“What do you mean, Margaret? Pictures in the fire again?”

“No; I was just thinking of what Lucy said when she first came in, before Dorothy jumped all over her,” said Margaret, with a twinkle in her eye that had only found its way there of late.

“Jumped all over her? What kind of language do you call that, Margaret Pratt Stillman?” reproved Marjorie, with her best grandmother air. “If you are not careful, the habit of using slang will grow upon you.”

“Oh, do keep still, Marj, for half a minute, can’t you?” cried Jessie. “I suppose you can’t,” she added, “but you might try, anyway. A great many impossible things come with time.”

“Speak with yourself, Johnette,” retorted Marjorie.

“Why the Johnette?” inquired Lucile, with interest.

“Feminine for John, of course,” Marjorie explained, patiently.

Jessie broke in upon the laugh that followed. “But we haven’t come to the point yet,” she complained. “Speak up, Margaret, before some other rude person interrupts.”

“That’s right,” said Lucile, ignoring the irony in her tone. “Now is your chance, Peggy.”

“Why, you said that our guardian was a vision,” said Margaret, dreamily. “I quite agree with you.”

"Come, come, I can't allow this," cried the vision, gaily, as the girls turned adoring eyes upon her. "I've 45 been thinking sundry little thoughts on my own account since I've seen my girls again."

"Oh, doesn't it seem great to be back?" cried Dorothy. "I know I should be terribly homesick if I stayed away six weeks, let alone six months."

"Indeed it did. Just the same, New York is fascinating, with its great buildings, its busy, absorbed throng of people, each intent on getting ahead of the next one. There is something about it all that draws one irresistibly. The very air seems charged with electricity, and just to walk down Broadway gave me more real excitement and enjoyment than the most thrilling play could have done." Helen Wescott's face flushed and her eyes sparkled as she talked.

"Go on," cried Evelyn breathlessly. "Do tell us all about it. Oh, I can't even imagine it!"

"I don't believe I could tell you everything if I should talk for a month," she went on. "But I do remember a conversation Jack and I had soon after our arrival. We were walking up Fifth Avenue one exceptionally busy day—I don't know why I should say that, for every day over there seems busier than the last—when Jack asked why I was so quiet. 'Because everything else is making so much noise,' I answered. Which, indeed, was almost reason enough. But when he insisted, I said what had been in my thoughts for the past two days:

"'I've been wondering, as I looked at all these people rushing along as if their lives depended on their getting to a certain place on a certain second—these people with set faces and eyes that seem to see a

long way off—I've just been wondering what they all find to do.'

"'My dear,' said Jack, and he laughed in a way I could not understand, 'It's easy to see you have lived a long way from little old New York, and I'm mighty glad you have. I'd rather you would face all these people for the first time with me along.'

"'But you haven't answered my question,' I insisted, for I was still filled with wonder at the great throng surging 46 past us, whose purpose never seemed to change or falter.

"'You asked what they were all doing,' said Jack. 'Well, for the most part, they are busily and congenially engaged in doing to the best advantage the next poor victim that comes to their net.'

"Somehow, that little remark put a different aspect on everything and Fifth Avenue didn't hold quite the same charm for me that it had. Just the same," she added, brightly, "I like New York mighty well. The only thing I didn't like about it was that it didn't hold my girls, and I did miss you all so much!"

"Oh, I don't see how you would ever find time to miss anybody with all those wonderful new sights and sounds around you all the time," said Evelyn, naively.

Marjorie sniffed. "Of course, we know you wouldn't," she said.

"I wouldn't," said Evelyn, unabashed. "I'd be too awfully excited all the time."

"Oh, Evelyn, Evelyn!" said Lucile, laughing. "Won't you ever learn to cover up your faults?"

"I'll have to get some first," she retorted, impishly;

and the girls, who were in a mood when everything strikes them funny, began to laugh. The more they laughed, the more they tried to stop, the more impossible it became, until the whole house rang with merriment. Lucile was the first to recover herself.

“That’s quite enough for some time to come, Evelyn,” she cried, choking back her laughter. “We all know you are wonderful, but please remember that no human being is perfect.”

Gradually they quieted down, with only an occasional explosion, and Lucile returned to her guardian again.

“I suppose you have gone to all the theaters and restaurants and things in the city,” she asked. “Are they just as wonderful as people make them out to be?” 47

“More,” said Mrs. Wescott, emphatically, dimpling happily at her memories. Indeed, she was very young and very enthusiastic, and the girls, looking at her, thought they had never seen her so entrancingly lovely.

“It is almost impossible to describe,” she went on. “At first you have only a confused impression that the world is on fire with electric lights. To ride through the crowded theater district at night, with the great electric signs blinking at you from all sides —with the honking of the motor horns making a very Babel—with the crowds on the sidewalk, still hurrying, but for such a different reason—men and women in evening dress, all bound for one or other of the gay restaurants or theaters close by. And then the theater itself! To walk from the street to the gaily lighted lobby, its walls paneled from floor to ceiling

with great mirrors that reflect lovely women and distinguished men. Then in the theater where the rich carpet deadens every footfall and you feel rather than hear the murmur of many voices speaking softly —the subtle rustle of a crowded place—the lights—the music—oh, girls, it was wonderful, wonderful! I can't describe it!"

"Oh, but you have described it—beautifully!" cried Lucile. "I feel as if I had been there!"

"Oh, just to go there once!" breathed Jessie, rapturously. "If I could only see those things once, I think I'd be willing to die!"

The girls raised laughing protests, and Lucile cried, "For goodness' sake, don't speak of dying yet awhile, Jessie. I'm going to see lots before my end comes. Oh, if we could only go back with you, Miss How—I mean Mrs. Wescott," she stammered, blushing furiously at her mistake.

The lovely guardian of the fire looked down upon Lucile, a quizzical smile curling the corners of her mouth.

"I don't wonder you make that mistake once in a while," she said. "It took me a long while to get used to it."

"I should think it would seem strange just at first," ventured Margaret, amazed at her own temerity and looking 48 up at her guardian shyly. "I mean not being Miss Howland any longer."

The girls laughed and Margaret flushed confusedly.

"You shouldn't say such things, Margaret; it ill befits your age," said Jessie patronizingly.

There followed another burst of laughter, out of

which Margaret's voice rose defiantly. "I don't care," she cried. "It seemed mighty funny to me to call our guardian Mrs. Wescott, and if it seemed strange to me, what must it have seemed to her? I was almost afraid——" her voice trailed off into silence, and Mrs. Wescott prompted, gently, "Afraid of what, dear?"

"Oh, just afraid that you might be—different."

It was the vague, half-formed fear that all the girls had felt, yet none had dared express, and the silence that followed was pregnant with meaning.

"Different, Margaret?" their guardian's voice was low and tremulous. "Never! Happier, oh, so very much happier, girls; but never changed in my love for you except as it grows stronger. Do I seem different?" she asked, turning swimming eyes upon them.

"Oh, no—except that you are twice as dear," cried Lucile, and the cry found an echo in each girl's heart.

"I'm so happy I'm afraid I'm going to have hysterics or something," cried Jessie, dabbing her eyes with a square inch or so of handkerchief. "I want to laugh and cry, and you can't do both at once."

The girls laughed shakily and Mrs. Wescott said, with a gay little laugh, "Here, this will never do. Now that that question is settled forever and ever, I want to hear what you girls have been doing all this time, and what you expect to do this summer. Come, who's first?"

"Lucile," cried Dorothy. "You just ask her what she intends to do this summer. All our plans are tame beside hers."

The girls had completely forgotten the wonderful topic that had seemed all absorbing before this

guardian's arrival, 49 but now it took on an added importance, and the girls waited eagerly for Lucile's disclosure.

"What great plans have you been making now, Lucile?" said Mrs. Wescott, with that ever-ready interest that had won the girls completely. "I can see there is something great in the wind. Tell me about it."

"I'd never have thought of it if Dorothy hadn't reminded me," said Lucile, amazed that it should have slipped her mind for two minutes, let alone two hours. "Why, it's only that Mother and Dad are going to Europe this summer and they have decided to take Phil and me along with them; and then Dad said I might ask Jessie and Evelyn to go with us if they'd like to, and so they are coming—to make trouble," she added, slyly.

"Oh, no doubt of that last," said Mrs. Wescott, laughing, and then added, with enthusiasm, "It certainly is splendid for you to have the chance. I know your pet hobby has always been to visit Switzerland, Lucy, and now you will, provided you get that far. Do you suppose you will?"

"I really don't know," said Lucile. "I've been too stunned by the mere fact of going to Europe to think of asking for details. If I have anything to say about it, we'll go to Switzerland, if we don't go anywhere else."

"Just hear her talk of Switzerland, as if it were just around the corner," marveled Ruth. "It has always seemed to me like some myth or fable."

"And you feel as it you ought to speak of it in whispers," agreed Marjorie. "That's the way I feel about it."

"Oh, I almost forgot about tea," Lucile interrupted, springing to her feet and making a dash for the door. "It's getting late, and everybody must be starved. Come on, Jessie, and help me, for goodness' sake!"

"Coming," said Jessie, stopping at the door to make a low bow and declaim, "Ladies and gentlemen, we crave your indulgence——"

"You'd better come out here, or I'll use force," cried Lucile's voice from somewhere in the rear, and the orator fled precipitately.

50

CHAPTER VIII

ENTER JACK

It was the last day Lucile and Evelyn and Jessie would spend in Burleigh for some time. Since early morning they had been so busy they had scarcely found time to breathe, and it was not till five o'clock in the afternoon that Lucile slammed down the cover of her last trunk with a triumphant, "There, that's done! Now, I wonder if I've thought of everything."

Tired and happy, she flung herself upon the bed, a little meditative frown puckering her forehead, and began a mental checking up of all the hundred and one things she would need.

"I guess I have all the dresses I'll want," she

ruminated. “Shoes and combs and brushes and ribbons and handkerchiefs—oh, I wonder if I put in my little flowered scarf; I mustn’t forget that——”

Then began a frantic searching through bureau drawers, during which the scarf failed to come to light. Finally she gave it up in despair and turned upon the two trunks so fierce a look that the only wonder is they didn’t fade then and there and vanish into thin air.

“You disgusting old things!” she cried, hotly. “I suppose you think it’s fun to go all through you again and take out all your horrid old trays and everything, just to make sure I put that scarf in. I suppose I’ll find it way down at the bottom, too.”

She was on her knees before the smaller of the two trunks and had taken out a good deal of the contents, still grumbling good-naturedly, when her mother came in.

“What are you talking to yourself about, Lucile? I could hear you way down the hall; and what *are* you doing? 51 I thought you had your trunks nearly packed.” Mrs. Payton’s voice was irritably impatient.

Lucile sat back on her heels with a joyful, “I’ve got it, I’ve got it—and I didn’t have to unpack the whole trunk, either!”

“Got what?” cried Mrs. Payton, sharply. “I asked you a question.”

Lucile sobered instantly. “My scarf,” she answered. “I had the trunk all packed, and then I thought of it. I guess I have everything else, though.”

“Let us hope so. As soon as you put the things back, you had better get ready for to-night. It’s pretty late.”

"All right; I guess I will have to hurry," Lucile agreed, and finished the repacking in silence.

Five minutes later she flew to the 'phone and called up Jessie.

"Hello!" she cried. "That you, Jessie? I've just finished packing, and I've got to get dressed in a hurry. How about you?"

"I'm not quite through yet," came the answer. "But I will be pretty soon. Mother came to my rescue a few minutes ago, and together we're making things fly."

"That's good; be sure and get there in time. I haven't any idea who will be there, but I guess there'll be quite a crowd. You know, I'm all shaky from excitement," she confessed.

"So am I," said Jessie. "My hand trembles so I can hardly hold the receiver."

"I guess it runs in the family," said Lucile, laughing. "Well, you'd better get back to your packing—and do hurry, Jess!"

"Don't worry! I never knew the meaning of the word till this afternoon. Good-by—oh, wait a minute! What dress are you going to wear?"

"My new white one, I guess," said Lucile. "I've been undecided all afternoon whether to wear that or the pale green, but Mother thinks the white is prettier." 52

"Oh, for goodness' sake, wear the white one, Lucy. I want to wear my blue dress, and I was afraid we might clash."

"Oh, all right; anything for friendship's sake," laughed Lucile. "Good-by, Jess—hustle!"

"I'm glad that's settled, anyway," Lucile murmured,

as she hung up the receiver. “Now I will have to rush,” and away she flew to her room, hair rumpled and eyes shining, to prepare for the dance.

The great affair had been originated by their guardian a few days before in honor of the prospective voyagers, and the girls hardly knew what they had looked forward to more, their trip to Europe or the dance.

“Oh, you look like the wild man of Borneo,” cried Lucile as she caught a glimpse in her mirror of tumbled curls and sadly rumpled dress. “It’s good you don’t have to go to the dance looking that way. They’d put you out, sure as fate. Well, here goes; let’s see how long it will take the wild man to take the form of Lucile Floyd Payton.”

Half an hour later Lucile lifted the dainty mass of lace and chiffon from her bed with a sigh of satisfaction. “When you’re on, then we’ll be all ready. Guess I’ll have to get Jane to do it up, though. I don’t know just how it goes yet.”

Jane did the work satisfactorily; so well, in fact, that when she gave the girl a little finishing pat and announced admiringly that “You surely will be queen of the ball to-night, Miss Lucy,” that young lady gave an involuntary gasp of delight.

“Oh, it’s pretty, it’s pretty!” she cried.

“Indade, an’ it’s not the only thing that has a claim to beauty,” said Jane, with an admiring glance at her young mistress. “Now, you’d better come down an’ get a bite to ate, Miss Lucy, before iverything gets cold. Ye needn’t be worryin’ ’bout yer looks the night,” she prophesied.

“Thanks, Jane,” cried Lucile, gaily. “I got ready in

pretty good time, after all, didn't I? Oh, there's the dinner gong and I am not a bit hungry!" 53

"Excitement's no good on an empty stomach," said Jane sagely. "Take my advice an' ate yer fill—ye'll be all the better for it."

"I'll do my best," she promised, and ran lightly down the stairs and into the dining-room, where the family were already assembled.

"How do you like it?" she cried, dropping them a low curtsey and smiling like a little witch. "It's the first time I've had it on, Mother and Dad and Phil—how do you like it? Isn't it becoming?" and she executed several little toe-dances which brought her so near Phil that he hugged her impulsively.

"It's a peach, and so are you, Lucy. I didn't know you could look like that," said he, eyeing her approvingly.

"It's a beauty," said her father, but his eyes were more for the rosy cheeks and dancing eyes of his little girl than they were for the beloved new dress.

Once, while Lucy and Phil were in the midst of an animated discussion about some baseball game or other that they had seen recently, Mr. Payton managed a sly wink in his wife's direction that said more plainly than any words, "Aren't you proud of them? And they are all ours!"

At quarter past eight the first of Mrs. Wescott's young guests began to arrive. They came in relays of three and four, all very excited and happy and eager for a good time.

Promptly at eight thirty Lucile and Phil, with Jessie and a cousin of hers, Jack Turnbull by name, started up the drive to Mrs. Wescott's beautiful home.

“Doesn’t it look lovely with the lights all over the place?” said Jessie.

“Yes; especially because it has looked so forsaken for the last six months,” Lucile answered. A few moments later they reached the door and were ushered into the brilliantly lighted hall.

“Lucy, stay near me, will you?” Jessie urged in a nervous whisper. “I don’t know half these people.”

“Cheer up; we’re all in the same fix,” whispered Phil over her shoulder. “We four can stick together, anyway.” 54

“You have the right idea,” said Jack Turnbull, with perhaps a trifle more emphasis than was necessary, and with a glance toward Lucile, who had gone forward to meet her hostess.

“Oh, he always has the right idea,” Jessie chaffed, with a merry glance at Phil, and then she followed Lucile to her guardian’s side.

She greeted her guardian and then looked reproachfully at Lucile.

“Here, just the minute after I ask you not to go away, you desert me,” she said.

“Well, I didn’t go very far,” Lucile consoled.

Mrs. Wescott laughed. “Go up in my room and get your things off, girls,” she directed. “You’ll find Margaret and Evelyn up there. Come down as soon as you can,” she added, as they started upstairs. “I want to introduce you all around.”

“All right, we’ll hurry,” said Lucile, and then squeezed her friend’s hand. “Oh, Jessie, what a lark!” she whispered. “We’re in for a good time to-night.”

“You have the right idea, as Jack says,” answered

Jessie. “Did you see him look at you, Lucy?”

“Hush! they’re right behind us,” cautioned Lucile. “Hello, girls,” she cried, as she entered the room. “I don’t see how you managed to get here before us.”

“Oh, that’s easy,” laughed Evelyn. “How lovely you look! Oh, I love your dresses—both of them! Are they new?”

“Of course they are, or we would have seen them before,” said Margaret.

“Well, we’re not the only ones, anyway,” said Lucile. “I know yours are new. They’re awfully pretty.”

“We’re all satisfied then,” said Jessie, briskly. “Lucy, will you *please* put this pin in where it will do the most good. I never can keep this lock of hair in place.”

“You poor infant!” said Lucile. “Come here and let me fix you.” 55

Then some strange girls came in and, after a few admonitory pats of stubborn bows and ruffles, the girls started downstairs. They made a pretty picture as they descended the wide staircase together, and as they reached the last step their guardian disengaged herself from a laughing group of young folks and came forward to meet them with an approving smile.

“You didn’t stay up there as long as I expected,” she laughed. “Now come in and meet everybody.”

The introductions were soon over, much to everybody’s relief, and the girls were surprised to find how many of the boys and girls they knew.

“Why, I know most all of them,” Lucile confided to Jack in a lull. “Those I don’t know to speak to, I’ve seen over and over again on the street.”

“That’s not strange,” said Jack. “There’s a great big crowd and it’s growing every minute. Here are some new arrivals!”

“Oh, it’s Marjorie and Dot, with the boys,” she cried, jumping up. “Will you excuse me a minute? I’ll be right back,” and she threw him a glance so full of sparkling mischief that his heart leaped suddenly and unaccountably, and Phil had to speak to him twice before he could make himself heard.

In half an hour the dancing began. The floor of the two great rooms that had been thrown open for the use of the guests had been polished till they shone, and at the far end of the room a platform had been erected, upon which sat the musicians, partly screened by magnificent palms. The rooms were decorated from end to end with flowers and the air was heavy with their perfume.

At an appointed signal the orchestra struck up a one-step and at that irresistible summons the boys began a mad rush to secure partners.

“Oh, I didn’t know it would be like this,” murmured Jessie. 56

“Isn’t it wonderful?” cried Lucile, and the next instant a voice at her elbow pleaded, “Give me this dance, will you, Lucy?” and she looked up into Jack’s smiling face.

An answering smile flashed out. “Will I?” she cried, and led the way, Phil and Jessie following.

Another instant and she was being whirled away on Jack’s arm, and Jack, who had won renown for his dancing among his New York associates, thought he had never danced with anyone so lovely and so exquisitely graceful as this friend of Jessie’s.

“You dance wonderfully,” was Jack’s comment. “Anybody could tell you love it.”

“Oh, I do,” said Lucile, fervently. “There’s nothing like it.”

“Nor you,” said Jack, and he believed it.

The girls never forgot that night. A new world seemed to open before them—a world they never knew existed. A world filled with bright lights and music, where every one danced and laughed and was thrillingly and unbelievably joyful.

And Lucile, who had never dreamed of anything like this, suddenly found herself the very center of attraction. The crowd was always thickest about her and Jessie and Evelyn, and she was so deluged with requests for the next dance that her order was filled in no time and Jack had all he could do to squeeze in two numbers at the very end.

Some of the boys, to be perfectly frank, quite a few, were awkward and stepped on the toes of her dainty little white pumps until they were very nearly black, but she was so happy as to be absolutely oblivious of such trifles, while the awkward youths fell entirely under the spell of her sparkling, fun-filled eyes and the merry, bubbling laugh that seemed to overflow from sheer joy.

Once Jessie managed to whisper to her, “Miss—Mrs. Wescott didn’t say she was going to have such a wonderful affair as this. Were you in the secret, Lucy?”

“No; there wasn’t any secret. Our guardian just did it as a splendid surprise, the dear,” said Lucile, and her eyes 57 traveled to where her guardian and her husband were standing with a group of older people

who had come later in the evening to enjoy the fun and to help the young Wescotts do the chaperoning.

“She is all right,” agreed Jessie. “And doesn’t Jack Wescott look splendid? I believe he’s handsomer now than he was in the country.”

“He is fine looking,” Lucile admitted, grudgingly. “Just the same, I’ll never quite forgive him.”

Jack took Lucile into dinner. It required skillful manoeuvering on his part and he never could tell afterward how it happened, but the fact remains that he finally succeeded in extricating her from the mob and started with her toward the dining-room.

“Where’s Jessie? I promised to wait for her,” said Lucile, half turning round. “She’s lost in the crowd, I guess.”

“Probably,” said Jack, perfectly satisfied with this solution. “You needn’t worry about her. Phil will see that she finds her way to the dining-room all right.”

“I shouldn’t wonder,” laughed Lucile, and so the matter was settled, to their satisfaction at least.

After dinner the last few dances passed rapidly—far too quickly for the happy young folks. As the last notes of “Home, Sweet Home” died away, Jack turned to his radiant little partner.

“It seems to me they cut that dance mighty short,” said he. “I wish they would give us an encore.”

“Yes, aren’t they stingy?” Lucile agreed, as the frantic applause brought no response from the bored musicians, who were already putting away their music. “It must be pretty hard for them,” she added, as Jack started to pilot her toward the door. “They have to do all the work while we have the fun.”

"Yes, but they have the fun of getting paid for it," Jack suggested, practically.

Lucile laughed. "I never thought of it in that light before," she said, and then added, with a sigh, "Well, I suppose it's all over now." 58

"Sorry?" whispered Jack.

"Of course; aren't you?" she countered, with a quick upward glance, that fell before his steady gaze.

Jack answered softly, as several of the girls and boys approached "More sorry than I can make you understand—now."

Lucile thrilled with a new, strange emotion that she could not analyze; she only knew it was absurdly hard to look at Jack, and that she was immensely relieved when Evelyn greeted her with a merry, "Don't you wish it were beginning all over again, Lucy? I don't feel a bit like going home."

"That seems to be the general cry," broke in Marjorie. "And to think that you girls are going away to-morrow!" she added. "You'll be tired out after to-night."

"Oh, we're not going till late in the afternoon, so we can sleep all we want to in the morning. All the packing is done," said Jessie, reassuringly.

"But who speaks of sleep?" broke in Lucile, gaily. "I never felt so far from it in all my life."

"No, but you'll feel mighty near it about two o'clock to-morrow afternoon, if I'm any judge," Phil prophesied, grimly.

"Well, everybody knows you're not," said Lucile, running lightly up the stairs and stopping to make a laughing face at her brother over the banister. "Come

on, girls," she cried. "Everybody's going and we haven't even started yet."

The girls followed her, laughing merrily, and Phil grinned at the fellows. "You can't get the best of Lucy," he said.

An hour later Lucile put out the light and crept into bed with a sigh. "Such a wonderful time," she breathed, "and he *is* good looking. Jack——" Then she smiled whimsically into the dark. "It must run in the name," she said.

59

CHAPTER IX

HURRAH, FOR EUROPE!

Lucile opened one sleepy eye upon the busily ticking little clock on the table. As she looked, her gaze became fixed and she sat up in bed with a startled exclamation.

“Eleven o’clock!” she cried. “Oh, it can’t be!” she added, with sudden inspiration, which was clouded with disappointment the next minute as the steady ticking continued.

“How silly!” she said, laughing at herself. “Since it’s still going, it’s certain that it hasn’t stopped.” With which profound remark she slipped out of bed and into her dressing gown.

“Oh, how could I waste so much time on sleep,” she marveled, “when to-day means—Europe? Oh, I can never wait to get dressed!”

She did wait, however, and when she had donned her dress and tucked her unruly curls into place, she looked as fresh and sweet as a flower. She finished her toilet in breathless haste, and as she flung open the door of her room she nearly ran into Phil, who was tearing down the hall toward her.

“Hello, Sis; it’s about time you were up,” was his greeting. “Mother said to call you if you weren’t. Do you know what time it is?” he queried, regarding her

severely.

“Yes, I know what time it is, Grandad,” she mimicked, and, catching him about the neck, she began to do a series of steps not standardized in the Vernon Castle repertoire. “Come on, old sobersides,” she laughed; “dance for your life. I’ll be the orchestra.”

Phil was nothing if not a “sport,” so he grasped his sister around the waist and away they went down the hall at a great rate, Lucile singing like mad, until the sounds of 60 merriment reached Mr. Payton in the library and out he came, paper in hand, to have his share of the fun.

He was greeted by a peal of laughter, and Lucile cried, “Stop stepping on my toes, Phil, for goodness’ sakes! See, it goes like this.”

“What’s all the rumpus about?” thundered Mr. Payton, in his hearty voice, and Lucile poked her bright face over the banister to smile impishly and threw him a kiss.

“Dancing, Dad; don’t you want to try?” she challenged.

“Sure,” was the unexpected reply, “only leave a little of the stairs, please,” as they came down two steps at a time and landed right side up with care.

Then Mr. Payton was hugged and kissed and called a “dear” and dragged into the library, where the rugs were rolled up and full preparations made for the first dancing lesson. They were in full swing, with the Victrola going and Lucile counting “One-two-three, one-two-three,” when Mrs. Payton came in.

She looked her disapproval of the disorderly room, but when her glance rested on her husband, who

proved surprisingly light on his feet for so heavy a man, her eyes filled with interest and she sat down to watch.

When the record stopped, Lucile turned shining eyes on her mother. “Wasn’t that fine, Mother?” while Phil burst out with, “Bravo, Dad! I had no idea you could do it.”

“All due to my very able teacher,” said Mr. Payton, modestly. “Don’t you want to try it, Nell?” he asked. “It’s more fun than you can imagine. I remember that when I first met you there was no better dancer on the floor, dear. Come on and try.”

“I always used to love to dance,” Mrs. Payton admitted, and that admission was enough for Lucile.

“I tell you what we’ll do,” she said. “You take Mother, Phil, and I’ll take Dad. Oh, what a lark!”

It was half an hour before the Paytons could bring themselves down to a consideration of the sober and substantial things of life, and then it took Mrs. Payton to do it. 61

“Lucile,” she cried, stopping in the middle of a dance to gaze upon her daughter, “I don’t believe you’ve had a mouthful of anything to eat since you got up, and it’s after twelve o’clock.”

“Oh, I forgot,” said Lucy, and then added naively, “Now I come to think of it, though, I am hungry.”

“Of course you are. Run along and tell Mary to make you some toast. That will last you till we all have lunch, which will be pretty soon now.”

“I hope so,” said Phil, who was always ready for his three good meals a day. “I begin to feel the ravages of famine,” he groaned.

"If you are real good, I may give you a piece of my toast," Lucile promised.

"No, don't, Lucy; it will only spoil his dinner," said Mrs. Payton. "Dancing does give you an appetite, though, doesn't it?" she added, at which Lucile smiled to herself, for it was very, very long since she had seen her mother unbend so far.

"If dancing will do it," she decided, on her way to the kitchen, "we'll dance from here to Jericho," and the firm lines of her mouth showed that she meant it.

At half past four Phil put on his hat and announced his intention of going round for the girls.

