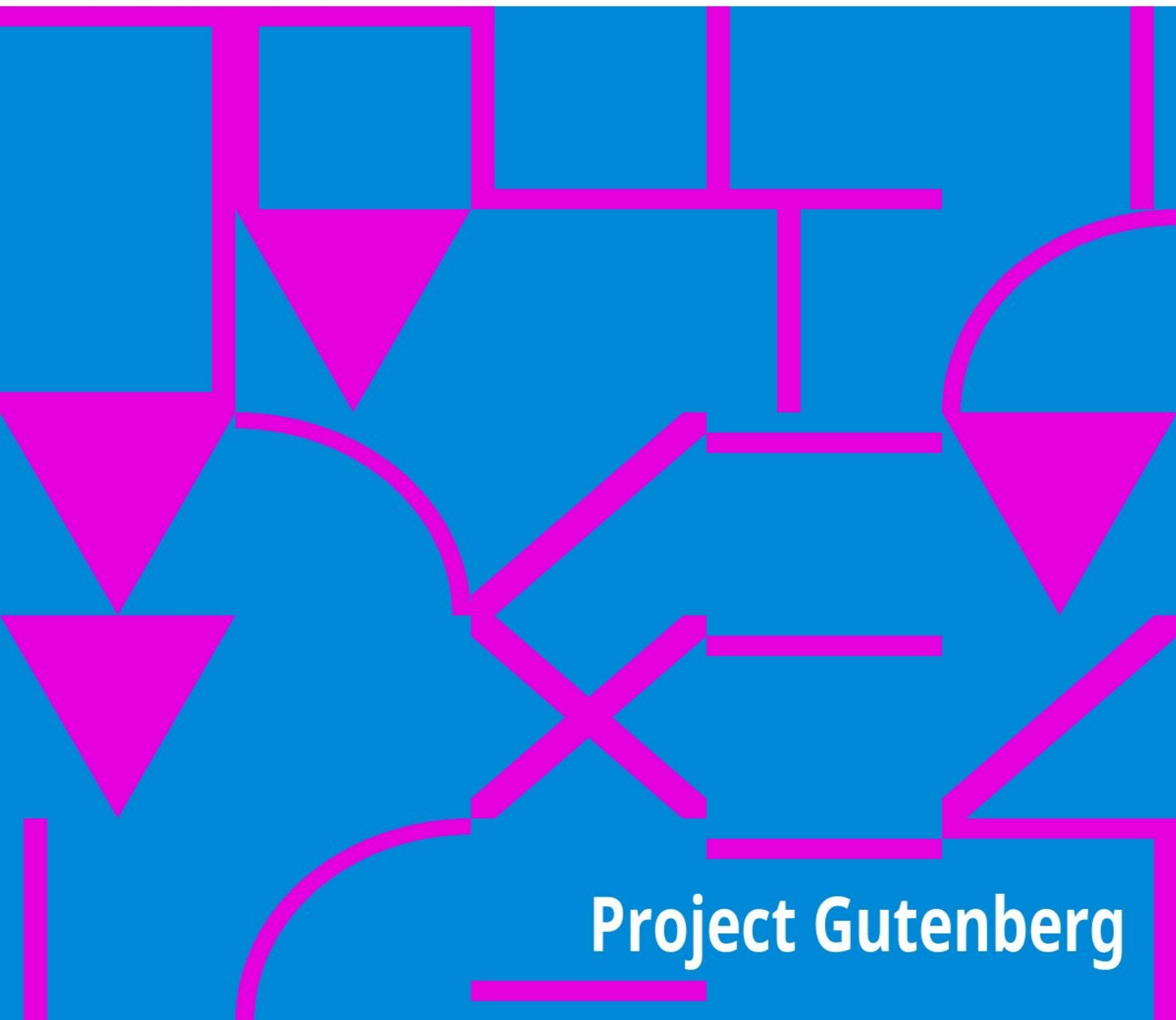


Polly's Business Venture

Lillian Elizabeth Roy

The background of the lower half of the image is a solid blue field. Overlaid on this are various geometric shapes in a vibrant pink color. These include several triangles of different sizes and orientations, some of which are nested within larger shapes. There are also thick, irregular lines and curved segments that create a complex, abstract pattern. A large 'X' shape is formed by two intersecting pink lines. The overall effect is a modern, geometric design.

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POLLY'S BUSINESS VENTURE

THE TWO CARS COLLIDED.
Polly's Business Venture. Frontispiece—(Page 99)

POLLY'S BUSINESS VENTURE

BY
LILLIAN ELIZABETH ROY

Author of
POLLY OF PEBBLY PIT, POLLY AND ELEANOR,
POLLY IN NEW YORK, POLLY AND
HER FRIENDS ABROAD

ILLUSTRATED BY
H. S. BARBOUR

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POLLY'S BUSINESS VENTURE

CHAPTER I

POLLY RETURNS TO AMERICA

Five girls were promenading the deck of one of our great Atlantic liners, on the last day of the trip. The report had gone out that they might expect to reach quarantine before five o'clock, but it would be too late to dock that night, therefore the captain had planned an evening's entertainment for all on board.

"Miss Brewster! Miss Polly Brewster! Polly Brewster!" came a call from one of the young boys of the crew who was acting as messenger for the wireless operator.

"Polly, he is calling you! I wonder what it is?" cried Eleanor Maynard, Polly's dearest friend.

"Here, boy! I am Polly Brewster," called Polly, waving her hand to call his attention to herself.

"Miss Polly Brewster?" asked the uniformed attendant politely, lifting his cap.

"Yes."

He handed her an envelope such as the wireless messages are delivered in, and bowed to take his leave of the group of girls. Polly gazed at the outside of the envelope but did not open it. Her friends laughed and Nancy Fabian, the oldest girl of the five, said teasingly:

"Isn't it delicious to worry one's self over who could have sent us a welcome, when we *might* know for certain, if we would but act prosaically and open the seal."

The girls laughed, and Eleanor remarked, knowingly: "Oh, *Polly* knows who it is from! She just wants to enjoy a few extra thrills before she reads the message."

"Nolla, I do *not* know, and you know it! You always make 'a mountain from a mole-hill.' I declare, you are actually growing to be childish in your old age!" retorted Polly, sarcastically.

Her latter remark drew forth a peal of laughter from the girls, Eleanor included.

But Polly failed to join in the laugh. She cast a withering glance at Eleanor, and walked aside to open the envelope. The four interested girls watched her eagerly as she read the short message.

Polly would have given half of her mine on Grizzly Slide, to have controlled her expression. But the very knowledge that the four friends were critically eyeing her, made her flush uncomfortably as she folded up the paper again, and slipped it in her pocket.

“Ha! What did I tell you! It is from HIM!” declared Eleanor, laughingly.

Dorothy Alexander was duly impressed, for she had firmly believed, hitherto, that Polly was a man-hater. The manner in which she had scorned Jimmy Osgood on that tour of England would have led anyone to believe that such was the case. Now the tell-tale blush and Eleanor’s innuendo, caused Dorothy to reconsider her earlier judgment.

Polly curled her full red lip at Eleanor’s remark, and was about to speak of something of general interest, when Dorothy unexpectedly asked a (to her) pertinent question.

“Polly, has anyone ever proposed to you?”

Eleanor laughed softly to herself, and Polly sent poor Dodo a pitying glance. “Is that little head of yours entirely void of memory, Dodo?” said she.

Then, without waiting for a reply, Polly continued: “Did not Jimmy propose to me, as well as to every one of you girls?”

“Oh, but I didn’t mean that sort of an affair,” explained Dorothy. “I mean—were you ever in love with anyone who thought he loved *you*?”

“Oh, isn’t this a delightful conversation? I wouldn’t have missed it for anything in the world!” laughed Eleanor.

“Nolla,” rebuked Polly, seriously, “your head has been so turned since all those poor fortune-hunters in Europe flattered you, that I fear you will never succeed in business with me. I shall have to find someone else who will prove trustworthy and work.”

Polly’s threat did not appear to disturb Eleanor very much, for she laughed merrily and retorted: “Dodo, if I answer your question for Polly, what will you do for me, some day?”

“Nolla, you mind your own affairs!” exclaimed Polly, flushing again. “Dodo is

such a tactless child that she never stops to consider whether her questions are too personal, or not. But *you*—well, you know better, and I forbid you to discuss me any further.”

“Come, come, girls! This little joke is really going too far, if Polly feels hurt about it. Let us drop the subject and talk about the dance the Captain is going to give us tonight,” suggested Nancy.

“I’m going to wear the new gown mother got in Paris,” announced Dorothy. “Ma says we can save duty on it if I wear it before it reaches shore.”

The other girls laughed, and Eleanor added: “That’s a good plan, Dodo. I guess I will follow your example. I’ve got so many dutiable things in my trunks, that I really ought to economise on something.”

“Well, I won’t wear one of my new dresses tonight for just that reason. If I want them badly enough, to bring them all the way from Paris where we get them so much cheaper than on this side, then I’m willing to pay Uncle Sam his revenue on them,” said Polly, loftily.

“Ho! I don’t believe it is duty you are saving, as much as indulging in perverseness by not donning one of your most fetching gowns,” declared Eleanor.

“Maybe it is,” said Polly, smiling tantalizingly at her chum. “Perhaps I want to keep the freshness of them for someone in New York, eh?”

“Certainly! *He* will be there to meet you, sure thing!” laughed Eleanor.

At that, Dorothy drew Eleanor aside and, when Polly was not looking, whispered eagerly: “Do tell me who he is?”

But Eleanor laughingly shook her head and whispered back: “I dare not! That is Polly’s secret!”

But she did not add for Dorothy’s edification, that try as she would, she (Eleanor) had never been able to make Polly confess whether she preferred one swain to another. As Eleanor considered this a weakness in her own powers of persuasion, she never allowed anyone to question her that far.

Had anyone of the four girls dreamed of who the sender of the wireless was, what a buzzing there would have been! Eleanor Maynard would have been so pleased at the possibility of a romance, that she would have acted even more tantalizing, in Polly’s opinion, than she had been of late months.

Perhaps you are not as well acquainted with Polly and her friends, however, as I am, and it would be unkind to continue their experiences for your entertainment, until after you are duly informed of how Polly happened to leave her home in Oak Creek and also what had passed during the Summer in Europe.

Polly Brewster was born and reared on a Rocky Mountain ranch, in Colorado, and had until her fourteenth year, never been farther from her home than Oak Creek, which was the railroad station and post office of the many ranchers of that section.

Eleanor Maynard, the younger daughter of Mr. Maynard who was a prosperous banker of Chicago, accompanied her sister Barbara and Anne Stewart, the teacher, when they spent a summer on the ranch. Their thrilling adventures during the first half of that summer are told in the book called "Polly of Pebbly Pit," the first volume of this series.

After the discovery of the gold mine on Grizzly Slide, and the subsequent troubles with the claim-jumpers, Polly and her friends sent for John Brewster who was engaged to Anne Stewart, and Tom Latimer, John's best friend, to leave their engineering work on some mines, for the time being, and hasten to Pebbly Pit to advise about the gold mine, and to take action to protect the girls. These experiences are told in the second volume of this series.

Success being assured in the mining plans of the gold vein on Grizzly Slide, and the valuable lava cliffs located on Pebbly Pit ranch also finding a market as brilliant gems for use in jewelry, Polly and Eleanor decided to accompany Anne Stewart to New York, where she was going to teach in an exclusive school for young ladies.

In the third book, Polly and Eleanor's adventures in New York are told. Their school experiences; the amateur theatricals at which Polly saved a girl from the fire, and thus found some splendid friends; and the new acquaintance, Ruth Ashby, who was the only child of the Ashbys. They also met Mr. Fabian in a most unusual manner, and through him, they became interested in Interior Decorating, to study it as a profession. When the school-year ended, all these friends invited the two girls to join their party that was planned to tour Europe and visit noted places where antiques are exhibited.

The following fourth book describes the amusing incidents of the three girls on board the steamer, after they meet the Alexanders. Mrs. Alexander, the gorgeously-plumed ranch-woman; Dorothy, always known as "Dodo," the restive girl of Polly's own age; and little Ebenezer Alexander, too meek and

self-effacing to deny his spouse anything, but always providing the funds for her caprices. This present caprice, of rushing to Europe to find a “title” for Dodo to marry, was the latest and hardest of all for him to agree to.

Because of Mrs. Alexander’s whim, the ludicrous experiences that came upon the innocent heads of Polly and her friends, in the tour of England in two motor cars, decided them to escape from that lady, and run away to Paris. Before they could sigh in relief at their freedom, however, the Alexanders loomed again on their horizon.

Plan as they would, the badgered tourists found that Mrs. Alexander had annexed herself permanently to them. They resigned themselves to the inevitable. But that carried with it more ridiculous affairs, when Mrs. Alexander plotted for the titles found dangling before her, in various places on the Continent.

One good result came from this association with the Alexanders: Dodo found how fascinating the work of collecting really was, and decided to study decorating as an art. Hence she spurned her mother’s ambitions for her, and announced her plan of remaining in New York with the girls, upon their return to America, to follow in their line of study.

Mrs. Alexander felt quite satisfied to live in New York for a season, as she fancied it an easy matter to forge a way into good society there. But her spouse detested large cities and longed for his mining life once more, but agreed to it because Dodo was delighted with the opportunity opened before her, in the profession of decorator.

Polly’s party on board the steamer consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Ashby and Ruth; Mr. and Mrs. Fabian and Nancy; Mr. and Mrs. Alexander and Dodo; and lastly, Polly Brewster and Eleanor Maynard.

Just a word about the last two girls: Polly knew that Eleanor was fond of Paul Stewart since she met him a few years before. And Eleanor wondered if Polly preferred Tom Latimer to any other young man she knew; but Polly always declared that she was married to her profession and had no time to spare for beaux. Hence Tom Latimer sighed and hoped that she might change her mind some day.

Meantime, Tom lost no good opportunity to show how he appreciated Polly and, whenever possible, he managed to perform the little deeds that mean so much to a woman—especially if that woman is young and impressionable. Thus he actually made better headway in his silent campaign for Polly, by never

broaching the subject of love—from which she would have fled instantly and then barred the doors of her heart.

The wireless received by Polly was from Tom who had been anxiously awaiting the time when he could communicate with the vessel. The contents of the message could have been read to all the world without exciting comment—it was so brotherly. But Polly felt that it was a private welcome to her and so it was not to be shared with others.

The wireless said that Tom and Polly's dear friends who were in New York, had been invited on board Mr. Dalken's yacht, to visit the quarantined steamer that evening. That they would arrive about eight o'clock, having secured passes from the Inspector at Quarantine.

Although this explanation about Polly and her associates took time for *us*, it did not interrupt the lively banter between the five girls. Dorothy was now certain that Polly had a real beau, somewhere, and being so very candid and talkative herself, she admired the reticence displayed by Polly in keeping the affairs of her heart to herself.

Dodo whispered back to Eleanor: "Dear me! I hope he is worthy of her. She ought to have the finest husband in the world."

Eleanor laughed. "Don't worry, Dodo. She will. If he was not meant for Polly, I'd try and get him for myself—that is how much I admire him."

"Oh my! Won't you tell me something about him, Nolla?" asked Dorothy, eagerly.

"I really don't dare, Dodo," returned Eleanor, assuming a wise expression. "Polly would drop me forever, if she thought I confided in anyone about her love-affairs. Besides, you can find out everything for yourself, now that you are going to remain with us, this winter. Still, I would love to know just who that wireless came from." Eleanor added the latter remark after a moment's deep consideration.

"I'll tell you what we can do," ventured Dorothy, in a whisper. "We have often visited the wireless room; let's you and I go there again, and start a friendly chat with the operator. Maybe he will speak of the message."

Without stopping to think whether this method would be principled or not, Eleanor eagerly agreed to Dorothy's plan. While Polly and Nancy were discussing the beautiful hazy picture made by New York's sky-line as seen from the Harbor at Quarantine, Dorothy and Eleanor hurried to the wireless room.

The young man had often been entertained by the girls during the trip from Europe, so this visit was not suspected of having a secret motive back of it. He chatted pleasantly with his callers and, after a time, spoke of the very topic they wished to hear about.

“I suppose you girls will all be on the *qui vive* this evening?”

“Yes, it is awfully nice of the captain, isn’t it?” said Eleanor, referring to the dance and thinking that the operator also meant that event.

“Oh, I do not think the captain had as much to do with the invitation as had the Inspector General of the Quarantine. Of course we have a clean bill for the ship or no one would have been allowed to step on board tonight; but at the same time your friends must have had a good hard time to get the invitation from the authorities. Only a New Yorker who understands the ropes, could have managed the matter so quickly.”

Dorothy was about to ask what he was talking about, when Eleanor pinched her arm for silence. Then the latter spoke: “Oh yes! He is a wonder—we think!”

Dorothy gasped at Eleanor, and the smiling girl winked secretly at her. The operator had not seen the pinch nor the wink, but he continued guilelessly: “Well, from what I’ve seen of Miss Polly, only a ‘wonder’ would cause her to notice him at all!”

He laughed at his own words and Eleanor joined him, even though she failed to see a joke. Then she said: “Polly could have so *many* admirers, but she never looks at a man. Perhaps that is why all you males sigh so broken-heartedly at her heels.”

The young man laughed softly to himself. “Maybe! But this ‘Tom’ seems to feel assured of a ‘look’ from her.”

Now it was Dorothy’s turn to pinch Eleanor, and she did so with great gusto. Eleanor winced but dared not express herself in any other manner, just then. She was too keen on the trail of learning what she could, to signify any sense of having felt that pinch.

“Oh—Tom! He is an old family friend, you know. He was Polly’s brother’s college-chum for four years while both boys studied at the University of Chicago. I am from Chicago, and I knew those boys when they used to come to my home with my brother, who also attended the engineering classes. There was a fourth boy—Paul Stewart, who was from Denver. Anne Stewart was his sister and she married John Brewster, this Spring. So you see, we are all old friends

together. I suppose the whole family crowd will come out on the yacht, tonight.”

Dorothy listened in sheer amazement, as Eleanor spoke with all the assurance possible. But Dorothy was not aware of Eleanor’s lifelong training in the home of a social leader of Chicago’s exclusive set. That such a home-training made a girl precocious and subtle, was not strange, and Eleanor had had fourteen years of such a life before she went to Pebbly Pit and met Polly. Habits so well-engrounded are not easily broken, or forgotten.

“Then the sender ought to have sent his message to one of the adults of the party. Even *I* misjudged the matter, because I thought this ‘Tom’ must be a faithful admirer of Miss Polly’s to get through to visit the steamer tonight,” explained the operator.

“But he isn’t coming alone—didn’t you stop to consider that?” asked Eleanor, eagerly. “Seeing that most of the friends are Polly’s personal ones, the wire was sent to her, you know.”

“I see.”

“The only thing that hurt me, was that no one sent me a message. Tom is as dear to me as to Polly, and I wonder he did not wire me.”

“Perhaps this Tom thought you would have scores of eager messages the moment your beaux knew you were near enough to get them,” laughed the young officer.

“Well, they didn’t! But I want you to do something for me—will you?” asked Eleanor, quite unexpectedly.

“I will if I can,” agreed the officer.

“Write off a fake message for me and sign some make-believe name to it, so I can hold my head up with Polly. She will never let me rest if she thinks she got a line, and I didn’t!”

“Oh, that is easy to do. As long as we know it will never come out, and that I wrote a line to you, it will be a good joke.”

“All right!” laughed Eleanor, delightedly. “Now write:——” She stopped suddenly, then thought for a moment before she said: “Why not copy the exact words sent to Polly, but sign another name?”

“I’ll write one, as much like the original as possible without actually duplicating that information,” chuckled the officer.

Then he took up a slip of paper and wrote: "Miss Eleanor Maynard. We will join you this evening, on steamer. Yacht will arrive about eight." He looked up laughingly and asked: "Now what name shall we sign to this?"

"Oh—let me see! Sign 'Paul.' I know he is in New York, now, so I am not taking chances of making a mistake," laughed Eleanor.

The name "Paul" was added to the message and the paper placed in an envelope. This was addressed to Eleanor Maynard and her stateroom number written down upon it. Then it was handed to the gratified girl.

The young man was thanked with unwarranted warmth, and the two girls hastened away.

CHAPTER II

A DISAPPOINTING EVENING

Eleanor and Dorothy did not join their friends at once, after leaving the wireless room. Eleanor explained wisely: "We must promenade along the deck and let them see us reading and talking over the message, you know, to make them believe we just got it from the boy."

So this little act was carried out, and when the two girls felt sure that Polly and her companions had noticed them reading the wireless message, Eleanor whispered: "Now we can stroll over and join them. Leave it to me."

Just before she joined her friends, Eleanor thrust the paper into her sweater pocket, and seemed not to remember it. But Nancy spoke of it, immediately.

"I see you received a *billet-doux*, too. Is there any reason why I should not say to you exactly what you said to Polly, when she got hers?" laughed the young lady.

"Oh, not at all! I am not so bashful about my affair," retorted Eleanor, taking the paper from her pocket and handing it to Nancy. "You may read it aloud, if you choose."

So Nancy read, and the fact that the words conveyed the same information as Polly's had done, but the sender had signed himself "Paul," made Polly feel relieved. Then she said:

"It is evident that someone secured a yacht to carry our friends out to see us this evening. My message said about the same thing, so now, you see, it was ridiculous in Eleanor to tease about it being a love-note. Had she been sensible I would have read it aloud to all, but because of her silliness, I made up my mind to keep her guessing."

Nancy and Ruth laughed, but Eleanor and Dorothy exchanged glances with each other. Then Nancy said anxiously: "We ought to start and dress most fetchingly for tonight, if everyone you know is coming out."

Before anyone could reply to this suggestion, Mr. Fabian was seen hurrying across the deck to join them. "Girls, our old friend Dalken has a yacht, I hear, and he has invited everyone we know to come out here this evening to welcome us home. We are to be ready to return with him, as he has secured the necessary bill-of-health for us. Now get down to your rooms quickly and pack."

"Oh—aren't we going to remain to the dance?" asked Eleanor, with disappointment in her tones.

"You can do as you please about that, but we will go back on the yacht when she returns to the city."