"You needn't stop for Jessie," Lucile called after him; "nor for Evelyn either, for that matter. All their folks are coming along to see us off."

"I'm going anyway," he replied, briefly, and Lucile called gaily after him, "There's a reason," and shut the door before he could retort.

Mrs. Payton met her in the hall.

"Better get your hat and coat on, Lucy. It's almost time to start."

As Lucile ran lightly up the stairs and into her room, her heart beat fast and her face flamed with excitement.

"We're going, we're going!" she sang, as she slipped into her coat and pulled her hat—a perky little affair with a blue bow at the side, that held in place a black wing set 62 at an aggravating angle—down over one eye and then surveyed herself critically.

"Guess I'm all right," she said, pushing a stray lock into place with experienced fingers. "Now for my gloves and bag and I'll be ready. Coming, Mother!"

This last to an impatient command from the lower regions. “Will you ask Dad if he took my Gladstone bag downstairs?”

Mr. Payton replied in person that he had, and Lucile stepped out in the hall and closed the door softly. She paused at the head of the stairs to still the tumultuous beating of her heart, for it seemed to her that it could be heard a mile away. It was all so new and strange and wonderful—and now that their great dream was to be realized so soon, she felt more than ever that it must be a dream and nothing more. She wondered if Jessie and Evelyn were feeling that way, too, and then she heard the clamor of voices on the porch and knew that they had come.

Then a sort of panic seized her, as she realized that Jack Turnbull would be with them. She knew he would, for that had been the last thing he had said to her last night—oh, how very far away it seemed! Half unconsciously, she straightened her little hat and ran downstairs, just in time to answer Phil’s urgent, “Where’s Lucy?” with a merry, “Here, Phil; bag and baggage!”

Everybody turned to greet the radiant little figure, and Lucile included them all in her bright, “How’s everybody?”

“Rather shaky,” Evelyn answered, in an awe-struck voice, and everybody laughed good-naturedly.

“Well, what do you say if we start?” suggested Mr. Payton. “We are all here and we might as well have plenty of time. We don’t want to have to hurry.”

They all agreed, and so, with a great deal of noise and laughter, the party started out. Lucile ran back to say a word of good-by to Mary and Jane, who, good souls, were weeping heartily at the thought of

parting with the family for so long. With difficulty she managed to break away from them, and on her way back came face to face with—Jack! 63

“Oh,” she stammered, “I thought they—everybody—had gone!”

“So they have, but I came back to get you and—tell you to hurry,” he replied, with a laugh. It was a very frank, nice laugh, Lucile decided, and she was very glad he had come back, so she answered him gaily and they started out to overtake the others.

At least, Lucile did, but, after covering a half-block at a fast walk, that was almost a run, Jack protested.

“What’s your awful hurry?” he queried, reproachfully. “You have an hour to catch the train, so why rush?”

Lucile opened her eyes wide in feigned astonishment.

“Why, I’m only following instructions,” she teased. “You told me to hurry, and so I’m trying to.”

“With great success,” he added, with a smile of understanding. “Just the same, you know I didn’t mean it that way. I had to see you and I needed some excuse. I won’t have a chance to see you for a long, long time, you know.”

Lucile looked up quickly, this time in real surprise.

“But I thought you were going back to New York to-day, anyway,” she said.

“So I am, but there isn’t the width of the Atlantic between New York and Burleigh,” he answered meaningly.

Just then Evelyn turned around and, making a megaphone of her hand, shouted, “Better hurry up; we’ll miss the train.”

“Plenty of time,” Jack threw back, pleasantly. “Got half an hour yet.”

“Aw, there’s something wrong with your watch,” Phil retorted. “Next time you buy an Ingersoll, see that you get your money’s worth.”

“Thanks!” drawled Jack, but Lucile looked anxious.

“Perhaps we would better catch up with the rest of them,” she suggested. “The front ranks have quite a start on us, and we don’t want to keep them waiting.”

“Oh, all right,” agreed Jack cheerfully. “Give me your hand and we’ll do a hundred-yard dash in record time.” 64

Lucile took the proffered hand and away they went like two happy children, reaching the rest of the party a moment later, out of breath but triumphant.

“Didn’t I tell you we’d break the record?” laughed Jack, forgetting for the moment to release her hand. “You’re some little runner, too,” he added, admiringly.

“Speak for yourself,” she threw back gaily. “That was a good run, though. I guess we won’t miss the train now.”

“Not an unmixed blessing,” Jack grumbled, at which they all laughed with such infectious mirth that more than one passer-by turned to smile after them.

They arrived at the station in plenty of time, after all, for it was fully fifteen minutes before a distant toot announced the coming of the train that was to carry them to New York. It had been Mr. Payton’s intention in the first place to take passage on one of the smaller steamers, but the girls had been so

evidently disappointed, although, to do them credit, they had tried their very best not to let him see it, that he had changed his plans at the last minute and had decided to take passage from New York on the great steamer “Mauretania.”

In talking things over, the girls’ parents and one or two of their relatives had decided to take the trip with them as far as New York, and from there give them a glorious send-off.

The girls’ desire and curiosity to see the great metropolis had been heightened by their guardian’s vivid recitals of her experiences, and they were on edge with expectancy.

“I wish we were going to spend some time in New York,” Phil was saying. “We just shoot in and then right out again.”

“You ungrateful heathen!” Lucile chided. “What do you expect? I’d like to spend a year in New York, too, but we can’t do everything at once.”

What Jack might have replied will never be known for just then they heard the whistle of the train. The journey had begun.

65

CHAPTER X

WHIRLED THROUGH THE NIGHT

Mile after mile, the long train rumbled on over shining rails that fell away behind and merged in the far-distant sky-line. The first rays of the morning sun struck on the brilliant metal and gathered up the dazzled sunbeams to scatter them broadcast over hills and fields and flying houses. Now and then the hoarse whistle of the engine broke the early morning quiet, only to be flung back on itself by wood and cave and mountainside in a scornful shout of mockery.

And still the girls slept on in the dreamless, heavy sleep of tired girlhood. Of course, not one of the three had had the least intention of doing anything so commonplace as going to sleep; in fact, the very idea had been vaguely irritating. Had they not looked forward to this very thing for months—at least, so it seemed to them—and it was almost impossible for them to have patience with the idiocy of any one who could calmly suggest slumber at such a time. And Phil—for it was at him that this Parthian shot had been aimed—had evinced remarkable self-control, in that he had refused to argue, but had continued to smile in an aggravatingly superior manner, which had said more plainly than words: “You think you mean it, no doubt, but I, who am wise, know what simpletons you are.”

Of course, Phil was right, as they had known in their hearts he would be, in spite of all their resolution, and it was not until the sun struck through the little window and dashed upon Lucile’s sleeping face in a golden shower that she stirred impatiently and brushed her hand across her eyes.

Fifteen minutes later, in dressing gown and cap, she pushed aside the curtain into the aisle and crept out, 66 meaning to steal a march on the others. She let

the curtain fall with a little gasp of astonishment, for as she looked, two other curtains moved stealthily, animated by unseen hands, and two heads popped simultaneously into the aisle. Jessie and Evelyn looked at each other, then at Lucile, vacantly at first, and then, as the truth dawned upon them, they began to laugh.

"Oh," gasped Lucile, "I thought I was the only one awake, and here you two come along and spoil my well-laid plans."

"The well-laid plans of mice and men
Aft gang agley,"

quoted Jessie.

"Stop spouting poetry before breakfast," commanded Evelyn. "You might wait until I get strength to bear it."

"There she goes! First thing in the morning, too," said Jessie, despairingly.

Lucile laughed, and, taking each disputant by an arm, hurried them along the aisle.

"May I ask our destination?" queried Jessie, with the utmost politeness.

"Certainly," Lucile agreed, cheerfully, and then, as no further explanation seemed forthcoming, Jessie added, with an air of indefinite patience, "Well?"

"Go ahead, ask all the questions you like," said Lucile, with a twinkle in her eye. "I'm not going to answer them, though," and, with a little laugh, she pushed her before her into a little room at the farther end of the car.

"A-ha, a mirror!" cried Jessie. "Lucile, I forgive all."

“Thanks,” replied Lucile, laconically. “Even at that, you needn’t take up the whole mirror, you know.”

“Oh, you can look on both sides,” said Jessie, serenely.

The girls laughed.

“The only wonder is that we showed almost human intelligence in bringing our combs along,” Lucile remarked, after a moment.

“Not at all,” observed Jessie, grandly. “We only followed a very obvious line of reasoning.” 67

“A very which?” asked Evelyn, turning round with her comb poised in mid-air. “If you must talk, kindly speak United States, Jessie.”

Jessie turned upon her friend a look in which was more of pity than of anger.

“It is evident,” she remarked sadly, “that there is one among us who has never grasped the opportunity for learning afforded by our present-day civilization ——”

“Jessie, darling,” broke in Lucile, sweetly, “if you don’t come down from your soap box pretty soon, I’m afraid we’ll have to resort to force. Much as we would hate to,” she added, apologetically.

Evelyn threw up her hands in desperation.

“You’re just as bad as Jessie, Lucy,” she accused. “I’m going in and see if I can’t find peace. The boys ought to be up by this time,” she added, slyly.

The girls laughed as the door slammed behind her, and Lucile exclaimed, with a little flourish of her comb, “Come on, Jess; I’m ready for the fray.” And, with arms about each other, girl fashion, they followed Evelyn into the aisle.

How could they know on that morning, when their hearts were full and their heads light with the heady wine of Spring, that before three months had sped, they would feel the strands of the mighty web of nations tighten about them; that they would see the beginning of the greatest war the world has ever known? Perhaps it was just as well that they were not gifted with prophecy, for the grim shadow of war that hung menacingly over all Europe would have darkened this bright morning and would have tinted all the hills and countryside with the grayish hue of impending disaster.

As it was, there was no cloud to darken the horizon of their exuberant happiness and they gave full rein to their high spirits.

As Evelyn had said, the boys were up when they returned, and they were not the only ones, for the train seemed suddenly to have come to life. Voices called merrily to each other from different points in the car, and 68 everywhere was the stir and bustle of awakened and refreshed humanity.

As Lucile and Jessie made their way through the car, they encountered several women, apparently bound for the dressing-room.

“It’s good we got there early,” said Lucile. “If we hadn’t, we never would have gotten a chance at the mirror.”

“You’re just right,” laughed Jessie. “There wasn’t room enough for three of us, let alone a half a dozen.”

A moment later they joined a group of their own folks at the other end of the car. They flung a merry greeting.

“Well, well, girls,” observed Mr. Payton, catching sight of the girls out of the corner of his eye, “we thought you were lost.”

“I didn’t think so,” said Phil. “Evelyn said you might be in there half an hour if you had good luck, so we didn’t expect you so soon.”

The girls threw a reproachful look at the traitress, who made a defiant little mouth at them.

“Well, I had to get even with you some way,” she cried.

Just then Jack, who had been trapped into a discussion with some of the men and had been anxiously watching for a chance to escape, suddenly finding it, excused himself and joined the young folks.

“What’s the row?” he asked casually.

“Nothing, save that we have a traitress in our midst,” declaimed Jessie, dramatically.

“How exciting!” drawled her cousin. Then, turning to Lucile, he inquired, lightly:

“Did you get any sleep last night, or were the bumps too much for you?”

“The bumps didn’t worry me at all,” she confessed, as she smiled whimsically. “In fact, I didn’t know there were any.”

“How about something to eat?”

It was Mr. Payton who voiced the welcome suggestion, and there was a prompt shout of approval from all hands. 69

“You have said it, Dad,” commended Phil. “If we start now, we’ll get there before the crowd.”

So off went the merry company to the dining-car, where the tempting odors made them more ravenous than before, if such a thing were possible, and Phil kept on ordering until it seemed as though the rest of the passengers would have to go on short commons.

The early morning passed quickly and it was no time at all before Jack announced to Lucile—for he was never very far from her side—that they would reach New York within the next hour.

Then, as Jack had said, at exactly five minutes of nine—the authority for the time being Phil's beloved chronometer, which he declared, and devoutly believed as well, varied hardly a second during the year—the train glided smoothly into the station and they reached—New York!

The girls stood with shining eyes and breath that came and went quickly through parted lips. Then, as the porter shouted in stentorian tones, "New Yawk—all out!" they moved half dazedly through the crowd and out on the great platform, where the din half fascinated, half frightened them.

"Stick close together, everybody," Mr. Payton directed. "It wouldn't be any joke if we got separated!"

Lucile had faced many situations and never turned a hair, but now the roar of the great metropolis, the rumble of the hand-cars on the platform as the heavy baggage was carted to and from the trains, the shrieking of engine whistles, the hoarse cries of the train-hands, all combined in such a menacing roar that for a moment she had a wild desire to run and hide somewhere, anywhere to get away from the thunderous din.

It was only for a second, however, for, as Jack

slipped a reassuring arm through hers, she looked up at him with her old, confident smile.

“I’ll see that you don’t get lost or run over,” he said, comfortingly, with that air of protection that all men, even very young ones like Jack, love to assume toward girls and women, especially pretty ones. 70

And it must be noted that from that instant Jack Turnbull rose forty good points in Lucile’s estimation. It gave her a feeling of grateful security to be piloted through the crowd in this masterly fashion. Soon they had covered the length of the platform and had reached the curb, which was lined with cabs and taxis.

“Here, pile in, all of you,” Mr. Payton commanded, as he looked around to see if they were all there. “I guess you five young people can manage to squeeze into one car. Come, Nellie,” to his wife, “you get right in here,” and he proceeded, with the other men, to help the ladies into the two waiting cabs.

“Pretty close quarters,” said Jack, as he slipped into the square inch of space between Jessie and Evelyn. “I suppose I might have walked,” he was adding, doubtfully, when Lucile broke in with a decided, “Indeed, you shouldn’t have thought of such a thing! What difference does it make if we are a little crowded?”

“That’s all very well for you, Lucy; you’re not having the breath squeezed out of you,” Jessie began, when Phil interrupted, mischievously:

“Why don’t you change places? Lucy doesn’t mind and you do, Jess.”

“You have it!” exclaimed Jack, enthusiastically. “The first minute I saw you, I said to myself, ‘That fellow

has brains.' Come on Jess; vacate," and he slipped his arm about his cousin, gently lifting her from the seat.

"Go ahead, Lucy," urged Evelyn from her corner.

So, with a great deal of merriment, the exchange was made, much to the satisfaction of everyone concerned.

The rest of the journey through the traffic-laden streets to the hotel was so vivid a panorama of shifting scenes that, to the unaccustomed eyes of the girls, it seemed like one confused blur.

"Oh, are we there already?" Lucile exclaimed, regretfully, as the taxi stopped abruptly before the great white pile of the Hotel McAlpin. "The ride has seemed so short!" 71

"I wish you were going to stay in New York," Jack whispered, as he helped her to alight. "We'd get my car and whiz all around this old city until you'd know it better than Burleigh."

"Oh, if I only could!" she cried, her eyes alight with the very thought. "Wouldn't it be fun?"

"You just bet it would," he agreed, with a warmth that brought even a brighter color to her face.

An instant later they were joined by the others and they passed through the imposing entrance.

In the hotel office the girls drew close together, and Lucile said, in a voice scarcely above a whisper, "So this is New York!"

"Do you like it as much as you thought you would?" asked Phil, overhearing.

The girls turned wonder-filled eyes upon him.

"Oh, much more!" they chorused, with a vehemence

that left no room for doubt.

72

CHAPTER XI

"ALL ASHORE WHO ARE GOING ASHORE!"

Three hours later, refreshed and invigorated by a most delectable lunch, eaten in the beautiful dining-room of the hotel, our travelers were ready for the last stage of the preparatory journey. Nothing remained now but the short ride to the wharf and then—the rapture of embarking on the wonderful "Mauretania," which had hitherto been but a magic name to them, breathing of romance and wonder. Then a final farewell to their friends, and before them stretched the great European continent, holding the unfathomed mysteries of thousands of years.

There was England, upon whose soil, in ancient times the savage Britons fought against great Caesar —and lost. There was France, scene of the bloodiest revolution that has ever dyed red the pages of history—a revolution that proved supreme the tremendous, onrushing power of the masses. And there was Rome itself, where every inch of soil, where every nook and cranny of the famous catacombs marked some great historic drama played in the days when "to be a Roman were better than a king!"

With all the romance of the Old War about to unfold itself to their enchanted eyes, is it any wonder that our girls were eager for the start?

“All ready?” said Jack.

“Oh, I’ve been ready and waiting for half an hour or more,” laughed Lucile. “I do wish the folks would hurry!”

“I’m afraid you don’t like our great city, you seem so anxious to leave it—and me,” he said, with a reproachful side glance.

“Oh, I do, I do! I love it—the city, I mean!” she added, in some confusion, as he glanced at her inquiringly. “It’s all wonderful, and I could spend a year here without 73 getting tired; but as long as we do have to leave it, I wish we would hurry,” she added, naively.

“Well, here come your brother and Jessie now, so you won’t have much longer to wait—worse luck!” said Jack, with a wry smile. “I suppose I may at least be allowed the privilege of seeing you safely on board?”

Lucile threw him a merry glance as the rest came up. “I suppose you may,” she mimicked.

A few minutes later they stepped out of the cab and onto a sun-flooded wharf, where confusion reigned supreme. An immense crowd of people stood upon the dock, talking, laughing and gesticulating excitedly, and every one seemed in the highest of spirits. And, indeed, how could they be anything else, thought Lucile, as she looked about her with dancing eyes; the world had never seemed so essentially a place to laugh in as it did on this glorious morning.

"Well, we haven't very much further to go," said Mr. Payton, beaming genially down upon them. "There's the good ship, 'Mauretania,' mates. Neat little craft, eh?"

And following the direction of his glance, they gazed for a second at the towering bulk of the steamer, scarcely daring to believe the evidence of their eyes.

"Say, that's class!" breathed Phil, reverently, and Jessie added, "You could put all of Burleigh in one corner and never miss it!"

They all laughed, and Lucile started forward. "We can go on board now, can't we, Dad?" she inquired.

"Sure we can go on board. We'll have just about time to look at our staterooms, if we hurry."

Since that was just the very thing everybody was most anxious to do, they wasted very little time in following his suggestion.

Jack kept close to Lucile's side as they threaded their way through the crowd, and Phil took charge of the other two girls.

As Lucile watched the three, she suddenly broke into a little ripple of laughter, and, upon being questioned severely as to the reason of such unseemly mirth, she said, 74 gaily, "I was just wondering what poor Phil will do with three girls, and one his sister, at that."

Jack laughed amusedly. "It will be pretty hard on the poor fellow," he admitted. "I think I ought to go along. I could at least relieve him of his sister."

"For which he would be devoutly thankful," she added.

"No more than I," said Jack, from which we may gather that our friend was much accomplished in the

gentle art of flattery. However, to do him justice, he meant it, and even the most confirmed old bachelor, looking at Lucile, must have admitted that he had just and sufficient cause. In fact, there were not many who did not look at Lucile, who, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, was the very image of radiant happiness.

At last their party had wormed its way through the crowd and were waiting at the foot of the gangplank for them to come up.

“Goodness! I had no idea it was so enormous!” Evelyn was saying. “I’m almost afraid of it.”

“You’d better stick close to me,” Jessie advised. “Then if we get lost, we’ll at least have company.”

“Don’t let’s stand here, at any rate,” Mrs. Payton broke in, impatiently. “Our friends won’t have a minute to look at our staterooms.”

“We had to wait for the young folks, my dear,” suggested Mr. Payton, mildly, and then, as Lucile and Jack joined them, he hurried them before him with scant ceremony. “We don’t want to lose you,” he explained, when they laughingly protested.

And then, at last, they were on deck, where a steward relieved them of their light luggage.

The girls tried to take in everything at once as they followed their guide along the deck and down the cabin stairs, but they had at last to give it up as a bad job.

“I feel as if I must be home in Burleigh, dreaming all this,” said Jessie. “I’m getting dizzy trying to take in all the new impressions.”

“Stick close to me, then,” Phil invited. “I’ll be on

deck when you faint." 75

"Much good that will do Jessie when she is in the cabin," remarked Evelyn, with scathing sarcasm.

"Oh-h!" groaned the boys in unison, and Jessie clapped her hands delightedly, crying, "That's right, Evelyn; give it to them whenever you can."

And then all nonsense stopped suddenly as the steward paused and, fitting the key in the lock, disclosed the stateroom engaged for Mr. and Mrs. Payton. They crowded into the room and the girls set about examining everything without more ado.

"Oh, isn't it splendid?" cried Lucile. "You would never dream from the looks of this room that we were on board ship. Why, it's just as complete and comfortable as our rooms at home!"

"Pretty nifty," Phil agreed, as his glance traveled from the neat brass bed to the dresser and the large, inviting chair.

"I hate to hurry you," said Mr. Payton, as he pulled out his watch, "but as time waits for no man, we will have to hustle considerably if we expect to see the other two rooms."

So, reluctant to leave secrets still to be discovered, yet anxious to see their own room, the girls filed out, talking and laughing all at once, till they reached a door a little further down the corridor, which Mr. Payton designated as belonging to their stateroom.

While they waited it seemed to them that never before had simple tasks, such as fitting a key into the lock, been performed with such exasperating slowness, and the girls fairly danced with impatience. The older folks smiled indulgently, and Mr. Sanderson chuckled as he pulled Evelyn's ear

and inquired inanely, “if she were having a good time.”

He was crushed a moment later by the withering scorn from three pairs of merry eyes, and Mrs. Payton exclaimed, laughingly, “Such a question! All you have to do is just look at them.”

Then, at last, the door flew open and they gazed on what was to be their own domain for five days at least; and it 76 is safe to say that, in her heart, each of the girls wished it were to be twice as long.

“Oh, isn’t it perfectly, beautiful, wonderfully lovely?” cried Jessie, getting more excited with each adjective, and when the others laughed merrily at the extravagance of her description, she added, defiantly, “I don’t care; it is! I’ll leave it to any one.”

“You are right as far as you went, Jessie,” Lucile backed her up, “only you didn’t say half enough.”

“And there’s a full bed and a cot, just as we thought,” Evelyn went on with the inventory, “and a bea-utiful dresser, and three darling chairs, and—and——” she finished incoherently.

“I’m sorry you all seem so dissatisfied,” said Mr. Payton, with so droll an attempt to look gloomy that Lucile then and there threw her arms about his neck and gave him an ecstatic kiss, crying joyfully, “Oh, you are the most wonderful father in all the world!”

“Lucile!” exclaimed her mother warningly, whereupon Lucile, who was far too happy to consider consequences, promptly kissed the astonished lady. “To say nothing of Mother!” she cried.

Much to every one’s surprise, far from being displeased, Mrs. Payton seemed rather to enjoy her

daughter's impulsive outburst, merely cautioning her not to overheat and overexcite herself too much, as the day gave promise of being a very hot one.

"The big portholes make it so nice and light, too," said Jessie, again referring to the stateroom. "Why, one wouldn't even mind being seasick here!"

"Oh, Jessie!" cried Lucile and Evelyn, in dismay, and Lucile added, "I guess it doesn't make much difference where you are when you're seasick. From all I have heard, you just about wish you could die."

Mr. Payton laughed, and said, reassuringly, "The probability is that none of us will be sick, but we needn't worry about it till the time comes, anyway. And now," he added, "I guess, if you young people can tear yourselves away, we had better go on deck."
77

"But we haven't seen Phil's room yet." Lucile began, when that young gentleman, interrupted with a superior, "Don't let that worry you. I wouldn't have a lot of girls making a fuss over my quarters."

"We probably wouldn't anyway," said Jessie, and passed out with her nose in the air.

"I've heard that lemons and salt herring are good for seasickness," Jack teased, as they stepped on deck.

"Oh, don't!" Lucile pleaded, puckering her mouth at the thought of the lemon. "There is only one comfort," she added, triumphantly, "and that is, if I am seasick, you won't be here to know it."

"That's cruel," he laughed back; then added, quickly, "But you are going to write to me, any way, and tell me all about your experiences, aren't you?"

"I don't—know," she answered, doubtfully. "You see,

even if Mother were willing, I wouldn't stay in one place very long—and——"

They were standing near the rail, Jack bending toward her very earnestly and she, gazing out over the crowded wharf, a little confused and very uncertain what to do; and yet, in her girl's heart, she knew what she *wanted* to do!

"If you don't want to get left, Turnbull, you'd better hustle," sang out Phil. "Everybody's off that's going."

Jack leaned forward and took Lucile's hand. "Please," he urged. "Just a little short letter—anything, as long as you write. Won't you please?"

Then Lucile's last little barrier gave way and, with a quick, half-whispered "All right," she ran to join her father and mother, who had caught the little interchange and had regarded each other with troubled eyes. "Perhaps it's just as well we are going to Europe," Mrs. Payton had said, and Mr. Payton had nodded an unusually grave consent.

Jessie and Evelyn were engrossed in taking leave of their folks, who were half laughing, half crying at the thought of parting with them for so long. 78

Again the warning cry, "All ashore that are going ashore!" and, with a last hug and kiss and cry of "Take care of yourselves and be good," the ladies, assisted by their impatient escorts, hurried down the gangplank and were instantly lost to sight among the jostling mob down below.

"Phil, run and get the spy-glasses—quick!" directed Mrs. Payton. "They are in the grip in my stateroom. Here's the key—hurry!"

So Phil raced off as directed and the rest were pushed up against the rail by the crowd that pressed

four deep behind them, all striving eagerly for a last sight of the dear ones on the wharf.

“Where are they?” cried Jessie, frantically. “I can’t see a soul——Oh, yes; there’s Dad’s hat, I know—look, he’s waving it——”

“And there’s your mother, too, Evelyn,” Lucile broke in. “See, she’s waving her handkerchief——”

“Oh, I can see them all now,” said Evelyn, dancing up and down excitedly. “They’re all there, oh—oh-h ——”

“Here’s Phil,” said Lucile, making room for him, as he wormed his way through. “He didn’t waste much time.”

“Bet your life I didn’t,” said Phil. “How I found the place I don’t know—must have been a sort of instinct, I guess. Here you are, Mother.”

Then there was a great noise and rattle as the gangplank was pulled up, and a moment later the great ship began to draw away ever so slowly and majestically, and the great whistle shrieked a blatant blast of farewell to the shouting, cheering, handkerchief-waving crowd on the wharf.

“Lucy,” whispered Evelyn, squeezing her friend’s arm so tightly that it hurt, “did you ever see anything like it?”

CHAPTER XII

MONSIEUR CHARLOIX

"What's the matter, Lucy? You look so—funny——"

It was the morning of the second day out and the three girls were leaning against the rail, gazing dreamily out over the boundless expanse of ocean. They wore natty white middy suits and, with floppy little sailor hats shading flushed cheeks and laughing eyes, they made an alluringly picturesque little group that had attracted much attention from their fellow-passengers.

"I'm glad you think so," said Lucile, dryly, in response to Jessie's question. "If I look the way I feel I must be a very laughable object!"

A quick glance of consternation passed between Jessie and Evelyn, and the latter turned to Lucile with dismay in her uplifted eyebrows.

"Seasick?" she inquired in a still, small voice.

Lucile nodded grimly. "Rather," she answered. "Guess I'm going to die."

"Don't say that," begged the girls, stifling a desire to laugh and cry at once.

"Oh, Lucy, dear, what can we do?" said Jessie, putting a comforting arm about her friend, whose complexion had grown a peculiar, greenish-gray color in the last few moments. "Don't you think you had better go below? Maybe if you lie flat on your back you will feel better. Come, dear."