In the bustle of packing the stateroom trunks, and then dressing for the evening, the girls forgot about the wireless messages. Then during the dinner that was like a party affair because of the passengers' exuberant spirits at being so near home again, Mr. Fabian smiled approvingly at the five young girls in his charge. They looked so charming in their Paris gowns, and their youthful forms and faces expressed such joy and pleasure in living, that he felt gratified to think the old friends would see them as *he* did that evening.

Shortly after leaving the dining-salon, the attention of the Fabian party was drawn to a graceful white yacht that sailed swiftly down the Bay and soon came alongside the steamer. The spotless looking sailors instantly lowered the boat and a party of young people got in. The Fabian group leaned over the rail of the steamer and watched breathlessly as the boat was rowed across the intervening space and, finally, was made fast to the steamer.

"Poll, did you recognize your future Fate?" giggled Eleanor, nudging her companion, knowingly.

"I saw *yours*!" retorted Polly. "And now I comprehend why you can speak of nothing else than beaus and Fate! You are so obsessed by your own dreams that you think everyone you know must be dreaming the same stuff!"

Polly turned quickly and hurried to the spot where the visitors were being greeted by Mr. Fabian, and the other girls, laughing at the repartee, followed. In the first group to arrive were Tom Latimer and his younger brother Jim; Kenneth Evans, Jim's chum; Paul Stewart; and John Brewster with Anne, his bride.

Happy welcomes were exchanged between everyone, but Polly purposely avoided any extra favor being shown Tom Latimer, although he looked as if he deserved it more than Jim and his friend Kenneth. Eleanor quite openly showed her preference for Paul, when they separated from the others for the evening.

“Where is Mr. Dalken and the others?” asked Polly, gazing around at the small group that had arrived on board.

“The boat is going back for the second installment,” explained Anne, keeping an arm about Polly’s waist. “We-all were too impatient to see you to accept the suggestion of waiting for the second trip, so the older ones sent us off first.”

To Polly’s surprise and joy, the second boat-load brought her father and mother, Mrs. Stewart, the Latimers, the Evans, and Mr. Dalken, the owner of the yacht. When the family circle was complete, on board the steamer, they proved to be a happy party, and many of the passengers wished they were included in that merry group.

The steamer rolled gently with the swells from the ocean, while the full moon shone mistily through a fog that veiled its brightness enough to add romance to the meeting of the various young people on deck. Eleanor and Paul had been genuinely delighted to see each other again, and neither cared *who* knew just how much they liked each other.

Polly watched them for a time, then smiled as they walked away to discover a cozy retreat behind one of the giant smoke-stacks, where they could enjoy a tête-à-tête without interruption. When she turned to hear what her brother John was saying, she found Tom Latimer just at her elbow.

“Suppose we find a nice sheltered spot where you can tell me all about your trip abroad?” suggested Tom, his eyes speaking too plainly how anxious he was to get Polly away from the others.

“Oh, I’d far rather be with the crowd and hear all that is being said,” said Polly, nervously.

“Very well, then,” said Tom, moodily. “I only thought you’d like to hear all about Grizzly Slide and how it’s been cutting up this summer. The gold mine has had several adventurers trying to jump the claim, too; and Rainbow Cliffs has had an injunction served on it so that we are tied up by law, this year.”

“So mother wrote to me. But I don’t want to hear about troubles and business tonight. I just want to enjoy myself after coming home to all the dear folks,” said Polly.

Tom was too unsophisticated with girls, although he was so popular with men, to make allowance for the contrary spirit that often sways a girl when she wishes to make a good impression; so he sulked and followed at Polly’s heels when she hurried after her friends.

Mr. Dalken turned just now, and saw the girl running as if to get away from Tom, and he understood, fairly well, just how matters were. So he endeavored to calm Polly's perturbed spirit and encourage Tom's "faint heart" at the same time.

"Well, Polly dear," said he, placing an arm about her shoulders, "now that you have seen many of the wonder-spots of Europe, and know more about antiques and art than any of us, I suppose you are quite decided that business is not your forte, eh? The next thing I'll hear from you, you'll have dropped your ambitions and be sailing down a love-stream to a snug harbor."

"Indeed not! You ought to know me better than that, Mr. Dalken," declared Polly, vehemently, causing her companions to laugh. "I am more determined than ever, since seeing such wonderful things in Europe, to devote my life to my chosen profession. Why, the marvellous objects I saw in Europe, used in interior decorating in centuries past, enthuse me anew. I wonder that anyone can keep from studying this fascinating art where there is such a broad field of work and interest."

Polly's mother and father listened to their daughter, with adoration plainly expressed on their faces, and Tom had to grit his teeth to keep from swearing, because of what he considered their influence over Polly in this, her foolish infatuation for a business when she ought to be in love with him.

When Mr. Dalken saw that he had launched a dangerous subject for Polly and Tom, he had a bright idea. So he acted upon it instantly. He excused himself from his friends' circle, and sought the Captain. In a short time thereafter, the passengers heard the band playing dance music, and immediately, most of the younger set hurried to the Grand Salon.

It was second nature with Polly to dance, and she did so with as much grace as she rode her father's thoroughbred horses on the ranch; or hiked the Rockies, over boulders and down-timber like a fawn. Kenneth Evans, the youngest man in the party from the city, was by far the handsomest one in the group; and when he guided Polly through the maze of dancers, they both attracted much attention.

Tom stood and sulked while he watched Polly dance, but he refused to dance himself, although he was considered a most desirable partner by any one who had ever danced with him. Eleanor was having such a thoroughly good time while dancing with Paul, that she forgot about the romances and lovers' quarrels of others.

The moment Kenneth escorted Polly to a chair and stood fanning her, Tom pushed a way over to them and said, quite assuredly: "The next dance is mine,

Polly.”

“Why, I never told you so, at all!” exclaimed Polly, annoyed at Tom’s tone and manner. “How do you know there will be another one?”

Tom flushed and sent Kenneth an angry glance, although poor Ken was innocent of any guile in this case.

“If you do not care to dance with me, Polly, say so, and I’ll go to the smoking-room and enjoy the companionship of men who appreciate me,” retorted Tom, impatiently.

The imp of resistance took instant possession of Polly, and she said: “Tom, there’s where you belong—with men who want to talk about work and money. You are too old to enjoy youthful follies as I do.”

Tom had been dreaming of this meeting with Polly again, for so long, that now everything seemed shattered for him. He felt so injured at her mention of his age in comparison with her own, that he said nothing more, but turned on his heel and marched away without a backward glance. His very foot-falls spoke of his feelings.

Polly turned to Kenneth and resumed her laughing banter, and he thought she was glad to rid herself of Tom’s company. He felt puzzled, too, because Tom Latimer, in *his* estimation, was everything noble and manly. But Kenneth was inexperienced with girls’ subtleties. Had Eleanor been present she would have understood perfectly how matters were.

After this incident, Polly danced every dance with a gayety of manner that she did not truly feel. Some of the joy of that party was lacking, but she would not question the cause of it.

Tom went directly to the smoking-room where he sat down to brood over his misery. He never filled his pipe, but sat lost in thought until a friendly voice at his elbow said: “Well, old pard! Anne says you are to come with me. She has a word to say. She is a wizard, too, so you’d best obey without question.”

Tom looked up and saw John. “Can Anne help me in the planning of the legal defence of those lava-cliffs at Pebbly Pit?” Tom demanded of his friend.

John smiled knowingly. “I’ll admit you’re not smoking, even though you rushed to a sanctum protected from girls’ invasion; and you are not thinking of lava or injunctions, just now. You’re pitying yourself for what you consider shabby treatment, while all the time Anne can see that your evening’s disappointment is

your own fault.”

Tom weakened. “For goodness’ sake, tell Anne to advise me what to do, if she knows every cure.”

“Come on and have a talk with her. She is just outside, waiting for us,” coaxed John, placing his arm in that of his friend’s, and gently forcing him out of the room.

When Tom met Anne’s sympathetic eyes, he confessed. “Anne, what’s the matter with Polly? She doesn’t seem to know I am on earth. Did you watch her enjoy that dance with a kid like Ken, and then snub *me* outright when I asked her to dance the next one with me?”

“I don’t know what she did, Tom, but let me give you a bit of sensible advice about Polly. John thinks I am right in this, too, don’t you, dear?” Wise Anne Brewster turned anxiously to John for his opinion.

“Yes, Tom, Anne is a wonder in such things. You listen to her, old man,” agreed John.

Tom sighed heavily and signified his willingness to listen to anything that would end his heartache. Both his companions smiled as if they deemed this case an everyday matter.

“Tom, you are morbid from over-work at the mines,” began Anne. “Remember this, Polly has been on the go in Europe all summer, seeing first one interesting thing after another, and not giving a single thought to you, or anyone, on this side the water. She sneered at anyone who tried to flatter her, or pretended to make love to her, while in Europe, and only cared for art during that tour which meant so much to her.

“You ought to be thankful that she took this attitude, and returned home heart-whole. What would you have done, had she fallen in love with an attractive young man with a title? But she was too sensible for that. She returns home with her mind still filled with the wonderful things she saw abroad, and eager to tell everyone she knows all about her trip. Naturally, she never gives a thought to a lover, or a future husband. She is too young for that sort of thing, anyway, and her family would discourage anyone who suggested such ideas to her. We want her to continue her studies and find joy and satisfaction in her work, until she is twenty-one, at least, and then she can consider matrimony.

“You know, Tom, that we all favor you immensely, as a future husband for Polly, but we certainly would discountenance any advances you might make right now,

to turn Polly's thoughts from sensible work and endeavor, to a state of discontent caused by the dreams of young love. If you are not willing to be a good friend to the girl, now, and wait until she is older, before you show your intentions, then I will certainly do my utmost to keep Polly out of your way. But if, on the other hand, you promise to guard your expression and behavior, and only treat Polly as a good brother might, then we will do everything in our power to protect Polly from any other admirers and to further your interests as best we can. Do you understand, now?"

Tom had listened thoughtfully, and when Anne concluded, he said: "If I thought I had a chance in the end, I would gladly wait a thousand years for Polly!"

"Well, you won't have to do that," laughed Anne. "In a few years, at the most, Polly will want to get out of business, and settle down like other girls—to a slave of a husband and a lovely home of her own that she can decorate and enjoy to her heart's content."

Tom brightened up visibly at such alluring pictures, and promised to do exactly as Anne advised him to.

"If Polly pays no attention to you now, remember it is because she is different from most girls you have known. She was brought up at Pebbly Pit ranch without any young companions, until we went there that summer. She had a yearning for the beautiful in art and other things, but never had the slightest opportunity in the Rocky Mountains, to further her ideals. The only education she had had in the great and beautiful, was when she was riding the peaks and could study Nature in her grandest works.

"Can you blame her, then, because she revels in her studies and has no other desire, at present, than that of reaching a plane where she can indulge her talent and ideals? Can't you see that a youthful marriage to Polly, now seems like a sacrifice of all she considers worth while in life?"

Tom nodded understandingly as he listened to Anne. And John added: "I told you Anne had the right idea of this affair! Polly's absolutely safe, for a few years, from all love-tangles. And when she begins to weary of hard work and disappointments in business, then is your chance to show her a different life."

"But, Tom," quickly added Anne, "do not give Polly the opportunity, again, to suspect you of lover-like intentions. Be a first-class brother to her, and let *her* wonder if she has any further interest in you. Never show your trump card to a girl."

Both men laughed at this sage advice, and John nodded smilingly: "Anne ought to know, Tom. That was the way she got me."

Anne was about to answer teasingly, when Mr. Dalken came up and said: "I've been hunting you three everywhere. Hurry and get your wraps, as the yacht is waiting to return to the City."

The trio then learned that passes had been granted the members in Mr. Fabian's party, to leave the steamer that night and go back with their friends, on the yacht. So the cabin baggage had been brought up to the gang-way, and when Mr. Dalken summoned John and his companions to come and help the girls get away, the boats were already on their way to the yacht with the luggage.

Many of their fellow-passengers crowded about the party when they were ready to go. Good-bys were exchanged and the happy bevy of young folks left. Then the boat returned for the older members in the party, and soon the yacht was ready to fly back to her dock, up the River, near 72nd street. But the thick haze that had made the moon look so romantic, developed into an impenetrable fog. And anyone who has ever experienced such a fog hanging over New York Harbor, knows what it is to try to go through it.

So the vessel had not traveled past the Statue of Liberty, before the heavy pall of fog suddenly dropped silently over the Bay, and anything farther than a few feet away from the radius of the electric lights on the boat, was completely hidden.

The Captain bawled forth orders to the crew and instantly the uniformed men were running back and forth to carry out the instructions. Before all impetus to the yacht was closed down, however, the engines had driven her into the route generally used by the pilots of the boats running to Staten Island.

Captain Johnson anxiously studied his chart but could not gauge his position exactly, because of the dense fog and the lack of signals. In a few minutes more, every fog-horn in the Bay and all the great reflectors from guiding lights from bell-buoys would be in full operation. But at the time, there was nothing to tell him that he was in a dangerous zone.

CHAPTER III

THE ACCIDENT

When the party reached the yacht, Mr. Dalken said that chairs had been placed on the forward deck where they could sit and watch the scenes at night, as they sailed up to the City. So all but Tom and Polly went forward and found comfortable seats. Tom had asked Polly to stroll about with him, and she, feeling guilty of neglecting such an old friend when on the steamer, consented.

Thus it happened that Tom led her to the side of the craft where they had climbed the ladder to the deck, as this side was in shadow and farthest from the group of friends who were seated on the forward deck.

But they had not promenaded up and down many times, before the Captain gave anxious commands to his crew. Every man jumped to obey, instantly, while Tom and Polly halted in their walk just at the gap in the rail, where the adjustable ladder had been lowered to the boat when the passengers arrived from the steamer. The steps had been hauled in but the sailor had forgotten to replace the sliding rail. In the dense fog this neglect had been overlooked.

Immediately following the Captain's shouts, a great hulk loomed up right beside the yacht, and a fearful blow to the rear end of the pleasure craft sent her flying diagonally out of her path, across the water. The collision made her nose dip down dangerously while the stern rose up clear of the waves.

The group seated forwards slid together, and some were thrown from their chairs, but managed to catch hold of the ropes and rail to prevent being thrown overboard.

Polly and Tom, standing, unaware, so near the open gap in the rail, still arm in arm as they had been walking, were thrown violently side-ways and there being nothing at hand to hold to, or to prevent their going over the side, they fell into the dark sea.

Feeling as if the earth had dropped from under her, Polly screamed in terror

before her voice was choked with water. Tom instinctively held on to her arm, as he had been doing when the impact of a larger vessel came upon the yacht, and he maintained this grip as they both sank.

Polly had always dreaded water, because it seemed so unfamiliar to her. After living in the mountains with only narrow roaring streams, or the glacial lakes found in the Rockies, she had never tried to swim in the ocean, but preferred swimming in a pool. Consequently, this sudden dive into the awesome black abyss so frightened her, that she fainted before she could fight or struggle.

But Tom Latimer was an expert swimmer, having won several medals while at College for his continued swimming under water. At one time during his first college days, he had saved the lives of some young folks when their canoe capsized a long distance from shore. In this supreme test of ability and presence of mind, with the girl he loved in his arms to save, Tom was as self-possessed as if on deck with Polly.

In less time than it takes to tell, both victims of the collision sank until the natural fight between the weight of the water and the force of the air in their lungs, sent them up again to the surface. In that short time, Tom used every muscle and physical power to swim far enough *under* the water to clear away from the boats which might do them more harm than the water.

Fortunately he found the surface free when he rose for breath, and finding no resistance from the unconscious form he held, he managed to change his grip from her arm to a firm hold under the shoulders. In this position he could manage to keep Polly's head above water, and at the same time, could swim backwards, by using his feet as propellers.

The only handicap he now had, was his clothing and shoes; these interfered with his free action in swimming so he managed to kick off his dancing pumps. The greatest danger he feared, was the sudden coming of some craft that would compel him to dive again, or might even run them down, unseen in the dark.

But the very fog that had caused this accident, also befriended them now, as no wary seaman would recklessly go on his way in such a bewildering mist, and the majority preferred waiting for a temporary lifting of the blanket, before continuing their journeys.

Tom felt no concern over the fact that Polly had fainted or had been in the water for a time, for he knew she was so healthy that no ill would occur to her from such causes. All he feared now, was his power of endurance to keep floating until some craft might pick them up, or he could reach a temporary rest.

Suddenly he felt a sweeping current whirl him about and in another moment, he was swimming rapidly *with* instead of *against* the tide in the Bay. He realized that in that short time the tide had turned, either about some point of land, or in the River. He began to tread water while he tried to lift his head and gaze across the waves. Then a broad shaft of dazzling light shot across the Bay from a nearby reflector. At the same time Tom heard the tolling of a bell-buoy, not very far distant.

He changed his course that the outgoing tide would assist him in reaching this light that might be coming from a ship, or maybe, from an island in the Bay. As his powerful strokes carried him along, the sound of the bell-buoy seemed to come so plainly that he felt sure it was not far away. If he could but hang on to it for a time, in order to gain second wind!

Suddenly there was a momentary lift of the heavy fog, and he discovered he was quite near Bedloe's Island. The powerful search light had reflected from the arc held aloft in the hand of the Goddess of Liberty; and the light that danced upon the waves all about him came from the smaller arcs which were placed along the sea-wall of the Island.

The current now carried him helplessly past the pier where the boats from the Battery land, but just as he tried to lift his head once more and yell for help, a motor boat was heard chugging through the fog. His cry was heard by those in the boat, and in a few moments the flash-light in its prow was blinding Tom because of its proximity.

A chorus of amazed voices now mingled with the noise of the water dashing against the wall and the ringing of the buoy, and Tom began to feel faint and dazed. But almost before he knew what was happening, a powerful grip caught him on his thick hair, and he was dragged partly out of the water.

A commanding voice shouted: "Help grab the girl—we'll take care of the man!"

Then Tom heard no more, nor indeed, knew more until he indistinctly heard a far-off call of "Guard! Guard!" Then he opened his eyes to find he was on the solid earth, once more. Polly was stretched out on the sand. The Guards tumbled out of the barracks and rushed for the spot where the officer stood calling.

While a few of the boys lifted and half carried Tom to the general assembly room, others ran to assist the boatman with the girl. She was carefully conveyed to the barracks and the doctor sent for. Meantime the men applied the Schaefer Method to both the strangers; Tom instantly recovered himself fully but Polly's faint lasted longer.

When the doctor hurried in, his kindly wife followed. Tom was able to sit up and tell the story of how the accident happened; then he begged someone to notify the Wharf Police to keep a lookout in the Harbor as there might be a yacht in distress after that collision. Also, if inquiry was made at Police Headquarters, the news was to be given that both Polly and he were safe on Liberty Island.

A Corporal of the Guard was sent to attend to these messages, and Tom was taken to a cot in the ward of the Barracks. His wet clothing was removed and he was rolled in a hot blanket and given hot lemonade. In a few moments he was sound asleep.

Polly was taken to the doctor's cottage where his wife attended the patient as well as any trained nurse could have done. The girl also was rolled in warm blankets with hot-water bottles placed about her cold body. Slowly she began to show more animation, and when she could speak, she asked if Tom was saved.

TOM AND POLLY ARE RESCUED.
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"Yes, dear; you both are safe now," replied Mrs. Hall.

"And can we get word——" began she.

"We have taken care of that, too, dear. Now try to drink this nice hot lemonade and then go to sleep."

Polly obediently drank the hot drink and sighed in relief. Then she sank back and, almost instantly, Nature claimed her rights to make up for the unwonted interference with her customary routine.

Mrs. Hall sat beside the cot for some time after Polly was asleep, but she finally succumbed to weariness, and finding her patient fully recovered and warm, she threw herself upon a nearby cot.

Both young people slept late in the morning, and when Tom finally opened his eyes, feeling a bit stiff in his joints, he had to collect his thoughts to remember where he was. Like a flash, everything came back, and he jumped up to dress and find out how Polly was.

His suit had been dried and pressed and hung over a chair beside the cot. His dress-coat seemed ridiculously out of order after that swim and, now, for the

morning's work. But he smiled as he donned the clothes, and started for the door of the long room.

Just as Tom reached the door one of the men entered and greeted him warmly. "I see you're all right again!"

"Yes, thank you. I hope the little girl is feeling as well," ventured Tom, anxiously.

"Doctor Hall just left her and says she is right as a fiddle. I'm the young fellow that telephoned the Police for you. I got back word, early this morning, that your folks finally got home, without any harm to anyone. And say! Maybe there wasn't some joy when they heard you two were safe with us!"

Tom felt a strange gripping at his throat, and his voice quavered as he replied: "I know there was!"

The young man glanced at the evening dress and then said, "I'm going to loan you one of my long coats to cover those togs."

Tom responded gratefully, and said: "If I can only do as much for you boys some time!"

"Say," laughed the soldier, "don't wish such an experience on any of us!"

Then both laughed. As they reached the house where Polly had spent the night, the doctor opened the door and smiled. When he saw that Tom was feeling as good as ever, he said: "I just hung up the 'phone. A gentleman called 'Dalken' told me that they were all coming over to take you away. But I warned him that the entire party would be arrested if they landed on Government Ground without a permit.

"Then I remembered that he might secure a permit, so I said: 'Anyway, before you people can get here, my patients will be on their way to the Battery.' I said that, because the young lady ought to be kept perfectly quiet all morning, after such a fearful experience, you know."

"Yes, I know," admitted Tom. "And I am glad you said what you did."

"Now we had her dress dried and pressed, and the little miss will be up and ready to thank you for your courageous deed, in an hour or so," explained the doctor, significantly.

"Thank you, ever so much!" said Tom, grasping his hand.

"Let Ted, here, show you about the place and entertain you until it's time to call

again,” suggested the doctor.

So Tom went away with his companion, not to explore the Island, but to go to the telephone and have a long talk with his friends in the city, who were anxious to hear about the accident.

Just before noon, an orderly came to Tom to say that Mrs. Hall said, “Mr. Latimer could call, if he liked.” Tom laughed at the message—“if he liked.”

As he entered the little sitting-room of the doctor’s house, Tom tiptoed as if he felt he had to tread softly. But Polly sat in an arm-chair by the window and saw him coming. She jumped up and ran to the door to greet him, and Mrs. Hall went out of the room by the kitchen-door.