"I knew I'd go and spoil everything by getting seasick," moaned Lucile, in the same toneless voice,

and then, as a flash of her old saving humor came to the front, she turned to the girls with a suggestion of a smile. “I suppose I’ll have to come to the lemon and herring,” she said. 80

She was deathly sick all the rest of that day and most of the next, and it was not till near nightfall of the second day that she began to feel the first faint desire to live.

Jessie and Evelyn had wandered about aimlessly all the time, looking, as Phil said, as if some one had just pronounced a death sentence upon them. Though they had become acquainted with a great many of the passengers, no one of them had been able to coax a smile to the girls’ long faces. In spite of Phil’s uncivil remarks, it must be noted that even the wondrous engine-room had lost much of its charm for him and he had cut his visit short, merely to ask if they, meaning his father and mother, thought it would not help some to get Lucile on deck —fresh air—etc., etc.

Toward evening the cause of all this unrest opened heavy eyes upon a tossing gray world and turned her head languidly toward the porthole.

At the slight sound, Evelyn, who had been sitting, chin in hand, gazing gloomingly out to sea, rose quickly and ran to the side of the bed.

“Are you better, dear?” she said, softly stroking Lucile’s dark hair back from her forehead with gentle fingers. “You went to sleep and I was so afraid of disturbing you that I didn’t dare move.”

Lucile caught her friend’s hand and pressed it to her cheek. “You and Jessie have been darling to me—both of you,” she cried, warmly, and Evelyn dropped to her knees beside the bed.

“Oh, that sounds like our old Lucy,” she exulted. “You are feeling better aren’t you, dear?”

“Lots,” said Lucile, smiling up at her friend.

Then Jessie came running in and they hugged each other and laughed and cried after the dear and foolish manner of all girls, until a gentle knock disturbed them and brought Jessie to her feet with a start.

“Oh, I promised Phil I’d come right back and tell him if you were awake, and I never did,” she cried, in consternation. 81

But, upon opening the door, the visitors proved not to be a wrathful and avenging young god, but Mr. and Mrs. Payton, coming to inquire after the patient’s health.

“Hello!” said Mr. Payton, as Jessie gave a relieved sigh. “We came down to see a sick girl and we find a rank imposter in her place.”

“Aren’t you disappointed?” gibed his daughter. “Is that you, Mother? It’s so dark in that corner I can hardly see.”

Her mother’s answer was a very comforting one, for she took Lucile in her arms and kissed her gently.

“I’m glad you are feeling better, my dear,” she said. “It will do you good to get on deck as soon as possible. The salt air works wonders.”

So it was decided that Lucile should have a light supper brought her in the cabin, for she was beginning to develop an appetite, after which she was to go on deck and test the revivifying power of salt sea air, mixed with a little soft moonlight, for Phil had laughingly prophesied that there would be

“a peach of a moon to-night.”

When Lucile, pale of face and lips and a trifle shaky and trembly on her feet, stepped from her cabin into the full beauty of a cloudless night, she turned to her friends with the first smile they had seen for ages—or so it seemed to them.

“Girls, it’s good to be alive again!” she stated, fervently.

“Huh, you haven’t been dead yet,” grunted Phil.

“Well, I thought I was going to die, which is as bad,” she retorted, with spirit. “But I’m going to live now, my brother, if only to disappoint you,” she added.

“My, what a disposition!” said Evelyn, with a sad shake of her head, and Jessie murmured, with an encouraging pat, “Cheer up, Lucy; you are far from being a dead one yet.”

Lucile sank into the chair they had so carefully prepared for her with a low laugh. “They are all pickin’ on me,” she said, plaintively. “But what do we care, on such a night? Just look at that sky,” and, leaning forward, with 82 her hand on the rail, she let her gaze wander hungrily out over the water, where the long, graceful combers caught the reflected, starry light and passed it on till it merged in the silvery pathway of the moon, which, as Phil had prophesied, was at its height. She sat quite still, realizing as she had never done before the utter grandeur, the awe-inspiring majesty of the ocean.

“It’s enough to make one sentimental, isn’t it?” said Jessie, at her elbow. “Wouldn’t it be nice if Jack were here?” she added, innocently.

“Oh, bother!” said Lucile, leaning back with a contented sigh. “He would spoil everything. He

would probably want to talk, and I can't."

"Oh," said Jessie, silenced, but unconvinced.

However, they were not destined to enjoy the beauty of the night in peace, for it was not long before the after-dinner crowd began to pour out on deck and the girls were surrounded by friendly, interested fellow-passengers, who inquired solicitously after Lucile's health.

Lucile was surprised and touched by these demonstrations, and it was not long before she was chatting naturally and merrily with a jolly little group to whom her father had laughingly introduced her as "the convalescent."

"Do you see that young man coming toward us?" said Evelyn, nodding in the direction of a tall, spare young fellow, who, with his shock of black hair, long, aquiline nose, and sensitive, thin-lipped mouth, looked decidedly temperamental, even to the most casual observer.

Lucile nodded. "What about him?" she asked.

"He's a Frenchman," adding, with a mysterious shake of her head, "Thereby hangs a tale."

Much to Lucile's secret annoyance, the young man at her right claimed her attention at that important moment, asking her, inanely, or so she thought, if she could swim.

It was not until an hour later, when most of the passengers had drifted off to different, and often more secluded, parts of the deck, and only three or four remained 83 with them, that Lucile had an opportunity to question her friend.

"I hate mysteries, Evelyn," she whispered. "What did

you mean by ‘thereby hangs a tale’? Explain yourself.”

“I can’t just now,” answered Evelyn. “He might hear us. Anyway, I don’t know very much to tell. He would probably explain for himself if only those old stick-plasters would go away and tend to their own affairs,” and she glared belligerently at the three unconscious gentlemen and young Monsieur Charloix, the Frenchman.

“No chance—they’re glued!” said Jessie, gloomily, and Lucile looked from one to the other of them despairingly.

“I wish I knew what you were getting at,” she sighed.

“Mademoiselle has been very seek?” the voice was low, caressing, with the slightest suggestion of a foreign accent.

Lucile turned her head and found herself looking into the bright, restless eyes of the mysterious stranger.

For the first moment she was startled and a little confused, but the next instant, recovering herself, she answered, gravely, “Yes, I have been rather under the weather for a couple of days,” and she added, with her bright smile, “The thing that bothers me most is the thought of what I have missed during that time.”

“Mademoiselle is brave,” he smiled back. “Most would think only of their sufferings. However, there are still two good days in which to see everything.”

“Two days?” sighed Lucile. “It seems to me as if it would take two years to see all I’d like to.”

“Ah, but it is Mademoiselle’s first voyage.” There was an undertone of sadness in the low voice that made

Lucile steal a quick glance at him. There was something about the man, perhaps in the tired droop of his shoulders, perhaps something in the wistful way he had of looking far out to sea, as if seeking the solution of his problem there; perhaps it was only the pathos in his low, Southern voice. Be that as it may, Lucile's heart went out to him then and there. 84

"When one has been back and forth, back and forth, many times," he went on, "he is bound to lose that so fresh enthusiasm and long only for the shore where something may be done. At such times the days, they seem to have no end. But I transgress," he interrupted himself, with a little deprecatory laugh. "Mademoiselle should have reminded me."

"You speak of having crossed the ocean many times," said Mr. Payton, who, with his wife, had approached the absorbed little group unknown to them.

Monsieur Charloix arose from his chair quickly and offered it, with a Frenchman's elaborate courtesy, to Mrs. Payton. When they were again seated, this time in a cozy little semicircle, Mr. Payton repeated his question and the girls listened eagerly for the reply.

"Didn't I tell you?" Jessie managed to whisper. "Now we are going to have the story."

"Yes," came, in the gentle, modulated tones, "Monsieur is right; I am not a stranger to America."

"And you like our country?" said Mrs. Payton, adding, with a laugh, "Do not be afraid to tell the truth; we shall not be offended."

"Ah, but that is where Madam does me great injustice," said the stranger, with a smile. "There is no country in the world for which I have so great respect and admiration as I have for your great

America. It has been my misfortune that, in my flying visits, I have had so little time and opportunity to make the acquaintance of so great a nation."

"Hip-hip-hooray!" cried Phil, the irrepressible, taking possession of the chair next to Jessie. "It's good to have the old country boosted when you're so far away."

"Phil," protested his mother, "I do wish you could get along without so much slang."

"He'll be engaging an interpreter next," murmured Jessie, at which the culprit looked his reproach. 85

"I hope you will pardon the interruption, Monsieur Charloix," said Mrs. Payton, apologetically, and her husband added, "Our excuse for Phil is that he is young and still has much to learn, although it is mighty hard to convince him of the truth of that last fact," at which scathing remark, delivered with a twinkle that was lost in the dark, Phil looked almost cast down, until Jessie declared in a whisper "that she loved slang," accompanying the declaration with a comforting little pat that cheered him immensely.

"No apologies, Madame and Monsieur," the Frenchman was saying. "I was once a boy myself. The slang has many advantages which the more flowery language has not; it is, at least, much to the point."

"If he would only use it, he might reach the point sooner," complained Jessie, in an aside.

"I'd be happy if I only knew what point you wanted him to get to," sighed Lucile. "You see, I am completely in the dark."

"'Listen, my children, and you shall hear,'" Jessie broke in, still in an undertone. "Methinks the story is

about to unfold itself——"

"Sh-h!" said Lucile, warningly. "Listen!"

Mr. Payton was speaking. "You say the will cannot be found?"

Four pairs of bright young eyes centered upon the stranger with eager intensity as they waited for his reply.

86

CHAPTER XIII

ROMANCE

The moist, salt-laden breeze fanned their hot faces gratefully. The musical tap-tap of the waves against the side of the ship came to them as from a great distance, and even the voices and laughter of the passengers seemed, somehow, strangely remote.

The stranger brought his gaze back to them with an effort, as he said, wearily, "Monsieur, I am tired—you cannot know how much. But I had not meant to bore you with my so selfish perplexities——"

"Sometimes to tell our troubles is half the cure," Mrs. Payton suggested, gently.

"You are very—good," murmured the stranger, gratefully. "If you are sure it will not tire——"

Then at their vigorous denials, he proceeded, in his low, even voice: “Sometimes I have felt the great necessity of telling all to some one—some one who would understand. If I did not, I felt I should go mad.” He passed his hand over his eyes with an infinitely weary gesture.

“You see, my father and I, we had long been estranged. Not even in my earliest childhood have I the memory of a gentle word, a fatherly pressure of the hand. So I grew to young manhood with no knowledge of a mother’s or father’s love—for my mother,” here his voice lowered, reverently, “died when I was born. My childhood was of the utmost loneliness, for my father thought the children with whom I wished to associate were too far beneath me in social station. My sole companion was the old dame who took care of the house—the one person in the world of whom my father seemed to have fear. So the miserable years dragged by. When I had just begun to make some 87 plans by which I might escape from this dungeon they so falsely called my home—just at the time I was most despairing—like a joyful, radiant rift of sunlight in a clouded sky, came —my Jeanette. Oh, if you could but see her!”

Under cover of the dark the girls’ hands sought and clasped convulsively, but no one spoke.

“I cannot attempt to describe one so gay, so beautiful, so lovely. She seemed like a spirit from another world—a far dearer, happier world than I had ever thought to exist. Ah, how I loved her, and she—ah, she loved me, and for a while we were, oh, Monsieur, so divinely, so unthinkably happy——” His voice broke and again his gaze wandered dreamily out into the night.

“And who was the girl?” Lucile prompted, eagerly.

“Ah, Mademoiselle, that was the rock upon which all our dreams were wrecked. My father would but reply sourly to any question I might venture that my fair Jeanette was the ward of a friend who, on his death-bed, had bequeathed her to his clemency—the fool!”

“As for my Jeanette herself, she told me all she knew about herself, which, in fact, was little enough. She had lived with her guardian and his faithful old servant for ever since she could remember, and had been very happy. The chateau where she lived was a pretty, open place, with gardens all about and beautiful woods on either side, where one could roam for hours, becoming acquainted with the little folk of the wood—this my little Jeanette did, not feeling the need of human companionship as had I. When, upon rare occasions, she had questioned her guardian as to the identity of her parents, he had answered with a most strange reticence that she must not bother her head about such matters, but to wait till she was twenty-one, when she would know all. Naturally, the child believed and did as she was bid, but the maiden wondered and began to brood in secret. In time she began to form great plans wherein she might discover her identity, and perhaps, who knows, she might find herself to be a duke’s daughter —such things happened with the utmost frequency in the books which she read. 88

“So spoke my little Jeanette, and I encouraged her in this fancy and became, if anything, more eager than herself to solve the mystery of her parentage.

“So the days and weeks fled by so happy, till once again those plans began to take form and shape that had so long laid dormant after the arrival of Jeanette. The voice of my manhood urged me insistently to throw off the fetters that bound me and

advance bravely into the seething world of men and from it wrest the so well-earned fruit of my endeavor—for I was ambitious and rebelled at being shut within four walls, where each detail of my life was arranged for me as if I had still been a child.

"Yet I liked little the thought of leaving my sweet Jeanette alone in that gloomy house. But, on the other hand, how could I aspire to help if I remained at home?"

"That night Jeanette and I talked long—ah, I shall never forget it!—and it was then she urged, with tears of earnestness in her dear eyes, not to think of her, but to do as I judged best. I have seen her as she looked that night so many, many weary days!"

Here there was a long pause in the narrative, and it was not till Mr. Payton prompted, softly, "And then ——"

"Well, then, Monsieur, events flowed along easily enough till it was about a week to the time we had set for my departure. Then, one night, I came upon Jeanette suddenly and, to my great alarm and dismay, I discovered her in tears.

"'Jeanne!' I cried. 'My little Jeanne, tell me what is wrong!'

"But she would not answer me, only sobbing out in a way that broke my heart that 'I must go away, and never, never see her again!'

"Then it was, while I was still stunned and stupefied by the change in her, that a servant brought me a message from my father. He wished to see me on the instant.

"I made one last, agonized appeal to Jeanette, but she kept her face averted and answered me nothing,

and I, 89 stricken, bewildered, hardly knowing what I did, followed the servant to my father's rooms.

"I found him pacing the room with an angry scowl upon his face and an air that augured ill for me. Far from being taken aback, I welcomed this attitude of my father. I felt, somehow, that he was to blame for the tears of my Jeanette. I could have fallen upon him, doing him bodily injury, so great and terrible was my anger. With an effort, I conquered this first mad impulse and waited, with hands so tightly clenched that the nails bit deep into the flesh.

"I had not long to wait. At the sound of the opening door my father whirled and, with an imperious gesture, ordered the servant to retire. When the door was closed behind the man, my father burst out, furiously, 'So you have been deceiving me, lying to me in my own house. You need not start and look surprised, for what I have not seen with my own eyes has been faithfully retailed to me through one I can trust.'

"I fear I must have appeared stupid, for suddenly my brain refused to act naturally. How was it for my father to find out this—my so great secret? Surely, I had taken every precaution. But my father's voice broke in rudely upon my bewilderment.

"'Have you nothing to say?' said he, furiously. 'Must you stand there like a dog, a monkey, a piece of wood, and make no attempt to defend yourself? Ah, to have reared such a son?'

"Suddenly, in a flash, came my wits again. In an instant I had drawn myself to my full height and stood regarding calmly my enraged father. Ah, that I have not one kind thought—one gentle memory——" Again the stranger paused, and the girls felt the

undernote of tragedy in his voice. Instinctively, Lucile glanced at her own father where he sat, knees crossed, cigar in hand, listening attentively, and her heart gave a great, warm throb as she whispered, "Dear old Dad!" 90

"Well," said the Frenchman, with a shrug of his shoulders, "there is not much more to tell, though it may mean the wrecking of two lives, mine and that of Jeanette. My father and I had many words, calm on my part, enraged on his, and during the interview I learned that our great secret had been discovered by that old witch, the housekeeper, the week before, when Jeanette and I had had our never-to-be-forgotten conversation. For some unknown reason she had kept the discovery to herself till the day before.

"'So you meant to marry Jeanette?' my father flung at me.

"'Oui, Monsieur, mon pere,' I answered, still calmly, 'and if Jeanette will do me the great honor to become my wife, I have not in the least altered my determination.'

"'Ah!' cried my father, stung by my calm. 'But she will not have you—Jeanette. She has too much pride!'

"'What do you mean?' I cried, shaken out of my composure for the first time. 'Explain quickly; my patience is almost at an end.'

"'Ah, if that is all, my impatient son,' said my father, lowering his voice, craftily, 'you will soon know far too much for your peace of mind!'

"'Explain!' I cried, my wrath rising to fever heat. I towered above him, white with rage, and he,

seeming to realize for the first time I was no longer a child, retreated nervously.

"'You have often asked about the parents of Jeanette, and now I think it is but right you should know all.'

"'Ah!' I cried, joyfully. 'At last!'

"'But there is little cause for rejoicing,' said my father, lowering his voice till it was scarce above a whisper. 'What would you say, my son, if I were to tell you that the father of your fair Jeanette was—a *thief*?' Ah, the evilness of that smile! How I hated him at that moment!

"'Sir,' said I, 'no such statement will I give belief till it has been proven to me beyond all doubt, and——' I 91 leaned forward, speaking with intensity, 'you have yet to understand that were Jeanette's father doubly a thief, still would Jeanette be Jeanette, and the more obstacles you set in our path, only the more determined shall I become to wed her—if she will have me.'

"'Ah, but that is the question,' sneered my father. 'It seems you know not your Jeanette so well, after all, for you have left her natural pride outside your fine calculations. Suppose she will not have you, what then, eh?'

"'Ah, then you have told her!' I cried, choking with rage at my father—with pity and a great longing to hold my love in my arms and dry away her tears. 'Why could you have not have spared the child that knowledge? Oh, Jeanette!' I cried, and flung myself against the door; then, turning, met my father's sneering look with one of bitter defiance. 'I will see Jeanette first,' I said, tensely. 'And then, my father, we will have a short reckoning,' and going out, I slammed the door upon his sneering face and flung

myself down the stairs in search of my love.

"'Jeanette,' I cried, implored, 'Come to me!' and ran from room to room, when, not finding her, I became frantic and knocked wildly upon the door of her own room, calling to her aloud. But she was not there, nor could I find her anywhere. Her room showed evidence of a hurried packing—small things strewn here and there; but her sweet presence, that had filled the gloomy house with sunshine, had fled, where, where, I could not tell!" Here the speaker's voice trailed off and came to a stop. Then he turned to the group about him, saying, half questioningly, half apologetically, "I fear to tire you with this so long tale. After all, I suppose it is interesting only when applied to one's self."

"Oh, no!" cried Lucile, impulsively, while her eyes shone with eagerness. "Please go on!"

"You are good, Mademoiselle," murmured the Frenchman, and went on with his story:

"Well, I sat down outside her door and wept like a child, for to me the world seemed ended; but then, drawing 92 myself together, and angry at what I termed my miserable weakness, I set to work earnestly, doggedly, to find some way out of this great chain of circumstances that bound me. Where to find Jeanette? My brain reeled with the schemes and plans that came crowding upon me, only to be rejected one by one as improbable, fantastic, children of an overwrought imagination.

"At last, one idea became fixed in my mind. The thought came to me and stayed persistently that, in her great extremity, she would naturally fly to the one place of refuge which she knew—the old chateau where she had spent her so happy childhood.

"I knew the place to be still occupied by the old servant and his wife—this scrap of information my father had thrown to me—but, alas! I knew not the location, and there were so many chateaux of the kind in the province! How could I hope to find it?

"I sprang to my feet, while a new determination and resolve took possession of me, and I uttered a solemn oath, swearing that I would leave the house that night, *not* returning till I should bring Jeanette with me—my wife!"

Little chills of excitement chased themselves all over the girls in a highly disconcerting manner, and even scoffing Phil leaned forward in his chair to miss not one word of this remarkable story.

93

CHAPTER XIV

A VAIN QUEST

"So I packed what few belongings I had and took the money which I had managed to save from my father's so meager allowance," the low voice continued; "and when night came and all was still in the house, I stole quietly away and turned my back upon what was the only refuge I have ever known.

"I will not dwell upon the days and weeks that followed. Suffice it to say that they were very, very

hard, and I was dangerously near giving up all hope, when, one day, I chanced to come across an old, old man, full three score ten he must have been, perhaps more, who seemed to know something of the people I sought. When I had described them to the best of my ability, he nodded sagely and directed me up a side road near by. Three miles of steady travel would bring Monsieur to the chateau where lived the old caretaker and his wife. Aye, he remembered the old gentleman, who was now dead, and the little, fairy-like creature, his ward, whom all had loved.

"I thanked him with great warmth, for he had brought a little spark of hope to a heart that before had lain heavy as lead.

"Wearily I trudged along till I was rewarded by the vision of a small chateau, almost surrounded by dense woodland. My unruly heart throbbed violently at the thought that in these very woods my sweet Jeanette had played when a child and earned the name throughout the countryside of the fairy child, whom every one loved. My heart yearned toward the little home which I was convinced must shelter my love, and, weary as I was, in my 94 impatience I began to run, covering the remaining distance with feet as light as air and a heart that sang with dawning hope and joy.

"As I neared the door of my heart's desire, it opened and out stepped a plump, middle-aged little person, looking very trim and neat in her spotless white attire.

"To her I appealed. 'Madame,' said I, 'will you be so kind as to allow me the privilege of a few words of conversation? You have it in your power either to raise me to the heights of joy or to sink me in the very depths of despair.'

“She gazed upon me as she would upon a madman, and perhaps, after all, it was not so strange that she should do so, I being footsore and weary and all covered with the stains and dust of travel—or perhaps it was merely my so strange form of address which startled her. However, she retreated several steps toward the house and stood with her hand clasping the latch, as though making ready to fly should I attempt any violence.

“‘May I ask sir,’ she said, with great primness, not unmixed with fear, ‘who comes so early in the morning with so strange, so unusual, requests?’

“‘Aye, Madame,’ said I, with most reassuring manner, ‘if you will but allow me, I will soon make all clear. Give me but a hearing,’ I cried, frantically, as I saw she was about to retire.

“To my great surprise, when she spoke it was in so much different and more gentle a tone that I could have gone on my knees to her, so great was my gratitude for a little kindness!

“‘Oh, Monsieur, I believe you are honest,’ she said, gently. ‘I will listen to what you have to say.’

“‘Ah, Madame, you are good!’ I cried from my heart. ‘I am sure your good opinion will be strengthened when you hear all.’ 95

“Then did I pour out my story, while the good soul listened attentively, nodding now and then or uttering little exclamations of surprise or sympathy. ‘And, oh, Madame,’ I finished, ‘if you have seen her; if, as I believe, she is here, I beg you, take me to her. Let me but see her, and all, I am convinced, will be well.’

“Then, what was my great horror, my boundless

despair, when the good woman slowly and sadly shook her head, saying, in a voice full of sympathy and commiseration, ‘How loath I am to shatter your hopes and add more trouble to your already much overheavy sorrows, you cannot know, Monsieur, but I fear I can give you little encouragement.’

“‘Ah, Madame,’ I cried, wildly, beseechingly, ‘surely, you cannot be so cruel; surely, you must give me some hope! If Jeanette is not here now, surely, you have heard from her, seen her, can give me some clue to her present whereabouts!’

“It seemed to me as though she hesitated for the fraction of a second, but when her answer came, though gentle and sympathetic as before, it contained decision and finality which I could not but respect.

“‘Monsieur, she is not here, and neither have I seen her.’

“‘Merci, Madame,’ I murmured, wearily, and was turning away with sinking heart and feet that seemed weighted with lead, when she called to me softly:

“‘Monsieur is weary. Will he not rest and partake of some refreshment before continuing his journey?’

“Apathetically, scarce knowing where I went, nor caring, I followed her into a great, homelike, airy room, with flowers all about, even in the broad-silled, open windows. In the fragrance of the flowers it seemed that I could see Jeanette, and I had a strange impression she was near me. But I pushed it aside, thinking it but one of the many fancies that had beset me unceasingly of late. 96

“It was not long before the good dame set before me a steaming dish, and I, who, a few minutes before,

had thought I could never eat again, fell upon it ravenously and never stopped until the last delicious morsel had disappeared. Thus refreshed and strengthened, my courage returned as by magic and I began again to make my plans for the future.

“An hour later, leaving the house upon which I had based such high hopes, I again turned my steps toward the city. Of course, I was now—what you call it?—more in the dark than ever about Jeanette, but in my heart was a great and dogged determination to find her somehow, somewhere, if I had to search the city through.

“Five days later I found myself again before the city, infinitely more dusty, infinitely more hungry, infinitely more footsore and more weary than when I had encountered Madame Vidaud at the chateau.

“As I turned a corner, a great, whirling streak rushed by me, so close as to make me jump quickly to the side of the road. To my great surprise, the automobile stopped a few yards from where I was standing and two men, one tall, one short, jumped out and hurried toward me.

“‘Hello!’ cried the tall one, in a big, rumbling voice. ‘Aren’t you the son of Charloix?’ he said. ‘I thought I recognized you, even through the dust. Just the man I’m looking for!’

“‘I would be pleased, sir, if you would name your business with me,’ I replied, not being in the best of humors to bandy words with this stranger who seemed so familiar with my name and ancestry.

“‘Certainly, certainly,’ said the big man, with a heartiness that made me ashamed of my bad humor. ‘That’s exactly what I stopped for. I am your father’s solicitor.’

“I started and drew back. ‘You come from my father?’ 97

“‘Yes; and you must prepare yourself for a great shock, my son,’ said he, laying a great hand upon my shoulder. ‘Your father is very ill.’

“‘Dead!’ I gasped, feeling myself turn white. ‘When?’

“‘Four days ago,’ said the little man, who had not yet spoken. ‘Apoplexy.’

“‘Ah, I had forgotten! My friend M. Abbott, M. Charloix.’

“I bowed, scarcely acknowledging the introduction, for my mind was a whirling turmoil of hopes and fears. ‘You say,’ I began, still much dazed, ‘that my father died four days ago. And have you been looking for me since then, Monsieur?’

“‘Yes, Monsieur, we have scoured the country and, before this fortunate meeting to-day, had almost given up hope of finding you.’

“‘But why did you take this so much trouble to find me Monsieur?’ I had asked. ‘I had not thought myself of such importance.’

“‘There were many good reasons for our search, Monsieur,’ said my big friend, a trifle stiffly, for I doubt not he was amazed at my lack of emotion, not knowing my father as I had known him. ‘In the first place, we thought you might possibly wish to know of your father’s death. Also, there are several important matters relative to his decease that we thought might interest you.’

“‘Pardon, Monsieur,’ said I. ‘I had not meant to be abrupt. As you may see, I have had a long and wearisome journey and am—what you call—fagged.

I must rest, Monsieur; then I can talk.'

"'Quite right, quite right!' he agreed, in his hearty manner. 'If I had had any brains instead of being a great empty-headed fool of an attorney, I should have seen to that before,' and, linking his arm in mine, he led me in 98 spite of all protests on my part, to his great touring car and bade me enter.

"'But, Monsieur,' I protested, gazing despairingly down upon my torn and dusty clothing, 'I am not fit ____'

"'But me no buts, young man. As your attorney and rightful executor of your estate, I have the right to demand an interview, and I am going to take advantage of that right.'

"There being nothing more to say, and it seeming only natural and right to obey the commands of this great, blustering attorney, I submitted, and lounged back against the soft, upholstered seat with a great sigh of relaxation.

"My father's attorney talked incessantly until we reached our destination, giving me no time to think. At his home he directed me to a large room, saying that in an hour's time he would meet me in his study, where, over a good dinner and a bottle or two of choice Madeira, we could talk in comfort.

"Ah, the luxury of that bath and the subsequent putting on of a clean, whole suit of clothes placed upon the bed by the so obsequious man servant, who said his master had sent these clothes with his compliments and the hope that they would fit. The clothes I accepted thankfully enough, for I had decided to ask M. Cartier the address of a shop in the city in which I might purchase myself a cheap but respectable suit, for I had still a little money left.

“In Monsieur Cartier’s study again that night I learned many things. I learned, among other things, that my father had long been suspected of being somewhat of a miser—that he was thought to possess a great deal more money than he cared to let people know about. Also, I learned that, several days before his death, he had made a flying visit to a little chateau which had been owned by a friend of his—I must have started, for the lawyer asked if I had heard of the place. ‘Yes, I had heard of it—but please go on.’ 99

“‘Well, he stayed over night that night,’ the lawyer continued, ‘saying that he had come in search of his ward, who had run away from home.’

“‘Yes, yes,’ I cried; ‘go on! What then?’

“‘Well it seems that in the night the good dame heard a noise, and, rising to investigate, came upon your father in the attic, bending over something, the nature of which she could not make out.’

“‘But, Monsieur, you mean to say my father——’ I began, but he interrupted me with an admonitory wave of the hand.

“‘If you will but wait till I have finished, Monsieur Charloix,’ he said, ‘I will be glad to answer any and all of your questions. As I have said, your father was bending over some object and was so absorbed that he did not hear our good friend till she ventured a gentle cough by way of introduction. At the slight sound, your father sprang forward with an oath, leveling the pistol at the good dame’s head——’”

“Oh!” breathed Jessie, and Lucile’s hand went out instinctively to silence the interruption. “Sh-h!” she warned, but the Frenchman seemed not to have heard and continued his narrative, while his hand

beat a nervous tattoo on the arm of the chair.

“I sat fascinated, my eyes fixed strainingly on the face of the lawyer, while he continued to speak, calmly, nonchalantly, as though that of which he spoke were of every-day occurrence. ‘Of course, the good dame screamed, but the next instant her fear turned to terror when the weapon fell from your father’s hand and he reeled, falling upon the ground with a strangling, choking cry, and lay motionless. She thought him dead, but ran for assistance nevertheless. It was some hours before the doctor arrived, and not long afterward your father passed away, quietly and painlessly, for he had lain in a coma since the stroke.’ 100

“‘But, Monsieur,’ I cried, forgetful of his admonition, ‘you say this was a week ago?’ He nodded consent. ‘But I myself but left the chateau three days ago, and Madame Vidaud made no mention of the tragedy to me, who am most concerned.’

“Then it was Cartier’s turn to have surprise. ‘You mean,’ said he, leaning his arm on the table and eyeing me steadily. ‘You mean that you were actually at the chateau three days ago and that the Vidaud woman said nothing to you of your father’s death? Are you sure that it was the right chateau?’

“‘Oui, Monsieur, I am sure,’ said I.

“Then ensued a silence, during which the lawyer seemed to ponder, and I, impatient though I was, must needs respect his silence and await his pleasure.

“‘Aye, it is strange—very strange,’ said he at last, with a thoughtful frown. ‘However, it is only one more snarl in the tangled thread of circumstances, and, with good luck, we ought to be able to get at the root of all this mystery soon. But, my young

friend,' said he, bringing his gaze back from the wall and long line of books and centering it once more upon me, 'there is one more very important matter which requires our careful consideration.'

"'And that?' I cried.

"'That,' he continued, 'is the matter of the will,' and then, seeing that I was about to interrupt, he continued, quickly, 'Just a moment, if you please, and you will know everything; then I will be in a position to discuss whys and wherefores. Your father's last will, the will which I myself drew up about a year ago, is strangely missing. One has been found, however, dating back two years, and in the event of the first will not being found, will, of course, become valid.'

"'Well?' said I.

"'Well,' he continued, calmly launching his thunderbolt, 'in that case, you, Monsieur, will be left penniless.' 101

"'Ah!' I cried, aghast, and the lawyer nodded, 'I trust that you now see the seriousness of the situation, Monsieur.'

"'Ah, but there is one point of far greater importance than you have mentioned,' I cried, with such earnestness that he leaned back in his chair with a sigh of resignation, saying, 'Great heavens! What could be more important than that?'

"'Many things, Monsieur, which, when you have heard of them, will cause you to agree with me.'

"My manner may have impressed him, perhaps my earnestness; for he bade me speak out freely, leaving nothing untold. This I did, to the most minute details, save, of course, those things sacred only to

Jeanne and me. When I had finished, we had a long talk, during which I came to know the value of this new ally of mine.

“So it was finally decided that I was to travel to America for the purpose of hunting up one of the chief witnesses of my father’s will and beg him to return to France with me. Meanwhile, my father’s attorney assured me he would not be idle.”

“And did you find him—the witness, I mean?” said Mr. Payton.

“No, Monsieur, I did not; but, after a long and exhaustive search, I learned that the one I sought had sailed a week ago on the steamer ‘Baltic,’ so all my journey has been for nothing.”

“What difference does it make? At least, you accomplished your purpose.”

“That is true, Madame, but he would have sailed without aid of mine, and it maddens me to think that all this time I have been wasting in a fruitless search, my Jeanette is still unfound. Where may she not be? Dead—perhaps——” His voice trailed off into silence and they sat motionless, fascinated by the spell of romance, tragedy and mystery he had woven.

102

CHAPTER XV

“LAND, HO!”

Lucile opened her eyes slowly, lazily, and let them rove aimlessly about the bright cabin; then, chancing to come upon Jessie and Evelyn sleeping sweetly and peacefully, they stopped and focused resentfully.

“Nothing to do but sleep,” she murmured, pushing back her rumpled curls and yawning prodigiously. “I wonder why it is I always have to wake up first,” and then, her eyes happening to fall on Evelyn at this precise moment, she cried, “Oh, I saw you wink, Evelyn; you can’t fool me! You’re playing possum,” and, springing quickly out of bed, she gave that young lady a vigorous shake, which caused her to open her eyes rather suddenly.

“Wh-what’s the matter? Can’t you let a fellow sleep?” she began, but the laughter in her eyes belied the sleepy tone, and Lucile hugged her and pulled her out of bed. “I’ll admit you’re a dabster, Evelyn, dear,” she cried, “but you will have to get up early in the morning to get the best of your little friend.”

Evelyn laughed merrily. “You whirlwind!” she cried. “Nobody has a chance to sleep when you’re around.”

“Don’t be too sure of that; look at Jessie. She is still sleeping the sleep of the just.”

“All right; let’s make her get up, then. Even if she does want to sleep, why should we worry?”

“Evelyn,” cried Lucy, shocked, “you’re getting most horribly slangy.”

“Oh, Lucy, you look so funny, trying to be severe in that rig! It can’t be done!” And, with a laugh, she plumped down on something hard and lumpy, which proved 103 to be Jessie’s feet. The outraged owner objected promptly and emphatically.

“Oh, Jessie, I’m so sorry! Are those your feet?” cried

Evelyn, in concern.

“No; they are Lucy’s,” said Jessie, coldly, rubbing the injured members gingerly.

Lucile laughed merrily. “Don’t you go slandering my poor feet,” she cried. “Anyway, it serves you right for being so lazy, Jess.”

“Oh, does it? Well, I’ll just prove you wrong by beating you all on deck, One, two, three—we’re off!”

Then ensued a great amount of talk and laughter and wild scrambling for clothing that would get out of sight, until at the end of half an hour, our girls made a dash for the door at precisely the same instant.

“Oh, that’s not fair,” cried Evelyn, as Lucile wrenched open the door and ran straight into the arms of the rather stout, middle-aged matron who happened to be passing.

“Oh,” she gasped, “I—I beg your pardon! I——”

“Look first, and you will save your apologies,” said the sweet-tempered lady, who, to do her justice, was considerably shaken by the impact.

Lucile flushed scarlet, but walked on with her head in the air, thankful she had not expressed the thought that had rushed to her lips.

“Cranky old curmudgeon!” murmured Evelyn, vindictively. “It’s lucky there aren’t so many of them in the world.”

To their surprise, Lucile began to laugh with great enjoyment. “Girls,” she said, “did you hear her say ‘woof’ when we clashed?”

Two hours later they sighted the harbor, and on board pandemonium broke loose. Questions and answers were fired back and forth like bullets from a

Gatling gun, and everywhere field glasses were glued to eager eyes.

“So that’s England?” said Lucile. “Oh, Jessie, pinch me!” 104

“Won’t. Love you too much,” said Jessie, gazing intently toward the harbor, which became more and more distinct with every passing moment.

“Don’t let any such soft scruples stand in your way,” said Phil, administering the desired pinch with such good effect that Lucile jumped almost a foot and lowered her glasses to gaze reproachfully at him.

“Phil, that will be black and blue for a month,” she said, with conviction. “You needn’t have done it so hard.”

“You didn’t say not to,” said Phil, with the air of injured innocence that sat so comically upon him. “Here comes old Charlie,” he added, a minute later. “Wonder if he’s found anything since last night.”

“Who in the world is old Charlie?” inquired Jessie, mystified.

“Old Charlie? Why, old Charlie is short for Monsieur Charloix, of course,” elucidated Phil, with the patronizing air of one speaking to a peculiarly stupid child.

Instantly the girls’ interest in Liverpool harbor waned, as they turned smilingly to greet the historian of last night.

“I see Mademoiselle is entirely recovered from the seasickness,” said he, turning to Lucile. “It is good to see you looking so well.”

“Thank you, Monsieur. I suppose you will be glad to get back to France?”

"Oh, very glad, for, though I admire your America, it is not to me like my own country," said he, smiling.

It was not long before they were joined by other excited fellow-passengers, all talking at once about what they intended to do upon reaching land, and in the babble it was impossible to carry on any but a disjointed conversation, so the girls wisely gave up trying.

Nevertheless, Lucile had been more deeply impressed than any of the rest by the recital of Monsieur's tragic romance. It seemed, somehow, like the plays their guardian had described to them. Phil, the skeptical, had seemed inclined to think the story over-drawn, but the girls had 105 emphatically disagreed with him, overwhelming him by sheer force of numbers. And way down in Lucile's heart was the hope that she would, sooner or later, hear the finishing chapter of the romance. Whether this premonition was inspired partly by her own desire or partly by the fact that, sooner or later, they would be in France itself, where they would have the opportunity of following the fortunes of the disconsolate Frenchman, cannot be determined, but certain it was, the premonition was there. As she had said to Jessie at the end of a long and excited discussion the night before, "Stranger things have happened."

And so, in the girl's eyes, and, in fact, in the eyes of all who had heard his story, even Phil, the stranger had taken on an added importance, the importance of the chief actor in a romantic drama.

"I would like to help," Lucile murmured, as the Frenchman excused himself and moved off down the deck. "I never saw any one look so wistful in all my life."

“No wonder,” said Jessie, in the same tone. “If I had been through all he has, I’d never have lived to tell about it.”

“And poor Jeanette!” Lucile mused on. “I’d give almost anything if I could bring them together again.”

Jessie glanced at her friend curiously. “Perhaps you will tell me now that my dear old novels always exaggerate,” she challenged.

“A little more of this sort of thing and I’ll be able to believe anything,” Lucile answered, with a rueful smile. “It surely is wonderful!”

“Oh, Lucy, dear, I may convert you yet,” Jessie was crying gleefully, when she was interrupted by another crowd of fellow-voyagers, who, for the time being at least, cut her triumph short.

Later came the call to luncheon, and everybody hurried down to the dining-room, where the atmosphere of excitement and unrest prevailed to such a degree that people almost forgot to eat, or else bolted their meals in half the ordinary time, anxious not to miss a moment above decks. 106

Then, toward one o’clock in the afternoon, Mrs. Payton advised the girls to get everything ready, and see that nothing was left in the stateroom.

“We will dock in a few minutes,” she explained, “and we don’t want to leave everything until the last instant.”

Down rushed the girls to the stateroom obediently, treading on each other’s heels and not even bothering to apologize, for what was so everyday a thing as politeness at such a time?

Jessie and Evelyn waited in undisguised impatience while Lucile fumblingly fitted the key into the lock with fingers that trembled rebelliously.

“Oh, for goodness’ sake, let me have it!” said Jessie, in desperation.

“Hold on a minute; there it is!” And as the door swung open, they tumbled rather than walked into the room.

“Oh, bother! Where did I put my comb?” moaned Evelyn, searching wildly under the dresser for the missing article. “You might know it would disappear just when I haven’t any time to look for it. Are you sure you’re not sitting on it, Lucy?”

“Of course not,” denied Lucile; “but if you don’t get off my suitcase this minute, Jessie Sanderson, I’ll know the reason why.”

“Here’s your comb, Evelyn! Catch!” said Jessie, throwing the missing article toward her friend. “If you would only keep it over on your side instead ——”

“Oh, if you talk so much you will never be ready, Jessie! Do hurry!” And so on in this fashion until, finally, the last thing was ready and they tumbled up on deck again, only to be swallowed up by a jostling, gesticulating throng intent, apparently, on getting nowhere in particular, and doing it, withal, with a perseverance that was truly admirable.

“Hello!” said Phil, elbowing his way through the crowd. “We dock in ten minutes. Just look at the harbor now;” and he was off again. 107

With difficulty they made their way to the rail and stood gazing at the scene with wondering eyes and parted lips. Craft of all sizes and descriptions plowed

and snorted through the ruffled water, and everywhere was life and bustle and activity. And further back, past the lines of docks and warehouses, the girls could discern the spires and steeples of—England!

"Well," came Mr. Payton's gruff, hearty voice from just behind them, "how do you like your first glimpse of the Old World, eh? It won't be any time at all before you set foot upon it."

"Oh, Daddy, isn't it magnificent?" said Lucile, drawing a long breath. "It all looks just exactly the way I dreamed it would, though. Oh, I can't wait!" and she leaned far over the rail, as if by that means to bring it so much the nearer.

Her father's strong hand drew her back to safety, and he said, reprovingly, "Don't do that again, Lucy. Accidents will happen, you know."

"Even in the best-regulated families," finished Lucile, gaily.

Her father laughed, and pinched the tip of one pink ear fondly. "I suppose there is no use trying to make any of you serious at such a time," he said, with the resigned air of one giving up all hope; "but there is one little phrase that it will be well for you to remember, and that is, 'Safety first.'"

And with that fatherly admonition he left them, bidding them wait where they were until he could rejoin them. In a few minutes he returned, bringing his wife and Phil, declaring that nothing now remained to be done but walk off the ship when the time came.

The great "Mauretania" was very near her destination now, and was nosing her way carefully

through the traffic, convoyed by two snorting and puffing tugs. The raucous shouts and cries of sailors and watermen came to their ears, with now and then a snatch of song from the decks of some tall, four-masted freighter. There were shouts of 108 "aye, aye, sir" and "ship, ahoy," mingled with the rasping of cables and the clatter of cargo cranes—and behind all this noise and confusion lay the quaint, historic streets of Liverpool, and later, London, filled with the glory of ancient times.

The girls' eyes were large and dark with wonder and excitement as they lowered their glasses and looked at each other.

"Yes, you are awake," said Mrs. Payton, with a laugh, interpreting the look.

"Jessie looks as though she had just seen a ghost," said Phil.

A few minutes later the great liner was warped securely alongside the great landing stage, while the whistle shrieked a noisy greeting. Passengers hurried from one group to another, shaking hands in a final farewell with shipboard acquaintances whom they had come to know so well in so short a time. Porters hurried past, laden with luggage, and groups of eager passengers formed about the entrance to the gangways.

"I feel as though my hand had been shaken off," said Evelyn, regarding that very necessary appendage ruefully.

"Oh, there's Mrs. Applegate and Puss," said Lucile, and darted off through the crowd so suddenly that the girls could only follow her with their eyes.

"Lucile," cried Mrs. Payton, and then, as her voice

would not carry above all the noise, “Go after her, Phil,” she said. “If she gets separated from us now, we will have a hard time finding her.”

Phil hurried off and was soon lost to sight in the swaying crowd.

“Oh, what did she do that for?” wailed Jessie. “If Lucy goes and gets lost now in all this crowd——”

“Don’t worry; Phil will have her back in a jiffy,” said Mr. Payton, soothingly, but the frown on his forehead betrayed his own anxiety. 109

The gangplanks were lowered, and the people had already begun to surge forward, and still no sign of either Lucile or Phil.

They eagerly searched the faces of the passers-by, nodding to some, yet scarcely seeing them, while Mr. Payton began to mutter something about “tying a string to that cyclonic young flyaway” when he got her back again.

Five minutes passed. The deck was beginning to be emptied of people, and they had begun to make their way slowly toward the gangplank, when Phil came rushing up to them, very red and very much out of breath.

“Well?” they cried together, and Mr. Payton took him by the shoulder, demanding, sternly, “Where is she?”

“Wouldn’t it make you sick?” panted Phil, disgustedly. “Here I rush all over the boat trying to locate her, and get everybody scared to death, thinking she’s fallen overboard or something, and then I find her down on the float there, talking to the ——”

"What?" interrupted Mr. Payton, incredulously.

"Yes. Isn't it the limit?" said Phil, fanning himself with his hat. "Said she couldn't find her way back to you, so thought she'd wait with the Applegates at the foot of the gangplank; said she knew you would find her there."

The girls laughed hysterically, and even Mr. Payton's stern face relaxed; the action was so truly "Lucilian."

"Well, I suppose all we can do is to follow," said Mr. Payton, and Mrs. Payton added, pathetically, "I do wish Lucile would be a trifle less impulsive now and then; it might save us a good deal of trouble."

Mr. Payton had felt inclined to read his "cyclonic" young daughter a lecture, but the sight of her bright young face completely disarmed him, and he could only breathe a prayer of thankfulness that she was safe.

They said good-by to Mr. and Mrs. Applegate and their very diminutive daughter—whom somebody had fondly nicknamed "Puss"—and turned to follow the crowd. A short time later they set foot for the first time on the soil of the Old World. 110

"Where are we going, Dad, now that we're here?" asked Phil.

"To London, as fast as we can, by the train that connects with our steamer," said his father. "Stick together, everybody—here we are," and he hustled them before him into the long coach—for in England, you must remember, trains are not made up of cars, but of "coaches."

By this time it was getting late, and after vainly trying to distinguish objects through streaked and misty glass, the girls gave up and leaned back with a

sigh of tired but absolute content.

“Well, we’re here, and still going,” said Lucile, happily, feeling for her friend’s hands.

“We jolly well know that, my de-ar,” came in sweet, falsetto tones from Phil. “We ought to have no end of sport, you know; rippin’, what-what!”

“Bally goose!” murmured Jessie.

The reproof that rose to Mrs. Payton’s lips was drowned in a shout of laughter.

111

CHAPTER XVI

THE RED-LETTER DAY

“Hang the luck!” ejaculated Phil, flinging aside his book in disgust. “Here it is, our first day over, and look at it!” And, drawing aside the light chintz curtains, he disclosed a view that was, to say the least, very discouraging.

The rain came down in torrents, rebounding from the shining pavement and the no less shining umbrellas of passing pedestrians, with vicious little pops and hisses that sounded more like a storm of tiny daggers than of raindrops. As time went on, instead of lightening, the sky had grown murkier and murkier and darker and darker, until, in many parts of the

hotel, people had been forced to turn on the lights. Over and about everything hung that moist, indefinably depressing atmosphere that makes one rail at fate and long for the blessing of the sun and a clear day.

Such was Phil's enviable state of mind as he dropped the curtain and slumped back into his chair with an impatient grunt.

"'Tis rather mean, isn't it?" drawled Jessie, dropping her book and looking at the disconsolate Phil lazily. "You don't happen to have any more of those candies around you anywhere, do you, Evelyn?" she queried.

"Hardly. How long do you think they last when you're around?" answered Evelyn, without raising her eyes from the magazine she was reading.

With a quick movement, Jessie reached over and pulled the candy box toward her before Evelyn could interfere.

"A-ha, I thought so!" she cried. "I was sure they couldn't all have vanished so quickly, you unscrupulous—" 112

"Beg pardon!" interrupted Evelyn, blandly.

"Well, you are, anyway," Jessie maintained. "What do you mean, no more left? Here are half a dozen at least."

"Well, you know you've eaten half a box already, Jessie," Evelyn was beginning, severely, when Jessie interrupted.

"But, Evelyn, what else is there to do on a day like this?" she pleaded plaintively. "We can't make any noise, for fear that we'll annoy the other people, and we can't go out——"

This was more than Phil could stand.

“Eat all the candy you want, Jessie, and when you’ve finished what you have, I’ll buy you some more,” and he sauntered out, hands in pocket, despite all his mother’s training, and whistling mournfully.

“Seems to me you have him very well tamed, Jessie,” gibed Evelyn. “Just the same, I’m going to pray for clear weather.”

“Why the sudden fervor?” asked Jessie, munching away happily.

“Because if you take Phil’s advice and eat all the chocolates that you want to while it rains, and it doesn’t clear up soon—well, all I have to say is——”

Jessie laughed, but added, more seriously, “I guess maybe you’re right, after all. There was a time when I’d nearly given up the habit, but now I’m just about as bad as ever. I’m afraid our guardian might not like it.”

“Of course she wouldn’t,” said Evelyn, seizing upon the opportunity eagerly. “Do you know, Jessie, there’s been so much going on and so much excitement that we have—well, rather lost sight of the camp-fire idea, don’t you think?”

“I was thinking just that very thing the other day,” replied Jessie, slowly, putting down a half-finished candy. “It ought to mean just as much to us now, and more, for that matter, than it ever did before——”
113

“Girls, girls, girls!” sang out Lucile, bursting in upon them, with cheeks like two red roses, and waving something white aloft in the air. “We’ve got some letters, some beautiful, thick, booky letters, and you’ll never guess whom they’re from.”

The girls ran to the sofa, where Lucile had flung herself with a pile of letters in her lap, and hung over the back of it excitedly.

“Oh, go on, Lucy; show them to us!” cried Evelyn, as Lucile put both her hands teasingly over the letters, inviting them to “guess.”

“If you don’t hand over my property before I count five,” threatened Jessie, “I shall be compelled to use force.”

“Well, in that case,” laughed the threatened one, “I suppose I’ll have to——”

“Oh, Lucy, you know you always were my favorite che-ild,” begged Evelyn, melodramatically. “I’ll destroy the old will and make a new one, leaving everything——”

“To me,” finished Jessie, at the same time making a lunge at the tempting little pile of paper.

“Oh, go on!” cried Lucile, and, dodging out-stretched arms, made a dash for the door, only to be captured and brought back by two indignant and protesting girls to the sofa.

“Oh, we will be put out of the hotel,” gasped Lucile, between laughs. “We’re making no end of noise. Now, if you two girls will only sit down and behave like sensible—”

“Huh!” broke in Evelyn. “We were only demanding our just rights.”

“You would better hasten, Lucile Payton,” said Jessie, with her best heavy-villain scowl. “My patience is dangerously near an end.”

“All right,” Lucile capitulated, patting the sofa on either side of her invitingly. “Sit down here and I’ll

hand them out just as they come."

"And we'll read each one aloud before we open the next one," Jessie suggested, eagerly. 114

"That's right," assented Evelyn. "Whom is the first one from, Lucy?"

"The first one," drawled Lucile, turning it up with aggravating deliberation, "is for Evelyn, from——"

"Miss—er—our guardian," cried Evelyn, snatching the envelope unceremoniously. "Oh, oh, oh! Got a letter opener, Lucy? Oh, all right; anything. Hairpin? Thanks! Oh, girls, what has she got to say?"

"I might suggest that the best way to find out is to read it," said Jessie, and immediately became the recipient of a withering stare from Evelyn, who was opening the letter with trembling, clumsy fingers.

"My dear little girl," she read and then stopped and looked from one to the other pleadingly. "I can't do it; I can't read it out loud——"

"Don't try," said Lucile, putting an arm around her. "I know exactly how you feel. We would better read them first and compare notes afterward."

"That's right," agreed Jessie. "I didn't think how hard it would be to read them out loud when I suggested it. Better give them all out together, Lucy."

"Well, here's one to you from your mother, I guess, Jessie, and another from your father, and one for you from your mother, Evelyn, and one for me——"

"From whom?" interrupted Jessie.

"Our guardian," answered Lucile, touching it lovingly. "And here is yours, Jessie," she added, handing her a letter in the well-known and well-loved handwriting. "Isn't she dear to remember each

one of us like that? And oh, here are whole stacks of letters from the girls—one from Margaret—here, Jess ——" And so on until each had a little pile of her own.

"And whom is that from, Lucy?" asked Evelyn, as Lucile picked up the last letter, looked at the unfamiliar handwriting curiously, then looked again more closely, while the tips of her ears became very pink. 115

"I—I don't know," she stammered. "It's for me, and —oh, well, I'll open it later on," and she tucked it among the others, just to gain time, as she explained it to herself.

"No, you don't! No, you don't!" cried Evelyn. "We have stumbled upon a deep, dark mystery and it must be cleared up at once, at once. Come on, Lucy; who wrote that letter?"

"I tell you I don't know myself, so how can I tell you?" cried Lucile, angry at herself for being so confused.

"If you don't know whom it's from, why do you get all red and snappy and try to hide it?" asked Evelyn, triumphantly. "'Fess up, Lucy. You might as well, first as last, for you can't fool us."

"Methinks," began Jessie, in deep, stentorian tones, "that this writing seems strangely familiar. Where can I have seen it before? Ah, I have it!" Then, suddenly throwing her arms about Lucile in a strangling hug, she cried, "Oh, I knew it, I knew it! I knew he would just go crazy about you, like all the rest of us. He couldn't help himself! And you never, never would believe anything could happen the way it does in novels—oh—oh——"

"Oh, I see it all! I see it all!" shouted Evelyn, suddenly springing up and whirling about the room, using her letters as a tambourine. "It's Jessie's cousin! He's gone—he's gone——"

"Girls, you are crazy, both of you!" cried Lucile, extricating herself with difficulty from Jessie's strangle hold and smoothing back the hair that was tumbling down in the most becoming disorder—or so her two friends would have told you—while her laughing eyes tried hard to look severe. "Probably it isn't from him at all, and if it is, why—why—well, it is," she ended, desperately.

"Why, of course it is," soothed Jessie; "but I don't think you need worry about it not being from him ——"

"Aren't you going to read it over now?" broke in Evelyn. "Then you can tell us——"

"I wouldn't tell you a thing," said Lucile, driven to her last entrenchment; "and what's more, I'm not going to 116 read it till I get good and ready, and not then if I don't want to," and she slipped her letter into her pocketbook, which she closed with a defiant little snap. "Now, what are you going to do about it?" she challenged, gaily.

"We might use force," mused Jessie, meditatively.

"But you're not going to, because you can't," Lucile declared, raising a round little arm not yet wholly free from last summer's tan, for inspection. "Just look at that muscle," she invited.

"Terrific!" cried Evelyn, in mock terror. "Guess we'd better think twice before we tackle that, Jessie."