Tom was unable to speak a word when he finally came into Polly’s presence. She caught hold of his hands and shook them gladly, as she cried: “Oh, Tom! What do I not owe you after last night!”

Tom wanted to demand payment, but he knew that would ruin his chances forever, so he held a tight leash on his feelings and smiled wanly. Then he said in an unnatural tone: “Lucky for us both that I knew how to swim, eh, Polly?”

Polly was relieved to hear him speak in such a way, but her next act was the outgrowth of spontaneous gratitude. She flung both arms about his neck and being too short to reach his cheek, kissed him on the chin as she would have done had he been John. Tom trembled, but realized at the same time, that Polly’s kiss meant nothing. Still he was humbly grateful for even that token of gratitude from the reserved girl.

“Now tell me, Tom dear, what did the folks say about our sudden elopement?” Polly laughed as she used the term.

“Oh, Polly! I’d swim from here to China for you if only it could be an elopement!”

The girl instantly took alarm, and looked about for Mrs. Hall. But Tom forced a laugh and tried to make her believe he was joking. “Do you think that any man would do *that* for a girl?” he added.

Then he hurried on to say that no one on the yacht had been injured by the collision, but they were hours in reaching their dock. He said that they (Polly and Tom) were not missed at first, and not until conditions had calmed down somewhat, did Eleanor call for Polly. Then it was found that neither Tom nor Polly were to be found.

“It was Eleanor who remembered seeing us promenade along the side where the rail was detachable, and it was Eleanor who said we must have been thrown out where the steps came up. So the captain was taken to task for having such a careless man on board, and both the man and the captain were discharged.”

“Poor man—it wasn’t his fault!” sighed Polly.

“Well, if you hadn’t recovered, I’d have sent him to jail for life, because it was criminal negligence to leave that rail open as it was!” was Tom’s threatening reply.

“I’m glad there is no cause for such harsh treatment,” responded Polly.

Tom gazed, with his soul in his eyes, as he breathed fervently: “You’re not half as glad as I am, darling!”

Polly sprang away at that, and ran to the window, saying: “Don’t you think we might start for the City? Mrs. Hall went to fetch a hat and wrap for me and she ought to be back by this time.”

CHAPTER IV

A REUNION AND A VISITOR

Never was maiden welcomed so enthusiastically and so fervently, as Polly Brewster, that morning when she stepped from the launch to the sea-wall at Battery Park. Her father and mother vied with each other in embracing and kissing her, while the tears of happiness streamed from their eyes; John and Anne hovered beside them, watching every dear feature of Polly's face. Eleanor stood holding fast to her best friend's skirt, as if that could keep her forever near her.

The members in the "Delegation of Welcome," acted as if they had been imbibing some intoxicating stimulant. Such happy laughter, and vehement demonstrations of joy and love because Polly was with them again, spoke louder than words that they had all thought she was drowned. Tom found that little fuss was made over him in the first exuberant greetings, but he came in for his share after the doctor had concluded his story about the valiant young rescuer.

"Now, Mr. Brewster, you pay attention to me," remarked the physician, when he was ready to depart on the launch: "You take your daughter home, at once, and put her to bed for the rest of the day, to spare her any nervous reaction. Then, if she is all right tomorrow, you may allow her to receive a caller, or two—no more for the time being, or you will have her break down."

Mr. Brewster promised to obey the orders faithfully, and soon afterwards, Polly's friends followed her and her parents to the automobiles which were waiting near the curb of the Park. Tom was surrounded, on both sides and fore and aft, by his family and John and Mr. Dalken, all of whom wished to hear the thrilling story of the rescue again.

"I'd rather hear how you folks kept afloat after that boat rammed the yacht," said he, shunning a subject that still made him shudder.

Mr. Dalken insisted that Tom with his father and mother get into his luxurious limousine and let him drive them home. On the way uptown, Mr. Dalken told the

story of their narrow escape from being lost in the Bay after the collision.

“Immediately after the yacht was rammed and we could collect our senses to comprehend what had happened, and what to do, the old tub of a ferry-boat kept on her course. But there were some worried citizens on board, for they shouted and, finally, the captain stopped his engines and blew the whistles to see if we needed help.

“Fortunately for us, a river tug was quite close at hand when the accident occurred, and its captain called through a megaphone to say that he would assist us in any way we commanded.

“Our Captain then ascertained that part of our gear had been shaken out of place, and it would be dangerous for him to try to run the vessel under her own power, and trust our steering gear. So the good old man on the tug took us in tow and landed us, towards dawn, at our dock.

“The moment we were on land, I rushed to the telephone at the Yacht Club house, and notified Police Headquarters. Ken Evans was an eye-witness to the dive that we feared had cost Polly and you your lives; so we told the Sergeant at the Station just about where you went down.

“The Bureau at Battery Park was ’phoned but they said the tide was running out at that time, so you both would be carried past Bedloe’s Island; if you both were good swimmers there was a slight hope of your being rescued.

“I tell you, Tom, we were almost frantic with joy and relief when word came from Liberty Island that you both were safe in bed, there, without injury or other hurt, excepting the shock. Polly’s mother swooned and we thought she was gone because it was so long before we could revive her.”

Tom’s mother sat holding her boy’s hand within her own, and his father smiled at him so often that Tom began to feel fussed. But Mr. Dalken laughed at his apparent self-consciousness.

“Tom, my boy, grin and bear this ordeal for the time, as you may never in your life, have another experience like it. It shows you what we all think of you, to sit and idolize you in this fashion.”

They laughed at the banter, but Tom felt more at ease after Mr. Dalken’s little speech.

Having arrived at his home, Tom rebelled against being kept quiet that day. “Goodness’ sakes, mother! any one would think I was an invalid. Why, I feel

better than I have in months!” and his happy gayety attested to his spirits. But no one knew that he was joyous because Polly had kissed him that morning. And he was sure that that *something* he had detected in her eyes, was the awakening of love, instead of the fervent gratitude it really was.

Tom could not settle down to do anything that day, but he called John up on the 'phone several times to ask about Polly. John patiently replied each time, that Polly was fast asleep and would probably remain so, for several hours more, because she required it. When Tom asked if he had better come down that evening and call, John was most emphatic in his refusal.

But the following day, Tom kept telephoning the Brewsters every little while and Anne finally capitulated and invited him to call that evening.

Polly was fully recovered again, with no signs of the shock or soaking she had received; so, when Tom was announced by the telephone girl in the hotel office, she felt no undue nervousness.

“Anne, you are going to help entertain Tom, aren't you?” said she, casually patting her hair down neatly.

Anne looked at her sister-in-law with an amused smile. “If you think you will need a chaperone when such an old friend calls. Tom always seems more like a brother than a young man who might turn out to be a beau, some day.”

Polly pondered this sentence for a time, then said: “Well, there's no telling what he may think after that ducking, you know, so it will be more comfortable to have you about.”

Tom fully expected a warm welcome from Polly, and perhaps, another flash of something akin to love that he thought he had detected in her deep blue eyes, when he met her in the hospital. So he was more than chagrined to find Polly smile friendly upon him as she took his hand in the same manner that she would have taken Mr. Dalken's.

“I just thought I would bring in a little glow with me, Polly,” remarked Tom, when he recovered self-possession again. “A few roses, such as I know you like.”

He handed a long box to Polly and watched eagerly as she cut the string and opened the lid of the box.

“Oh, Tom! American Beauties again! How lovely!” and she buried her face in the fragrant red petals that filled the one end of the box.

Anne held out her hand for the box when Polly went to place it on a chair. "I'll hand them to mother, Polly, for her to arrange in a jar. The others that came yesterday, can be placed in another glass."

"Oh, did Polly receive other roses?" asked Tom, trying to appear unconcerned, but flushing as he spoke.

"Why, didn't you send them to me? There was no card in the box, but you always send American Beauties, Tom," exclaimed Polly, in surprise.

Tom laughed sheepishly. "Well, I did send them, Polly, but I thought I would make you guess who it could have been. I never dreamed you would give me credit for the roses."

"Why shouldn't I? It would have seemed queer if you hadn't sent flowers, when everyone within a thousand miles, sent boxes and bouquets to me, all yesterday and all day today."

"They did! What for?" asked Tom, wonderingly.

"What for? Why, goodness me! Don't you suppose my friends were *glad* that I wasn't drowned," retorted Polly, in amazement. "Everyone that ever knew me, sent love and flowers, so I never thought it strange that you sent me some, too."

This was a hard slap for Tom, and he winced under the words which denoted that Polly considered him only as one of many friends. Even the roses presented that night, with a little heart-shaped card tied in the center of the group of stems, now seemed useless in his eyes.

But Polly had not removed the roses from the box so she failed to find the heart-shaped card that Tom had spent the whole afternoon in inditing. Anne gave the box to Mrs. Brewster, and when that sensible mother took the roses out, one by one, and found the card, she put it away with the cards that had come with other flowers. She also forgot to mention the card to Polly, so the girl never knew that Tom had written her of his undying love. As Anne replied, for Polly, to all the cards, Tom received the same sort of polite little note as others did, with Polly's name and a "per A.B." signed to it.

Finding Polly so self-possessed that evening, Tom pulled himself together with an effort, and tried to converse on various topics of general interest. Anne eagerly assisted in the conversation, so Polly listened without having much to say.

Tom tried to make Polly talk, too, but without success, so he became silent and

left most of the entertaining for Anne to do. But even she found the task of finding subjects to interest two dumb people rather irksome, and she decided on a *coup*.

“Excuse me for a moment, please, while I see if John has returned with his father.” So saying, Anne ran from the room.

Polly sat up and watched her go as if her protector had turned traitor. She glanced at Tom in a half doubtful manner as if to ask what he would do now with the chaperone out of the way?

But Anne’s absence gave Tom’s morbid senses an inspiration that he acted upon without second thought. It was the best thing he could have done with Polly in this baffling mood.

“I’m returning to Pebbly Pit, in a few days, Polly. I am actually homesick for a sight of the dear old mountains.”

Polly gasped. “Oh, no one told me you were leaving us. Jim told me that he thought you might remain here for several months.”

“Jim? What does that kid know about my affairs?” said Tom, impatiently. “Besides, when did you see Jim?”

“Oh, Jim just dropped in for a minute this afternoon.”

Tom felt the pangs of jealousy because his younger brother had been able to see Polly before she would allow him to call. Then he remembered his rôle to act the part of a platonic brother and friend.

Polly continued: “I think Jim is a dear boy. He is so fond and proud of you, too. Why, when he was here he sat and talked of nothing else but you and your loyalty to family, friends, and your work.”

As Polly spoke, Tom felt ashamed of his momentary jealousy of his brother. When she had finished speaking, he laughed and said: “What a pity Jim sees me through such fine magnifying glasses. The undesirable qualities in my character he never detects.”

“I think it is great to have your family think you are all that is wonderful! I think my family regard me as a saint, and I like it, too,” declared Polly.

“That’s because you are one, Polly dear,” retorted Tom, and the fervor he expressed in his eyes and voice, caused his companion to gasp.

Before Tom could follow up his sudden declaration and make Polly understand

his sentiments for her, she broached another subject of conversation.

“Tom, what has been accomplished at the mine and at Rainbow Cliffs while I was in Europe?”

Tom frowned, but he realized that Polly was more sensible than he. He remembered, once more, what Anne had advised, so he choked the despondent sigh and replied instead, with seeming interest:

“Oh, John and I had another queer bout with some thieves. They were not after the land this time, but they planned to get at the ore and carry off as much of the gold as they could lay hands on. Our old friend, Rattlesnake Mike, caught them red-handed, and now they are serving a term in prison at hard labor.”

“Oh, Tom! I never heard a word of this!” cried Polly, eagerly. “Do tell me about it.”

CHAPTER V

THE RAID ON CHOKO'S FIND MINE

"You remember when we all came East last June to attend John's wedding and see you off for Europe?" asked Tom.

Polly nodded eagerly but said nothing to interrupt him.

"Well, we remained longer than we had planned when we left Pebbly Pit. The friends in New York were so eager to entertain us before we went back home, that the days passed swiftly before we realized we had stayed on ten days longer than we should have done at that time.

"Now to go back to the time when those two rascals tried to jump your claim, the time your father and Mike guided the party when you-all climbed the Indian Trail to Grizzly Slide.

"It seems that crafty clerk who had copied the rough map of the claim you staked on Flat Top and filed in Oak Creek, never gave up hope of some day getting his hands on enough of that gold to help him get away and live comfortably, ever after, on the proceeds.

"When he learned that everyone of the family at Pebbly Pit, would be East for a few weeks, and the mine would be left in charge of Mike and the other employees, he immediately called a few cut-throats together and laid his plans accordingly.

"After the discovery of his perfidy in copying the claim papers and then trying to jump the staked claim, he had been discharged from the office in Oak Creek and, thereafter, no one respectable would employ him. So he hung about the saloon and spent his time in gambling with the miners from Up-Crest, back of Oak Creek station. He found willing confederates in this group of Slavs who hailed the invitation to steal enough gold to enable them to go back to Europe and pose as rich men.

"The whole plot had been kept unusually secret for that species of foreigner, so

no one at Oak Creek knew of the proposed raid. But Mike rode into Oak Creek the morning before the night these rascals planned to act, and with his unusual gift of intuition, he felt that something was working quietly in the minds of the evil-looking men he found whispering over a small table in one corner of the saloon.

“Mike hung around for several hours to try and learn if any plot was hatching against Rainbow Cliffs while the owners were absent; or perhaps these men planned a rush on the mine while he and but few men were on guard. But nothing could be discovered. Feeling assured because of the sly and malicious expressions of the men at the table when they glanced at Mike, as he sat in another corner and pretended to doze, that Hank had some move under way to trouble him and his assistants, made the Indian use splendid judgment and action that day.

“He borrowed the Sheriff’s thoroughbred bloodhound, and asked for a few extra men to accompany him to the cave and stay there until the owners returned, promising them better wages than they could earn at any work in Oak Creek, or on the ranches nearby. To allay suspicion he rode out of town, alone, but he had agreed to wait at Pine Tree Blaze for the extra men.

“The men rode away from town each at a different time, to avoid talk or notice by the loungers at the saloon, and all met at the rendezvous that afternoon. Mike then led the way up the steep trail, and by dark they were in camp.

“This was the second day after we left Pebbly Pit. Mike had warned Jeb of his suspicions, too, and that wary little man had instantly taken steps to protect the Cliffs, by ordering all hands working there to keep away from Oak Creek until the Boss got home. He said that unusual care must be used for a time, to watch during the nights, and keep trespassers out during the day, for fear of raiders.

“The first night in camp on the mountains, Mike never rested a minute, but moved silently from one place to another, with senses keyed for some sign of the rascals. However, that first night passed quietly away. His extra men spent the evening in smoking and playing cards, then they rolled up in their blankets and snored peacefully the night through.

“The next day Mike smiled to himself when the men laughed at his suspicions. They were so far from any settlement and the mountains were so great and silent, that it gave them confidence in the peace and good will with all men.

“The second night the men were again playing cards near the camp-fire. Mike sat on the ledge in front of the cave with the hound stretched out on a slab of

rock at his feet. The giant wooden flume could be faintly discerned, through the smoke of the fire and from the pipes of the men, not twenty feet away from the engines that worked it.

“Suddenly the hound lifted his head and pointed his ears. Mike leaned forward with face turned towards the flume, listening. Then he laid his pipe down on the rock and crawled away upon his hands and knees, followed closely by the hound.

“Do you remember the giant flume we planned to carry off the water of the river that flowed underground; the one into which Nolla and you dropped the torch the day you found the cave?”

Polly silently signified that she remembered, and Tom continued: “Well, we used that flume during the work of mining and washing trash from the ore, but at night, when there was no need for the water to pour through it, we turned the current down the other way on the opposite side of the mountain.

“Mike crept silently across the ledge and peered far down into the black chasm below, to ascertain if the suspicious sounds came from that pit. But the dog crawled noiselessly across the ledge to the flume and there he stood with tense nerves. His ears were erect and his tail was standing out straight behind him, as he stood and glared at the wooden flume.

“As the dog was so well-trained, Mike did not doubt his instinct, but crept over to his side and there waited and listened.

“Had he not been absolutely quiet, the faint sound of something moving inside that flume would have been lost on the outside. But Mike was as keen a hunter as his dog, and they both sensed that something very foreign to water was passing through that flume.

“Accompanying the strange muffled sound inside the flume every few moments, there came a different sound, as if something sharp was being driven into the wood for a hold. Mike figured out that the inside of the flume had been worn so slippery with the flood of waters and sand or pebbles passing through it in torrents, that it was necessary to use steel-pointed staffs and creepers to help anyone in the dangerous ascent.

“As soon as Mike felt convinced that someone was trying a new trick to gain possession of the mine, he crept back to the camp-fire and told the men of the sounds inside the flume. They laughed immoderately at Mike, and declared that he was going mad because of his prohibition since his employers left him in

charge.

“But Mike ordered a few of his most trustworthy miners to guard the cave in front, while the others were sent over the top of the range to keep watch at the opposite entrance to the mine. You’ll remember, Polly, that that was the side where the pit cut the cave in half. We bridged that chasm, you know, and used the short-cut entrance quite often, although the ore was brought out through Choko’s Find.

“Mike then selected several of his brawniest fighters and very quietly led the way to the opening of the flume where the water-gate was located. As they could travel faster on the ground than the men creeping up inside the slippery wooden tube, Mike and his companions reached the water-gate before they heard the suspicious sounds from within the flume.

“He signalled his men to keep absolutely quiet, and then crept out on the lintel of the gate and got a firm purchase on the lever. No one dreamed of his purpose at the moment, and he suddenly seemed to reconsider his plan, for he crept back again and had just reached the trio of curious men, when a sigh of relief was distinctly heard from inside the flume.

“Then a whispering was heard, but not understood. In a few moments a grating sound as if some sharp tool was being used. Mike surmised that they were trying to break a way through the wooden door by which to get out.

“Without further delay, then, Mike threw open the lid in the top of the flume and commanded the trespassers to come forth.

“There was no reply from within, and not a sound was heard after Mike opened the lid. So he called again: ‘Ef yoh no come us wash riber fru dis pipe.’

“Still no reply or sound was heard, so Mike winked at his companions, and gave a fictitious order: ‘Frow water gate open!’

““Stop! Wait a minute!’ shouted a frightened voice from the flume.

“Another voice cursed in the most dreadful way, but soon after Mike’s order to turn in the water, four men managed to emerge from the tube and sit astride it.

“Seeing but four opponents there to fight, the leader of the gang gave a sign, and the daring raiders tried to over-power Mike and his three men. But they had not seen the wolf-hound in the shadows. As they dropped upon the men to fight them, the dog sprang out and drove his fangs deep into one rascal’s throat. He will carry those marks to his last day. It was a wonder he was not killed outright.

“That released Mike and he turned his attention to help his companions free themselves. The dog fought mightily, and after a short but fierce battle, the trespassers were bound and laid on the ground for the night.

“‘What’cha goin’ to do wid’dem, Mike?’ asked one of his men.

“‘Ship ’em down th’ flume, Mike, th’ way they come up,’ laughed another of his men.

“‘So me say, but Mike go jail fer kill man,’ replied the Indian.

“The other men strongly approved of that course of justice, however, and Mike had all he could do to keep them from following their inclination to wash the guilty men down the flume and out into Bear Forks River at the foot of the mountain.

“The next day Mike and his men drove the raiders down the steep trail and left them in the hands of the constable of Oak Creek, to await trial in the County Court. But the captured rascals had boon companions in Oak Creek, and when they learned that four of their group were in prison they started a regular riot.

“They tarred and feathered poor little Jeb the next time he drove in to Oak Creek for mail and supplies, and a few days before we got back home, they made a well-planned raid on the lava mines at Rainbow Cliffs. Not a piece of machinery was left intact, and the great bags of jewels we had waiting for shipment were scattered far and wide by the vandals.

“But the sheriff heard of the proposed visit to Pebbly Pit, and took a posse of men to follow the drunken miners to the Cliffs. Such a battle as ensued, beggars my weak description. The sheriff told us about it when we got home, but his language is not very graphic, nor is it thrilling, so we only heard the bare facts of the fight.

“But, Polly, you must supply with your own vivid imagination, the details that may be missing from my account. When I tell you that the vandals were slowly backed away from the Cliffs and were, eventually, driven to the gully back of the Devil’s Causeway where those two men were engulfed in the slide, the day they came to cajole your father into signing papers for the Cliffs, you can picture their horror when the edge of the great cliff began to crumble in. They could not turn to right or left, as they were hemmed in by the pursuers, and they dared not remain where they were for fear of being swallowed in the quicksand that was already sliding downwards. So they gave up to the sheriff and surrendered their guns.

“That was a bad case, as one of the sheriff’s men had been dangerously wounded and it was feared he would die. All our valuable machinery was ruined and all orders for the delivery of the lava jewels had to be cancelled, or postponed for a year. So the culprits each got twenty years and Oak Creek is quieter, by far, because more than a score of its worst citizens are safely housed in jail.”

As Tom ended his story, Polly unclasped her hands which she had nervously clenched during the recital of the raids on her precious property.

“Oh, Tom! I never dreamed of all the trouble everyone would have because of those precious mines, the day Nolla and I filed our papers at Oak Creek,” gasped Polly.

“No one does dream of these things—they only see the future in rosy hues,” retorted Tom.

“And to think of the work and worry John and you have had in establishing this great undertaking, while I was in Europe taking life easy, and spending money without a thought of how it was being produced at home!” sighed Polly.

“That is as it should be, Polly. You were not squandering the money, but using it in ways to profit yourself for the future. John and I knew, when we started in on this mining venture, that the line would not lay in flower-strewn paths, but that it might force us over all sorts of snags, before we reached success.”

“Well, it is fine of you to talk like this, Tom,” admitted Polly, gratefully. “If it were not for you boys taking an interest in the work, I might as well say ‘good-bye’ to the gold.”

Tom laughed. “Polly, this is so insignificant a work to do for you—just taking an interest in your mine. Some day I hope to prove in some greater way, just what I want to, and can, do for you.”

Tom’s manner and looks again alarmed Polly and she changed the subject adroitly. “Tom, do you like the home in Pebbly Pit? Isn’t it different from living in the city, in these apartments?”

Tom smiled, for he understood. “Yes, it is fine, Polly. It is a real home—with your blessed mother at the ranch-house. I have lived in adobe huts in Arizona, and out on sand wastes in New Mexico, you know, so that Pebbly Pit is great, in comparison.”

“Mother told me how good it was to have Anne and you with her all summer, while I was abroad,” said Polly, after a short interval of silence. “I feel that it was

not so heartless of me to enjoy myself in Europe as I did, so long as mother and father were not lonely and homesick for me.”

“But your mother often said to me, that were it not for Anne’s being with her, she would have cabled you to come home. She had looked forward so anxiously to your spending this vacation at Pebbly Pit,” remarked Tom.

“My! Then I was more fortunate than I dreamed of,” laughed Polly. “I should have hated to leave Eleanor in Europe, with such a wonderful tour before us, and come back home without having done the whole trip.”

Tom had no desire to hear more about that enjoyable tour and the probable acquaintance the girls had made with eligible young men with fascinating titles. So he spoke of his imminent departure for the West.

“I had a talk with Dad and Mr. Dalken today, and they think it best for me to get back at the mines without further delay. The mountain storms will soon be sweeping over the peaks, and winter protection must be completed at the Cave and Flume before then; so I think I shall be leaving in a day, or so.”

Polly murmured some friendly regret at his going so soon.

“But the need of my being at the mines to prepare for winter is not the main cause of my leaving New York, so soon,” began Tom, moodily. “I came East with a definite hope in mind, but so many unforeseen events have happened since I met you, that I haven’t furthered my interests since I left Pebbly Pit.” Tom waited for encouragement from Polly.

Polly did not pursue the subject, however, but she said: “Well, this winter, I have planned to actually *work!*”

“I thought you said you have been working ever since you came to New York,” laughed Tom.

“Yes, at school and in other ways; but now, I propose going to work in Mr. Ashby’s shop. You know, he has a wonderful place on Fifth Avenue where they have every kind of article one needs in the way of ornament or decorating. There is where Eleanor and I managed to get such splendid experience in textiles and other objects familiar to interior decorators.

“Now I propose going to work for him at a stated salary, and giving every morning to the work, this year. In the afternoons I will be free to visit Exhibitions, Museums, hunt up antiques, or just play. Four evenings every week we will attend school and lectures, you know, so there will not be very much

time left in which to write letters.”

“You never did work hard at writing letters,” said Tom, smilingly.

“No, and this winter there will be even less time for them. My friends will have to be satisfied with picture post-cards or telegrams,” laughed Polly, hoping that would answer all expected requests for a correspondence.

“Well,” said Tom, “I only write to people I really want to hear from. And I never ask anyone to write to me unless I take a great deal of pleasure in reading their letters. I never asked you to correspond with me, have I?”

“No-o, I think not,” replied Polly, disconcerted at this announcement. She had felt sure he was going to beg her to write as often as possible, and now this was so different!

“I thought not! You see our likes and pursuits are so different. The very difference in our ways of living now—you with luxurious art in New York, me in the rugged life of a miner in the Rockies, creates a gulf between our ideals. Mine is getting at gold that is the basis of most worldly success, and yours is an ideal and aspiration in art that transcends my common work and business. So we would not know what to say to each other in letters, would we? You would not wish to speak of gold and mining, and I haven’t any idea of art or its ideals.”

What it must have cost Tom to say all this, no one knows, but he was piqued, at last, and so acted his part admirably; and he had the satisfaction of seeing that Polly felt sorry at his words.

“Tom, I always felt sure you were an idealist at soul. It makes me feel a deep regret to learn that you have no such ideals left.”

Tom bid Polly good-by without an outward sign of regret, and so she sat and pondered over that unusual fact, long after he had gone.

CHAPTER VI

POLLY AND ELEANOR BEGIN COLLECTING

Within a week after the westerners had gone back home, matters with Polly and her friends in New York settled down in a smooth current. The Fabians found a commodious house in a refined environment quite near the Ashby's home, and the two girls, Polly and Eleanor, lived with them.

Mr. Fabian temporarily resumed his lectureship at the Art School of Cooper Union, and his two promising pupils, with Dodo Alexander as a new beginner, accompanied him every night that the classes met.

The Alexanders had leased an expensive suite at an apartment hotel near the Fabians, and much to little Mr. Alexander's joy, although much to Mrs. Alexander's disgust, they settled down to a hum-drum life that winter. She sighed as she referred to her life.

"Dear sakes! Here I am with all this money to spend on a fine time, and I have to waste my days sitting around hearing Dodo rave about Corunthian Columns, Ionack Piers, and such foolish stuff. As for Ebenezer! He is just impossible to get along with, since he found what quiet friends he had in the Fabians and the Ashbys!"

The result of such complaints from Mrs. Alexander were soon evidenced by her spending her evenings at theatres, dances at various clubs and places she had forced an entrance to, and in daily shopping trips about the city.

The motley collection of antiques the girls had secured while abroad and had shipped home, arrived in due season and the cases were sent to Mr. Ashby's Shop. The girls were told that the goods had been delivered, and the next day they hastened to the establishment to admire their purchases.

The articles were arranged in one small room, and when the three girls followed Mr. Ashby to the place, they were amazed at the insignificance of their exhibition.

“Why! I thought I had a lot of stuff,” declared Eleanor.

“You see all that you bought. There is your list,” laughed Mr. Ashby, sympathizing in her disillusionment.

“And I thought that chest so much more elaborate—when I chose it in France,” ventured Polly, puckering her forehead.

“I’ll tell you why,” said Mr. Ashby. “When we see these pieces on the other side, the glamour of the places and the stories connected with them, actually charm us more than the objects themselves. After we secure our desires and find we own them, we ship them home and do not see them again until they reach prosaic and business-like New York.

“Meantime, we enhance the beauty and romance of the objects we purchased, by thinking of them in connection with the romance of their past; thus idealizing them in mental pictures, they appear far finer and more alluring than in truth they are.

“When we really view them again, just as you are now doing, the shock of finding them just simple antiques, and so inferior to what we dreamed them, reverses our sentiments about them.

“Now beware, girls! Don’t let this reversal affect you, in the least. These objects are just as valuable and desirable, here, as ever they were over there. It is only your personal view-point that has changed, somewhat. You have not been visiting old collections, or museums abroad, for some weeks now; and the radical change from touring ancient Europe, to rushing about in New York in quests of homes, school, and clothes for the season, has made a corresponding change in your minds.

“In a short time, you will be back in harness and feel the same keen delight in these old possessions as aforetime.”

Polly appreciated the sense of Mr. Ashby’s little lecture, but Eleanor still felt disappointed with her purchases. And Dodo laughed outright at the old pewter she had gone wild over in England, and now scorned in America.

That evening Mr. Fabian explained, carefully, about the times and customs of the purchases that represented certain people. He wove a tale of romance about each piece of furniture the girls had delighted in, and enhanced their interest in the dishes and other small objects they had collected that summer, until the three disappointed owners felt a renewed attraction in the articles.

Mr. Ashby was present, but he said nothing until Mr. Fabian had ended. Then he added in a suggestive manner: "Fabian, what do you say to the girls taking short trips to the country, each week, to hunt up such antiques as can be found in out-of-the-way nooks all through New England?"

The girls perked up their ears at this, and waited to hear Mr. Fabian's reply.

"If they had a car and someone to accompany them on such excursions, I think they would thoroughly enjoy it."

"Dalken has three cars—two limousines, you know; and he told me that he wished he could prevail upon the girls to make use of one, instead of his leaving it in a garage to eat up its value in rent. I thought of this way to give the girls many interesting quests, and make use of the car at the same time, so I mentioned it to him. He was delighted and wants the girls to try the plan," explained Mr. Ashby.

"And I will offer myself as chaperone," hastily added Mrs. Fabian.

"If I could only be included in these outings I should love it," laughed Nancy Fabian.

"You are! Any one who belongs to us, must consider themselves as invited," said Polly, laughingly.

So an outing for Saturday was planned, that night, and Mrs. Fabian and Nancy were to manage the details for the girls.

"We will choose a likely country-side for our first trial," remarked Mrs. Fabian, looking at her husband for advice.

"That's hard sense," laughed he. "But where is such a spot?"

"Somewhere in New England," ventured Nancy.

"That's as ambiguous as 'Somewhere in France,'" retorted Polly.

"Not when you consider that New England begins just the other side of the city-line of Portchester," said Mr. Fabian.

"But there are no antiques to be found in Rye, Portchester or Greenwich, in these days of amateur collectors hunting over those sections," remarked Mrs. Fabian.

"You are not limited to those nearby towns; but you can travel fifty miles in the inland sections in a short time, and stop at simple little farm-houses to inquire, as we did this summer while touring England. I wager you'll come home with enough trophies of war to start you off again, in a day or two," explained Mr.

Fabian.

On Saturday morning, Mrs. Fabian packed an auto-kit with delectable sandwiches, cakes and other dainties, and the party of amateur collectors started out on their quest. The chauffeur smiled at their eagerness to arrive at some place on the Boston Post Road that might suggest that it led to their Mecca. He kept on, however, until after passing through Stamford, then he turned to the left and followed a road that seemed to leave all suburban life behind, in a very short time.

“Where are you taking us, Carl?” asked Polly, curiously.

“On a road that Mr. Ashby told me about. He has never stopped at these places, but he thinks you will find something, along here.”

After several more miles had been reeled off, the eager and watchful passengers in the car glimpsed a low one-story farm-house, with plenty of acreage around it. The two-story box-like addition built at the rear and hooked up to the tiny dwelling that almost squatted on the road itself, seemed to apologise for the insignificance of its mother-house.

“Slow up, Carl. Let’s look this place over,” called Mrs. Fabian.

The automobile came to a stop and the ladies leaned out to inspect the possibilities in such an old place. A girl of ten came around the corner of the box-house and stood gazing at the people in the car.

Carl seemed to be no novice in this sort of outing, and he called to the girl: “Hey! Is your mudder home?”

The girl nodded without saying a word.

“All right! Tell her to come out, a minute.”

Mrs. Fabian hastily interpolated with: “Oh, we’d better go in and ask for a drink, Carl.”

Carl laughed. “Just as you say, Missus. But dese farmer people don’t stand on fussin’. You’s can ask her right out if she wants to sell any old thing she’s got in the attic or cellar.”

“How do you know?” asked Polly, smilingly.

“’Cause Mr. Dalken got the fever of collectin’ after you folks went to Urope. And many a time I’ve sat and laughed at his way of getting things.”

“Oh! That’s why you knew where to drive us, eh?” said Eleanor.

“No, ’cause he never come this road, yet. He mapped it out, once, and said he would try it some day. That’s why he told me which road to foller today.”

The girl had disappeared but was coming back by this time. She climbed upon the picket gate and hung over it, as she called out: “My ma’s kneadin’ bread an’ can’t get out, this minit. She says if you want somethun, fer you to come in and see *her!*”

This invitation sufficed for all five to instantly get out of the car and lift the latch on the gate. The girl never budged from her perch, but permitted the visitors to swing her back as the gate was opened.

“Go right to the side door,” advised she, holding on to the pickets.

As invited, the collectors went to the side door and Mrs. Fabian knocked timidly. “Come in!” said a shrill voice from within.

The lady of the house had plump arms elbow-deep in dough. She glanced up and nodded in a business-like manner. “Did yer come fer fresh aigs?” asked she, punching the dough positively.

“If you have any for sale, I should like to take a dozen,” returned Mrs. Fabian, politely. Polly and Dodo stared in surprise at their chaperone, but Eleanor and Nancy comprehended at once, why this reply was made.

“Wait a minute, will yuh, and I’ll get this job off my hands afore I go fer the aigs.”

Eleanor laughed humorously as she remarked: “It looks like dough on your hands.”

The woman laughed appreciatively, while the others smiled. “That’s right! It’s dough, all right. I s’pose you folks are from nearby, eh?”

“Not very far away,” returned Mrs. Fabian. “We are out on a pleasure jaunt this morning, but I saw your farm and so we decided to ask your little girl if you were in.”

“That’s right! I tole my man to put a sign out on the letter-box fer passers-by to see how I had aigs to sell; but he is that procrastinatin’—he puts off anythun’ ’til it’s too late.”

The woman was scraping the bits of dough from her hands as she spoke, and this done, she sprinkled flour over the top of the soft lump in the pan and covered it with a piece of old linen cloth. As she took it to a warm corner behind the stove,

she added: “Do you’s know! Abe was late fer our weddin’. But I knew him for procrastinatin’, even in them days, so I made everyone wait. He come in an ’nour behind time, sayin’ he had to walk from his place ’cause his horse was too lame to ride. That’s Abe all over, in everythin’.”

The house-keeper finished her task and turned to her callers. “Now then! Do yuh like white er brown aigs?”

“White ones, please,” returned Mrs. Fabian.

The woman went to the large storeroom off the kitchen and counted out a dozen eggs in a box. When she came back she held them in one hand while waiting for payment, with outstretched other hand.

“That’s a fine sofa you’ve got in the next room,” remarked Mrs. Fabian, pretending not to notice the open palm.

“Yeh, d’ye know, I paid fifteen dollars jus’ fer that red plush alone?” declared she, going to the door and turning to invite her visitors to come in. The box of eggs was forgotten for the time.

The girls followed Mrs. Fabian to the best room that opened from the large kitchen, and to their horror they saw that the sofa referred to was a hideous Victorian affair of walnut frame upholstered in awful red mohair plush.

But Mrs. Fabian made the most of her optics the moment she got inside the room. Thus it happened that she spied a few little ornaments on the old mantel-shelf.

“What old-fashioned glass candle-sticks,” said she, going over to look at the white-glass holders with pewter sockets.

“Ain’t they awful! I’ve told Abe, many a time, that I’d throw them out, some day, and get a real nice bankit lamp fer the center table,” returned the hostess.

“And won’t he throw them away?” asked Mrs. Fabian, guilelessly.

“He says, why should we waste ’em, when they comes in so handy, in winter, to carry down cellar fer apples. He likes ’em cuz he onny paid a quarter fer ’em an’ a glass pitcher, at an auction, some miles up the road. But that wuz so long ago we’ve got our money’s wuth outen them. Now I wants a brass lamp an’ he says I’m gettin’ scandalous in my old age—awastin’ money on flim-flams fer the settin’ room. He says lamps is fer parlor use.”

Her repressed aspirations in furnishings made the woman pity herself, but Mrs.

Fabian took advantage of the situation.

“I’ve needed a pair of candle-sticks for some time, and I’ll exchange a lamp for your auction bargain which you say has paid for itself, by this time.”

“What! Don’t you want your lamp?” exclaimed the lady, aghast at such a statement.

“Well, I have no further use for one, and it would look lovely on your marble-top table,” returned Mrs. Fabian.

“Well, well! How long will it take you to get it from home?” asked the woman, anxiously.

“If you really wish to get rid of the candle-sticks and jug, I’ll leave the quarter you paid originally for them and go for the lamp at once. Maybe I can be back in an hour’s time. I’ll pay for the eggs, too, and leave them until I come back,” explained Mrs. Fabian, graciously.

Without wasting an extra word or any precious time, the owner of the rare old candle-sticks wrapped them in a bit of newspaper and went for the glass pitcher. Mrs. Fabian had no idea of the extra item being worth anything, but she included it, more for fun, than anything else. But once they saw the tiny glass jug with Sheffield grape-design on its sides, they all realized that here was a wonderful “find.”

Mrs. Fabian seemed uneasy until she had the paper package in her hand and had paid the twenty-five cents for the three pieces of glassware. Then Eleanor made a suggestion.

“Why couldn’t we wait here, Mrs. Fabian, and look at some of the old china the lady has in this cupboard, while you go for the lamp. There’s no sense in all of us going with you.”

“That’s a good plan, if Mrs.——” Nancy waited for the lady to mention her name.

“I’m Mrs. Tomlinson,” said she, politely.

“If Mrs. Tomlinson is not too busy to show us her dear old house,” added Nancy.

“All right, girls. Is that satisfactory?” asked Mrs. Fabian. “How does it appeal to you, Mrs. Tomlinson?”

“Oh, now that that bread is risin’, I’ve got time to burn,” declared the lady, independently.

“All right. We’ll visit here while you get the lamp,” agreed the girls, deeply concerned to know where their chaperone would find a lamp such as Mrs. Tomlinson craved.

Mrs. Fabian left, and invited the child swinging on the gate to drive with her as far as Stamford. The little girl, pleased at the opportunity, ran for her bonnet and told her ma of the wonderful invitation.

Mrs. Tomlinson signified her consent to Sarah’s going, and then gave her full attention to showing her company the house. “You musn’t look at the dirt everywhere, ladies,” began she, waving a hand at the immaculate corners and primly-ordered furniture.

“Now come and see my parlor, girls. I’m proud of that room, but we onny use it Sundays, when Sarah plays the melodian and we sings hymns. Now an’ then some neighbors come in evenin’s, fer a quiltin’-bee in winter; and I uses it fer a minister’s call, but there ain’t no way to het the room an’ it’s all-fired cold fer visitin’.”

Polly thought of the ranch-house at Pebbly Pit as Mrs. Tomlinson described the cold winter evenings, and she smiled at the remembrance of how she used to undress in the kitchen beside the roaring range-fire, and then rush breathlessly into her cold little room to jump between the blankets and roll up in them to sleep.

Eleanor laughed outright at the picture of a visiting dominie sitting on the edge of a chair with his toes slowly freezing, while his parishioners tried in quaking tones and with teeth chattering to entertain him.

But Mrs. Tomlinson paid no heed to their laughter, for she was in her glory. “Ain’t this some room?” demanded she, pulling the shades up to give enough light to admire the place.

A stained cherry parlor suite of five pieces upholstered in cheap satin damask, with a what-not in one corner, and an easel holding a crayon portrait of Abe and his bride at the time of their wedding, in the other corner, graced this best room. A few cheap chromos flared against the gorgeous-patterned wall-paper, and a mantel-shelf was crowded with all sorts of nick-nacks and ornaments. Polly seemed drawn to this shelf, the first thing, while the other girls glanced around the parlor and felt like laughing.

“Won’t you sit down, a minute?” invited the hostess, but her tone suggested fear lest they soil the damask with their dust-coats.

Polly had made a discovery in that moment she had to look over the motley collection on the shelf.

“This is a nice tray you have standing against the wall,” said she, using Mrs. Fabian’s tactics to interest the hostess.

“Yes, that’s another auction bargain. When Abe fust got it, the day I went fer that oak side-board, I got mad. But I’ve used it a lot sence then, fer lemonade and cookies, when comp’ny comes to visit all afternoon. And I feels made up, *I kin* tell you, when I brings that tray in like all society does.” Mrs. Tomlinson chuckled to herself.

Polly examined the tray and believed it a rare one. It was oval in shape, and had a stencilled rim in a conventional design. The coloring was exquisite, and the central design was a wonderful basket over-flowing with gorgeous fruit. The touches of gold on the decorations was the beauty-point of the unusual object.

“I’ve always wanted just such a tray, too. I wonder if you know anyone who has one and will sell it to me. I’d drive a long ways to go to an auction such as you say you attended, when you bought this tray,” said Polly, trying to act indifferent.

“Laws-ee, Miss! I see’d trays sold at mos’ every country auction I goes to. I’d jes’ as soon sell that one to you, if you like it, but maybe you’d think I was askin’ too much if I was to tack on the cost of time I lost that day. I never got a chanst to bid on the oak side-board, ’cause a city man felt so mad at Abe fer buyin’ the tray, that he run up the side-board out of spite, when he found we wanted it. Ef he’d onny a said he wanted the old tray he’d cud have had it an’ welcome. But he never told us. The neighbor who finally got the side-board laffed an’ told Abe why the man did the trick. The man told him he’d double-crossed us that way.”

Polly would have offered the woman the full value of the fine stencilled tray, but Eleanor hurriedly spoke for her.

“How much was the tray with the cost of time tacked on?”

“Well, it won’t be fair to charge *all* afternoon, ’cuz I had a good time with my neighbors what met at that vendue. But Abe lost three hours’ work on the corn that day and that is wuth sixty cents an’ ’nour, anyway. Tack that on to thirty-five cents fer the tray, an’ you’ve got it.”

Mrs. Tomlinson started counting laboriously on her fingers and ultimately reached the same total as the girls had found five minutes before. So Polly paid over the munificent sum to the lady’s delight, and took possession of the tray.

“Ef I onny had some other old things you’d like to get, I would almost have enough money to buy a swell glass lemonade set I saw down to Stamford one day. It had a glass tray under it and a dozen painted glasses and a fine glass pitcher—all fer two ninety-eight.”

Almost before the lady had ended her words of her secret ambition, the four girls had pounced upon various things found on the shelf. Eleanor had an old glass toddy-mug with a lid, which was used for a match-holder in the parlor.

Nancy selected a small oil lamp with a brass base and stem, and a lovely-shaped glass shade. Mrs. Tomlinson informed her it was another auction bargain that cost fifty cents. Being so expensive they put it on the parlor mantel instead of using it.

Dodo yearned to possess an old afghan she saw on the settee of the suite of furniture, but she feared to say so. Finally she summoned courage enough to offer the lady a price for it that caused Mrs. Tomlinson a failure about the heart.

“My goodness’ sakes alive! That’s ten times more’n the wool ever cost when the thing was *new*. Take it! Take it, quick, ef you really mean it!”

The girls laughed wildly, for Dodo took it quickly and paid the price offered to the consternation of the sales-woman. “Well,” gasped she, at last, “you must have some family-past what has to do with knitted covers, is all I can say to explain you!”

By the time the inspection of the house was over, Mrs. Fabian returned with just such a brass pedestal banquet lamp as Mrs. Tomlinson had secretly envied and long hoped for. Such joy and pleasure as she took in selecting a clean crocheted mat to spread on the cold marble slab of the center table, and then place thereon her vision come true, was worth all the trouble Mrs. Fabian had had in finding the lamp at a second-hand shop at Stamford; but later when that wise collector examined her old candle-sticks and pitcher, she felt a hundred times repaid for the lamp—as she truly was.

The merry collectors started home that afternoon, after enjoying the picnic luncheon beside a brook in the woods back of Stamford, with their hopes pitched high for future successes in collecting.

Mr. Dalken heard from Carl about the successful quest that day, and telephoned to the Fabians, that evening. The Ashbys had hurried over when they heard of the pieces secured at the farm-house, and were present when Mr. Dalken questioned the girls all about their “find.”