"Mere nothing!" sniffed Jessie, scornfully. "Now, if you want to see real muscle——"

"Oh, yes; we know all about that," said Lucile, and, throwing an arm about each of the girls, she dragged them over to the settee, saying gaily, "What's the use of having all this fuss about one old letter, when we have all the really good ones to read?"

The girls exchanged significant glances, but, never-the-less, followed Lucile's example, opening one letter after another amid a shower of exclamations, comments, questions and quotations from this or that letter, till the other disturbing document was all but forgotten—except by Lucile.

After half an hour of delightful reveling in the news from Burleigh, which seemed so terribly far away, and in tender little messages from mothers and fathers and friends, Lucile looked up from her guardian's letter, which she had just read for the third time.

"Girls," she said, seriously, "I'm glad the letters came just as they did this morning. I've been thinking——"

"So were we," broke in Evelyn, "just before you came in——"

"Wonderful!" murmured Jessie. "A red-letter day!"

The girls laughed, but Lucile went on:

"Just because we're over here, so far away from home, is no reason for our forgetting or neglecting the least 117 little bit the rules of our camp-fire. In fact, I don't think we deserve any credit for being good where Mrs. Wescott is; you simply can't help yourself when our guardian is around."

"That's true enough," agreed Jessie, and for a few minutes they sat silent, while the dreary, sodden, steaming streets of London, as, in their short experience, they had already begun to think of them,

faded before the magic power of memory and they were once more back in camp—eating, swimming, walking, canoeing—subject always to the slightest word or wish of their lovely, smiling, cheery guardian, who always knew just what to do and just the time to do it.

“That’s all right for me,” began Jessie, heroically. “I’ve been eating candies and drinking sodas and reading so much that my eyes are nearly out of my head, but I don’t know what under the light of the sun you two have done.”

“Well, in the first place, I’ve become horribly rude,” confessed Lucile.

“We haven’t noticed it,” said Jessie.

“Well, I have,” she went on. “This morning an old lady dropped her handkerchief under my very eyes and I was in such a hurry to get to you that I didn’t stop to pick it up. And all my clothes need mending. That good waist is all ripped where you yanked the button off, Evelyn——”

“Oh, I did not,” began Evelyn, hotly.

“All right. I don’t care who did it; the fact remains that it is torn and I haven’t mended it, and I haven’t written half as much as I ought to, and—well, if I told you everything, I wouldn’t get through to-day.”

“And I use slang from morning to night, and I chewed a piece of gum that Phil gave me right out in the street, too,” began Evelyn, miserably.

“Oh, Phil!” said Jessie, disdainfully. “He would ruin anybody’s manners.” 118

“All the more credit, then, in being good while he’s around,” laughed Lucile. “But, seriously, girls, don’t

you think it would be a good plan to make up our minds to act just the same all the time as though our guardian were in the next room?"

"Let's" said the girls. And so, with no more form or ceremony, the simple little compact was made, but it had taken firm and solid root, nevertheless, in the girls' hearts.

"Hooray, people; here comes the sun!" cried Phil, bursting in upon them with a box of candy and a radiant smile. "I just waylaid Dad and asked him what was up if it cleared this afternoon, and he said, 'Westminster Abbey, Trafalgar Square, a look at the Thames, an auto ride.' Hooray!"

The girls ran to the window, and, sure enough, the sun was beginning to shine, feebly and mistily, to be sure, but yet unmistakably.

They hugged each other joyfully and began to gather up their scattered belongings.

"It must be nearly lunch time," sang Lucile. "We'll go up and see what we look like and change our dresses and——"

"Then for the fun," finished Evelyn.

"I say, Jessie, here's the candy I promised you," Phil called after her.

Jessie turned at the door and eyed the tempting box longingly.

"I'd love to, Phil," she said, "but I can't. Thanks just as much. I would spoil my lunch," she added, lamely, making a hasty retreat.

"Well, of all the——" began Phil, at a loss to understand such insanity. Then, with a shrug of the shoulders, he voiced the eternal and oft-repeated

masculine query:
“Aren’t girls the limit?”

119

CHAPTER XVII

THE GLORY OF THE PAST

With light hearts and lighter feet the girls danced from the dark hotel to the sun-flooded street. Umbrellas had been down for half an hour and in some places the sidewalks were already partly dry. Smiles and friendly nods had once more become the fashion where before had been only grumbling discontent, with now and then a muttered, “Beastly rotten day, what?”

“Oh, what a dif-fer-ence!” cried Lucile, surveying the scene with delight. “I’d begun to be rather disgusted with London this morning, everything looked so dreary and forlorn. I wonder what can be keeping Dad and Mother,” she added, turning to the hotel entrance, while her foot tapped impatiently. “They said they’d be with us right away—oh, here they are! Speaking of angels——”

“And they’re sure to turn up,” said Phil, producing himself with startling suddenness from nowhere. “Bet you can’t guess where I’ve been.”

“Why work when you don’t have to?” philosophized Jessie. “If we don’t care where you’ve been, why bother to guess?”

“All right; I won’t let you in on the secret now, but when you do find out about it, you’ll wish you had

been more civil," Phil prophesied, darkly.

"Here is the car; come down, all of you," commanded Mr. Payton; and, all else forgotten, they very willingly obeyed.

The machine was a big touring car, hired especially for the occasion, and the girls thrilled at the thought of seeing London in this fashion. In they tumbled joyfully, the big tonneau just accommodating five, while Mr. Payton took his place beside the driver. 120

"Where to, sir?" asked the latter.

"Oh, all around," said Mr. Payton, with a wave of his hand. "You know the points of interest better than I do. Only, of course, the young folks must stop for a long look at Westminster Abbey on the way back."

"All right, sir," said the man, with an understanding grin, and added, "For the whole afternoon?"

"Yes," said Mr. Payton.

With that the chauffeur threw in the clutch and the big machine whizzed away through the crowded traffic bearing a very happy cargo.

The girls never forgot that afternoon. Impressions crowded so thick and fast upon them they had all they could do to gather them in, and Lucile more than once exclaimed, "Oh, I must come here some day when I have lots of time and just stand and look and look and look!"

The last time she had made this remark was when they were proceeding slowly through the crowded traffic of London Bridge.

"Do you remember what Mark Twain said about people in olden times being born on the bridge,

living on it all their lives, and finally dying on it, without having been in any other part of the world?" said Phil, looking about him with lively interest.

"Well, I don't blame them much," Jessie answered; "it is fascinating."

"Yes; only they don't have the heads of Dukes and things on spikes the way they used to," Evelyn complained.

"Goodness, Evelyn, you can't expect everything! Besides, you wouldn't actually like to *see* those things," cried Lucile, horrified.

"Well, maybe I wouldn't *like* to look at them," Evelyn retracted, embarrassed by so many laughing eyes upon her. "But if they were there, I just couldn't help looking, could I?" she finished, lamely. 121

There was a shout, and Jessie exclaimed, "I do believe you'd enjoy being a cannibal, Evelyn. You and the black-skins certainly have a great many views in common."

At last they had left the bridge behind and were once more speeding through the historic streets of London.

"The Abbey now, Dad?" Phil questioned, eagerly. "That's what I came to Europe to see, you know."

"Seems to me you're getting mighty familiar," commented Jessie. "Why don't you call it by its full name?"

"Are we, Dad?" said Phil, ignoring the interruption.

"We are," said Mr. Payton. "I've been wanting to see it, along with other things, all my life, Phil. You see, I wasn't so lucky as you. However, I expect to make up for lost time."

"Well, it's a treat just to ride along the streets," said

Evelyn. “It’s so very different from anything I ever saw before.”

“Yes; you could imagine you were reading Dickens,” said Lucile, her eyes bright with the idea. “Why, that little shop might almost be the same one where——”

“Uncle Sol and Cap’n Cuttle hung out,” said Phil.

“Yes,” Jessie added, excitedly. “And you can almost see little Florence Dombey——”

“And her black-eyed maid, Susan,” said Evelyn, eagerly, and they all laughed delightedly at the picture.

“Gee, it does seem to make his books lots more real,” Phil chuckled. “Dear old Cap’n Cuttle and Uncle Sol’s nevvy, Wal’r—you remember him, don’t you?”

Of course they did. So on they went, most of the time in gales of merriment, as some house or modest little shop suggested some character or happening in the books of the great writer and humorist.

So happy were they in their imagining that they were almost sorry to find themselves at their destination.

“Oh, so soon?” cried Lucile, trying vainly to straighten the corners of her laughing mouth into some semblance 122 of the sobriety that befitted so great an occasion. “Oh, I never get enough of anything!” This last a protest against fate.

“Greedy child!” whispered Evelyn, lovingly, as the chauffeur opened the door. “It is a great deal better than having too much of everything,” she added, philosophically.

Phil was standing a little apart from the rest and was gazing with rapturous awe at this object of his

boyhood adoration.

“Gee, Lucy, look at it!” he murmured, as his sister tucked her arm in his in mute understanding. “Think of the architect that could plan that magnificent structure!”

“It is wonderful,” Lucile agreed, softly, sobered by the beauty, the indefinite repose and dignity of the old, historic pile. “Phil, can you really imagine we are standing here in London, actually looking at Westminster Abbey? I can’t.”

“It sure does seem impossible, little sister,” Phil answered, understandingly. “But so it is. I guess Dad wants us now; he seems to be ready,” he added, as Mr. Payton beckoned to them.

“Yes,” began Evelyn, the irrepressible. “I want to see all the aesoph—sarcophaguses—gae——” she floundered hopeless and looked to the others for relief.

“Perhaps you mean sarcophagi,” Jessie suggested, loftily, while the others laughed at her discomfiture.

“Well, whatever it is, I want to see it,” she persisted, doggedly.

“Don’t worry; you shall,” Lucile promised. “If I know anything about it, you will have plenty of time to see everything, for I’m not going home till I have to.”

A moment more and they had stepped within the great, silent, shadow-filled cathedral. The lights and sunshine of the out-of-doors made the contrast more impressive and in the wonder of the moment the girls drew closer together. Gone was all their levity now, buried deep beneath an 123 overwhelming reverence for this great architectural masterpiece—exalted resting place of England’s noblest men.

The mellow, softly-tinted light from a hundred lofty windows bathed the clustering pillars, the magnificent nave and choir in a soft, roseate glow. To the girls it seemed that all the glory, all the romance, all the pomp and splendid grandeur of the ages lay embodied there.

Lucile's hand was cold as it rested on her father's. "Dad," she breathed, "it almost makes you feel the wonderful scenes it has witnessed."

"Do you wish to be shown about the Abbey?" The calm voice startled them and they turned sharply.

"Why, yes," said Mr. Payton to the tall, thin, aesthetic-looking young man who stood regarding them blandly. "We will be glad to have you act as guide."

This the young man did, and to such good effect that the girls and Phil were soon hanging on every word.

The magnificent choir held for them especial interest, for it was there had taken place the gorgeous coronations of the kings of England from the time of Harold.

"It seems like a fairy tale, anyway," said Jessie, wide-eyed and pink-cheeked. "Why, to think of all the great monarchs of England—Richard the Third and Henry the Eighth and Queen Elizabeth—actually being crowned on this spot! Why, it is the next best thing to seeing the coronation itself!"

From there the party passed into the north transept, where lay, for the most part, the great statesmen and warriors of England.

But it was in the south transept, in the poets' corner, where were erected memorials of the great English writers, that our party was most interested. Chaucer,

Shakespeare, Thackeray, Dickens—magic names, names to conjure with!

Their English guide grew more eloquent and his face flushed with pride as he went into eulogies of these great men who had made England famous in the literary world. 124

They lingered longer over Dickens' tomb, visioning the man who, by the far-reaching genius of his pen, could sway multitudes to laughter or tears at will.

"And it is to Dickens, largely, that we owe the marvelous improvement in social conditions among the lower classes," the young man finished. "If it had not been for the boldness of his pen, we might still be going blithely along, blind to the miserable, unjust conditions that so prevailed among the poor of his time."

And so the afternoon wore blissfully on, till Mr. Payton drew out his watch and four pairs of eager young eyes followed the action fearfully.

"It can't be late, Dad," from Lucile.

"After six," said Mr. Payton, and they groaned in unison. "I'm as sorry as you young folks to tear myself away, but I'm afraid we've seen all we can for to-day."

Slowly, and each step a protest against a necessity that demanded their return so soon, the girls made their reluctant way to the door of the cathedral.

Before they stepped into the waiting machine, our party turned for one more look at the Abbey.

"Oh, Dad, did you ever see anything like it?" breathed Lucile.

"There *is* nothing like it," her father answered,

slowly. “It is testimony in stone, a silent epitome of the glorious, stately, romance-filled history of England!”

125

CHAPTER XVIII

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

“And to think that the Applegates own a motor boat!” It was Lucile who spoke.

The girls were walking down the quaint, narrow street at the side of the hotel. Although it was very early, scarcely seven o’clock, the girls had been up and dressed for nearly an hour. There was so much to be seen and thought about and talked about that an ordinary day, begun at, say, eight o’clock, seemed to these young people wholly inadequate. So it was they happened to be taking a walk while other guests of the hotel were just beginning to wake up, talking over the events of the day before and beginning to feel a most inordinate longing for breakfast.

“I’m awfully glad,” Jessie was saying, in answer to Lucile’s remark. “We ought to have a great old time to-day. Oh, girls, I’m so hungry!”

“That’s the tenth time you’ve said that very same thing within the last ten minutes, Jessie,” said Evelyn, teasingly. “That suit is awfully becoming,

Lucy," she approved.

"What do you mean?" queried Lucile of Jessie, while she thanked Evelyn with a bright smile.

"Oh, you don't pay any attention to me at all, and nobody throws any compliments in my direction," and Jessie contrived to look very injured and forlorn.

"Why, we were listening with all our ears," declaimed Lucile; then added, naively, "What did you say?"

"Humph!" grunted Jessie. "I just said I was hungry."

"So are we all of us," sang Lucile, cheerily. "And if my nose does not deceive me, there issueth from the regions of various kitchens a blithe and savory odor —as of fresh muffins, golden-yellow eggs, just fried to a turn, and luscious, juicy, crisp——" 126

"Oh, Lucy, don't! I can't bear it!" shrieked Jessie, covering her ears with her hands. "Eggs and bacon and—oh—oh——"

"No; bacon and eggs," corrected Evelyn, soberly; "and cereal, with lots and oodles of rich cream—and maybe some marmalade——"

"Is this a conspiracy?" cried Jessie, glowering belligerently at the two mischievous faces. "Girls, if you only had an idea how hungry I am, you wouldn't joke; it's too serious."

"My goodness, don't you think we're hungry, too?" cried Lucile. "Why, I'm so hungry a piece of dried bread would taste like—like——" She hunted desperately for a comparison.

"Ambrosia and nectar," began Evelyn.

"And a pinch of angels' food mixed in," finished Lucile, laughing. "Why, I'd steal, murder, anything,

for it!"

"My, you must be worse off than I am," said Jessie, regarding her friend with awe. "I wouldn't do all that for anything less than chicken."

Then they all laughed, just because they couldn't help it—the world was such a wonderful place to live in.

"Just the same, I've never eaten anything since that tasted like the food we cooked in camp," sighed Lucile.

"You must guard against giving wrong impressions, Lucy," Jessie admonished, gravely. "Anybody, hearing you, might actually imagine you could cook."

"When I made that remark I had you in mind, Jessie, dear," purred Lucile.

"In that case, of course——"

"I wonder what the girls are doing this minute," Evelyn interrupted, dreamily. "I'd give the world to get just one little glimpse of them and our guardian and Jim and Jeddie——"

"Don't! You make me homesick," pleaded Lucile. "It seems strange to think there's a whole ocean between us. I wonder if we'll be able to tell our guardian, when 127 we do see her, that we have tried faithfully to live up to the camp-fire laws—even when we were so far away."

"Well, there are two of them that we surely haven't broken," said Evelyn soberly, "and they are—hold on to health, and be happy."

"Yes; and we've pursued knowledge so hungrily that I haven't begun to get the facts all straightened out

yet," said Jessie, in funny bewilderment.

"I guess we're all in the same boat there," Lucile comforted. "There is one thing I'm learning pretty well, though, and that is to count in shillings and pence. I can figure in English money almost as well as in United States now."

"So can I, and I haven't eaten more than two candies in a week, and they were little ones," Jessie confided, virtuously.

"And I haven't used slang for, oh, I don't know how long," cried Evelyn. "And I wasn't rude even to that old man who stepped on my foot and then looked cross—"

Lucile laughed infectiously. "Goodness, we're in a fair way to become three little angels," she laughed.

"Aren't you girls coming in to breakfast?" said Phil, appearing for a minute at the door as they passed. "If you are, follow me"—and they needed no second invitation.

In response to Mrs. Applegate's very cordial invitation, Mrs. Payton and the girls had made their visit the day before. It was then that they had learned, to their surprise, that the former owned a beautiful motor boat, anchored farther up the Thames. What was their great delight when Mrs. Applegate voiced her hope that they had made no special plans for the morrow, as she had arranged a little party and was counting on them to make it complete. Of course, they had assured her that no plans could be so important as to stand in the way of so tempting an invitation; so it had been settled to the satisfaction of every one. 128

It was just nine o'clock when they climbed into the

automobile and Mr. Payton started to give the chauffeur his directions. He was to drive through Hyde Park, entering it through the beautiful gate at Hyde Park Corner and ending with the magnificent Marble Arch. From there they would drive straight to Henley, where they were to meet the Applegates.

“It’s good we started early; now we can see lots before we meet the other people,” said Jessie, contentedly.

“Can’t we get out, Dad,” begged Lucile, “and get a little closer look at Kensington Gardens—I love to say it; it sounds so very English, don’t you know—just for a little while? Can’t we, Mother? It looks so pretty!”

“No; we’ll have just time to ride through the park,” Mrs. Payton answered, and Lucile must needs be satisfied.

“I read somewhere that they took several hundred acres from the park to enlarge the gardens,” Phil volunteered. “Is that so, Dad?”

“Yes; three hundred, I think it was,” his father answered. “And now here we are, before the famous Hyde Park itself!”

As they entered the park through a most imposing gateway the girls uttered a little cry of admiration.

“The lawns are like velvet!” cried Lucile. “And those exquisite flowering shrubs! What do you call them, Mother?”

“I think they are hawthorne bushes,” Mrs. Payton answered, absently.

“And the flowers! Did you ever see such gorgeous tints?” said Jessie. “And the splendid old trees! Why,

they look as if they might be a million years old!"

"I bet some of them could tell many a tale of duels fought beneath their shade in the time when such things were the fashion," remarked Phil, and Evelyn turned to him with shining eyes.

"You mean real duels, where they both fight till one of them gets killed? Oh!" 129

"It's plain to see you were born a century too late, Evelyn," Jessie remarked, mournfully.

"I don't care; it must have been fun," she maintained.

"Lots," Lucile agreed, gravely. "I can't imagine anything funnier than having a couple of silked and satined gentlemen sticking spears into each other for my sweet sake."

The description did not coincide in the least with that of authors and historians who love to dwell on those chivalrous days, but it accomplished its purpose, nevertheless; it sent our girls into gales of laughter.

"You're jealous, that's all," Evelyn remarked, when she could make herself heard.

The beauty and grandeur of the great Marble Arch sobered them a trifle and they were enthusiastic in their admiration. Then, when they could look no longer, they continued toward their rendezvous, leaving the beautiful, historic park behind and speeding along the Thames embankment toward Henley.

As they advanced further out of the city and deeper into the country, they were dazzled by the beauty of the scenery. The sun struck hot and bright upon the road, while the shrubs and foliage on the outskirts of

the woodland seemed outlined in molten gold against the softer background of shadowy green. The river shone and sparkled in the brilliant sun like some great, glistening jewel turned to liquid sunshine. The world was bathed in gold.

“If our guardian were only here!” Lucile murmured. “And little Margaret!”

Jessie turned to her, surprised. “How did you know what I was thinking about?” she demanded.

“I didn’t,” said Lucile; “only, when I see the woods and the water, it makes me think of the camp-fire and our guardian and little Margaret——”

“Isn’t this where we stop, Dad?” Phil interrupted; and they had no time for further conversation. 130

As they alighted, a man came up to them and, touching his hat, said that he was from the “Vigil” and was looking for a party bound there.

Upon Mr. Payton’s assuring the man that his was the party in question, they stepped into the trim little launch that was to bear them to their destination.

“Say, wouldn’t it be great to have a little motor boat like this down at the river?” said Lucile, trailing her hand in the warm water. “Just think of the races we could have with it—although nothing could be much more exciting than the one we had,” she added, loyally.

“Of course it couldn’t,” Jessie agreed. “I’d rather paddle any time.”

“You must admit you can’t go quite as fast,” teased Phil. “Almost, of course, but not quite.”

“We never admit anything,” Lucile retorted. “Besides, I dare say we could go a good deal faster than some

motor boats."

"Sure," said Phil, encouragingly. "I've seen lots of old tubs, minus the motor, that I'm sure you could run rings around."

"Phil, if you don't stop talking about things you don't understand," began Jessie.

"Is there anything?" asked Phil, with interest.

"We'll dump you out and make you walk ashore," she added, treating his remark with the haughty disdain it deserved.

"It's a long way to shore," said Phil, with a rueful glance over his shoulder. "Give me one more chance, fair damsel, and I will promise never to offend again."

"Oh, if I could only believe him!" said Jessie, prayerfully.

Lucile laughed and flipped a salt drop toward the offending Phil. "You mustn't be too hard on him, Jessie," she remonstrated. "You know, he really might be worse."

"Thanks, sweet sister," said Phil, gratefully. 131

By this time the little launch had noisily chug-chugged its way among the various craft, small and large, and had finally come to a standstill beside a beautiful boat, upon whose bow and stern was engraved the name "Vigil."

The Applegates, proud owners of the "Vigil," crowded eagerly to the rail to welcome their guests.

"Oh, I'm so glad you could come," cried Mrs. Applegate, as Phil and Mr. Payton climbed the short ladder preparatory to helping the women folk on board. "The Dickensons and Archie Blackstone—we

came over with them, you know—are on board."

There was an enthusiastic meeting between the fellow-voyagers, for they had formed a sort of mutual-admiration society while on board the "Mauretania" and were only too glad to come together again.

While their fathers and mothers were talking, the young folks had seized upon the opportunity to look about them. They were just at the height of this delightful process when Mrs. Applegate hailed them.

"Don't you girls want to come down in the cabin and take your wraps off?" she called.

"Surely; we're coming right away," Lucile answered for them.

"Why do you have to fix up any?" protested Archie. "You look just fine just as you are. What's the use of wasting an hour?"

"We're not going to fix up," denied Lucile; then added, "It won't take us an hour, anyway. We'll be back in five minutes."

"Oh, how I'd like to believe you!" said Archie, as they disappeared down the companionway.

"Get out your watch," challenged Lucile. "I'll wager a pound of my home-made fudge against a pound of Huyler's that we'll be back before the five minutes are up."

"If I were you, Arch," said Phil, loudly, for the benefit of his sister, "I'd rather lose than win," which was treated with a laugh of merry derision.

132

CHAPTER XIX

THE BREATH OF THE WAR GOD

The girls proved as good as their word and five minutes later tumbled breathlessly on deck, cheeks flushed and eyes shining with triumph.

“Where’s that pound of Huyler’s?” Lucile demanded, with an “I told you so” look at Archie.

“I’ll pay it as soon as we get to shore,” he promised. “It’s worth ten boxes of candies to see you so soon,” he added, gallantly, and, catching Lucile about the waist, he fox-trotted up the deck to the accompaniment of his own merry whistle.

“Oh, we can do that, too,” said Phil, not to be outdone in anything, and soon they were all at it with a swing and a go that made their fond parents, who had come up in the meantime and were watching them, marvel.

“I can give you something better than that to dance to,” said Mrs. Applegate, when they had stopped from sheer lack of breath. “There is a phonograph below, and if you boys don’t mind the trouble, you might bring it on deck and start it going. Then you can dance to your hearts’ content.”

Phil gave a whoop of joy and nearly fell down the companionway in his eagerness to find the machine, and the other two boys followed closely on his heels.

“There seems to be no lack of enthusiasm,” remarked Mrs. Applegate, as the ladies made themselves

comfortable in the big chairs placed against the rail. “They can’t seem to get tired. I never knew there was so much bottled-up energy.”

The boys soon returned with the phonograph and they were having the time of their lives teaching each other the newest steps when they were interrupted by the arrival 133 of some people from the boat club, who had been invited to meet them.

There were three girls and three boys somewhere about their own age and four of the club’s most popular members and their wives.

“There sure is going to be a crowd,” said Archie, as the newcomers began to pour over the side, all talking at once. “I wish we could have finished that dance,” he added, regretfully.

“Oh, there will be plenty more,” said Lucile, smiling roguishly in a way that made him wish all these intruders—for so he regarded them—were at least as far away as the North Pole.

Soon the introductions were over and the girls found themselves liking the gay young strangers immensely. Their English accent and the way they said, “Bah Jove!” and “Beastly hot weather, what?” fascinated the uninitiated girls, and they were soon imitating their new-found friends with surprising success.

“You were dancing when we arrived, weren’t you?” asked Anita Derby, a dashing, fair-haired girl, who made almost as many enemies as friends with a rather sharp, unbridled tongue. “I thought I heard a phonograph. What was it you were playing?”

“‘Good-bye, Girls,’ from ‘Chin Chin,’” said Lucile. “It’s a splendid fox trot.”

“Never heard of it,” said Anita. “Peculiar name —‘Chin Chin’—what?”

Lucile was about to reply when Mr. Applegate interrupted.

“There’s a stiff breeze on the way,” he said, casting his weather eye aloft. “And, from the looks of things, it’s more than possible that we may run into a storm somewhere up the river. However, we’ll have to take a chance on that.”

“Oh, I wonder if we will,” cried Lucile.

“Don’t worry,” said Gordon Ridgley, whose gaze had not wandered from Lucile’s bright face, with its dancing eyes and mischievous mouth, always quirked in a smile 134 and showing the dimples in the corners of it—he wondered how many dimples she had, anyway—since he had come on board. “If you will come with me forward,” he added, “I’ll show you the prettiest view of the river there is. B’ Jove, it’s incomparable!”

Lucile consented rather hesitatingly. To tell the truth, she would much rather have stayed where she was. Nevertheless, they went off around the corner of the cabin, while Archie watched them with a gloomy frown on his face.

“Nervy beggar!” he muttered.

Evelyn squeezed Jessie’s hand and whispered, delightedly. “Did you see the look Archie gave that ‘bally Henglishman’? There will be a regular duel in Hyde Park yet.”

“Shouldn’t wonder. I don’t know how Lucy ever does it.”

Meanwhile, Lucile’s cavalier, Gordon Ridgley, had

helped her carefully along the deck and established her in a corner from which he had declared the view "incomparable."

"This is rippin' luck," he cried, seizing a couple of handy chairs and dragging them to the rail. "The bally things knew we were coming!"

Lucile laughed happily. She liked being taken care of; it made her think of Jack. Meanwhile, the breeze, which had been steadily rising, had grown perceptibly stronger.

"Oh, this is wonderful!" breathed Lucile, leaning forward and drinking in the beautiful scene. "I've wanted a chance to sail in a real motor boat all my life."

"Well, does it meet with your expectations?"

"It's beginning to. You know, I was crazy about the river yesterday—it was all so different from anything I had ever seen and a thousand times more interesting; but now I can see that I had only begun to appreciate it."