“Now we’re dying to start again, Mr. Dalken, and hunt up other trophies,” said Polly, in conclusion.

CHAPTER VII

A REVOLUTIONARY RELIC HUNT

So delighted were the amateur collectors with the result of their first search for antiques, that they planned another trip a few days later. Carl could not drive the car for them, as Mr. Dalken had invited a number of business friends who were in New York for a few days to go out on Long Island with him, for the day. He took the seven-passenger car and Carl for the drive, so the girls had to be contented with the smaller car. But neither Mr. Dalken nor Carl knew that the girls proposed going alone. They believed Mr. Fabian or Mr. Ashby's chauffeur would drive the car.

Eleanor bragged about her ability to drive an automobile and the girls knew from experience how well Dodo could drive, so the outing was planned without any grown-up being consulted about the driving or chaperoning.

"Did not Carl have a road-map in the side-pocket of the car, the day he drove us to Stamford?" asked Polly.

"Yes, but the car is in the garage, and the map with it," returned Eleanor.

"Daddy has a road-map. I'll get his," remarked Ruth Ashby, who had been invited to be one of the party this trip.

"Then bring it around tonight, Ruth, when you come to plan about the route we ought to choose for this outing," said Polly.

Ruth hurried home and immediately after dinner, that evening, she found the map in the library desk-drawer and tucked it in her pocket. As she ran through the front hall she called to her mother:

"I'm going over to the Fabians for a little talk, Mummy."

"But, Ruth, you just came from there a few moments before dinner," came from Mrs. Ashby.

"Oh, I didn't visit that time! I only stopped in with the girls to wait and see if

Nancy had a map they all need. Now I'm going to visit," explained Ruth.

Mrs. Ashby laughed at a girl's interpretations of a call and Ruth ran out.

Their pretty heads were closely bending over the map, when Mr. Fabian passed the living-room door and stopped a moment to consider the picture they made under the soft-shaded light. He went on to his private den without saying a word to distract their attention from (as he thought) their books of learning.

"Now listen here, girls!" exclaimed Nancy, tracing a line on the map. "Polly doesn't know much about this end of the United States, and Eleanor doesn't know much more than Polly does but I am supposed to be well informed about Westchester County, having lived there when I was a little girl. So I can tell you something about this road I've traced."

The four girls lifted their heads and listened eagerly.

"You know Dobb's Ferry and its vicinity was there in the days of the Revolution, and Washington camped at that town. Even the Headquarters he occupied is to be seen as it was at that time. This road, running easterly from Dobb's Ferry, is the old turnpike road used by the army as it marched towards the Hudson.

"Now this is what I say! Why shouldn't there be lots of old houses along that road, or in that locality, that were there during Washington's time? And if standing still, why shouldn't there be old furniture, or odd bits, to be found in them?"

Eleanor instantly caught Nancy up on one of her phrases. "Naturally the houses would be standing still—you wouldn't want them to be dancing a tango, would you?"

"Oh, pshaw, Nolla!" scorned Nancy, in disgust at such a poor attempt to joke, "you know, well enough, what I mean."

The other girls laughed at Nancy, and Polly added: "Well, what is your plan?"

"I say, let's drive along the River Road as far as Dobb's Ferry, and then turn off to this road and venture on any country road we find, that has old-fashioned houses which look as if they were built in 1776."

"That sounds thrilling!" laughed Eleanor.

Her companions refused to smile this time, so she sat grinning at Nancy, as if waiting to attack her again.

"I think that plan will answer as well as anything Nolla has proposed, don't

you?” asked Nancy.

“Yes, we’ll try your scheme out, Nan. But you’ll have to be the guide through the country, as we haven’t the least idea of the lay of the land,” said Dodo.

“We’ll succeed splendidly, as long as we have this map,” promised Nancy.

The girls pictured many rare treasures added to their collection after this proposed trip, and when it was time for Ruth to go home, each girl had chosen rare and wonderful objects to be found in these imaginary Colonial home-steads they expected to visit on the morrow.

Classes had to be attended to before excursions could be enjoyed and then it was lunch-time; but after that they finally started on this trip.

Mrs. Fabian was out with Mrs. Ashby, so the girls met no one who would question them, when they were ready to leave. Ruth and Dodo called at the Fabians and they all went to the large garage where Mr. Dalken kept his automobiles; and the man, having had instructions to give the car to these young friends of the owner, whenever they wanted it, said nothing but backed the car out to the street for them.

The five girls drove away in high spirits, for they were eager to harvest all the marvelous antiques they had ever read or heard of, that might be scattered throughout the country-sides wherever General Washington had made a camp for his army.

Dodo was an excellent driver but she had no New York license, and the girls had forgotten all about that necessity. So the car was speeding along the boulevards at about twenty-five miles an hour, when a traffic policeman in Yonkers held up his hand to stop the northward-bound travelers.

Dodo had just turned her head momentarily to send a quizzical look at Polly who sat in the back seat, and so failed to see the raised hand. The car therefore ran across the street and at the same time, a low-built racer shot along the right of way and the two noses rammed each other, although both drivers used the emergency brakes.

The girls screamed with fright at the unexpected shock and the dreadful jolt they received when the cars collided. And two young college students cursed politely and scowled fearfully at the “crazy girl-drivers” who never knew which way they were going. But the poor cars suffered the most from this conflict. Headlights were smashed, fenders and mud guards were so dented in as to look pitiful, while the front wheels of both cars were interlocked in such a way that

they could not be separated.

This cause held up all traffic on both streets and annoyed the officer so that he threatened a wholesale arrest. He asked the names of both drivers. The young man gave his as “John Baxter, New York.” His license number was taken, and he was asked for his permit. He showed it without hesitation, and the girls gazed at each other in dismay. They had forgotten about such a need!

The officer came over to Dodo’s side.

“What’s your name?”

“Dodo Alexander,” stammered she, forgetting her full name.

“Humph! Baptized that name?”

“Yes—no, oh NO. I never was baptized, I reckon.”

“Humph—a heathen, I see!” snarled the policeman. “Well, where do you live, or where’d you hail from?”

Eleanor had been grinning at the officer’s reply, and now she could not withstand the temptation to answer: “From the Cannibal Isles.”

The crowd standing about the two cars, laughed—all but the policeman. He scowled at Eleanor and said: “Be careful, young lady, or I’ll take you along for contempt of court.”

“But you are not arresting *me*, and this is not Court,” argued Eleanor.

“Oh, goodness me! Is he going to arrest me?” cried Dodo.

“If you don’t answer my questions promptly, I’ll arrest you,” returned the officer, severely.

“Well, I am from Denver, Colorado, where folks don’t fuss like you do in the East, just because you cross a street to get to the other side!” declared Dodo, in self-justification.

“From Denver! Got a New York license to drive?” said he.

“No, I haven’t, but I’ve driven all over England and the Continent this Summer—as these girls will tell you. They were in the party.”

“It’s nothing to me whether you drove up the Matterhorn and down the other side; as long as you can’t show me a plain old American license, you’ll have to pay the costs.”

“How much is it?” quickly asked Dodo, taking her purse out to settle the bill.

“I don’t know. You’d better follow me to the police station and we’ll see.”

Dodo was handed a little paper which she read aloud to her horrified companions, and thus, finding themselves arrested, they meekly tried to follow the blue-jacket. But the cars had not been disentangled, although both boys from the racer were doing their utmost to clear the way.

As the storm raised in the hearts of the two students by the carelessness of Dodo abated, both boys realized how pretty and helpless the five girls were, so they began to feel sorry for them. Besides this, the front wheels were now divorced and the two cars backed away from each other to give room for the congested traffic to pass.

“Dear me,” wailed Dodo, “what will Mr. Dalken say when he hears about his car! I don’t mind going to jail or being made to pay a hundred dollars fine, but to break up his automobile the first time I drove it, and get his license tag into trouble—that is terrible!”

Polly laughed. “Not Dalken’s license tag, but his name—in the papers. That’s what comes of being so well-known in New York.”

“And the newspaper men will be sure to say that a party of joy-riders stole his car to have a little jaunt in the country, I suppose,” added Eleanor, teasingly.

One of the good-looking young students now came over to the girls and lifted his cap. “Did I understand you to say this is Mr. Dalken’s car?”

Five girls glowered at him. Polly snapped out: “Are you a reporter from a city paper?”

John Baxter laughed. “No, I am his protégé. Mr. Dalken is the executor of my father’s estate and I was just on my way to the city, to visit him, this evening.”

“Oh how nice! We know Mr. Dalken very well, too. He is one of our best friends,” returned Polly, eagerly.

Nancy Fabian would have been more reticent had she been spokeswoman for the girls; but both boys were so pleasant, now, that they were introducing themselves to the girls, hence she said nothing.

“We’ll go with you to the station house and see that the sergeant behaves himself,” suggested John.

The girls felt very grateful to this needed friend, and the boys started their car

after the policeman, the girls following in their damaged car that bumped and jolted on one side.

When the inspector learned that not one of the five girls had a license to drive a car in New York State, and that the car belonged to someone else, he fined Dodo and gave her a good scolding to boot.

“This time I’ll let you off easy, as you are green in the East. But don’t let it happen again, or you’ll be sorry. Apply for a permit to drive, as soon as you get home, young lady, and then get a book of rules on traffic, and learn it by heart.”

Dodo meekly paid the fine, and the young people left the room with lighter hearts than they had entered it. Both cars had to be taken to a garage and put into running shape again. Meantime there would be two hours of waiting on their hands, and seven young folks with impatient blood in their veins to kill that time.

“I’m sorry you ladies have been deprived of your pleasure drive, but I might suggest a little consolation if you ever deign to go to the Movies,” said John Baxter, politely.

“There’s a good show up the street in that large Picture Theatre,” added his friend Andrews.

“We love movies—when they are good,” ventured Eleanor.

“What do you think, Nan? Shall we go?” asked Polly.

“Oh yes! it will be awful—waiting about this place with nowhere to go other than the Movies, as you say,” returned Nancy.

So the two young men escorted the five girls to the show where they forgot their recent troubles in watching Harold Lloyd do his best to break his neck.

Dodo paid the bill at the garage for both cars, even though the boys insisted that they pay for their own damages. But she replied: “No, the insurance company will have to settle eventually.”

The good-natured way in which Dodo accepted the situation more than convinced the boys that these girls were “bricks” all right! It was now past five, and the cars were ready to go again, but the “collectors” found they had to go back to the city for that time, without having seen as much as a shadow of an antique.

“What will you girls do about getting home?” asked Andrews.

“Why, drive, of course!” returned Dodo.

“But you can’t—you haven’t a license. Neither has any one of the other girls,” explained Jack.

“Oh, we never thought of that!” exclaimed Polly, perplexed.

“I have one,” suggested Andrews. “I can get in your car, and one of you girls can drive with Baxter, if you will. That will solve the problem.”

“All right,” assented Dodo, getting out of her seat to allow Andrews to get in.

“Which one wants to drive with Jack?” asked Andrews.

Neither girl answered, and not as much as by a tremor of the eye-lid did either show how delighted she would have been to sit beside the handsome young man and skim along the road to New York.

Baxter laughed heartily, and Andrews added: “I never dreamed that *no* one would care to drive with him. I’m sorry, Jack, but you’ll have to go alone.”

“Not if I know it!” retorted Baxter, quickly. “I can’t choose when all are so desirable, but we can cast lots to see who will be my companion.”

The girls thought this most exciting, and when Andrews had shown the slip of paper that would be the lucky draw, and then had folded and shaken the slips well in his cap, the girls drew. As each girl opened her scrap of paper to find it was blank, and then watched the others try, there was great laughter and anxious waiting. Finally Polly opened her slip and found she had drawn the lucky one.

“Ha! Isn’t Jack Baxter lucky, though!” laughed Eleanor. “Not only gets the cleverest girl in the crowd, but the prettiest one, too!”

“Stop your nonsense, Nolla! How many times do I have to tell you to allow me to live in peace, without so much of your chaffing!” exclaimed Polly, impatiently.

Everyone laughed merrily at Polly’s retort, and Baxter looked admiringly at the flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. He was most gallant in assisting Polly into the “boat” as he called it, and then he jumped in beside her.

Eleanor sat beside Andrews in the other car, and entertained him with a highly colored story of Polly and her home in Pebbly Pit. Before they reached the Fabian home in New York, young Andrews pictured the enormous wealth of “Choko’s Find” gold mine, and the marvellous beauty of the lava jewels found in Rainbow Cliffs on the ranch. To think that one girl should be lucky enough to own both such money-producers!

Shortly after dinner that evening, Mr. Dalkeon telephoned the girls and told them to come over to his apartment for a party. He explained that he had two nice little boys visiting him, and he was at a loss to know how to entertain them so that they would care to come again, another day. Remembering how well Polly and her friends managed other boys, he felt sure that they could help him now.

Polly laughed in reply, and said: "Oh yes! If one of those boys now visiting you, is anything like Jack Baxter who drove me home, this afternoon, we won't have any trouble in amusing them."

But Polly never told Mr. Dalkeon that Jack declared himself so deeply in love with her, before she had been in his car ten minutes, that she had all she could do to keep him at the wheel instead of placing an arm about her, and thus stalling the engine in the ditch alongside the main road to the city.

That evening, after the girls returned from Mr. Dalkeon's party, Eleanor remarked: "My goodness! Polly has another scalp to hang to her belt of trophies. If she keeps on piercing hearts, as she has done this past year, she'll have to discard some of her old scalps and loan them to us, to make room for her new ones."

But Polly sniffed loftily at such foolishness, and made no reply.

CHAPTER VIII

ANOTHER ATTEMPT AT COLLECTING

Although the trip planned for the Dobb's Ferry territory had ended so disastrously, the girls were not discouraged. Dodo secured a license without any difficulty, and was equipped to drive Mr. Dalken's car without being fined a second time. But the wise owner of the car considered it wiser to send Carl out on these excursions, instead of trusting to Fate to bring the girls back home again without broken bones or a damage suit.

Mr. Fabian had had a brilliant idea, too, after he heard his wife's story of the country auction where the old antiques had been secured by Mrs. Tomlinson. He suggested that they subscribe to several country papers, both daily and weekly, and in that way they would learn of any vendue advertised in its columns.

Eagerly following his advice, the four girls—Nancy was not interested in antiques but was willing to go around with her friends when they hunted for them—subscribed for the Yonkers papers, the White Plains papers, several weeklies in New Jersey, and others, in order to learn of any country auctions advertised for the following week.

Through this medium, they read of a country sale advertised for the following Thursday, to take place at an old farm home-stead way back in the hills of Westchester. The items mentioned included a mahogany four-poster bed, and other old bits.

Polly and Eleanor had not attended an auction since the days in Paris, and neither of them had ever heard of, or witnessed a back-farm country auction, so they were not prepared for what they really experienced.

Carl was detailed to drive them, that day, and Mrs. Fabian escorted them, in the seven-passenger car. They took the turnpike road as far as White Plains and then turned to the left to follow a country road that would lead past the farm.

The sale was advertised for eleven o'clock, but the girls did not arrive on the

premises until twelve. Still no auctioneer was to be seen or heard. Groups of farmers stood around, gossiping about their crops that season, and their wives sat indoors exchanging notes on canning, new neighbors, or babies.

Polly gazed curiously at the types assembled for that sale, and whispered to Eleanor: "Wouldn't you say these farmers had been picked up from Oak Creek ranches and dropped down here in this front door-yard?"

Eleanor smiled and nodded. Then she said in a low voice: "They don't look as if they were here to buy. We seem to be the only folks here with a pocket-book."

A young farmer who had been leaning against the old well now came forward to welcome the strangers who stood looking about.

"I be the clerk fer the auctionair, but he hain't come, yit. His baby swallowed a shet safety-pin an' they had an orful time wid ippycak tryin' to git it that way. Now the doctor's thar sayin' that stuff is all wrong. He'll git the pin, all right, 'cause I swallowed a quarter, onct, and he got it, but it costed me a hull dollar extra to pay him fer his docterin'. Ye's kin go in and peer aroun' to see ef you wants anything."

Mrs. Fabian expressed her sympathy for the parents of the baby and said she knew just how frightened the mother must be.

"Not much!" was the clerk's astonishing reply. "She's young Kit Morehouse what ain't got a grain of sense in her bean. This baby's mother died when it was a week old, and Lem had to have someone look after it. Thar warn't no sensible woman about what would hev him, 'cause he don't make salt fer a red herrin', seein' his professhun is auctionin' an' folks ain't sellin' out like-as-much as they ust to be, years ago. But this crazy Kit was onny nineteen, with no fam'ly, er no payin' job, so she hired out to take keer of the kid. Don't it allus end like this? The gal marries the father an' gets mad cause another woman's kid is cryin' around!"

The girls were intensely interested in this bit of local gossip, but Mrs. Fabian thought they had heard enough about "Kit," so she bid the clerk good-by and started for the low one-story-and-a-half house.

The interior presented a different appearance from the home of Mrs. Tomlinson's. Every conceivable object ever used in the house was brought out and placed in the front rooms. Women and children sat about on various sorts of seats, waiting for the sale to begin. As most of the assembly were neighbors and acquainted with each other, the entrance of Mrs. Fabian and her girls caused

quite a surprise.

Audible whispers of “Who air they?” and “Where did they come from?” or “What d’ye s’pose they come to bid on?” were heard on all sides as the strangers passed through the “settin’ room.”

The moment Mrs. Fabian’s party left the clerk, outside, he hurried over to the automobile where Carl sat enjoying a quiet smoke.

“Howde,” began Abner Clark, the clerk.

Carl removed his pipe and nodded nonchalantly.

“Do you-all hail from about these parts?” asked Abner.

“I should say *not!*” declared Carl, emphatically.

“From whar abouts are you?” continued the clerk.

“New York City—and that’s some town, let me tell you.”

“Yeh—so I’ve heran say. How did yeh get to come here to this vendue?” persisted Abner.

“I don’t know—I’m only the chauffeur. Why don’t you ask the ladies if you are so anxious to know?” Carl was growing angry.

“All right—no harm meant,” replied Abner, soothingly, as he turned away.

Carl resumed his pipe, and Abner strolled over to the group of men sitting on wheel-barrows, ploughs, chicken-coops, etc. With a furtive look over his shoulder, to make sure the city driver was not listening, Abner began to explain to his interested friends who the strangers were.

But he had not quite ended his tale before an old buggy drove up and the auctioneer got out. He glanced over the assembled farmers with an appraising eye, and then carefully hitched the old nag to a tree. This done, he broke off a great chunk of tobacco from a cake kept in a blue paper, and popped it into his mouth.

Abner walked over to the white-washed fence to greet his superior. “How’s the kid?” were his first words.

“All right, now. He didn’ swaller the pin, after all. The doctor found it down inside his shirt, an’ it cost me a dollar besides all that good mustard and eppicac, fer nuthin’!”

“Well, well!” sympathized Abner, not knowing what would be best to say in

such a delicate case.

“Did yuh keep all the folks about when I sent word over?” continued the auctioneer.

“Shure! An’ we’ve got some swell city buyers, this time.”

“City! You don’t mean anyone from the city’d want to buy old Morrissey’s trash?” exclaimed Lemuel, in disbelief.

“I dunno what they want, but thar’s their man what steers the autermobile,” and Abner directed a thumb over his left shoulder.

“Wall, wall! Come along; we’ll hurry up to get some of their coin afore they git tired awaitin’!” declared the wise man, as he made haste to reach the house.

Mrs. Fabian and the girls had made a cursory visit to the rooms on the ground floor, and while they stood in the small kitchen examining various old dishes and glassware in the cupboard, Polly spied a very narrow staircase leading to the attic.

“I’m going up to see if there’s anything up there,” said she. So without another word, she ran up the creaky steps.

The girls heard her walking overhead, and then heard her pull a heavy object across the floor. In another minute she came racing down the steps at a break-neck speed, her face all streaked with dirt and her dress covered with cob-webs and the dust of ages.

“Oh, folks! Do come up and see what I found in an old box under the eaves!”

They needed no second invitation, and soon all were up beside the box. There were many other empty boxes standing about and in some way this particular box had escaped the attention of Abner, who had taken the inventory of the contents of the house and barns.

Polly had removed the first object on top of the box which was an old woven coverlet in rare colorings of blue and white. In one corner was the name of the weaver and the date it was completed. Polly was not aware that old woven coverlets were considered very desirable by collectors, but she had read the date which showed the spread was more than a hundred years old, so she judged it was worth bidding on at the coming sale.

Directly under this woven coverlet was a white spread. It was very old and torn at the corners, but the rest of it was in good condition. Mrs. Fabian saw at once

that it was a spread of the finest candle-wicking style she had ever seen. It must have dated back to the early part of the eighteenth century.

Under this white bed-spread were small bundles of hand-spun linen towels, yellow with age but in perfect condition as to wear. But the greatest find of all, in this box, were the old brasses in the bottom.

Wrapped in papers to keep them clean, Polly found a long-handled warming-pan; a set of fire-irons—the tongs, shovel, and andirons of the famous “acorn-top” design; and a funny old foot-warmer. A pair of ancient bellows was the last article found in the box, but the leather was so dry and old that pieces fell out when Polly tried to make the bellows work.

“I must go right down and tell that clerk about these wonderful things. They must have overlooked them when they listed all the other articles in the house,” said Mrs. Fabian.

Eleanor held her back and said: “You’d better not tell him the news in that excited manner. He’ll understand at once, that these things are desirable, and then we’ll have to pay well for them.”

“You’re right, Nolla!” laughed Nancy, and her mother admitted as much.

“Why couldn’t we just take them down to the kitchen and pile them on the table. No one will know that we want them, and should anyone ask what we were doing up here and by what right we carried them down from the attic, we can honestly say that Abner said we could go over the house and see if there was anything we liked to buy,” said Polly, with a collector’s instinct for not paying extortionate prices for what she wanted.

The girls laughed, but each one caught up some object, and having gathered all safely in their arms, they started down. The kitchen, being the least desirable room to visit in the farmer’s wife’s judgment, no one was there when Mrs. Fabian and the girls returned to it. Their discoveries were piled on the old drop-leaf table, and they grouped themselves at the doorways to keep guard over the prizes.

A loud voice was shouting at the open front door, saying: “This are the terms of the sale: Everything bid on ’s got to be paid fer the same day and removed from the premises in twenty-four hours—all but th’ barn-stock. You’s kin take forty-eight hours fer them. I expecks everyone to pay cash fer anything they buy, ’cause I got enough trouble at that last sale at Hubbells’ when a lot of you folks bid on stuff an’ then went home an’ left it on my hands. Hubbell’s son had to

give 'em away at last, and I lost all that commission. So, none of that, at this vendue!”

Some of the assembled people looked guilty, and the auctioneer rode rough-shod over their feelings. “Anudder thing: Don’t haggle on a cent! When I call out a decent bid on a thing, raise it a nickel, at least, if you wants it. This cent business—and at Hubbell’s vendue, some of you’s even bid half a cent at a time—makes me tired! If a thing ain’t wuth a cent more to yeh, then let it go to the other feller what wants it!”

The girls laughed at this frank statement of *sense*, and Lemuel turned to see who had appreciated his speech. When he saw the city people Abner had mentioned, he felt warmed all through, for he felt sure he would earn some commissions that day.

“Our first number is in th’ kitchen. Ab, kin we get in thar, er had we better hold the stuff out here?” asked Lemuel.

“I can’t hold up the kitchen stove, kin I?” asked Abner, in an injured tone.

The people laughed heartily, Mrs. Fabian’s party joining more appreciatively than anyone.

“All right,” answered the auctioneer, in a matter-of-fact voice. “We’ll try to crowd in. But don’t anyone what don’t want to bid on kitchen stuff, come and use the room from others!”

It seemed that his very warning acted contrariwise for, to the girls, it looked as if everyone on the premises tried to crowd into that small room. Being first on the ground, they fared best for place. Mrs. Fabian mounted the steps leading to the attic and advised the girls to get up on the table, chairs, or other solid objects, to be able to look over the heads of the crowd.

“Now, Ab, what you got first?” asked the auctioneer.

Abner had his little book of items, and finding the table the first number inventoried, he called out: “Deal table and contents!”

Now Polly stood on the table, and all the covers had been thrown upon it, also, so when Abner shouted out “table and contents” Lemuel laughed loudly.

“Say, one of them contents is a mighty pooty gal, I kin tell yuh! I’ll begin bidding myself, on such a bargain!”

The country-folks laughed wildly at such a fine joke, and Polly, eager to own the

other valuable contents, smiled with them and nodded her head at the salesman. He was not aware that she meant she would bid, for his customers always shouted forth their bids. Then a man asked: "What sort of contents is thar?"

Abner pushed his way through the crowd to open the drawer in the table and enumerate the small ware mentioned as "contents," when he saw, to his surprise, that there was a heap of covers on the table.

He picked them up and stared at them in dumbfounded amazement, then said: "Say, Lem, here's them old bed-quilts we had sech a job huntin' up. Whar the heck'd they come from, I'm sure I dunno!"

"You got 'em, eh? Well, they ain't listed, so sell 'em fust. I'll mark them an 'A' lot. Who wants to bid on a ole bed-spread?" called Lemuel.

Had the women-folk known of bedding to be sold in the kitchen, there would have been a mad rush for it. But most of them were waiting for the blankets and comfortables found in the two small bed-rooms annexed to the parlor. So but few were in the kitchen when the old candle-wicking spread was bid on by Polly, and knocked down to her for a dollar-ninety.

Eleanor got the blue and white woven coverlet for a dollar and a half, and Mrs. Fabian bought the linen towels "in a lot" for two dollars. The old brasses that were also listed as an "A" lot were knocked down as follows: Polly bought the ancient foot-warmer for sixty cents; Eleanor secured the warming-pan for a dollar, and Dodo, the set of fire-irons with acorn tops, for three dollars. These undreamed-of bargains elated the girls so that they lost all discretion for a time.

"Now that we've cleared them things out of our way, we'll sell the table," said Lemuel, and forthwith he gave the table to a farmer for fifty cents.

"What 'che got next, Ab?" asked he.

"Some kitchen dishes," replied Abner, as he opened the cupboard and displayed several samples of blue ware.

Eleanor saw the familiar pattern of the pagodas and willows that are found on old willow-ware, and instantly decided that these must be rare antiques because they were found in the same house as the ancient objects just acquired by her and her friends. So she raised the first bid of ten cents for eight odd pieces, to a dollar.

The auctioneer gasped. He gazed at Eleanor and said faintly: "Did you bid a dollar?"

“Of course!”

“All right, Miss, you kin have them, but pay me now fer them, and don’t come back naggin’ me to say I stuck you wid cracked plates, and nicked saucers. You saw’d them afore you bid!”

Eleanor laughed, and handed over a dollar bill, but Mrs. Fabian tried to catch her eye to warn her not to bid recklessly on other things. Polly stood up on the table wondering why Eleanor got the old kitchen dishes.

The moment Lemuel had the dollar safely in his pocket, he remarked: “Gee! I’m goin’ out of this second-hand sellin’ and lay in a stock of ten-cent blue dishes to sell!”

One of the farmers haw-hawed and said: “That’s how Coolworth made so much money! Gettin’ so much cheap stuff and findin’ a pack of silly women to buy ’em.”

Eleanor tossed her head, but had she kept quiet she would not have been the object of pity she found herself, afterward. In self-justification of her purchase, she called out: “You people don’t know genuine old Wedgewood when you see it. I’ve got a big bargain in those eight plates!”

At that statement, a quiet young fellow, who had been standing about watching progress and noting the bids on a paper, laughed. “I don’t want anyone to say they was taken in at my folk’s sale; but I got’ta tell that young lady that I bought them blue dishes *myself*, last year, at the tea-store in White Plains fer ten cents each.”

Even Polly had to join in the laugh at Eleanor’s expense now, and poor Nolla felt like selling herself for a nickel. But the auctioneer had scant time for jokes or reckless buyers as he was there for business. So he finished the kitchen and called them into the parlor. Here Polly secured a china dog such as were common sixty to eighty years ago; Eleanor got a real bargain, this time, in buying two century old flower-vases for fifty cents. Mrs. Fabian saw an old engraving of “Washington Crossing the Delaware,” as it was taken from the wall behind the door, and offered for a quarter. On the spur of the moment she raised the bid five cents and got the picture which later proved to be one of the rare old originals, worth several hundred dollars.

Dodo ran up a pair of girandoles that stood on the narrow mantel-shelf in the front room, and finally got them for three dollars. Such an unheard-of price made the buyers look at her in pity, and Lemuel remarked:

“Well, some folks has more money than sense!”

Dodo’s friends laughed heartily at this criticism, but she cared little for them all, because she knew what she had obtained for her money.

The two bed-rooms were so small that few people could get in, so the auctioneer ordered Abner to carry the articles for sale, out on the lawn where everyone could see them. Had it not been for this sensible advice, Polly would never have seen or secured the fine old set of Staffordshire toilet-ware that was knocked down to her for four dollars.

It consisted of ewer in quaint shape, basin deep enough to be a huge punch-bowl, a soap-plate, a mug, and a commode. The rich deep coloring of the design on the china was lovely, and every piece was in good order.

The young man who had told the truth about the eight dishes from the tea-store, congratulated Polly and said: “That set has been in our family for more’n a hundred years. My grandmother used to keep it fer show, er when we had fine comp’ny comin’ to see us. That’s how it kept so good.”

“Oh, don’t you want to keep it, then?” asked Polly, regretfully.

“Nah, I’m goin’ west on the money I git outen this sale, an’ I’d ruther see someone what likes it own it, than any old clod-hopper about these parts!”

Polly felt sure the owner had not been lovingly treated by the people he glanced at as he spoke. But she learned, just before leaving the place that afternoon, that he felt so antagonistic against his neighbors because of their frank criticism of his habit of spending his inheritance.

Because of this unwise recklessness, he had had to mortgage the old farm, and when the proceeds of that had been spent, he had to sell out. “Perhaps his going west, where he would have to work hard for his living, would be his salvation, after this,” thought Polly.

Mrs. Fabian allowed the girls to watch the sale until the contents of the house were sold out and then she suggested that they start back home. The bargains were carefully placed between the coverlets purchased, and then the buyers got in the car.

The country-people were all crowding to the barns to bid on stock and farm-utensils when Carl started the engine. With a last look at the little house where they had found their interesting antiques, the collectors left.

CHAPTER IX

POLLY'S HUNT IN 'JERSEY

The collectors took several long trips, after the vendue in Westchester County, but found nothing of value at any place.

Still they lived in hopes, and towards the last of October, Polly suggested that they try New Jersey for a change. A girl who attended Art Classes told Polly of several very old places within the vicinity of Springfield and Morristown—both old Revolutionary towns of historic fame.

So Carl drove up to the Fabian home early one Saturday morning, and Mrs. Fabian with her party, hurried out with luncheon and wraps, and were soon speeding away for the ferry-boat that would take them across the North River.

The girls had never been in New Jersey, and found much to admire in the picturesque, rolling land of the Jersey Hills. They left Newark behind, and drove along the Union Turnpike road until they reached the Forks. Here they turned to the left and in a short time, were going through the ancient town of Springfield.

They were already past it, before Mrs. Fabian found what place it was. Then they laughed, and turned back again to visit a shop on the main street. Mrs. Fabian got out of the car and went in to question the proprietor.

“Do you know of any old houses, near here, where one can secure old bits of furniture, or antique objects?”

The man chuckled. “Say, Madam, if I have one person ask me that same question, I have dozens stop to question me. I tells them all, the same as I tells you now—the only antique I can send them to anywhere about Springfield, is that old church on the corner, where you can see the hole blown in the side by a cannon ball, when the British were here. And over yonder, you will find a burial ground where many old Indians are buried, with their stone arrow-heads and other trophies with them. The crumbling grey-stone slabs and the ancient tombs found there, will give you the dates. Some go as far back as two hundred, or two

hundred and fifty years.”

Mrs. Fabian thanked him and returned to the girls to repeat the conversation she had had with the shop-keeper. They all declared for a visit to the old church, and then to the cemetery, so Carl drove back and they visited both places.

In the ancient burial ground, they read many queer epitaphs on the head stones, and some of these the girls copied down. Then they got back in the automobile and Carl was told to drive on to Morristown.

This place was found to be so dreadfully modern, that no hope of discovering antiques was left alive in their hearts. But it was noon and they were hungry, so they discussed the advisability of going to a lunch-room, or driving into the country and having the picnic lunch.

“As long as we brought such a nice luncheon with us, why stop at a hotel or restaurant to eat?” asked Polly.

“There really isn’t any sense in doing that, but there certainly isn’t any picnic place in this town,” declared Eleanor.

“Well, then let’s start out and find one away from here,” suggested Polly.

“I’ll make another proposition, girls,” said Mrs. Fabian. “Why not stop at that Public Library we just passed, and find out if there are any notable spots in the vicinity of this town, where we might find old houses or old objects?”

“Well, the idea is good, but really, Mrs. Fabian, this town impresses me most emphatically with this fact: that the residents have as much desire for antiques as we have; and most likely, they started in years before we ever were born, to rake over the country-side, which must have been rich with old furniture and other things from Washington’s days here, so as to collect all those things for themselves,” was Dodo’s sensible remark.

The others smiled at her practical words, and Mrs. Fabian agreed with her. “But it will do no harm to stop just a moment to ask the attendant at the Library if she knows of any place in New Jersey where we might indulge our craze of collecting.”

Carl then turned around and they were soon back at the Library. The girls remained in the car while Mrs. Fabian went indoors to ask questions of the agreeable lady at the desk.

“I’m sure you will find a few old bits, here and there, about the country-side,” said the lady, in reply to Mrs. Fabian’s questions. “In fact, my friend furnished

her old-fashioned house that she recently bought of an old 1776 family, by driving about through the Mendham country, down through New Vernon and Baskingridge—all famous Revolutionary places, you know—and by visiting places as far away as Bound Brook, Plainfield, and the country about Trenton. I was amazed at the number of old things she managed to secure.”

Being given a pencil sketch of what roads to follow to reach Mendham, or Baskingridge, Mrs. Fabian thanked her informer most graciously. Suddenly the lady said:

“Now that you are in town, why not drive down to a little auction room I’ve heard of, just off Washington Street, and see if you can find anything in that Paradise for old stuff?”

“We will! Where is it, and how do we get there?”

“The man’s name is Van Styne, and he used to be a magnet for attracting the oldest pieces to his store-rooms! People used to commission him when they wanted anything in particular, and in some super-natural manner, he used to have it for them in a few days’ time. It would have taken ordinary individuals years, with plenty of money and energy, to accomplish the same result.”

Again Mrs. Fabian thanked her interested informer, and left the library. The girls were told of the conversation and they all voted to go to Van Styne’s old auction rooms first, and then try to locate an old farm-house along the road to Mendham, or in the opposite direction, towards Baskingridge.

The building where “Van Styne—Auctioneer and Appraiser” had his sign displayed, for the public’s guidance, was a long low place that had been used as the carriage house of “Liberty Stable” years before. The tiny windows, high up in a row along the front, were stall-marks that told what it had been in the past. Now it was an “Emporium” for all who needed second-hand furniture at a bargain; or for those who sought antiques of any kind, to add to their amateur collections.

Mr. Van Styne was a white-haired, long-whiskered, thin man who sat tilted back in a broken-through rush-bottom chair that had never had a bid at his weekly auctions, hence it was put to some use in his office to pay for storage. His feet were resting on the flat-table-desk in front of him, and he was sweetly snoring when the girls opened the door of the room.

Such an unheard of thing as customers in the early part of the afternoon, caused him to jump up and remove his aged straw hat that had been tilted over his eyes

to keep out the sun-light.

“We came to see if we could find anything in your salesroom,” began Mrs. Fabian, noting the dust that lay thick on everything, and the heaped up motley collection of family possessions displayed in the long adjoining stable-room.

“What kind of furniture do you need?” asked he, stifling a yawn.

“Why, anything old enough to be interesting. We heard that you were a wizard in finding antiques for people.”

The proprietor disclaimed such power, and said with a grin that displayed several gaps in his yellowed teeth, “You can mosey about, out there, to your heart’s content. If you find anything likely, call me an’ I’ll tell you what it’s wuth.”

He waved his arm to the long stacked-up storeroom, and then sat down again. In another moment his feet were up on the desk and his hat tipped down over his eyes. His hands were calmly folded over his waist-coat and he settled down to snooze, once more.

The girls giggled aloud and hurried after Mrs. Fabian to keep from laughing outright at the ambitious salesman. They prowled about and pulled out lots of things and examined many other old articles, soiling their gloves and dresses, without finding a thing that was of any value.

Finally Polly dragged out an old walnut chest of drawers to see what was stored back of it, that kept it so far away from the wall. She discovered a group of large, framed pictures standing against the wall, evidently forgotten by the auctioneer, as they were covered with a thick coating of dust.

“Come and help me lift these out, will you, Nolla?” called Polly, as Eleanor stood waiting for something new to look at.

In another moment, both girls were hauling out the mass of pictures, whose wires and screw-eyes were so entangled that to get at one, you had to drag all out at the same time.

“My goodness! Just look at our hands!” exclaimed Eleanor, holding up such dirty hands that Polly laughed.

“The result of digging!” said she, managing to separate one smaller frame from the others.

As she turned it over to study the picture, she was greatly disappointed to find it had an old, cheap, stained frame. The picture seemed nondescript to her. It was a

scene of an old bridge with fine old trees on both banks of the river. Quaintly costumed people strolled along both sides of the stream, and a funny tower rose at the further end of the bridge. The colors were crude and primary—no fine shading or artistic handling to be seen. A title under the picture, and several inscriptions in French at the left side of the bottom, were so stained and blurred as to be totally unreadable with the naked eye.

Meantime, Eleanor had managed to free the next frame, which was a huge affair of old mahogany. The glass was so dreadfully dusty that not a bit of the picture underneath could be seen. She looked about for something to use as a duster, and saw an old end of chenille curtain on the walnut dresser. This she used and wiped away as much of the dirt as would come off with hard work—the rest must have hot water and soap.

“Well, I declare! Look at this old engraving!” called she to the others. Polly was at hand, and saw that Eleanor had actually found a treasure.

Mrs. Fabian hurried across the room and took her magnifying glass from her handbag being always prepared with it in case of need to study signatures and other nearly effaced trade-marks.

The large engraving represented the Independence Hall at Philadelphia, and under that was the famous Declaration of Independence, with all the original signatures following. The picture of the Hall was engraved on a smaller bit of paper and had been mounted at the top of the printed matter. The engraving was signed by the engraver, and dated. Affidavits at the bottom of the parchment paper stated that this was one of the original documents made by Order of Congress for use in the Government Buildings so that the first original paper and signatures could be preserved as a relic, by the United States.

“Why, this wonderful old paper is more than a hundred and thirty years old!” exclaimed Mrs. Fabian amazed.

“My goodness me! How much do you suppose I shall have to pay to get it?” gasped Eleanor.

“I don’t know, but you really ought to shake that dirty rag thoroughly over the glass again, to hide what is under it,” advised Dodo, with astuteness.

The others laughed. But Polly had another suggestion to make. “Let’s see what else we can find in this stack of pictures. We will choose a number of them and then make an offer on the lot, as much as to say we need bargain-frames for other uses. This rare find of Nolla’s will be hidden in with the rest.”

“Polly’s idea is best. Because the old man will know that we wouldn’t buy a picture with all the dust covering the glass,” said Nancy Fabian.

A CRY FROM POLLY CAUGHT THEIR FULLEST ATTENTION.
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“What’s the little old one you’ve got in your hands, Polly?” now asked Mrs. Fabian.

“Oh, nothing much. It looks like an ugly little chromo printed before people knew how to use colors on printing-presses.”

Mrs. Fabian leaned over Polly’s shoulder to take a look, and puckered her forehead when she saw the yellowed paper and old stained edges of the picture.

“Polly, I verily believe that here you have something that Mr. Fabian has lectured on several times. Let me examine it.”

While the girls crowded about her, Mrs. Fabian placed the picture, face downwards, on the table near by and tried to draw out the old headless tacks driven in to hold the backboard snugly in its place.

“Well, whoever framed this picture did it for all time!” exclaimed she, breaking several fingernails and tearing the skin on her hands in the attempt to loosen the fine steel nails.

“Here! I’ve found an old pair of broken scissors in this desk—let’s use them to clinch the nails and force them out,” said Nancy, handing her mother the shears.

With this assistance, Mrs. Fabian soon had the nails out and then carefully removed the old sections of thin boards. Under the boards was a yellowed newspaper, folded neatly, and so wedged in at the edges of the frame that no dust could work a way through to the picture. Without a thought of the paper, Mrs. Fabian took it out and expected to see the back of the picture. Instead, she found a yellow-stained letter written to Paul Revere Esq. and signed by one of the famous men of the Revolution. It was a personal letter of that time, and had been used to paste over a crack in the back of the picture.

“Why—why! How very wonderful!” breathed Mrs. Fabian, as she stared at the old letter.

“What is it—anything valuable?” asked the girls.

“A genuine letter written to Paul Revere! Now that I think of it, girls, Paul Revere lived in Morristown and his home is still intact on De Hart Street, I believe. This old picture must have come from his house; or in some way, this letter found its way into someone else’s hands and was used at that time for scrap paper to mend this picture. Now let’s see what the picture is.”

But a cry from Polly, who had picked up the old newspaper and now had opened it wide, caught their fullest attention.

“Oh, oh! Isn’t this too funny for anything! Listen and I will read it.” Then Polly read aloud an advertisement in the tiny old newspaper, of a Squire at Baskingridge who wished to sell a healthy, young negro wench of unquestionable pedigree. Price and particulars would be given any interested buyer.

“Polly!” chorused her audience, in surprise. “That paper must be as old as the letter!”

“And see, girls!” added Mrs. Fabian. “It has great heavy black borders on the outside. What for, Polly?”

Polly turned over the sheet with utmost care, as it was so dry and brittle, and to the speechless astonishment of them all, it showed that the mourning bands were used for the death of George Washington. The entire front page was devoted to the news of his demise which had occurred the day before going to press. His fame, and value to the United States, were spoken of, and other features of his life were touched upon. His picture, printed from an old wood-cut, headed the page. All the spelling was such as was common at that time with the letter “e” tacked on when possible and the old English “f’s” were used for “s’s” and long-stemmed “p’s,” and high-browed “a’s” and “i’s,” were formed to show readers that the writer and editor was a well-educated man.

“Oh my! Must we fold it up and put it back of that board again?” sighed Polly, finally.

“If you want a bargain, that is what you’d better do,” returned Mrs. Fabian.

“Maybe the picture is as old as the paper,” ventured Polly.

The thought of the picture had completely vanished from the mind of Mrs. Fabian when she saw the rare old newspaper; but now she quickly picked up the article and turned it over. The magnifying glass was once more brought to bear upon the subject, and after several minutes of inspection,—minutes of impatient hesitation on the part of the girls,—she looked up bewildered with her discovery.

“Polly, this is really the missing picture that will complete the set that is on exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum, in New York. It is one of the famous color-prints made in France about the sixteenth century, and the subject is the famous Bridge at Avignon. This is worth thousands of dollars, dear, and I hesitate to tell you what to offer for it.”

Polly would have taken the rare picture out to the still sleeping man and offered him a sum that would have made him sit up and investigate the matter for himself. But clever Dodo advised another method.

“If you offer more than the old frame is actually worth, when you say you will pay so much for the frames—he will see right off that there’s a ‘nigger in the woodpile.’ Let’s tangle up a few of these old black-walnut frames with the two valuable pictures, and I’ll bargain for you.”

“Better let Mrs. Fabian bargain—you know how she got the candle-sticks in exchange for a two-dollar ‘bankit’ lamp,” Eleanor reminded them.

“I’ll do it, while you girls keep on poking about as if to find other things,” declared Mrs. Fabian. “Here, Polly, let us fix this frame up exactly as it was before, and I’ll take four out of the pile and place them, one on top of the other, upon this dresser, and then call the man out to quote me a price on the lot.”

This was carefully done, dust being shaken out of the old curtain so that the glass was again coated, and then dust was shaken over the back where the board had been removed and cleaned.