"Oh, it's not such a bad old river," he said, letting his gaze wander out over the water. "I suppose it appeals more to strangers than it does to us natives. For instance, 135 I would much rather see your Hudson River than this."

"I suppose so," said Lucile, dreamily, and then added, almost as though speaking to herself, "But the Hudson, though, of course, it is beautiful and much larger than this, is in a new country, while the Thames—why, the very name makes you think of those old times when there were noble knights and beautiful ladies and jousts and all sorts of interesting things. In those days the knights seemed to go

around with a chip on their shoulders all the time. If you happened to step on their foot or any other little thing, they'd flare up, throw a glove or something in your face—I should think it must have hurt sometimes, too—and command you to joust for the honor of knight or lady——" She broke off with a little laugh and added, demurely, "I don't know what you must think of me—I'm not always like this, you know."

"I think you're——" he began, but just what he thought was never expressed, for Mr. Payton and a friend, coming upon them unexpectedly, uttered a surprised exclamation.

"Oh, here you are!" he said, amusement in the glance he gave them. "The young folks are about to start the Victrola; don't you want to join them?"

As if to give proof to his words, a merry one-step reached them from the after deck and Lucile sprang to her feet, looking toward her escort invitingly.

"We can't miss this," she said, with conviction.

Young Ridgely looked as if he could miss it with great pleasure, but he followed her to the after deck, nevertheless.

"Will you go back again after the dance?" he pleaded, as they joined the others. "We were having such a good talk."

"Perhaps," she half promised, with a tantalizing little laugh, and a moment after was swept off into the dance by Archie, who had been seriously considering organizing a search party. 136

"You were away a mighty long time," he reproached her. "What were you doing all the time with that Ridgely guy?"

“I shouldn’t call him a guy; he’s a very nice fellow,” said Lucile, demurely. “Besides, we were only admiring the view.”

“Huh!” grunted Archie, unconvinced. “I dare say he found the view very interesting,” he added, meaningly.

“Doubtless he did, since he wants to go back and look at it all over again,” she said, wickedly; then, to change the subject, “Doesn’t Jessie dance wonderfully? I never saw such an improvement in any one.”

“Yes, she dances well, but she can’t touch you; nobody can.”

So the morning wore merrily on, the young folks stopping only long enough to get their breath between dances. Then came the ever-welcome call to lunch and they tumbled down to the roomy cabin, followed more sedately by their elders, who had enjoyed the morning as much as their offspring, though less riotously. It was a delicious luncheon and, with the added flavor of romantic surroundings and congenial company, was altogether a memorable affair.

When they reached the deck again, they were surprised to find that the sun, which had been shining so brightly before, had gone under a cloud, while the smooth surface of the water was stirred into ripples and eddies by an ever-increasing wind.

“Looks mighty threatening,” said Phil, anxiously. “I hope we don’t have a downpour.”

The others viewed the sudden change with equal trepidation.

“Look at that bank of clouds over there, Lucile,” said

Archie, pointing to a gigantic cloud formation, black and threatening, and moving swiftly in their direction. “By the way, I take back all I said about your prophecies this morning; it sure looks as if we were in for it now. Wonder what Mr. Applegate thinks of it.”

What Mr. Applegate thought of it proved to be certain confirmation of their fears. He stood regarding 137 the threatening sky-line with an anxious frown on his forehead. A moment later a sudden gust of wind struck the boat, heeling it so far to one side that they had to grip the rail and each other to keep from falling, while the vivid flash of lightning, followed by a low, ominous roll of thunder, made them draw closer together.

The captain was roused to sudden action. Turning to his guests, he said, “If you folks don’t want to get wet, you had better make your way down below. The storm is due to break any minute now.”

Obediently, but reluctantly, they followed directions, descending into the now almost twilight gloom of the cabin.

“Goodness! Whoever would have thought it would get dark so quickly?” said Anita Derby, fearfully. “If there is one thing I detest it is a thunderstorm.”

“I think it’s kind of exciting,” said Lucile, snuggling into a corner of the great leather-cushioned settee that ran around three sides of the cabin and pushing aside a curtain that obstructed her view. “I’ve always wanted to be on the water in a storm. Oh, look at that flash! Did you ever see anything so vivid?” But her voice was drowned in the great crash of thunder that followed it.

It struck the earth with terrific force; then retired,

grumbling and muttering like some tremendous monster robbed of its prey. Then the rain began, pouring down in torrents, dashing itself upon the cabin roof and windows with such violence it seemed solid wood and glass must give way before it. It raged; it danced in frenzy; it hurled itself in stinging dagger points upon the deck, while the wind shrieked a weirdly wild accompaniment.

“It’s a hurricane!” shouted Jessie above the wind, and some way in the semi-darkness she found her way to Lucile’s side, where Evelyn had come before her. It was strange how the three friends clung together instinctively.

“Oh, Lucy, do you suppose we could possibly be swamped?”

“Of course not,” said Lucile, trying with difficulty to be reassuring, as a sudden lurch of the boat sent her back 138 against the cushions. “Didn’t you hear the captain say we were perfectly safe?”

“How’s this for a storm, eh?” yelled Phil, balancing with difficulty. “If it wasn’t for Mother, I’d go on deck and watch.”

“And get struck by lightning,” said Lucile. “Oh-h!” as another flash rent the darkness, followed by a terrific crash of thunder. “This can’t last long.”

“Don’t be alarmed, any one.” It was Mr. Applegate’s voice, and though they couldn’t locate him in the gloom, it was a comfort just to hear him speak. “It’s only a hard shower and an unusually strong wind. It will blow itself out in ten minutes.”

The captain was right, and in less time than he allowed the storm began to abate; the flashes of lightning became less frequent, the thunder less and

less fierce, and the gloom began to lighten so they could distinguish each other. Slowly and reluctantly the wind died away until only the rolling of the boat remained to testify to its violence.

As soon as Mr. Applegate thought it wise to venture on deck the whole party very willingly repaired there. The sky was still a dull, leaden color, but around the spot where the sun was hiding behind the banked-up clouds shone a misty radiance, sure prophecy of brightness to come.

They were still finding it rather hard to recover their former hilarious spirits when, fifteen minutes later the sky opened as if by magic, letting forth a burst of golden sunshine that flooded the river and danced on the water so gladly and joyously that the girls and boys shouted with delight.

“You wonderful old sun!” cried Lucile. “Why, it makes the world a different place to live in!”

“It is all the difference between night and day,” said Major Ridgely, Gordon’s father, a tall, well-built man with a mass of iron-gray hair framing a strong-featured face—the face of a scholar and a gentleman. “And it’s 139 like the difference,” he continued, slowly and with emphasis, “it’s like the difference between peace and—war.”

There was silence for a full moment while the young folks regarded him with astonishment and interest, for they sensed a deeper meaning behind his words.

“You mean,” it was Mr. Payton that spoke, “you mean, Major, that you think there is any immediate danger of—war?”

“War—is—imminent.” The Major spoke slowly, pronouncing each word with exaggerated

distinctness. “I am no prophet, sir, but, unless I am very much mistaken, the month of August will see part of this continent plunged in the bloodiest war the world has ever known.”

“War! War!” The word ran from one to the other, as the Major continued:

“It has been coming for years. For years the interests and ambitions of at least two great nations—Germany and Russia—have been antagonistic. For years the countries of Europe have been looking forward to the time when the slender strand of national amity would be snapped like a thread and the nations plunged into deadly conflict. And now, it seems to me, the time is ripe!”

The young folks had been drinking in the conversation eagerly. War! Why, they had read of war, of course, in their history books; but war, in their time, in their generation, under their very noses, as it were! Why, it was impossible!

But the Major was speaking again. “For years the sole aim and goal of the German house of Hohenzollern has been the perfection to a marvelous degree of her policy of militarism. Why, there is not a man in the whole German Empire, who, at the command of his country, could not take his place, a trained soldier, in the tremendous, perfected military machine that is the German army.”

“Why, Dad, does that mean that we may have to fight?” fairly shouted Phil, who could not restrain himself a moment longer. “Now, right away——” 140

“We won’t son,” said his father, kindly. “Thank Heaven, we will have the broad Atlantic between us and the horrors of war!”

"War? Who talks of war?" cried little Mrs. Applegate, coming breezily up to them from the depths, where she had probably been giving some very important instructions for dinner. "I won't have the ugly word spoken on board my ship. Why, everybody looks as if they had seen a ghost. What have you been talking about?"

"Why, you heard, my dear," said her husband, kindly. "We were simply discussing the possibility of ——"

"Stop!" shrieked the little woman, clapping her hands to her ears. "I won't have it! Somebody start the phonograph—do!"

Gordon laughingly obeyed and soon they were all dancing merrily as if the great cloud of war were not hanging over all Europe. When the young folks were tired of dancing they settled themselves comfortably on the deck, talking, laughing, singing college songs, and otherwise enjoying themselves.

It was not till evening, when they had bidden their hosts good-night, after thanking them heartily for "the most glorious day they had ever spent," that the topic of the afternoon was again referred to.

"Do you think there is really any possibility of war?" Lucile asked of Archie, as they were nearing the hotel.

"There's no telling," he answered, seriously. "It looks rather like it now. You and I needn't worry, anyhow; we won't get any of it. Unless," he added, whimsically, "unless you should decide to go as a Red Cross nurse. Then I might even desert the Red, White and Blue and volunteer my services in the war."

And so they parted, with an almost imperceptible cloud shadowing their gayety. Little did Archie think, when he declared so confidently that "they wouldn't get any of it," that before the summer was over, they would experience to some infinitesimal extent the cruel, relentless, crushing power of that tremendous grinding machine men term—WAR!

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CHAPTER XX

CROSSING THE CHANNEL

Two days later our party started for France by way of Dover. They parted regretfully from their friends, who were obliged to remain in London a few days longer, and it is safe to say the others, the boys at least, were even more sorry to part from them. They had not expected any one to see them off, and so it was a complete surprise when they found, not only the Dickensons and Archie, but all the rest of the jolly yachting party, waiting to say good-by to them and speed them on their way.

Our girls were showered with good wishes and pleadings from the boys not to "forget them altogether in the gay and riotous life of Paris." They promised laughingly, thankful to their friends for making the parting a so much easier one than they had anticipated.

The little packet steamed away from the dock and the girls waved to the group on the wharf and the group on the wharf waved to them until they were out of sight.

"Wasn't that lovely of them?" fairly beamed Lucile, as she turned from the last wave at the little dots that had been people. "I think they are the jolliest crowd I've ever met. Jessie, your bow is crooked; hold still a minute. There, it's all right now. Oh, girls, I'm so happy that, if some one doesn't hold me down, I'll go up in the air like a balloon and sit on that fluffy white cloud. No, that one over there, the one that looks like a canary bird."

"Goodness! She's quite romantic!" said Jessie, squinting up at the cloud in question. "It looks more like an elephant to me."

"To come down from the discussion of clouds and elephants," began Evelyn, "to every-day matters, I wonder 142 if that Frenchman we met on the steamer—what was his name? Oh, yes, I remember; Monsieur Charloix—I wonder if he's found that girl yet."

"And the fortune," added Lucile. "Don't forget to mention the most important part. I've——"

"Lucy, how very mercenary!" reproved Jessie.

"Don't you call my sister names," said Phil, who was always pretending surprise at Jessie's long words.

"I've been wondering about that myself," said Lucile, ignoring Phil's remark. "Now that we're going to France, perhaps we will hear something about him."

"France is supposed to be a respectable-sized town," said Phil, with what was meant to be biting sarcasm. "It's not like Burleigh, where Angela Peabody can tell

you the history of everybody in town, and then some. We might be in Paris a year and never hear a word about him."

"I realize that quite as well as you do, brother, dear," said Lucile, sweetly. "However, you must admit that there is more chance of our finding out something about the gentleman in France than there was in London."

"Or in Egypt," Phil agreed, and Lucile gave up with a little shrug of her shoulders.

"Well, it doesn't matter, anyway; only I would like to know the end. It's like starting to read an interesting serial story in a magazine, and just when you get to the most exciting part, you come up against a 'To be continued in our next.' Look!" she added, irrelevantly, clutching Jessie's wrist and pointing upward. "Now the cloud has changed shape again. It's the image of old Jim's dog, Bull."

Phil turned away in utter disgust. "You don't have to go to Bronx Park to see the zoo," he muttered.

"Not when we have you with us," Jessie retorted, at which Phil retreated in undignified haste.

The girls turned laughingly to each other.

"What do you say if we have an old-fashioned talk?" suggested Evelyn. "There's has been such a crowd around 143 all the time that we haven't had a minute to talk things over."

"Let's not sit in any regular, ordinary old place to-day, said Lucile. Let's find some snug little corner in the stern, where we can do just as we please and make believe we are back in camp. Oh, for one little sight of our guardian!"

"If she were only here, our happiness would be complete," said Jessie, as they made their way back. "I wonder how Marjorie and Eleanor and Dot and Ruth and the whole bunch of them are, anyway. I'm crazy to see them all."

"And we haven't heard from them in so long! I do wish it didn't take mail so long to travel across the ——Oh, here's the very place we are looking for, girls," she interrupted herself. "It's just big enough for three of us, and I don't believe anybody ever comes this way."

So saying, she pulled a chair into the corner and made herself comfortable, while Jessie and Evelyn followed her example.

"You're a wonder at thinking things, Lucy," said Evelyn, as she comfortably settled herself with her head resting against the cabin. "This is ever so much better than sitting where everybody can look at us."

"Of course it is," agreed Lucile. Then, after a moment, she added, dreamily, "Girls, do I look any different than I did when we started? Somehow, I feel awfully different."

Jessie regarded her through lazy, half-closed eyes. "No," she drawled, "I don't see that you've changed so much. Your nose and eyes and mouth are all the same and your hair still curls. You have tanned, though, and there's a little rim of white right up close to your hair, where the curls keep the sun off, and ever since a certain morning"—here Jessie and Evelyn, companions in crime, exchanged glances, and Lucile began to burn a deeper red under the tan —"and ever since a certain morning I have noticed a very marked tendency toward dreaming, and several times when you should have answered 'no' to a

question you have 144 answered ‘yes,’ and we knew you hadn’t heard a single word. Aside from that, you haven’t changed at all, except that you’re a million times dearer and sweeter than you ever were,” she finished, with a sudden outburst of affection.

Lucile hugged her gratefully, but her cheeks were still unduly red when she answered, “I didn’t know I was being so rude, and it must have sounded frightfully foolish when I answered ‘yes’ instead of ‘no’; but I’ll try to reform.”

“Don’t you do it,” said Evelyn. “You don’t know how interesting you are this way, especially to Jessie. She says it’s better than reading a story any day, and she can enjoy herself without breaking any of the camp-fire rules.”

Lucile shot a reproachful glance at her friend, who laughed shamelessly, “I don’t care, Lucy; you’d enjoy it just as much as I do if you were in my place. You used to make such fun of my McCutcheon books and everything——”

“Yes; but don’t forget I took it all back that day in camp when we saw—well, you know what——”

“Yes, I know,” said Jessie, star-eyed at the memory. “Was there ever such a summer anyway?”

“You haven’t told us yet what Jack said in his letter,” Evelyn interrupted, irrelevantly. “Be good to us, Lucy, and throw us some more small scraps of information to satisfy our curiosity.”

“Well, I can’t tell you everything he said,” Lucile began.

“We hardly expect that,” murmured Jessie, and Lucile threw her a suspicious glance.

"Well," she continued, after an ominous silence, during which Jessie intently studied the sky-line, "I can tell you the part that would interest you most. He says if he can persuade his uncle that he is desperately in need of a change, he may see us in Paris."

"What?" cried Jessie, regarding Lucile with laughing eyes. "You mean that Jack says he may actually come to Europe? That means he will, because he can wind that 145 wealthy old uncle of his around his little finger. Good for dear old Jack!"

And so they talked on and on, reviewing past and prophesying future delights, until the position of the sun reminded them that it was time to seek the rest of the party.

"So here you are," said Mrs. Payton, as they approached her from around a corner of the cabin. "We were beginning to think you had jumped overboard. Your father has just gone around the other way to look for you."

"I'm sorry we didn't come back before; I can see it must be about time to land by Phil's face. He never looks sad unless he's hungry."

"You're wrong this time," said Phil. "I'm looking sad because I haven't seen Jessie for two long hours."

"Don't tell me that," said Jessie, the unconvincible. "You might try that with some one else, but not with me; I know you too well."

"But suppose I don't want to try it with any one else," Phil objected, managing to fall behind the rest and lowering his voice to a whisper. "Suppose I wasn't fooling; suppose I really meant what I said?"

Jessie turned quickly and said, in a tone in which

laughter and despair were equally blended, “Oh, Phil, you’re not going to begin anything like that—please——”

“Why not?” said Phil, doggedly. “If you don’t mind, I think I shall.”

Jessie regarded Phil’s serious face out of the corner of her eye and gave a little hysterical gurgle.

“It’s no use,” she thought, as Phil placed a chair for her with more than usual care; “it must be in the air. When Lucy knows——”

CHAPTER XXI

THE OLD CHATEAU

Lucile had been awake for some time. She lay with both hands beneath her curly head, staring straight up at the ceiling and thinking, thinking, very hard.

They were on the outskirts of Paris. Her father had heard from the Applegates of this wonderful little inn, where one might be as comfortable as in one’s own home. This had appealed strongly to them all, for the girls were eager for a sight of the country, especially since the gratifying of their desire would not entail the loss of city delights in the least—a machine could whirl them into the heart of Paris in half an hour.

Such was the pleasant trend of Lucile's thoughts as she turned her eyes toward the bright patch of window and beheld a world bathed in golden sunshine. "How pretty it all was!" she mused. "Take the clouds, for instance. How feathery and soft and fleecy and silvery-lined they looked, floating on that vast sea of brilliant turquoise; and somewhere, somewhere there was a bird singing, more exquisitely, she was sure, than bird had ever sung before. Oh, if she could only get one little peek at him!" With this in view, she stole silently from the bed and over to the window.

"Time to get up?" yawned a sleepy voice from the bed.

"Oh, he's stopped!" wailed Lucile. "He stopped the minute you began to talk. Oh, Jessie, why did you have to wake up just then?"

Jessie gazed at her friend as at one gone suddenly and violently insane. "If it will do you any good, I will go to sleep again," said she, with much dignity. "But I should like to know what or whom it was I stopped and—" 147

"Oh, hush!" begged Lucile, with her finger on her lips. "There he is now; listen, please!"

And Jessie listened while the little songster poured out his joy in liquid cadences that rose and fell and sparkled out upon the morning air like dancing sunbeams turned to music—so light, so rippling, so joyously alive, that the girls' hearts thrilled in answer.

"Oh, the darling!" cried Jessie, springing out of bed and joining Lucile at the window. "I wonder what he is; we never heard anything like that in Burleigh. Now he's stopped again——"

“He won’t sing when you talk, of course,” said Evelyn, who had been quietly watching them.

“Of course not,” said Jessie, calmly. “He knows there is no use in trying to compete with the music of my voice.”

“Time to get up,” exclaimed Evelyn, in a loud voice, and began a show of dressing in a great hurry, while Lucile gave a little despairing laugh.

“I don’t know what you two would do if you didn’t have me to act the part of peacemaker all the time. I’m afraid they would have one or the other of you up for murder before the end of the week.”

“Well, we couldn’t get along without you, anyway,” said Jessie, affectionately. “What’s the use of thinking of such awful calamities ahead of time?”

“All right; we won’t, if you say so,” said Lucile, and, snatching a pillow from the bed, she hurled it at the unsuspecting and suddenly pensive Evelyn. The aim was good and Evelyn tumbled over on the bed, while a couple of feet waved frantically in the air.

“Oh,” she cried, half smothered by the pillow, “I’ll get even for this, Lucile Payton! You just wait!” And, being a young person of her word, Lucile just ducked in time to escape an answering shot.

Then would have ensued an old-fashioned pillow fight, had not Lucile suddenly bethought her that this was not their own home. 148

“Girls!” she cried, half choked with laughter. “Girls, we’ll have somebody in here, sure as fate, if we don’t stop. They’ll think there’s a fire or something.”

“Or worse,” Jessie laughed, good-naturedly, and after that they gradually quieted down.

As usual, they were dressed and ready on the same instant. Lucile opened the door quietly and they stepped into the corridor.

“Guess we must have roused the hotel, after all,” said Evelyn, ruefully, as they heard unmistakable sounds of awakening in the neighboring rooms. “They’ll be notifying us that our patronage is no longer desirable if we don’t look out.”

“I wonder how you say that in French,” said Lucile, her eyes merry. “If they did try to put us out, we could just pretend we didn’t understand.”

“Yes, we could follow the example of Joe, the Italian who puts out our ashes,” laughed Evelyn. “Just grin when they try to argue and shrug our shoulders. ‘Me no speck Ang-lish.’”

The girls laughed appreciatively, and Jessie added, “Nevertheless, your comparisons are odious. Joe, the ash-man, is not what you might call—in our class.”

“I could understand French a good deal better than I can some of Jessie’s United States,” said Evelyn, plaintively, and so they laughed their way out onto the broad, picturesque porch of the rambling old inn and stood gazing curiously about them.

The road wound in front of the house, over a small hill, and was lost to view on the other side. The woodland, being so near the city, was not dense, but the girls thought they had never seen foliage so vividly green nor grass so soft and luxuriant. The beckoning shadows of the trees, the fragrance of the dew-drenched flowers, the trilling music of a thousand carefree, joyous little songsters, all combined in one irresistible appeal to the girls.

With common and unspoken consent they ran down

the steps of the porch and to the other side of the road. They plucked beautiful, long-stemmed flowers from their 149 hiding-place and excitedly called each other's attention to the brightly colored birds, that balanced on swaying twigs, regarding them with saucy inquiry.

"To see us now, anybody might think the country was new to us," exclaimed Lucile, with sparkling eyes and cheeks like twin roses. "Oh, girls, there's my bird again," she added, and stood, finger on lips, while the clear note, starting soft and sweet, swelled to a height of trilling ecstasy and abandon, when all the welled-up joy of summer poured liquidly golden from a bursting little heart; then slowly, hesitatingly, with soft, intermittent trillings and gurgles, died and faded into silence.

"Oh, ah!" Jessie whispered, as though afraid to break the spell. "Did you ever hear such bird music in all your life? What can he be?"

"I wish I'd paid a little more attention to my natural history now," said Lucile, smiling ruefully. "But even that wouldn't help much until we'd seen the bird, anyway. Let's see if we can get a glimpse of him."

They were following eagerly, when Jessie exclaimed, "Oh, bother! There's Phil on the porch beckoning to us. What do you suppose he wants?"

"I don't know; breakfast, maybe," Lucile answered. "Suppose you girls run over and tell him I'll come right away. I do want to locate that bird."

"All right; only don't be long," Jessie advised, as they started, arm in arm, toward the inn. "We'll have some time after breakfast to do the locating."

Lucile retorted laughingly, and was off in the

direction from which the sweet notes had seemed to come.

“Of course, he wouldn’t sing now that I want him to in a hurry,” she communed with herself. “Any one of these birds might be the one as far as looks are concerned.”

She was just about to despair, and had almost made up her mind to turn back, when the golden note rose again and she stopped, entranced. There, over her head and not five feet away, swaying perilously on a slender twig, 150 balanced the little songster, pouring out his joy to a responsive world.

“Oh, you darling!” cried Lucile, impulsively. “I wish I could take you home with me, which you would not like at all. I must ask Dad what you are; he would probably know.”

So, triumphant, she started happily along the path, anxious to tell the girls of her luck. It was a great temptation to linger along the way; it would be nice to take back with her a bunch of wild flowers. She would give them to a waiter, and see that they were put upon their table.

With this in view, she hastened along, not noticing that the sun had gone under a cloud and that the path to the road was very long.

Therefore, she was surprised, when she emerged from the woodland, to find the sky, formerly all blue and fleecy clouds, changed to a threatening, lowering gray.

“But where is the inn?” she stammered, looking about her, bewildered. Then, as the appalling truth struck home, she grew pale with consternation.

“How could I do such a thing?” she wailed. “I must

have taken the wrong path, and now I am goodness knows where. And even the sun has disappeared. Now I am in a nice fix," and she gazed about her helplessly and vexedly, not knowing which way to turn.

"Well, there's no use standing here; that never did anybody any good," she said, at last. "If my weather eye does not deceive me, I am in for a good wetting, if I can't find shelter anywhere. Oh, the folks will be wild!"

With these and other disquieting thoughts, she started to push her way along the deserted road, with the forgotten wild flowers clutched tightly in her hand.

She had walked for over half an hour, and the first drops of rain had begun to splash upon her bare head, when, to her great delight, she saw the white front of a house among the trees.

With a joyful cry she broke into a run and, a moment later, came upon a pebbled drive that led up to a low, picturesque structure, built on the top of a gentle slope. 151

Lucile had that strange sensation which we all have experienced some time in our lives, a distinct impression she was not looking upon the chateau for the first time. Something about it seemed vaguely familiar, and it was on the tip of her tongue to put her thoughts into words when she dismissed the idea as absurd. Why, she had spent all of her life, up to the last month at least, in Burleigh, so it was plainly ridiculous even to imagine she knew the place. Many and many a time she had read descriptions of French chateaux—ah, that was it! She must have read about just such a place. But, in spite of all reasoning, the

illusion clung with startling persistency. In fact, the nearer she came to the house, the more and more was she impressed with its familiarity.

She ran up to the porch just as the storm broke.

“Pretty good time,” she smiled, as she lifted the old-fashioned knocker on the big door and let it fall with a bang.

“Now, if I can’t make whoever comes understand my French, and I haven’t very high hopes, then am I lost indeed.”

But she had no time for further thought. The door opened quietly and a soft voice inquired:

“Que voulez vous, Mam’selle?”

152

CHAPTER XXII

THE HEART OF THE MYSTERY

Lucile regarded the speaker soberly for a moment. She was a dainty, pretty, bright-eyed little person, with a repose of manner that seemed, somehow, out of keeping with her obvious youth. Lucile had understood the softly spoken French question, but when she answered it was in the native tongue.

“I do not understand French,” she said, slowly. “I am an American.”

“Ah, I, too, can speak the English,” said the other, with a delightful accent. “What is it I can do for you, Mam’selle?”

Lucile could have hugged her, so great was her joy at hearing her own language spoken so unexpectedly.

“If you will just be good enough to let me stay here till the storm is over,” she said, “and tell me how to get to my friends, I will be very much obliged.”

“Ah, Mam’selle has lost her way,” said the little French girl, nodding her head quickly several times. “I know the country well and so will give you the aid you require.” She spoke with painstaking correctness. “Enter, Mam’selle!”

Lucile was very glad to avail herself of the invitation, for she was tired from the long walk and her damp clothing clung to her limbs uncomfortably.

Her diminutive hostess led her into a large, low-ceiled, home-like room, whose broad window sills were abloom with fresh-cut flowers. Lucile thought that only the sun was needed to make it the cheeriest room in the world.

“If Mam’selle will explain to me from where she comes,” the girl invited, “I will the better know how to make swift her return, since she wishes it.” 153

“Thank you!” said Lucile, gratefully. “I wouldn’t care so much for myself, but I’m afraid my folks will be terribly worried.” Then she went on to describe the inn and her adventure of the morning.

When she had finished, her hostess nodded thoughtfully. “I know the place of which you speak,” she said, “and I would most gladly take you there immediately, but my servant has gone to the village with the only carriage of which we are the owner

and has not yet returned. I fear he may have waited for the storm to abate," and she glanced out the window, where the rain was still pouring down in torrents.