A dreadful lithograph showing a string of fish, framed in a wide gilt affair, was one that was chosen for the group. An oval frame with a woman’s photograph in it, was another selected. Then the four were arranged: The large engraving at the bottom, the fish next, then the little old relic, and on top, the oval frame. All four appeared dirty and insignificant as they lay on the top of the dresser; and to finish the work, Polly used the chenille rag to gather up as much dust as possible from the filthy floor, and shook it vigorously over all the frames. Such a choking and coughing as ensued made them separate in haste, for fear the noise would make the auctioneer come out to enquire.

But he was too deeply concerned with some pleasant dream to awake to business, before his usual time for the afternoon siesta had ended, so Mrs. Fabian went out to rouse him.

“Eh, what did you say?” exclaimed he, jumping up.

“I want you to tell me how much are a few picture-frames which we found in a

corner.”

“Oh, anything you like. How much do you think they are wuth?” was his reply.

Mrs. Fabian smiled pleasantly. “That is not what I said. You are the salesman and I the buyer. You should state a price.”

“Um—ah!” yawned Mr. Van Styne at this, and stretched his arms out over his head. “I s’pose that ends my nap, eh?”

He shuffled out of the office after Mrs. Fabian and went into the store-house. When he saw the girls poking about amongst the old chairs, bureaus, and motley collection of furniture, he laughed, and said: “That’s right! Find all the old bargains you can. I’m your man to sell them cheap to you.”

Had he but known what he was about to do!

Mrs. Fabian led him down to the corner where the pile of four pictures were waiting on the dresser, and said: “These are the four I want a price on. The frames are all in good order and the glasses are not cracked at all.”

Mr. Van Styne took a pair of old steel-rimmed specs from the vest-pocket over his heart, and pushed them upon his thin nose. He picked up the top oval frame, blew off the dust and laughed at the homely face that stared out at him. He turned to Mrs. Fabian with a twinkle in his eyes and said, jokingly:

“Now, if that gal was your relation and you wanted her ugly photograph that bad, I’d say the hull thing was wuth a dollar to you. But seein’ it’s fifty year old, and you ain’t near that, yet, I will sell her fer a quarter. The glass is wuth that, I reckon.”

He placed it face down beside the other three pictures. “Now this one,” taking up the rare old print with the newspaper packed in the back, “Ain’t wuth a darn, so why do you pick it out?”

“But the glass is the right size and will cost me more to order, than I can get it for of you,” remarked Mrs. Fabian, anxiously, while the girls held their breath.

The old auctioneer heard the note of anxiety in her tone and peered over his specs to study her guileless expression. She instantly guarded herself, when she saw his look, and so he saw only a nice lady who was now picking up the fish-picture.

“And this dining-room picture; how much will you take for *it*. Why not give me a job-lot price and I’ll see. I may as well pack four as two in the automobile.”

But Mr. Van Styne had not known there was an automobile; and he was wondering now, why people with a car should come in and pick out a few picture glasses to save money. He glanced over the last picture which was the large engraving, and then turned it over to look at its back.

“That’s a mighty big sheet of glass in that one. That glass alone, cost about a dollar-forty. Then the frame’s a good hard-wood frame, too. I’ll look up my books and see who sent them pictures in for sale. Then I can see if they put a figger on them.”

He made notes of the chalk numbers marked on the backs of the picture-boards and then started for his office. Mrs. Fabian, with sinking heart, followed at his heels.

“If he looks up his records and finds they came from the old house of Paul Revere and his descendants, he will never sell them at a decent price,” thought she, impatiently.

She sat opposite the old man while he fumbled the pages of his book and slowly glanced down the entries, his bent fore-finger pointing to each item carefully as he read.

“Um! Here it is: Number 329, came from Sarah Dolan, who moved to a smaller flat last Spring. From this entry I see that all them seven pictures came from her. Do you happen to know her?”

Mr. Van Styne glanced up at his companion.

She shook her head, and he said, closing the book, “Why, Sally Dolan was cook fer the Revere boys, and when they broke up, she started a bordin’ house down on Morris Street. Then she took rheumatiz and was that crippled, she couldn’t get about the kitchen no more, so she gave up. Her boys manage to keep her now, and she takes things easy. But she sure was a good cook!”

Much as Mrs. Fabian would have liked to question the old man about the Revere boys she feared he might remember that the cook was given a lot of old pictures when the boys “broke up”, so she turned the subject adroitly.

“Well, I’ll go and see what the girls have found out there, I guess. But I wish you’d fix a price on those four frames.”

“Lem’me see, now. Sal Dolan didn’t set no price, and if I say five dollars for the four, would you take ’em?”

“Dear me!” objected Mrs. Fabian, craftily. “The large one you said was worth

about a dollar-thirty, and the fish-picture a dollar. That leaves two dollars and seventy cents for the other two. Isn't that pretty high for them?"

"But that fish picture makes a fine dinin' room piece, especially if you could get the mate what is a brace of quails."

"Oh well, rather than jew you down, I'll take them, if you will take the trouble to make me out a receipt for the four."

"Ain't this a cash sale?" queried the man, wonderingly.

"Of course, but two of them are for friends. I only intend keeping the other two. I want them, to have the bill to show, you see."

Thereupon Mr. Van Styne wrote out the bill on a scrap of paper and receipted it, and then counted the five one dollar bills Mrs. Fabian had paid him. "Ten per cent fer me and the rest for Sally," he added as he rolled fifty cents inside four one dollar bills and pocketed the other fifty cents.

Mrs. Fabian was about to go for the pictures, when Polly came out. "I want to ask the auctioneer how much this little box and mirror are?" and she showed a lovely little Empire dressing-mirror to him. It was scratched and had been varnished, but its former beauty could be quickly restored, for the form and material were good as ever.

"I'm told that is a real antique. That piece come from the old Revere place, too. Mrs. Dolan says she heard it was used by the boy's grandmother. But I don't know what to charge."

"I'll give you ten dollars for it," eagerly said Polly.

"Ten dollars!" gasped the man, sinking back in his desk-chair.

Mrs. Fabian tried to signal Polly, but the girl was too intent on securing the gem. Then Mrs. Fabian said to the man:

"Dear me! The child has more money than brains, eh?" and laughed heartily.

"I ain't so sure about that. She certainly knows a good thing," returned Mr. Van Styne. Then he said to Polly: "Will you carry it right along with you, if I sell it for ten?"

"Of course!" declared she, and the sale was made.

"I guess we'd better be going, Polly," suggested Mrs. Fabian, now. This told the girl that the deal over the pictures had been consummated, but she did not ask questions then.

Mrs. Fabian went back to gather up her four precious pictures, and had the other girls help her carry them away. Then they bid the good old man good-by and started off.

“Come again, when you have more time to poke around,” said he, as he stood on the doorstep watching them walk towards the car which was waiting a short distance down the street.

“We certainly will, and if you get anything really antique in the place at any time, drop me word, or telephone to the address I left on your desk, just now,” said Mrs. Fabian.

Once the hunters were safely on the way to New York, the girls importuned Mrs. Fabian to tell them the story of the pictures, but she laughingly remarked:

“Do you know, we forgot all about our luncheon! Poor Carl must be famished!”

“Not much,” retorted Carl. “I went to that quick lunch-room across from the old junk-shop, and got the best dinner for forty cents that I ever tasted. But we will stop for a picnic, when we reach the country, if you say so.”

“No, indeed! We’ll eat as we drive along, Carl,” said Mrs. Fabian, then turning to the girls, she told the tale^[A] of the old pictures and what she paid for them.

“Why!” gasped the wondering girls. “It can’t be possible!”

At that, Mrs. Fabian produced the bill of sale and said: “I got this in case there ever should be any dispute over the legality of this negotiation. The two awful pictures we can give to some family along the road, but the two precious ones we will cherish as if they were the Koh-i-noor Diamond.”

When the Ashbys and Mr. Fabian heard the story, and saw the validity of the two pictures, they sat astounded. Mr. Fabian then said:

“Polly really ought to immortalize her name by presenting this missing scroll to the Metropolitan Museum, but she can keep the letter and newspaper. That ought to be worth the price she paid for the ‘glass’.”

“That’s just what I’ll do, Mr. Fabian. I would never feel happy if I *kept* a thing that is considered so rare, and has been sought for by the Museum’s collectors.”

So Polly Brewster’s name is to be found ticketed as the donor of the twelfth valuable picture in that set.

[A]

True incident in author's experience.

CHAPTER X

UNEXPECTED NEWS FROM PEBBLY PIT

The young collectors experienced the usual “red-tape” in offering the rare picture to the Museum, and after the customary delays, it was accepted with letters of thanks. Individual letters from several officials were written to Polly and her friends, voicing the appreciation of the men at being able to complete the series.

Shortly after this pleasing incident, the girls went out on another excursion just across the Hudson, in New Jersey. They took the ferry at One Hundred and Thirtieth Street, and after reaching Edgewater, drove through the small towns nestling on the Hackensack, until they came to the village of Hasbrouck Heights. All about this section are old, old houses, and if you hunt keenly enough, you will find delightful odd bits from Revolutionary days.

That evening, upon their return, the girls were eager to compare their trophies of the day, but the maid came in with a day letter for Polly. The others waited for her to read it, and as she read, her expression changed perceptibly.

“Oh, oh! It’s happened again!” cried she fearfully, as she finished the letter.

“What! What has happened?” anxiously asked her companions, crowding about her.

“Another slide on Grizzly. This time it has destroyed *everything* so that mining the gold is out of the question,” and Polly gave the message to Mrs. Fabian to read aloud.

“Bad land-slide on Grizzly. Demolished all machinery and wiped out the entire surface of mountain-top. No lives lost, but cave and vein of ore lost. Topography completely changed. Wait for summer to start new search and locate gold. Letter sent to Latimer and Dalke. Ask them for particulars. John Brewster.”

“Oh, Polly! That means that our gold mine has vanished, and all our income from it will be stopped!” cried Eleanor.

“We haven’t had any income to stop,” replied Polly, cynically. “About all the good we’ve ever had from Choko’s Find Mine has been violent physical exercise, expenses and the dreams that buoy hope.”

Her friends laughed in spite of the seriousness of the matter, and Eleanor added: “It also means that Daddy, and all of our New York investors, have lost the money they invested in the project.”

“Well, when Tom Latimer called on me the evening after our ducking in the Bay, he said he was not in favor of working on the mine so late in the season. He thought John was taking dreadful risks to keep the plant open when snowstorms and slides were imminent.

“But John told him that plenty of snow was just what was needed on the peaks, to cement the chasms and crevices together that had been opened by the summer’s heat and continued drought all Fall. In case no snow came, he said he would agree to abandon work when the cold weather became too severe to remain at that altitude.”

“This unexpected accident and loss of the mine does not prevent the output of the lava jewels, Polly, so there’ll be no noticeable difference in your income, will there?” asked Mrs. Fabian.

“Well, Tom explained it all to me. He said that mine affairs were so involved with the jewel works at Rainbow Cliffs, that one disaster affected the other interest. Rainbow Cliffs is part of Pebbly Pit Ranch, so the Cliffs were incorporated when work began on the mining of the lava. Then when trouble at Choko’s Find Mine started, the mines at Rainbow Cliffs were mortgaged to secure financial aid for the gold mine on the mountains. So that everything is mixed up now in this calamity,” explained Polly, tearfully.

Soon after this, the telephone rang. Mr. Latimer said he was coming to call, that evening, and Mr. Dalken wished to come in at the same time. Would the girls be home?

Polly assured him they would, and also that he would be welcomed as she wished to hear about the important matters that he could fully explain to her.

Soon after eight o’clock, therefore, Mr. Latimer and Mr. Dalken were announced. Polly and Eleanor—the latter had realized that maybe her future, because of this disaster to the mine would not be as luxurious as she had dreamed of—anxiously welcomed the two men. Polly lost no time in polite nothings, but asked, at once, about the conditions at the mines.

“I see you have heard about the trouble?” ventured Mr. Latimer.

“Yes, I received a long night letter from home, this afternoon. But they do not say whether there is anything left to pay my way in New York, or whether I ought to start for home,” said Polly.

Eleanor was shocked at her words. “Why, Polly, surely you have no dread of such being the case, just because our old gold mine is choked again?”

“Don’t you understand, Nolla, that starting work on the mine, and all the machinery for it, costs so much that not only is the lava mine involved, but the very ranch is risked. Maybe father will have to sell out his beloved farm and go away,” explained Polly, with quivering lips.

“Oh no, Polly,” hastily came from Mr. Latimer. “We are all stock-holders in this venture, you know, and one man alone does not bear the costs of the mine and its losses. That is why Mr. Dalken and I came over, tonight, when we got word that John had written you. We feared you might not understand matters.”

“But I understand father, well enough, Mr. Latimer. He will never permit anyone to lose a penny because of him or his interests.”

“Maybe he won’t, Polly, but this mining venture was as much our interest as yours, or your father’s, remember. It seems gone, this time, but we must take our loss as courageously as we would our profits. Tom wired me to come and see you and explain that you need make no change in any of your plans, as everything would go on as usual at the ranch. He and John will devote all of their time to the Cliffs now, instead of dividing their attention between the two mines, as they have been doing, heretofore,” explained Mr. Latimer.

“But your mother wrote me, Polly,” now said Mr. Dalken, “that finances would be rather strained for the next year, because of this tremendous outlay on the mines and no income; and the terrible drought that killed off so many head of cattle on the ranch this year, makes things look rather unpromising. I know how practical you are, and I thought it best to let you hear how matters stand. Your folks asked me not to mention it, because they wanted you to finish your studies here, and there are ample funds to pay for that. But I took it upon myself to warn you about going deeply into any antique purchases, in your auction fever.”

“I’m so glad you did, Mr. Dalken. As you say, I am not a silly child, and now that I know exactly how matters are at home, I will see if I cannot do something while studying in New York, to pay my own way,” responded Polly, anxiously.

“Oh, it isn’t as bad as that, Child!” laughed Mr. Latimer; “but it is best for you

not to buy in Fifth Avenue shops, or give away rare old bargains from the country.”

Polly smiled. “Mr. Latimer, this is what I propose doing to earn my expenses in New York. Instead of buying old objects for fun, I shall secure them to sell again and make money.”

“Poll is right! And I propose going with her as the partner in her first business venture!” declared Eleanor.

“Where will you two girls find customers?” asked Mr. Dalken, admiring the way they accepted the news that their gold mine seemed wiped out for all time.

“Oh, Polly’ll find a way, never fear!” declared Eleanor with fervent faith in her friend’s ability to accomplish things.

“Yes, I’ll get Mr. Ashby, first of all, to permit us to exhibit our goods in his ‘odd room’ and we’ll pay him a commission for sales, just as other folks do who wish to exchange, or sell, their antiques,” explained Polly.

“Well, if you girls manage to find such valuable things as that famous missing picture that the Museum made such a time over, I should say you had found a big gold mine in New York instead of losing a little one in the Rockies,” said Mr. Dalken.

So, shortly after the girls learned that they had to economise on expenses that year, Polly carried her old coverlets to Mr. Ashby’s shop and left them with him to sell. The fine little mirror had been restored and was perfectly beautiful. This was placed on exhibition in the Empire Room of the Ashby Shop, but scarcely had it had time to be friendly with other rare objects in that room, before it was purchased at a high price. Thus Polly cleared several hundred dollars on the first sale, and felt encouraged to invest that money in new purchases.

Mr. Dalken gladly sent Carl with the car, to drive the girls whenever they heard of a place to visit, but Ruth and Nancy seldom accompanied them these days. Ruth had school to attend daily, and Nancy was painting a portrait for a famous stage beauty who had offered her an attractive price for the work.

The girls, with Mrs. Fabian, had gone again to New Jersey, after their great investment that day in Van Styne’s place; but they drove on to Baskingridge that day, and stopped at several ancient farm-houses to ferret for old things. At one of the places, they secured some very old glassware, also odd pieces of Staffordshire, and a well-nigh complete set of old Wedgewood dishes.

At another house they got a set of old brass fire-irons and a crane with all the hangers and pots complete, just as it had been removed from the brick fire-place and thrown up in the attic.

At the third house, Polly became enamored of a wonderful sampler, and several very old silhouettes—the latter, very different from the kind we are familiar with. As these old relics were in the attic and were considered valueless, she got them for a very small sum.

While Polly was bargaining for these trifles, Eleanor was in the grandmother's room looking at several marvelous patch-work quilts. The old dame told Eleanor the story connected with each quilt; and one, the unusual one of silk pieces, as well as worsteds, patched in with calico, velvet and other odd materials, was said to be made of a collection of famous bits from gowns worn by the ladies of Revolutionary Days.

How the old grand-dame ever came into possession of such a valuable quilt, was beyond Eleanor's comprehension. Then Polly and the house-wife joined her, and Polly was shown the quilt.

"How very interesting," remarked she.

"Yes, and I'll tell you how it came about," explained Mrs. Johnson. "We've always lived on this place, and when the Army passed this way, our folks helped out in all sorts of ways.

"During the winter that General Washington and his Lady were stationed at Morristown, there was lots of doings all about the county. You'll read in the history of Lady Washington, how she was entertained by the first families about here—the Fords, the Footes, and others.

"Our great-grandmother was a fine needlewoman and went about to the houses making gowns and cloaks for the ladies. She always saved the scraps of silk and stuff that was wasted, and of these she patched several quilts. On the back of each bit of these materials, she pasted little book-muslin tickets that had the name and date printed on it, of the lady and the occasion she wore the gown. So on the back of each of these pieces is still to be found the printing of that ancestress of mine."

"Oh, isn't this interesting!" exclaimed Polly, eagerly.

And Eleanor asked: "Where are the other quilts?"

"We don't exactly know what happened to the others she made; but this one

came right down from grandmother's mother to her, then to my mother, and now to me."

"Would any price tempt you to sell it?" asked Polly.

"Nothin' on earth, whiles I live. But I haven't any children, and goodness only knows what will become of the dear old heirloom. Why did you ask?"

"How I would love to own it! Not for its value in money but really to hold it as a precious patriotic reminder of those days when the ladies, even though they dressed fine and had good times, performed such heroic and almost super-human deeds for the Army," explained Polly.

Mrs. Johnson gazed keenly at the girl's face for a few moments, then said: "Tell me your name and address: I am going to write it out now, that this quilt is to be yours any time I die; and you must be as careful of it as we have been. Always keep tar-paper, or tobacco in it, during summer when moths fly about."

Polly thanked the lady very seriously and promised to be most careful of it in every way, but she said she hoped Mrs. Johnson would live a long time to enjoy the quilt as her own family relic.

On the drive back through Morristown that day, Mrs. Fabian had Carl stop at Mr. Van Styne's auction rooms, but the old man was not in, and the door was locked. A sheet of paper tacked inside the sash of the door, announced that the owner was at Parsippany numbering household goods for an auction to be held in two weeks' time.

Mrs. Fabian made a note of the name and location of the house where the sale was to be held, and came back to the automobile. She showed the paper to the girls, and said:

"We'll try to get out here for that sale. But I'll write Mr. Van Styne first, and ask him what sort of things the people have."

"Yes, it would be silly to come so far and find the house contained nothing but horrid old modern stuff," said Eleanor.

Arriving home, late that afternoon, Mrs. Fabian was given a letter sent from the old auctioneer at Morristown. He had kept his word and notified the young collectors of the sale about to be held at Parsippany: the sale they had heard about that day.

"He says, in this letter," explained Mrs. Fabian after reading it, "the old farmhouse where the vendue will take place, is filled with real old furniture; the

family that owned the farm have held it for five generations. Mr. Van Styne admits that he is not enough of a connoisseur to judge the actual value of the antiques, but there are some mahogany pieces, and loads of queer old things that *his* wife would have kept in the attic, or split up for kindlings. As he thinks this is what is now called 'Period Furniture,' he would suggest that we run out and have a look at it before the day of the sale."

"The letter sounds exactly like him, doesn't it?" laughed Polly.

"Yes, but it is very nice of him to be so honest about it. Most auctioneers would tell us the furniture was wonderful," returned Mrs. Fabian.

"When do you think we can run out there, Mrs. Fabian?" asked Eleanor, eagerly.

"We'll find out what day Carl can best arrange for the trip. We mustn't 'drive a willing horse to death,' you know."

Later in the evening, the telephone bell rang and Polly was called to the 'phone. The maid who answered the ring said it was a man's voice but she had not been able to understand the name.

Eleanor heard her chum say: "Oh, really! We've been wondering what became of you. It was so surprising to find you were an old friend of our Mr. Dalken's and then never hear from you again, or have anyone know where you had gone."

Mrs. Fabian glanced questioningly at Eleanor, but the girl shook her head in token of her ignorance of who the caller could be. Then they heard Polly say: "Why, I reckon so. If you'll hold the wire a moment, I'll run and ask Mrs. Fabian."

A few moments later, Polly rushed into the room and said eagerly: "Jack Baxter is on the 'phone and wants to know if he may come in, tomorrow evening, Mrs. Fabian. He says he has a little furniture commission for Nolla and me to take care of."

Mrs. Fabian immediately replied that the young man would be welcomed the following evening, and Polly hurried back to deliver the invitation. Eleanor waited until she heard the conversation over the telephone resumed between the two, then she said to Mrs. Fabian:

"I bet anything, that Jack Baxter is really in love with Polly! I watched him all that time, after he was formally introduced by Mr. Dalken, and he just hung on her every word and act."

Mrs. Fabian smiled. "That is the usual experience the young men have with

Polly. I think the very fact that she is unmindful of her attractions, coupled with her indifference to the attentions of the male sex, acts as a spur to them; each tries to see if she will not capitulate to his individual charms.”

Eleanor laughed. “You speak as if you believed the young men to be egotistical enough to *think* they were charming.”

“They do, Nolla!” retorted Mrs. Fabian. “Every Adam’s son firmly believes he is more alluring and attractive to a girl, than his friends. That is why they all follow tamely after a girl who has no time for them: they cannot believe it *possible* that she is not overcome with their fascinations.”

Eleanor smiled as she listened, then she remarked: “I guess I’ll try Polly’s strategy and see if the beaux line up for me.”

“You have no need to experiment with any new tricks,” replied Mrs. Fabian, warningly. “There are enough sighing young men already, waiting to break their hearts and necks, for a mere glance from those impish eyes of yours.”

Eleanor laughed merrily at her chaperone’s words, but Polly’s return to the room interrupted their little talk.