Lucile's heart sank. "Then I can't hope to get back to the folks or send word to them till the rain stops," she said.

The girl nodded confirmation. "I fear that is so, Ma'm'selle," she said; then, as though realizing her duty as hostess, she rose to her feet, saying, hurriedly, "But I forget myself. You must have hunger, Ma'm'selle. I will return at once." Then, checking herself again, she added, "But I have not yet told you my name. It is Jeanette Renard."

"And mine is Lucile Payton."

"Now are we acquainted," said Jeanette, gaily.

Lucile, left to herself, felt again, only to a greater extent, that strange sense of familiarity with her surroundings. Then, in a flash, the solution came to her. Why, how stupid she was not to have realized it before! The chateau corresponded, word for word, with M. Charloix's description. In Lucile's own words, it was it!

And her name was Jeanette! Why, of course! How absurdly simple the whole thing was! Why, this was the very scene of M. Charloix's amazing story. But that she, Lucile, should stumble into the very midst of all this mystery——

At this point in her meditations Jeanette re-entered the room, smiling and serene. Lucile decided she was older than she looked. 154

"I will send a servant with a message to your people after you have finished your repast," she said.

“But the rain?” Lucile began.

“Ah, that is nothing,” said the girl, shrugging her shoulders, as if dismissing the subject. “She is well used to it.”

Although Lucile’s excitement and curiosity were fast reaching fever heat, she tried to control herself and to answer Jeanette calmly and sanely.

A few moments later a delicious meal was spread before her, to which she did full justice, feeling by this time on the verge of starvation.

When she had finished, Lucile expressed her curiosity and admiration for the old place and Jeanette suggested that they look about—provided her guest was not too tired. Lucile replied that she felt as if the word “tired” had never been in her vocabulary—which was literally true.

At the end of a fascinating tour of inspection, during which Lucile had started many times to put pointed questions to Jeanette and stopped just in time, Jeanette paused at the foot of a winding staircase.

She ascended a step or two; then, looking down upon her guest, said, wistfully, “I am so glad you came! I have so little company and seeing you has been like—ah, like a cup of water to one dying of thirst,” and underneath the little laugh that followed Lucile fancied she detected an infinite sadness.

Her warm young heart went out to the other girl, as she said, heartily, “Then I’m very glad I mistook the path this morning, since it has given me a chance to know you. But why don’t you ever see anybody?” she added. “Aren’t there any girls around here?”

“Oh, yes, there are some—but it is so long a story, I would not bore you with it. Come, we will go

upstairs!" And, though Lucile was dying to hear more, she wisely forbore to press the point.

While they were looking about them happily there was the sound of wheels on the drive and Jeanette, rushing to the window, exclaimed, "There's Pierre at this minute. 155 Mam'selle will pardon if I speak with him a moment?" and for the second time that day Lucile was left alone in this house of romance and mystery.

"She won't mind if I look around by myself," and so she began to explore in earnest. She was tremendously excited.

"They say these old chateaux are full of secret passages, but I'd never have the luck to find any. Oh, I'm afraid the girls won't believe me when I tell them about it—and I won't blame them much if they don't; I'd have to see it to believe it myself."

The attic was large and many cornered, with a sharply slanted roof, shading tiny, many-paned dormer windows. There were the regulation cobwebs, that hung in attractive festoons from the rafters. These, with the quantities of discarded but beautiful old furniture, scattered about in picturesque confusion, formed an effective background for Lucile's detective work.

She groped her way over every inch of the wall, sometimes getting down on her knees, trying to persuade herself she really hoped to find a spring that would release something hidden—she didn't care much what it was, but it must be hidden. However, after she had convinced herself that there was not a square inch of space she had not investigated, she rose to her feet reluctantly, feeling as though she had been cheated.

“Horrid old thing!” she murmured, dusting the cobwebs from her hands. “You look so nice and interesting and mysterious just on purpose to discourage promising young sleuths like me. I wish I hadn’t given you the satisfaction of bothering with you,” and she leaned against the wall in utter disgust.

Thus does fortune, in the very hour of our despair, place in our hands the thing for which we have been so hopelessly searching. Even as her elbow touched the panel behind her there came a sharp click and before Lucile’s startled gaze a small, square door opened slowly and deliberately, trembled, seemed to hesitate, and then came to a full stop, leaving its shallow interior exposed to view. 156

It was not till then, when she stood, open-mouthed and open-eyed, staring dumbly at this apparition, that she realized how little she had really expected it to happen.

“Well, I’m not dreaming, that’s one sure thing,” she murmured, approaching the little opening with extreme caution, while chills of alternate fear and excitement coursed all over her. “It seems so weird and ghostly to see that thing open all by itself, with nothing to help it along! Ghosts or not, I’m going to see what’s there,” and, strengthened by this resolve, she started to place her hand in the opening, but drew it back quickly with a frightened gasp.

“You’re a coward,” she accused herself, angrily. “Any one would think you had touched a snake. If you don’t hurry up, Jeanette will be here and spoil everything. I think she’s coming now,” and spurred on by the sound of approaching footsteps, she reached in and drew forth a long, rolled-up, legal-looking document, tied and sealed and covered with

dust.

“I know it’s the will. I’m right, I’m right!” she cried, joyfully. “She is *the* Jeanette—but, oh, how the plot thickens——”

“What have you found?” said a soft voice behind her, and she turned to confront Jeanette, who was smiling and curious.

“Look!” said Lucile, waving the document wildly. “The door just opened—I don’t know how; my elbow must have touched a spring—and this thing was in it —the opening, I mean, not the door.”

“But what is it?” asked Jeanette, puzzled. “I have not the remembrance of having looked at it before.”

“Then you don’t know?” said Lucile, wide eyed.

The girl shook her head, eyeing the document with a puzzled expression. Gradually bewilderment changed to surprise, surprise to incredulity.

“It’s the will!” she cried. “The will of Henri Charloix! Oh, it cannot be so; it can’t—you say you found it in here?” she questioned, and, without waiting for an answer, 157 plunged her hand into the opening, while Lucile drew nearer to her.

“May I look?” she asked, and the girl nodded, turning luminous eyes upon the pretty, awed face at her shoulder. “You may prove to be the best friend I have ever yet known,” she said, solemnly, and drew from the secret hiding-place a very ordinary tin box, with a scrap of writing bound to it with a coarse cord.

The wording was in French, but Jeanette, translating for her benefit, read: “To be opened by my little daughter Jeanette on the event of her twenty-first

birthday. Signed, EDOUARD RENARD."

"It is from my father!" cried Jeanette, sinking down, all white and trembling, upon a worn old couch and clasping the precious box to her as though she could not let it go. "Father! father!" she cried, and, bending her head upon her arms, sobbed as though her heart would break.

Lucile turned and tiptoed from the room, thinking she had intruded long enough; but a soft call from Jeanette made her pause. She seated herself on the stairs and waited.

To Lucile's tingling consciousness that short wait seemed an eternity. Her head ached with the flood of imagination that besieged it, her two hands grasped the banister to keep her rooted to the spot, while her feet tapped an impatient tattoo on the floor.

At last the longed-for summons came.

"Lucile," called a low, unsteady voice, "will you come to me?"

Would she come? Lucile flew up the winding stairs and came to a standstill before Jeanette a trifle uncertainly, not quite sure what was expected of her.

The uncertainty lasted only a moment, for, as Jeanette, shy, and dewy-eyed, held out her arms to her new-found friend, quite suddenly Lucile knew. Impulsively she threw her arms about the older girl and drew her close, whispering, softly, "Tell me all you feel you can, Jeanette; you can trust me." 158

"Oh, I believe that," said Jeanette, between sharp little intakes of breath. "Were I not sure of it, I could not so confide in you."

"Thank you," said Lucile, simply.

“You see,” the girl continued, “when I was very young I went to live with M. Charloix, whose will this is,” indicating the document.

“And M. Charloix had a son, named after him, Henri,” Lucile supplemented.

The girl drew back in startled wonder, while the bright color flooded her face. “You know that—but how?” she cried.

“We sailed with M. Charloix from New York to Liverpool,” Lucile explained, striving vainly to keep her voice calm and steady. “He was searching for you.”

“Then you know—he has told you everything,” whispered the girl, while the document in her trembling hand rattled and shook. “Was he—did he —oh, how did he look?” And she turned pleading eyes upon Lucile.

Lucile’s own eyes filled suddenly and she had to choke back the tears before she could continue. “He looked very wan and sad. You see, uncertainty like that must be pretty hard to bear.”

“Ah, it has not been easy for me,” said the girl, softly. “It is a great thing to renounce all you hold most dear in this world—to fly for refuge to a spot like this—the long, weary nights—the waiting—the longing—oh, you cannot know!” and she burst into a passion of weeping.

“You—you’re going to make me cry,” said Lucile, while a tear rolled down her face and splashed upon Jeanette’s bowed head.

“Ah, I am so foolish! There is no reason for tears—not now,” and over the girl’s tear-stained face flashed such a look of radiant joy that Lucile could only

gaze, dumbfounded, at the transformation.

“Wh-what?” she stammered.

“Ah, you wonder, you are amazed—but you will not be when I have told you all. Look, this is the will—the will for which I have heard Henri is hunting. But that is 159 not everything—oh, it is nothing! See!” and she held up the little tin box for Lucile’s inspection, feverishly, eagerly. “In this is a letter from my father—my father, who died when I was so young and left me to the care of my guardian. He was good to me, but M. Charloix——” She shivered slightly. “But the letter,”—she drew it forth reverently—“ah, that changes the world for Henri and me!

“You see, when my father was very young, scarcely more than a boy, he ran away and married a girl of great beauty and intelligence, but one considered by the people among whom he moved as far beneath him in station. The rest is so old a story—his family were so cruel to him when it came to their knowledge, disinheriting him; and my father, not being accustomed to earn his own living, could not make enough to protect his sweet young wife—my mother——” Her voice broke, and Lucile squeezed the small, brown hand encouragingly.

“Ah, imagine it!” she cried. “Most often she had not enough to eat. Then, when I was only an infant, heart-broken at the suffering she thought herself to have brought upon herself and little daughter, together with so great privation itself, she died. My father followed soon after—heart-broken. Before he died, he wrote me this—ah, see how old it is—for he could not bear that I should hear of him from other lips than his.”

"But you, the child?" Lucile interrupted, eagerly. "What became of you?"

"Ah, he bequeathed me to the one friend whom he had not lost—and he was good; I cannot make you understand how good!"

"But he never told you about your parents?"

"It was my father's request that he should not—and —and——" Her voice trailed off into silence. Chin in hand, she gazed unseeingly at the opposite wall.

Lucile was silent for a moment, busy patching the pieces of the story together into one connected whole. Then, leaning forward suddenly, she cried, excitedly, "Then M. Charloix deliberately made up that wicked, cruel lie that separated you and his son?" 160

The girl nodded. "But nothing matters now, save that it was a lie," she cried, and Lucile, looking at her, marveled.

The raucous toot of a motor horn brought both the girls to their feet with a startled exclamation.

"Oh, it is your friends," said Jeanette, running to the window. "You must go down at once. Ah, I am sorry to part with you, *ma cherie*," holding the younger girl from her gently and looking earnestly into the flushed, eager, face. "You have come into my life like some good fairy, bringing happiness with you."

Emotion choked the words Lucile wanted to say, but her silence was more eloquent than words and Jeanette was satisfied.

A moment later they were descending the stairs, arm in arm, and very reluctant to part.

To Lucile's surprise, Jeanette paused as they reached

the lower hall and motioned her to go on.

“But I want you to meet my father and mother and the girls,” Lucile protested. “You’ve got to give them a chance to thank you.”

But Jeanette only shook her head. “I can see no one now,” she whispered, tremulously. “Ah, I could not bear it!”

Lucile nodded understandingly. Then, “Monsieur Charloix?” she questioned.

“Send him to me.” This last was very low.

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CHAPTER XXIII

LUCILE TRIUMPHS

Lucile sped down the steps and into the waiting arms of her assembled family.

She was hugged and kissed and handed from one to the other in a very ecstasy of reunion, until Mr. Payton spoke, a trifle huskily.

“Perhaps,” said he, “perhaps it would be just as well to thank the young person who handed our runaway back to us,” and he glanced inquiringly in the direction of the chateau.

“No, no,” said Lucile, hurriedly. “You see, it——”

She hesitated; then, throwing secrecy to the winds, she pushed Jessie and Evelyn ahead of her into the automobile, crying excitedly, “I can’t keep it in another minute; there’s no use trying—I can’t—I can’t——” and, turning from her astonished friends to her no less astonished father, she said, “Dad, if you’ll only get started for home, I’ll tell you all about it——”

“All about what?” Jessie started to interrupt.

“I’m going to tell you, Jessie, dear, but we must get started first,” and she clapped her hands impatiently while Mr. Payton gave the necessary orders and the chauffeur started the motor.

“Oh, Phil, Phil, do stop staring so!” she cried, hysterically. “I know you are going to be awfully cut up when you learn that your much-abused and misunderstood sister was right, after all.”

“Lucile,” cried Evelyn, in exasperation. “If you don’t stop talking in riddles and get down to plain United States that everybody can understand——”

“Oh, I will,” gasped Lucile. “Did any of you see anything unusual about that chateau?” she questioned. “Didn’t it look—well, rather familiar to you?” 162

“There she goes again!” wailed Evelyn, and Jessie added, “We were too busy looking at you to notice the old house. What’s that got to do with your story, anyway?”

“You’d find out if you would only have a little patience. I’ve a good mind not to tell you, anyway,” she finished, rather childishly, for, you see, in spite of the excitement, or, more probably, because of it, Lucile was very tired and a finicky audience didn’t

appeal to her. She wanted to tell her story her own way.

“Go ahead, Lucy; forgive us!” said Jessie, all compunction at once. “You’ve made us so excited we can’t wait, that’s all.”

“Yes, we promise not to interrupt again,” added Evelyn.

“Oh, go ahead and tell your story, Lucy; cut out the sob stuff!” This from an unsympathetic brother, who should have withered next minute beneath the scathing searchlight of scorn turned his way.

Then Lucile told her story, from the minute she left the girls to the present time. During the recital they forgot more than once their promise not to interrupt, but Lucile, heart and soul in her story, never noticed them.

Mr. Payton was as much interested as the young folks, for he had entertained a sincere liking for the despondent young Frenchman.

When Lucile, flushed and breathless, finished the recital and leaned back against the cushions, the girls and Phil overwhelmed her with a flood of questions.

“So that was really the chateau old Charloix told us about. Why didn’t you tell us while we were there, so we could have had a good look at the place?” Phil objected. “Let’s go back, Dad,” he added, eagerly. “It wouldn’t take very long and it’s a crime not to give the place the once over now that we have the chance.”

“Oh, Phil, we can’t go back now,” wailed his sister. “I’m a perfect mess——”

“Of course we can’t; there isn’t time, anyway,” said

Jessie, sweeping the suggestion aside with a *sang-froid* that aggravated Phil. “The thing I’m most interested in 163 now is that will and the letters her father left her. Oh, it’s too wonderful!”

“And to think,” said Evelyn, with shining eyes, “to think that all the time we were worrying about you and feeling sure you were lost, you were having the time of your life! Oh, if I’d only had the nerve to follow you!”

“Yes, just think of that lost opportunity,” wailed Jessie. “Such a chance will never come again, never. But, Lucile, dear, do tell us what Jeanette looked like,” she begged, for the fiftieth time at least.

Before she could reply, Mr. Payton said, slowly, “It is a very serious, a very delicate thing, to interfere in the lives of two people, Lucile. In this instance the end justifies the means, but it might easily have turned out otherwise. This isn’t a lecture, dear,” he added, patting the brown head tenderly, “simply a caution.”

“I know,” said Lucile, looking up understandingly into her father’s kind eyes, “and I will be more careful in the future, Dad. But oh,” she offered, in extenuation, “when mystery marches right up to you and begs to be looked into, what can you do? Oh, girls, if you could only have been there—if you only could!”

“Don’t rub it in,” cried Evelyn, clapping her hands to her ears. “You have me fairly jumping with envy now.”

“Do you think you could find Henri Charloix for Jeanette, Dad?” said Lucile, turning eagerly to her father and ignoring the interruption. “You see, there’s nothing to stand between them now.”

"I think so," said Mr. Payton, his eyes kindling with an interest almost as great as his daughter's. "I'll spare no trouble to bring those poor harassed young people together. It's an outrage the way the French hand their children about like so much merchandise. I'll do my best little girl, now that you have started the ball rolling," he promised.

Lucile squeezed his hand gratefully, and Jessie suddenly broke out with, "Now I know why Phil hasn't seemed to take much interest in the proceedings, and why he has 164 been studying the sky with such concentration ever since Lucile has been talking."

"Why?" cried both girls, in a single breath.

"Simply because"—she paused for dramatic effect, then flung her bomb with force at the intended victim—"he's jealous!" she hissed.

"Oh, is that so?" said Phil, drawing his gaze reluctantly from the far horizon and letting it rest dreamily on his accuser. "May I be allowed to ask what intricate and devious chain of reasoning leads you to make so unheard-of a charge?"

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Jessie, disrespectfully. "You know you're jealous, so why deny it? Seems to me I remember"—it was her turn to let her gaze wander sky-ward—"if I mistake not, that a short time ago a certain young gentleman—I mention no names, but look where I'm looking"—she threw him a mischievous glance, which he was by no means loath to intercept—"did, upon occasion, laugh and scoff ——"

"Same thing," Phil interrupted.

"At his sister," Jessie continued, undaunted, "when

she ventured to prophesy that which has really taken place."

"Yes. 'Paris is a very large place, you know,'" mocked Lucile.

"Take it all back, take it all back!" cried Phil, overwhelmed. "I'll admit you're the greatest sleuth outside of Sherlock, Lucy. Hands up and spare my life!"

The girls laughed with the joy of the victorious and Evelyn was about to speak, when Phil called out suddenly:

"Jack Turnbull, by all that's lucky! What brought you here?" And he fairly flung himself out of the stopping machine.

They had come upon the inn suddenly over the rise in the ground and there, standing against the pillar and nonchalantly surveying the scenery was—Lucile had to rub her eyes to be sure of unimpaired vision.

Then, the machine coming to a full stop, the two girls stepped out, while Lucile followed more slowly in their 165 wake, conscious suddenly of dust-stained clothing and rumpled hair. "And I wanted to look my best," she wailed, in truly feminine despair.

She had not much time for lamentation, for, through the handshakings of Phil and the ecstatic demonstrations of his cousin, Jack's handsome eyes sought and found hers.

"It's a long way to come just to see you," he cried, gripping her hands tightly. "But it's sure worth it," he added, boyishly.

Lucile never had longed so for a mirror. She knew her hair was all awry, that her dress was wrinkled

and covered with dust, and that her eyes must look funny from crying over Jeanette, and——

"I'm very glad to—to see you," she stammered. "If you will—excuse me just—a minute—I'll change this awful rig—and—and——" She flashed him an uncertain little smile and was gone through the broad doorway, leaving him to gaze after her, mystified and troubled.

"It's all right, Jack!" consoled Phil, with the superior knowledge of one who has a sister toward one who hasn't, and therefore knoweth not the ways of woman. "It's her clothes; but wait till she gets all dolled up; there will be a change. To talk of something else, how did you happen to strike the old inn?" and Jack, somewhat enlightened, entered upon the subject with a will, while the two girls followed in the wake of the deserter.

They found Lucile standing before the mirror, surveying herself dejectedly.

"What did you want to run away for?" charged Jessie. "Jack felt hurt, I know, even though Phil did try to explain."

"Just look at me," Lucile began, miserably.

"Well, look at you," repeated Evelyn. "What's the matter with you? Your eyes aren't red any more—the wind took that away—and your hair always looks better when it's rumpled——" 166

"And as for your dress," Jessie took it up, "do you think Jack would notice what you had on? He wasn't looking at that——"

"Well, how did I know I was beautiful with red eyes and wild hair and a dress that looks as if it were new in the seventeenth century?" cried Lucile, brought to

bay.

“We’d have told you if you’d asked us,” said Jesse, fondly.

Lucile threw an arm about each of the girls and drew them before the mirror—two fair heads with a dark one in between.

“You’re great comforts, both of you. But, girls, I did think I was such a—mess!” she chuckled, happily.

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CHAPTER XXIV

“TWO’S COMPANY”

Lucile was happy even before she awoke that morning. The sense of something delightful in store pervaded even her dreams. For a long time she lingered in that delightful interim between waking and sleeping, when the spirit seems to detach itself and fly on wings of golden sunshine through a dewy, scented universe. In her confused imagining she was resting on a rose-colored cloud, while all around her other clouds of varying tints swam and swirled, taking different shapes as they passed her by.

“How pretty!” she murmured, and woke with a start to find Jessie regarding her sleepily.

“What on earth were you muttering about, Lucy?”

cried the latter, fretfully. “I guess you must have been having a bad dream.”

“No, it wasn’t; it was beautiful,” she contradicted, putting her hands behind her head and gazing up at the ceiling. “I wish you hadn’t waked me up; I was having an awfully good time.”

“Well, I wasn’t,” said Jessie, so sourly that Lucile chuckled.

“You know, Jessie,” she said, “the only time you are ever cross is when you are sleepy—and that’s most all the time,” she added, wickedly.

“What?” said the accused, sitting up in bed and seizing Lucile by the arm. “Unsay those words or I will have your life!”

“Now, you know you don’t need it half as much as I do,” reasoned Lucile. “You have one of your own.” Whereupon Jessie laughed, and peace was almost restored when there came a knock at the door. 168

The girls started and looked at each other in questioning bewilderment.

“Now what have you been doing?” whispered Lucile. “I knew one of these days you would have the law upon us.”

“Up to your old tricks again, I suppose,” Jessie countered. “But you’d better answer them, Lucy.”

“Why don’t you?” said Lucile; but, receiving no answer, called out in a small voice, as the rap was repeated, “Who is it?”

“Aren’t you girls ever going to get up?” whispered a gruff voice, which they, nevertheless, recognized as belonging to Phil. “It’s almost eight o’clock and you said you’d be down by half-past seven. We’ve been

waiting for half an hour."

"All right; we'll be down right away, Phil," said Lucile, jumping out of bed and beginning to dress hastily. "I had no idea it was so late."

"You know you won't have time for a walk before breakfast, even if you are down in half an hour—which I doubt," said Phil, pessimistically. "Jack and I are going for our walk, anyway."

"Run along," sang Jessie, cheerfully, "and don't hurry back."

"You just wait till I get you, Jet," he threatened—Jet being a recent nickname to which he had clung despite Jessie's vehement protestations that the name would fit a Southern mammy a good deal better than it did her, for the simple reason that a darky was jet, but she wasn't nor ever would be.

"All right; only see that you pay enough," she assented. "I'm mercenary."

"I have always suspected something in your life, woman," he hissed through the keyhole. "Farewell!" And they heard his retreating footsteps on the stairs.

The girls laughed merrily, just as Evelyn, fully dressed, emerged from the next room—they always drew lots to see 169 who slept together—looking very sweet and dainty in her spotless white.

"Hurry up, you old slow-pokes," she greeted them, gaily. "I've been up for ever so long. It's a wonderful day."

"Oh, Evelyn, dear, you look darling in that dress! I've never seen it before!" cried Lucile, enthusiastically. "Turn around in the back. Isn't it cute, Jessie? Goodness! You make me ashamed of myself!" And

she began dressing with renewed vigor.

“Will you get dressed for me, too, Evelyn?” begged Jessie. “With so much energy flying around loose, I ought to catch some of it, but I don’t. Oh, for another hour’s sleep!”

“You don’t have to get up,” said Evelyn, sitting down on the edge of the bed. “You can sleep till noon if you want to, while Lucy and I have a look at the Capitol and dine at some nice little cafe——”

“Say not another word,” commanded Jessie, bouncing out of bed and winding her long braids about her head. “I’d like to see anybody leave me behind. Lucy, do get out of my way—I have to have the mirror some of the time!”

Lucile laughed. “All right; I’ll fix my hair in Evelyn’s room, now she’s through, and let you have the whole place to yourself,” she said, and gathering up hairpins and ribbons, she ran into the other room to finish up.

“What are you going to wear this morning, Lucy?” asked Evelyn, from the doorway, where she could see both girls at once.

“The little flowered one, I guess,” said Lucile, struggling with her hair. “I haven’t worn it yet and Dad raves about it.”

“I wish you would wear the blue one,” Evelyn suggested. “I think it’s the prettiest thing you have.”

“But I’ve worn it so much,” Lucile objected. “I don’t want to be known by my dress.”

With apparent irrelevance, Jessie called out from the other room, “Jack loves blue.” 170

Instead of looking confused, as she knew was

expected of her, Lucile answered, readily. “I’ll wear it then, of course. Phil likes blue, too.”

Evelyn and Jessie exchanged glances and the latter laughed aggravatingly.

“Evelyn, what have you done with my tan shoes?” cried Jessie, searching wildly under the bed. “I’m sure I put them in their place, and they’re nowhere to be seen,” and she sat back on her heels to glare menacingly about her.

“Here they are,” called Lucile from the other room. “You left them here last night. Hurry up! I’m all ready now.”

They were pictures of youthful loveliness as they began to descend the stairs—Evelyn, in her snowy white, looking for all the world like a plump and mischievous little cherub, and Jessie in the palest pink, which set off and enhanced her fairness. But it was to Lucile that all eyes instinctively clung. The soft curls framing the lovely, eager face; the color that came and went with each varying emotion; the instinctive grace with which she carried her proud little head, won her admiration wherever she went.

All this, and more, Jack was thinking as he watched the trio descend. He and Phil were occupying a strategic position, from which they could see but not be seen; in fact, they had left the front door slightly ajar with that very end in view.

“It seems very strange,” Lucile was saying as they reached the foot of the stairs, “that we haven’t heard any breakfast bell. If it’s as late as the boys say it is, everybody ought to be up.”

Then she flung open the door and came upon the boys, seated on the railing of the veranda, apparently

engrossed in conversation. The girls gasped with amazement at sight of the boys, and the boys gasped with very genuine admiration at sight of the girls.

“Wh-what——” began Lucile, bewildered. “I thought you and Phil were going for a walk.” 171

“So we are,” said Jack, easily. “We were only waiting for you.”

“Phil,” Lucile turned accusingly to her brother, “this is some trick you are trying to play on us. Why isn’t there any breakfast and why aren’t there any people. Come on, ’fess up!”

Jessie threw up her hands wearily. “We ought to know enough to suspect him by this time,” she sighed. “But I guess we’ll never get over being taken in.”

“By the position of the sun,” quoth Evelyn, “it ought to be about six thirty.”

“Just about,” Lucile corroborated. “No wonder we were sleepy.”

All this time the boys had been regarding the victims of their deception with an assumption of innocence, made ineffective by the suppressed laughter in their eyes.

“Now I guess we’re even for all the insults you’ve heaped upon my unoffending head in days gone by, Jet,” Phil gibed. “Routing you up at six o’clock evens up for a lifetime.”

“You needn’t take so much credit to yourself, brother, dear,” Lucile countered. “We were going to get up, anyway, weren’t we, girls,” to which the girls agreed shamelessly.

“It’s a compliment, anyway,” said Jessie,

philosophically. “They were so eager for our society that they even had to resort to tricks.”

“Right you are,” laughed Jack. “Now that we have some time, let’s make good use of it. Come on; we’ll hike,” and, taking Lucile’s arm, he started down the drive.

“Where to?” called Phil.

“Makes no difference to me where we go,” Jack flung back, recklessly. “Let the girls decide.”

“Make Lucile take the lead,” Jessie suggested. “Maybe she can unearth some more mysteries.”

“No, she won’t; she’s through,” said Phil, decidedly. “If there are any more clues floating around loose, it’s 172 going to be her brother that will find them. I want that distinctly understood.”

Meanwhile, Lucile and Jack had swung off into a narrow and much more difficult road than the one they were on, and Phil shouted a remonstrance.

“Why not stick to the road we know about?” he shouted, and they stopped and looked back. “That looks like a pretty stiff climb.”

“We know as much about this as we do the other,” Jack shouted back, “and this is lots prettier. Come on; if it gets too steep, we can always go back.”

“No, I guess we’ll stick to this one,” Phil decided. “It looks like too much work where you are,” and the trio walked on.

Lucile started to follow, but Jack laid a restraining hand on her arm. “We don’t have to follow them,” he pleaded. “It’s so long since I’ve seen you, and I haven’t been able to talk to you yet.”

Lucile hesitated; then, “Well, just for a short

distance," she conceded. "And then we can meet them on the way back."

"Thanks," he said; then added, "I thought you weren't very glad to see me yesterday. You know, I was strongly tempted to take the next steamer across the Atlantic. Haven't you thought of me at all?"

It was rather a hard question to ask, and Lucile blushed when she remembered how often she had thought of him and his letters.

"Of course," she said; "and I wrote to you——"

"Just twice," he finished. "I came very near sending you a box of writing paper—thought there must be a scarcity of it over here."

Lucile laughed her gay little laugh. "That would have been a surprise," she chuckled; then, more seriously, "But you know, there are so many people to write to, and it was awfully hard——"

"Oh, yes, I know all about it," he broke in. "Terribly busy; couldn't find time, and all that, but if you think 173 very much of somebody, writing isn't a duty; it's a pleasure."

"But I didn't say," Lucile began; then, desperately, "Oh, please, can't we talk of something else?"

"Certainly," he agreed, and Lucile sensed the hurt in his voice. "We'll talk of anything you please. What plans have you made for the day?"

"Why, Dad said he would take us to Paris," said Lucile, instantly sorry for her little speech, yet afraid to say so. "We simply can't wait to get there! Of course you are going with us?"

"If I may. I came over with my uncle, you know, and left him in Paris to transact some important business

while I hunted you up. It's a good little place—the inn, I mean—and I'm glad your father asked me to stay for the night. It's a charming spot and quite close enough to the city."

"That's what Dad thought. Then, after we have lunch at some swell little restaurant—you know——"

"Yes, I know," he agreed, laughingly. "Colored lights, and music, orchestra, and that," and he waved his hand expressively.

"Uh-huh; and after all that, he's going to drop us at the Louvre—oh, how naturally I speak of it now, and it used to seem like something on a different planet —while he tries to look up M. Charloix—he gave Dad his card on shipboard, luckily."

"And then?" he prompted, laughing eyes fixed on the lovely, animated face at his shoulder.

"Well, then," she continued eagerly, "then comes the very best of all. We're going somewhere for dinner, then the theater, then dinner again, oh-h——"

"Just one glorious day of gladness," he laughed; then, noticing her quickened breath, "We mustn't tire you too much this morning when you have such a long day before you. Suppose we rest a while."

"And here is the very place," she agreed, indicating a great, flat rock, shaded by a huge, spreading tree. "Oh, 174 isn't the view wonderful from here? I hadn't noticed it before."

"You said it," Jack agreed, stretching his lazy length on the grass at her feet. "The hill has formed a sort of shallow precipice and the lake sure does look great down there."

For a few moments they were silent, drinking in the

beauty prodigal Nature lavished all about them. Furtively Lucile examined this cavalier of hers. Straight of feature, bronzed from living in the open, eyes so full of fun you had to laugh in sympathy—oh, he was handsome; there was no doubt of that. And his hair, black and wavy and soft—Lucile was sure it was soft——

"I wish you would tell me what you are thinking about," he said, looking up with a quizzical little smile. "You were quiet so long——"

"That is unusual," she laughed, trying not to look confused. "Perhaps we had better be starting back," she added; "the others will be looking for us."

"Just as you say," he answered for the second time that morning; then, as he helped her to her feet, "I wish we could have this day together; it's been great to be alone with you even for this short time. But I forgot that that subject was unwelcome——"

"Oh, please," she begged, laying an impulsive little hand on his arm. "I—I didn't mean to be cross."

He caught the little peace-making hand in both his own, laughing down into the prettiest eyes he had ever seen.

"That's the best thing I have heard to-day," he exulted.

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CHAPTER XXV

THE THUNDERBOLT

Breakfast was over, and the girls had hidden their pretty evening coats under long linen dusters. For, as Mrs. Payton had explained, they would have no time to change for the evening, and they must look their best—to which, needless to say, the girls agreed with enthusiasm.

“And we can wear those new motor bonnets we bought in England the day before we sailed,” Lucile rejoiced. So the insistent honk of the motor horn found them all cloaked and bonneted, and ready for the day’s fun.

“Come on,” cried Lucile, pulling Jessie away from the mirror by main force; “you look wonderful, Jessie,” and down the stairs they ran and out onto the veranda, where a good many of the guests had assembled to see them off.

The boys took immediate possession of them and hustled them, willy-nilly, into the car, despite their vehement protestations that they must say “good-byes” to “lots of people.”

“They’ll be here when you get back,” Phil argued, “and mother’s already been waiting half an hour. Time’s up!” And off they went with great noise and laughter and waving of hands to the group on the

porch.

“Oh, what a perfect day!” cried Lucile, settling back between Evelyn and Jessie in the tonneau. As usual, Mr. Payton was in front with the driver, the three girls were squeezed tightly in the rear seat, Mrs. Payton occupied one of the collapsible seats, and Jack and Phil—well, they were anywhere they could get.

Jack had earlier proposed the use of his two-seater for Lucile and himself, but Mr. Payton had demurred, smilingly preferring “safety-first.” 176

But now, the floor of the machine being not the most comfortable place in the world, Phil objected. “Say, Dad, why don’t you let Jack take Lucy in his car? He’s a fine driver, and he’d stick close to us all the time.”

“I think it would be safe enough,” Mrs. Payton added. “Mr. Turnbull says he has driven the car for years.”

Mr. Payton hesitated, giving the command to slow up, nevertheless. “Well, perhaps it would be better,” he agreed at last, but very reluctantly; “if you will promise to stay close to us all the time.” This last to Jack.

Jack promised readily and happily, and they turned back. A few minutes later they were on their way again, everybody comfortable, everybody happy, especially Lucile and Jack.

“I didn’t dare hope for this,” he whispered, as they followed in the wake of the big touring car. “The hat’s class!” he added, admiringly.

So the morning was spent in touring the great city. The girls were fascinated by the noise and bustle, the

number and magnificence of the public buildings, and, most of all, by the gay little restaurants and cafes lining both sides of the broad boulevards.

“Imagine this at night!” said Jack, hugely enjoying Lucile’s unaffected delight in everything she saw. “Can’t you just see the lights spring up and the theater crowds gathering?”

“And we are going to see it all!” cried Lucile, clapping her hands and fairly dancing with delight. “Oh, Jack, I simply can’t wait; I can’t!”

Noon had come and passed. They had luncheon in a wonderful little restaurant near the Rue de la Paix, where they had enjoyed to the full of music and “all that,” and now the two automobiles, little and big, drew up before the magnificent piece of architecture, the Louvre.

Lucile caught her breath as she and Jack joined the group already assembled on the sidewalk. “The pictures you see give you absolutely no idea of it,” she breathed; “it must have been planned by an artist.” 177

“Yes; and see how big it is,” said Phil. “It’s going to take us a long time to explore it.”

“Explore is hardly the word——” Jessie was beginning, when Evelyn interrupted, “It doesn’t make any difference what you call it, but I’m just going to look and look and look till I can’t look any more.”

“Well, that’s what it is here for,” laughed Mr. Payton; “and now I’ll tell you what I am going to do with you young people. When we get you well started on your sight-seeing, Mrs. Payton and I are going to run away to hunt up this tragic hero and reinstate him and his

sweetheart, if it lies within our power. We'll be back in an hour or two, and I guess there will be plenty to interest you for that length of time. So, in with you; there's no time to lose," and he propelled his laughing flock before him up the broad stone steps.

Once inside, as may be easily imagined, the girls experienced no trouble in finding things to absorb their interest, and it was hard for them to take time to say good-by to their chaperons. The latter laughingly left them to their own devices, feeling sure that they were safe for the time being, at any rate.

"Talk about spending an hour here! Why, I could spend a week in just one room!" exclaimed Jessie, after half an hour of blissful wandering. "I never saw so many things all at once in my life."

"I suppose you girls have never visited our great museums at home?" Jack questioned. "I have often felt that way myself; a person could spend a month just studying the things in one room, and still not know all he should about them."

"By home I suppose you mean New York," said Jessie; then added, demurely, "You forget, sir, that we are simple country maids, who have hardly stepped outside of Burleigh until this summer."

"Yes, I guess that's one reason why we like everything so much," said Evelyn, naively. 178

"Oh, the mummies, the mummies! I must see the mummies!" cried Lucile, startling the others with the suddenness of her outburst. "Oh, Jack, please take me to the mummies."

"There, there; she shall have her mummies if she wants them," said Jack, soothingly. "If they haven't

enough, I'll head an expedition to Egypt for more right away, so don't worry; you shall have all you want."

"I wonder what you'd do if I took you up," laughed Lucile, as Jack hurried her off in the direction of the Egyptian section. "Egypt is a long way from here, you know."

"I came to Europe for you; Egypt isn't so much further," he teased.

A few minutes later Lucile and her friends were standing before the glass cases containing the swathed forms of some of Egypt's ancient rulers, encased in their vividly painted coffins.

They could not wonder enough at the miracle that had been wrought—the bodies of men who had ruled mighty Egypt four thousand years ago still in existence for twentieth-century moderns to marvel at! Besides the mummies, there were the numerous curiously wrought vases and utensils that had been placed in the tombs alongside the mummies for their use after death. The little party might easily have spent all their allotted time in the examination of these and other interesting relics, had not Jack hurried them away. "I realize we can't begin to see all there is to see on our first trip," he said, "but we can do our best, anyway."

They visited the art gallery, filled with marvelous paintings and sculptures; went through the room where old-time and modern musical instruments were gathered together; and so on through a very world of wonders, of which, as Evelyn plaintively remarked, "they had only time to see enough to make them want to see more." So interested were they that it was four o'clock before they realized that

it was long past the time set for Mr. and 179 Mrs. Payton's return. But suddenly this fact dawned on Phil, and he drew Lucile aside and asked her in a whisper what she supposed could be keeping them.

Lucile looked worried. "You don't think anything could have happened; an accident, perhaps?" she questioned, anxiously. "The streets were awfully crowded, you know, when we came down."

"No, I don't think there has been anything like that; probably it's taken them longer than they thought to look up that Charloix fellow," he answered, trying to be reassuring. "Any way, don't let's say anything to the rest. There's no use making everybody miserable."

So half an hour passed; then an hour; and the brother and sister could keep their anxiety to themselves no longer.

"What do you suppose can be keeping them?" Lucile wondered, as they all gathered round in anxious conference. "They surely never would have stayed away of their own accord, and it's getting really late."

"We've been here about three hours now, haven't we?" Jack added. "And they ought to have been here an hour ago at the latest. Oh, well, we can expect them any minute now."

"Suppose we go outside and see if we can find any sign of them," Evelyn suggested. "It's hot in here."

So out they went, making a very handsome group as they looked eagerly in all directions, vainly hoping to catch a glimpse of the big gray car.

"Phil, I'm terribly worried," Lucile murmured drawing closer to her brother and slipping her hand

into his for comfort.

Phil squeezed the little hand reassuringly. “Half an hour from now we’ll be laughing at our fears,” he said, cheerfully, trying hard at the same time to convince himself.

“Seems to me there’s a good deal more noise than there was, Jack. Why are all those boys running around like chickens with their heads cut off? They all have papers, too.” Jessie was frankly puzzled. 180

“They are newsboys, little coz, and they wouldn’t be flattered by our comparison. They are yelling what, in United States, would be ‘extra!’ I’ll get a paper and see if I can puzzle out some of the French,” and he strolled down to intercept one of the hurrying urchins.

Lucile watched him as he sauntered leisurely back, wondering, in her distracted little brain, how he could be interested in anything when he ought to be as anxious as she. “But it isn’t his mother and father,” she explained to herself.

Meanwhile, Jack’s puzzled frown had turned to a look of absolute dismay and incredulity as he read.

“What is it?” Phil asked. “Everybody seems to be getting more excited and worked up every minute. Look at that group of men over there. Does the paper throw any light on the subject, Jack?”

“Well, I should say so!” cried Jack, in huge excitement. “Look here, all of you!” And while they gathered around him, expecting they knew not what calamity, he brokenly read the headlines: “Austria declares war on Servia. Open break with Russia apprehended. Germany sides with Austria——”

“War, war?” Phil echoed, dazedly. “Why, it’s just as

old Major B—— prophesied, only sooner. Can you read any more, Jack?"

"Oh, do, do!" urged Lucile, forgetting her anxiety in this overwhelming almost unbelievable news. "There must be more of it you can make out."

The familiar honk of an automobile horn jerked their eyes from the paper to the curb, where the big gray touring car had silently drawn up. Lucile snatched the paper none too ceremoniously from Jack's hand and flew to the machine, joyfully relieved to find her father and mother safe and sound. She was closely followed by the others.

"Mother, Dad, I'm so glad to see you're back all right; we were awfully worried!" she gasped. "But have you seen the paper? Oh, what does it mean?" 181

"It means," said Mr. Payton, slowly, and with grim emphasis, "it means that the sooner we leave the country behind and set foot on good old United States soil the better it will be for all of us. Come, get in."

"But, Dad, how about dinner, and the theater, and all the other things we were going to do?" Lucile wailed. "Have we got to give them all up?"

"Better to lose a little pleasure than find ourselves stranded in a country at war and perhaps be unable to leave it. We haven't any time to lose." It was the first time Lucile could remember ever hearing that tone of command in her father's voice, and somehow she knew it must be obeyed without question.

Silently, and as yet unable to comprehend the full extent of what had occurred, the party, which had started out so merrily and under such bright auspices

in the morning, returned to their hotel.

Only once did Lucile shake off her preoccupation long enough to ask for M. Charloix.

“Did you find him, Dad? We thought you might have had some trouble, you were so long getting back.”

“Oh, it did take more time than we expected, but it was worth the trouble when we did find him.” In spite of his anxiety, Mr. Payton’s eyes twinkled at the memory.

“But what did he do?” Phil broke in. “How did he take the news?”

“Running, I guess. Before I had half finished explaining to the lawyer, he was off on a dead run for the chateau. Didn’t even wait to hear about the will.”

“Then he doesn’t know yet?” Phil cried.

“Of course he does, silly,” said Lucile, with the air of one who knows all there is to know of such matters. “Don’t you suppose Jeanette has told him long before this?”

Again Phil retreated gracefully. “Well, you know the lady,” he admitted.

The rest of the trip passed quickly in visioning the joyful reunion of the two young lovers, and it was not till 182 they were fairly upon the inn that the grim specter of war again intruded itself.

They found the same feverish excitement there as elsewhere, for the newspapers had arrived with the mail and the dire news spread like wildfire.

As Jack took his leave, saying that he had promised his uncle to spend the night with him, but would return the first thing in the morning, uncle and all, to

accompany them home, he drew Lucile aside for a moment.

“Mighty hard luck, not seeing the lights, after all,” he whispered, “but there may be other times.”

“I don’t know when we will ever get to Europe again, and there was so much to see yet—Switzerland, and Rome, and—and——” She struggled bravely to choke back the tears of bitter disappointment that rose to her eyes. “I—I don’t see—why they had to have an old war—anyway,” she sobbed.

For a moment they were alone, and very gently he took her hand in his. “Don’t you worry,” he soothed. “Some time, after we get home, perhaps you will come to New York, and then I’ll show you Broadway. It’s better than anything you can get over here, anyway! Here, I have your handkerchief,” and he abstracted a filmy little square, all lace and no center, from his pocket and handed it to her.

“Thank you,” she said, and smiled uncertainly through her tears. “You must think I’m very childish and foolish—and—everything——”

“Especially the last——”

“Lucile, Lucile, Dad wants to know where you are.” It was Phil’s voice.

“I’m coming,” called Lucile; then, turning to Jack, “Good-by,” she murmured, suddenly very reluctant to have him go.

“Until to-morrow,” he whispered, and was gone.

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CHAPTER XXVI

THROUGH SHROUDING MISTS

To the girls, the week that followed seemed like some vivid, disjointed nightmare. They were hurried from Paris to London and from London to Liverpool, along with crowds of worried, anxious Americans, who, like themselves, were fleeing from the unexpected cataclysm.

After much difficulty, Mr. Payton finally succeeded in securing two staterooms, second cabin, while Jack and his Uncle were lucky enough to get one not very far removed from our party.

“But how are we going to manage with only two cabins for six of us; little ones at that, from your account?” Mrs. Payton protested, in dismay. “Why, the three girls and I will have to occupy one between us!”

“Can’t be helped,” replied Mr. Payton, and then added, with intense earnestness, “I don’t believe that one of you realize yet the magnitude of this tragedy that menaces Europe. If you did, you would thank your lucky stars every minute of the day that you have the chance to leave England for our own blessed country, no matter what the cost or inconvenience. Why, within a month this whole continent will be involved in war. There are people now besieging the booking offices by the hundreds who would be glad and thankful to find room in the steerage. If we had not started when we did, we

would be among them."

Lucile shivered. "Oh, Dad, it does make the thought of home seem good," she said.

Their ship was to sail at nine o'clock the following morning, and long before the appointed time the girls were up and ready for the voyage.

"What a difference!" mused Lucile, looking wistfully out upon a dreary, leaden prospect. "Even the weather seems to be in sympathy with the country's trouble." 184

Jessie adjusted her hat soberly and thoughtfully before she spoke. "Yes," she said, at last, "one day it's all sunshine and happiness, and the next—oh, girls, I'm absolutely miserable!"

"What good does that do?" queried Evelyn, snapping her bag shut with an air of finality. "Besides, you're only breaking one of the camp-fire's strictest laws, you know."

"Yes; that sounds all right, but it's pretty hard to be cheerful when everything's going wrong," said Jessie, pessimistically. "I don't notice that anybody looks particularly happy these days, anyway."

"That's no reason why we shouldn't be the exception," said Lucile, shaking off the weight of depression with an effort and smiling bravely. "You never know what you can do till you try."

"Miss Howland always used to say that. We'll see her and the girls soon, anyway, and that's one big consolation," said Jessie, brightening perceptibly.

"Somewhere the sun is shining," began Lucile.

"Somewhere the world is gay," added Jessie.

Evelyn flung her arms about her friends.

“Somewhere the bells are chiming——”

“And that’s in the U. S. A.,” finished Lucile, and they went down laughing.

Mr. Payton met them at the foot of the stairs, and the frown on his anxious face turned to a smile as he heard the merry laughter.

“It does me good just to look at you,” he said, sincerely.

It was their third night out. In accordance with the strict orders of the captain, there were no lights on board, for there might be hostile warcraft lurking near. So the ship stole silently as a ghost through the mists that shrouded her.

Lucile, Jack and Evelyn were leaning against the rail, talking in subdued tones, awed by the grandeur of the drama being enacted before their eyes.

“Your uncle says that people farther inland are having all sorts of trouble trying to get to the coast,” said Lucile, 185 “and now I’m beginning to realize the truth of what Dad said about being lucky to get off as we did. Oh, but the cabin is awful!” she sighed, naively.

Jack laughed understandingly. “I guess you must be rather crowded.”

“Oh, but we oughtn’t to mind anything now that we’re out of danger,” Evelyn broke in.

“Yes; but I’m not so sure we are out of danger,” Jack protested. “The captain’s caution seems to show that there is still something to fear.”

“You mean we might be captured?” Lucile questioned, eagerly. “That would be some adventure. You might almost imagine we were living in the

Middle Ages——"

"Lucile," Evelyn was starting to remonstrate, when an excited voice whispered, huskily, "So you're here, are you?" and two figures loomed before them out of the mist. "It's I, Phil," said one of them.

"We were wondering where you and Jessie had gone," Lucile began.

"Did you know we nearly ran down a hostile cruiser? At least, that's what the captain thinks it was," he interrupted, excitedly. "If we had had lights aboard, they'd have caught us sure, take it from me."

"Which reminds me," said Phil, "that Mother sent me after you girls; she says it's too damp on deck."

Reluctantly, they turned from the spacious deck to the close, stuffy atmosphere of the cabin.

Lucile paused at the top step of the companionway to look wistfully up into Jack's sober eyes. "I—I don't want to go down there," she said.

"And I don't want you to," he replied. Then, with an earnestness that left no doubt of his sincerity, "Lucile, I'd give a lot right now to have you safe on shore."

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CHAPTER XXVII

HOME

The sun rose gloriously golden, dispelling the stubborn mist with an army of riotous sunbeams, that danced and shimmered over the waves in wild defiance of threatening wind and lowering sky. The decks and railings of the steamer, still wet from the clinging mist, shone and gleamed and sparkled in the sun like one gigantic diamond. Even the sailors sang as they worked, and one of them went so far as to attempt a sailor's hornpipe on the slippery deck, to the great amusement of his mates.

The girls had slept but little during the long night, and even when, from sheer exhaustion, they had dropped off into a troubled doze, weird, distorted fancies came to torment them into wakefulness, to stare, wide-eyed and fearful, into the inky blackness of the cabin.

So it was that, with the first streak of dawn, Lucile, who had been able to lie still no longer, softly rose, fearing to awake the others, and began to dress.

"I'm glad you are up, Lucy. I haven't slept all night," whispered Jessie, and the dark circles under her eyes bore unmistakable testimony to the truth of what she said. "I was afraid to get up for fear of waking Evelyn."

"You needn't have worried," and Evelyn, who had been lying with her face to the wall, turned over wearily. "I've been afraid to sleep—oh, girls, I've had such awful dreams!" And she covered her face with her hands to keep out the memory.

"We'll all feel better when we get on deck," Lucile prophesied, hopefully. "Don't let's talk so loud; Mother is asleep."

"No, I'm not," said a tired, fretful voice from the lower berth. "As soon as you girls get through, I'll

get up." 187

It seemed to the girls that morning as though they would never finish dressing. Their clothes, their hairpins, even their combs and brushes, evaded them with demoniacal persistence, hiding under things, falling under the berths, rolling into corners, and otherwise misbehaving themselves, until the girls' nerves were all on edge and they were dangerously near the verge of tears.

It was Lucile's undying sense of humor that finally saved the day.

"I feel just like the Prince in the Prince and the Pauper, when the rat made a bed of him," she said. "Things can't be any worse, so it stands to reason they've got to get better."

"Let's hope so, anyway," said Evelyn, halfway between laughter and tears. "I feel just now as though I'd like to hit somebody."

"I guess it's time we left, then," laughed Lucile, and, suiting the action to the word, she opened the door and stepped outside, the others following.

"If I look the way I feel, I must be a sight," moaned Jessie. "I hope the boys aren't on deck."

"Girls, look!" cried Lucile, pointing dramatically to the shaft of sunlight filtering through the companionway. "The sun, the blessed old sun—it's out!"

"Wonder of wonders!" cried Jessie, as they rushed up the steep steps. "Let's go look."

The sunshine fell on them in a warm, life-giving flood. It brought out the luster in their hair; it gleamed in their eyes; it sent the warm color tingling

to their faces; it made them want to sing, to dance, to shout with gladness.

“Oh to think that we were growling! To think that we dared to be down-hearted when this was waiting for us!” cried Lucile, joyfully. “We don’t deserve our blessings.”

“Of course you don’t,” said a cheerful voice behind them. “How’s this for a day?”

“That’s just what we’ve been raving about,” said Jessie, as she hugged her cousin ecstatically. 188

“Hey, look out, young lady!” cautioned Jack, gaily. “Not everybody on board knows we’re related, remember.”

“Well, what they don’t know won’t hurt them,” she retorted. “Besides, I’d hug the ship’s cook to-day if he happened to be anywhere around.”

“I’m flattered!” laughed Jack, just as Phil greeted him with a bang on the shoulder that Lucile declared could be heard in the galley.

“Say, let’s play ‘ring around a rosy,’” he suggested. “We’ve got to do something to celebrate.”

“How exciting!” Jessie began, but before she could utter further protest she was jerked into the circle and was soon whirling round madly with the rest until they had to stop from exhaustion and laughter.

“It’s good we stopped just when we did,” said Lucile, peeping around a corner of the cabin. “I see old lady Banks in the distance. ‘Pray, and may I inquire the cause of all this frivolity?’” and she imitated the old lady so perfectly that they went off into gales of laughter.

“You’ve sure missed your vocation, Lucile,” said

Jack, when they stopped to breathe.

“That’s what we all tell her,” agreed Evelyn. “In Burleigh——”

“Doesn’t it make me homesick, just to think of it!” exclaimed Jessie.

“You haven’t long to wait now,” cried Lucile, springing to her feet and searching the sky-line as though she hoped to see beyond it. “A few hours more, and—the harbor!”

Great crowds thronged the deck of the steamer. It had been announced that fifteen minutes more would bring them in sight of land—their land. Eyes, old and young, were straining for that first glimpse of a country never so dear to them as now.

“There it is! It’s there, it’s there!” came in excited tones from different parts of the deck, the shrill tones of women and children mingling with the deeper voices of men. 189

“Yes, now you can see it,” Mr. Payton was saying. “That tiny speck—that’s America.”

The word sped like magic through the crowd, breaking the tension. They all went mad with joy. Men shook hands with perfect strangers; women hugged each other, murmuring incoherently, and mothers gathered their little ones to them, weeping openly.

“Hello, Lucy; that you? Where did you go, anyway?” said Jessie, surreptitiously wiping her eyes. “I was looking for you all over.”

“Oh, just around,” Lucile answered, waving her hand vaguely, “congratulating everybody. Did you ever see such a wonderful time in all your life, Jessie? One

little chap over there, who is crazy to see his father, asked what the noise was all about. ‘Is it because I’m going to see Daddy?’ he asked, and when his mother couldn’t answer him, she was crying so, he put his little face against hers and begged her not to. ‘It’s just because I’m happy, little lad; so happy,’ she said, and—and—oh, why is it that when you’re happiest, you have to go and cry?” And she dashed the tears away fiercely.

Some hours later the crowd again assembled on deck, everything in readiness to land. The beautiful city towered, majestic and imposing, before them, and the lofty buildings, with the sun full upon them, stood out clear and gleaming against the gray-blue of the sky.

The girls, who had been standing close together, drew a sigh and turned to each other with tear-wet eyes and bursting hearts.

“Well, girls, have you got any luggage?” came in Phil’s matter-of-fact voice. “If you have, hand it over.”

“I’ll take Lucile’s,” said Jack, and, as she suited the action to the word, he cried joyfully, “We’re home, Lucile; we’re home!”

And Mr. Payton, regarding the little group with loving eyes, added, very reverently, “Thank God!”

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LUCILE TRIUMPHANT ***

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