“What do you think?” demanded Polly, as soon as she was in the room.

Not giving them time to answer, she said: “Jack Baxter is going to furnish a bachelor apartment in the city, and says he is going to give Nolla and me the contract for doing it. It will be our very first work as interior decorators!”

“Oh,” gasped Eleanor, “how can we do it?”

Polly looked amazed at such a question, and retorted: “Why, with money and brains, to be sure!”

“Is that why he’s coming tomorrow evening?” asked Eleanor.

“Yes; he is now staying at Mr. Dalke’s apartment, and both of them are coming over tomorrow. He says he has been West since we last saw him, and he stopped at Pebbly Pit to see the folks, on his way back from the Coast. That is why he has not been heard from—he was called away so suddenly, and just got back today.”

“I wonder why he took all the trouble to go to Pebbly Pit?” said Eleanor. “He didn’t know a soul there!”

“That’s what I asked him, and he says he will tell us all about it tomorrow night,” explained Polly.

CHAPTER XI

POLLY'S FIRST CONTRACT

Promptly at eight, Jack Baxter and Mr. Dalken were announced to Polly and Eleanor. The Fabians had gone to the Opera and Mr. Dalken was supposed to act as chaperone for the evening.

"This is a new experience for me," laughed he, "but not one that I dislike. In fact, I will be glad to offer my services in the same capacity, at any time, for you girls."

"Better beware how you offer yourself on such an altar," teased Polly, trying to appear calm and composed, whereas she was keyed up to hear about the proposed work young Baxter wished them to do for his new apartment.

Eleanor deemed it wise to mention another subject first, so she asked: "How long were you at Pebbly Pit, Mr. Baxter?"

"That's one of the reasons we came over to see you," interpolated Mr. Dalken. "Jack has a lot to tell you about the troubles there."

"What troubles?" wondered Polly. "You don't mean the land-slide, do you?"

"We know about that," added Eleanor.

"You only heard the first news of it. But you never knew what followed that first event," returned Mr. Dalken. "I've known how things stood for a short time, but I talked it over with the Latimers, and we decided to let Jack go West with Mr. Alexander, and investigate matters for themselves."

"Dodo's father! What has he to do with it?" asked both girls in surprise.

"More than we can ever appreciate. Because he is such an experienced old miner, having spent years in the Klondike, and later, down in the Colorado mining districts, his going to Pebbly Pit was the best thing that ever happened to our company. Jack had just decided to invest a great deal of his capital in the joint companies, so he decided to accompany Alexander and see for himself how

the land lay.”

“And what was Mr. Alexander’s verdict?” asked Polly.

“Listen to Jack’s story of what happened on the mountain, that early morning. It is as thrilling as anything I ever heard,” said Mr. Dalken.

“I’d have given anything to have been on the spot when that old peak divided her earthly substance,” laughed Jack. “But even the telling of it by Tom Latimer and John Brewster, was so exciting that I tried every way possible to reach the mountain where the awful avalanche took place.

“Tom had felt a tremor run along the side of the peak the night before, and had warned John that old Grizzly was ripping mad again. So the two of them rode along the Crest where those claim-jumpers were buried the time that other avalanche occurred, and they saw that Grizzly Slide had broken up great masses of ice-field, and on the far side where it drops suddenly to the valley, thousands of feet below, a great block of ice and rock had fallen from the top-side and had rolled down, destroying everything in its terrific plunge.

“Both boys were satisfied that it was only a matter of time before the gaping crevices showing on the side towards the gold mine, would widen and the top-mass begin to move. It was impossible to say whether a slide would happen on the cave-side or roll down one of the gulleys on either side of the mine. But the two of them made up their minds that everyone must move from the camp without delay, and seek safety.

“Orders were given to strike camp at once, and the men worked all night, packing away outfits and tools, and such machinery as could be moved inside the cave. Then the mouth was closed against winter storms, and they started, on their horses, to ride along Top Notch Trail, on the down trip.

“It was almost noon when they left the mine, and by two o’clock they halted on one of the crests to cook dinner. The horses were hobbled where a patch of Buffalo grass provided good pastureage, and Rattlesnake Mike started a fire to cook the meal. Tom and John got out their tackle to catch a few trout, when a fearful roll of thunder sounded along the crest.

“‘She come down, pooty queeck!’ exclaimed Mike, startled out of his usual calmness.

“‘Do you mean Old Grizzly?’ Tom asked him.

“But before he could reply, there was such a crash and roar, and the whole

ground shook under their feet as if an earthquake had caused it. Everyone stood aghast looking at what had been snow-capped Grizzly but a moment before. So astonished were the men that they couldn't speak.

"The roar and tumult continued so seemingly close at hand, that the men ran for their horses, and would have ridden down the trail had not Mike laughed and applied a match to the kindling, just as if nothing was happening above them on Grizzly Slide. It instantly quieted the fears of the others, and they turned again to wait for further events.

"Tom Latimer says, that what caused such a panicky feeling in them all, was the fact that one moment they had seen the glistening cap of Old Grizzly, and the next, it was gone, and a great cloud of flying white particles hid the scene for a time.

"The terrific detonation they heard immediately after the peak's snow-cap rolled down the mountain-side, was caused by the mass of rock, ice, snow and general débris, striking the ground below. How far it fell before striking, they could not say, but Mike claims it must have been hurtled, from the peak of Grizzly, to the great gulch that runs along its lower side, about five thousand feet below—all that distance before landing and filling the ravines about that section.

"All the way down, from Grizzly Gulches to the bottoms that run along Bear Forks branches, the avalanche tore up trees, boulders, moraine, and other heavy matter, that generally forms a dam for smaller slides than this one was. But this time, entire forests were shoved along, still standing, just like a great cake of icing with fancy frosting of colored sugar on top of it, is pushed off from a slice of birthday cake, when the knife loosens it. The moment any part of this avalanche came up against a cliff, or rolled over into vast ravines, that much of the sliding forest tumbled up against itself, or fell into the gulch to instantly fill up the cleft and cause the remaining slide to roll over it.

"The end of that avalanche did not come until it reached the valley of Bear Forks, just below Pebbly Pit ranch. If your home had not been snugly located up in that crater, but had been down in the valley by the river, it would have been completely covered with the tons of trash that still remained after having rolled for miles, and finally worn itself out on the banks of the stream.

"All the branches of Bear Forks that start up on the side of the mountain, are choked, and the waters rushed in every direction, starting smaller slides by up-rooting trees and loose stones and shale.

"The miners followed Mike's example, and ate a hearty dinner, although they

were all crazy to ride back and ascertain the extent of the damage caused. Mike was for their going quietly on home, but not one of the others would agree to this. So they turned back and rode as far as the trail was passable. But they could not climb over the great mass of débris that was piled up, shortly after leaving Four Blaze Tree. And the queer sensation of not seeing the old familiar top on Grizzly Peak, unnerved them for further adventure that day.

“They got home past midnight, to hear the account of what happened as witnessed by Anne, and Mr. and Mrs. Brewster.

“At the first rolling of the slide, Anne ran out of the ranch-house and watched anxiously, as she knew the men were up at the mine. She saw such a strange sight that she rubbed her eyes to make sure she was not dreaming. She says, she saw the top of Old Grizzly break right off as if someone had cleft it at a given point down from the peak. And this gigantic mass of ice, still glittering in the sun-rays, toppled down until she heard the crash and roar and felt the earth shake under her feet even at that great distance from the Peak that the ranch was.

“The ranch-house and the out-buildings shook as in a quake, and caused everyone to run toward the terrace that runs along the edge of the crater. There they stood watching clouds of snow float up over the forests that, one moment were to be seen, and the next were moving swiftly down the mountain sides.

“The folks feared the men at the mine had been killed, as the avalanche was the greatest they had ever heard of in that vicinity, so Mr. Brewster rode madly to Oak Creek to get some men to go with him to see if any signs of his boys could be found.

“They met them at Lone Pine Blaze, and Tom said that John’s father sat still and sobbed like a child, with relief at finding everyone in his mining-party safe.

“So, Miss Polly, the gold mine is closed by Nature, for untold repairs. Whether this generation will ever locate the ore and dig out the tools and machinery buried in the cave, remains to be seen. But I was so infatuated with life in the Rockies during the short visit I had there, that I determined to put in all the cramming at college that was possible, and finish my education so I could go out there to join Tom Latimer and John Brewster in their exciting engineering work.”

When Jack had concluded his story, the girls seemed rather downcast at the knowledge that their little mine was gone, but Mr. Dalken said to young Baxter:

“You may as well tell them about the Cliffs, and have all the mourning over at

one time.”

Polly glanced anxiously from Mr. Dalken to Jack, and then at Eleanor, but the young man explained without waiting longer: “All the miners working at Rainbow Cliffs went on a big strike shortly after the calamity on Grizzly Slide, and so unreasonable were their demands that Mr. Brewster refused to grant them. That stopped work on the lava jewels, too, and everything is closed down until next year. Of course, while there is no work going on, there are no wages to pay, but there is also no income from the vast amount of money invested in machinery.”

“Dear me, then really, I am a pauper for the time being,” exclaimed Polly, but not in a distressed tone as one would expect after such dire news.

“Your mother told me most emphatically, that that was *not* the case. Everyone at Pebbly Pit seems to want you to continue with your studies until you have finished; and your father said there was a tidy fortune in a Denver bank for you, so that no matter what happened to others, you were amply provided for. With your business that you wish to take up, you will not have to worry over the future,” explained Jack Baxter.

Eleanor remembered that Mr. Dalken had invested heavily in these two Pebbly Pit ventures, and now she turned to him.

“Will everyone connected with those two mines lose a great deal of money?”

“Your father, the Latimers, the Evans’, myself and John Brewster hold equal shares of stock, but Polly’s father holds twice as much as anyone else, for he holds Polly’s stock as her guardian as well as his own. The Montresor Estate, representing the heirs of Kenneth’s uncle who first discovered the mine on Grizzly, and then willed it to Polly who later re-discovered the same vein of ore in the cave, hold the same number of shares in the stock-company as either of us, although they did not furnish any cash for their stock.

“Now Ebenezer Alexander told Jack to tell us, that he simply could not stand city-life another day. And, after enjoying the freedom and open life of the Rockies again, he was determined to stay at Pebbly Pit and see the tangle worked out. His experience will be most valuable to Tom and John, who are only young engineers, after all. And Mr. Brewster is a stock-grower with no knowledge of mining. So we think it is a good plan to let Mr. Alexander take up some of our shares, and sell him an interest in the future of these mines.

“If anyone can pull Choko’s Find Mine out of the grave it is buried in, old

Ebenezer can do it. He has such energy and perseverance that nothing daunts him—excepting big cities.”

“And titles!” added Eleanor, making her friends laugh.

“Oh, I’m glad to hear he will stay there to help. I like him so much!” declared Polly.

“Well, now that most of our evening was given to the story about the land-slide on Grizzly, how much time am I to be given for the furnishing of my apartment?” asked Jack Baxter.

“Just talking about it won’t furnish it,” retorted Polly, smilingly.

“No, but we can get at first principles, can’t we?”

“Yes; if both sides know on what basis each wishes to start!” said Eleanor.

“I know my side of it, and I really think you girls know yours. This is my basis: I have two large rooms and bath near Fifth Avenue, that I want a decorator to do in keeping with the style of the rooms. I don’t care where or how you get the items for furnishing, but I’d like some of the fun of going about with you when you visit odd corners of the country to dig up the antiques.”

“If you waste your time that way, how do you expect to finish a hurried education in engineering?” asked Polly.

“Oh, furnishing won’t last long, and studying will.”

“If Mr. Dalken is a conscientious executor of your estate I should think he’d forbid your wasting any time hunting up furniture and hiring decorators to do it for you, at the same time,” teased Eleanor.

Mr. Dalken laughed and said: “I always said ‘All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.’”

“Well, Jack can work for two whole weeks before he gets any play, as far as going to a sale is concerned. There will be no sale, that we know of, until the old house at Parsippany is sold in two weeks,” explained Polly.

“I won’t have to wait as long as that, I hope, for my apartment. I’m paying rent on it already, and am stopping with Mr. Dalken as his guest, until I get a bed and a chair.”

“But I thought you wanted to furnish by going to the sales of antiques,” ventured Polly.

“I did, but I want to go to one tomorrow. Can’t you girls contract to escort me to places in the city where we can get things without waiting?”

“As far as that is concerned, we can take you right over to the Ashby Shop and find everything on earth you can use, right in his collections,” said Polly.

“I wanted to feel that you two girls were getting this contract and the profits, and not a famous establishment,” demurred Jack.

“We’ll have the contract, all right, but we will only buy what we need from Mr. Ashby, at regular discount, you know,” explained Eleanor in a business-like manner.

Mr. Dalken smiled indulgently on his two young friends who had developed such marvelous aptitude for business since their trip abroad that summer. And young Baxter concluded with: “All right; tomorrow, you girls get Mrs. Fabian, and come over to my rooms to get your ‘atmosphere.’ Then we’ll start in and shop.”

So the next ten days were filled with a great many visits to the apartment to determine certain colors and styles of things, and with a great deal of important conferring between the client and the decorators. But eventually, the apartment was almost ready for its occupant, and three young people declared that the decorating was a work of art—simply perfect! And it did not cost so *very* much, either! Mr. Dalken reserved his opinion on costs, however, and laughed in his sleeve at Baxter, for the latter had no more need of an apartment than a cat has for two tails. It was a whim of his to give the girls a contract, and Jack could afford whims, so his guardian said nothing about the bills.

“Well, I must say,” said Polly the day after Jack held a “house-warming” in his newly furnished domain, “I never saw ten days go by as fast as these did. Here we are almost on top of that sale in the country, and it seems like yesterday that we got the announcement.”

“It shows how much we really love our profession,” said Eleanor, “when we get so much pleasure out of work.”

But Dodo was present at some of the conferences the two amateur decorators held with Jack and she now remarked: “Work! did you two think that going about in Jack’s sporty car and lunching at swell dining-rooms, or holding up a strip of gold-gauze to watch the sheen on your hand, was hard work?”

Mrs. Fabian laughed to herself at the conversation. But Polly answered with an experienced air: “When you have had years of study in decorating, like Nolla

and I have had, you will find that work is not altogether a physical effort. At present, in your apprenticeship, you do more than you saw us do in furnishing, but you'll learn, some day!"

Dodo tossed her head confidently, and remarked: "I have nothing more to learn—if your knowledge is the acme of the understanding of your trade."

As no reply was given this statement, Mrs. Fabian hurried from the room to laugh quietly to herself at the egotism of youth. Later when Mr. Ashby was told the story, he said:

"When they have been at the profession for thirty years, and have acquired all the knowledge that I have in that time, they will begin to learn that we all know very little of harmony and perfect ideals in decorating."

CHAPTER XII

THE PARSIPPANY VENDUE

It was a lovely late Fall day when Carl brought Mr. Dalke's car around to the Fabian's residence to drive the girls to the Parsippany sale. Jack Baxter was seated beside Carl and announced to the girls as they came out with Mrs. Fabian: "I'm invited to go with you."

"Who asked you?" was the rejoinder from both girls.

"Carl did. He gets tired of chauffeuring for hours without rest. So I offered to help him out."

Of course, Carl's uncomfortable flush showed that Jack was joking, but he was a welcome addition to the small party, so they started off, a merry quartette.

As there had been no time to drive out, so far, to inspect the household goods for sale, it had been postponed until the day of the sale. Mrs. Fabian said that should there be nothing desirable at the old house, they could go on and have another hunt about the country.

But the sale promised to be an interesting one, for the moment the girls found out that the house they were looking for was an old Colonial two-story farmhouse, with wings at each side, they felt sure of its contents being worth-while.

They parked the car out in a large carriage-house and walked over to the front door. It was a true type, with sunburst window over the door, and a wonderful old knocker on the front panel of the door. A narrow high window at each side had diamond panes in them. There was a dear little hood over the doorway that someone called a "rain-shed." And on each side of the "stoop" which was reached by three steps, was a high-backed wooden seat, with funny low arms at the outer ends.

The windows of the entire house were filled with small-paned sash, the glass being green and wavy in some panes, and as cloudy as mist in others. Then again other panes were of really clear white glass. The city visitors found later, that

these old panes were the original old glass set in by the first owner.

But they did not come to admire the outside, so they all went indoors to look about. They entered upon a tiny entry.

The front parlor was a small band-box-like room with a chimney piece at one side, and a stove-pipe hole in it for winter use. Alongside the chimney was a narrow cupboard that was meant to hold books, or other things, to keep the parlor from being “cluttered up.”

Directly opposite the chimney was a long, high-backed settee, with haircloth covering. The frame was old mahogany and the shape hinted at Chippendale, with its six feet having beautiful lines, and the side arms curving graciously out to invite one to be seated.

In this best room were, also, several rush-bottomed stencilled chairs, and a Boston Rocker. An inlaid Hepplewhite table stood against the wall between the two front windows, with its drop-leaf raised against the wall. A number of old pieces of brass and pewter stood on the table. Over it hung an early Georgian mirror but the reflection one got when gazing into it was terrifying.

From the parlor, the collectors went to the long living-room that occupied one wing of the house. Here was a great open fire-place with crane, and everything used in olden times for keeping a fire in good order. Over the mantel hung a wonderful old mirror with a colored picture of Washington crossing the Delaware in its upper panel.

A rare Empire table with both leaves up, stood in the middle of the room, and Polly instantly made up her mind to own that table, if nothing more that day.

As they went about admiring the antiques, Jack said: “Gee! But I’m sorry we furnished the apartment so soon. What a lot of fine things we might have had at this sale.”

And Eleanor laughingly remarked: “Sell your flat out like so many New Yorkers do, and start in again on another.”

In the low-ceiled, wide dining-room, they found the typical round mahogany table with twelve chairs—two arm and ten side chairs. The seats were covered with rep, but must have had haircloth on them at one time. The backs were very low and curved away from the small of the back in a frightened manner. There was but one cross-piece in the back and that was curved also.

The side-board was nearly eight feet long, with six claw feet, and a high top. On

it stood a tea-caddy of mahogany, a knife-box, and several silver boxes. All of them must have been over a hundred years old. Very old china and glassware stood on the large table, ready to be sold. The collectors saw many desirable pieces there, but they were too anxious to visit the upstairs to stop, then, and examine the plates and other pieces.

There were four large square rooms on the second floor and in each one, stood a wonderful four-poster bed—two with canopy-tops and two without. Empire work-tables were in two rooms, and besides the high chests of mahogany drawers, and low dressing-tables with tiny front drawers to hold the comb and brush, there were also ottomans, foot-stools, and ornamental pieces. Mirrors hung over each mantel, and old-fashioned prints and paintings were on the walls.

By the time Mrs. Fabian and the girls went downstairs again, they were dumbfounded to find that a farm-house so near to Morristown and railroad stations, should have preserved such a wonderful lot of old mahogany furniture without having been discovered by collectors. But being strangers to the other people now gathering for the sale, they did not speak of their wonderment.

Mr. Van Styne was late, and as soon as he arrived he began in the kitchen, without any greeting to his followers. There seemed to be a far different type of buyer at this sale, than the girls had found at any of the little sales in Westchester; and once the auctioneer began on the antique pieces, the prices ran up alarmingly.

“That man standing over there just paid a hundred and sixty dollars for that Colonial secretary,” whispered Polly, annoyance expressed in her tone for she had been bidding on the same piece.

“He doesn’t look as if he had sixty cents in his purse,” said Eleanor, scornfully.

A lady standing beside her, looked at the buyer and smiled. “That man is one of the buyers of one of the largest antique collectors in New York.”

“He is!” gasped Eleanor.

“Who is the collector?” asked Polly, but the woman saw a little Toby put up for sale, just then, and she wanted to bid on it, so Polly never heard.

Anything that could boast of being a hundred years old, or more, brought fabulous prices, and the girls were amazed to hear names that they had read of in the columns of the New York papers, called out by the cashier, but never dreamed they would come face to face with the owners thereof.

Jack Baxter spied a woman he knew, and finally brought her over to meet Mrs. Fabian and the girls. This lady was a social leader in the City, and furnished much interesting information to her new acquaintances, about others present who were buying.

That sale taught Polly that it was not always the farm-houses that furnished the rarest bargains at a sale, especially when that farm was in proximity to a well-known residential suburb. But she also found that not everyone who attends a public sale, and bids anxiously, knows the value of what they are bidding on.

Thus it transpired, that she secured several of the finest antiques in the house, because others knew nothing of their true records or had overlooked the objects because of their unattractive finish or form.

Jack furnished much amusement to his friends by bidding on everything the girls did not want. And the most amusing part of it was, he seldom secured a thing he bid on. He finally grew so desperate in his bidding, because Polly laughed at his luck, that the people frowned upon him as being a “professional capper.”

Mr. Van Styne overheard that remark and was furious.

“I want you all to know that I am an honest auctioneer! I never had a booster in my life, and I’ve sold for nigh onto fifty years. That nice-looking young man you call a ‘capper’ is a friend of some friends of mine from New York, out here to buy antiques. To prove it to you-all, that young lady there, next the young man, is the one who gave the ‘Metropolitan’ the rare print she found in my shop. So there! I reckon that will hold you, for a time!”

The surprise felt by the buyers at this news about Polly, was instantly followed by a general laugh at the auctioneer’s final remark to them. Baxter laughed at the interruption, but Polly felt very uncomfortable with so many eyes turned her way. Mr. Van Styne, never dreaming of having made personal remarks, now continued his sale.

The antique furniture in the upstairs chambers brought higher prices than Polly had seen similar pieces on sale at the antique shops in New York, and she wondered still more that a country auction should bring forth buyers who were willing to pay such high prices.

Finally, feeling sure that there were no more bargains for them that day, Polly led the way downstairs. Young Baxter tried to persuade her to remain and try for a high-boy she had admired, but she refused to give the high bids demanded. So Jack stayed when the others left the room.

Down on the side-porch, while waiting for Carl to come from the carriage sheds, a well-dressed lady accosted Polly.

“I heard the auctioneer say you presented a rare print to the Museum in New York City. I should be pleased to hear about it.”

She handed Polly a card. Upon reading the name of one of the best known amateur collectors in New York, Polly forgot to reply. Mrs. Fabian smiled and spoke for her, to give her time to recover from her surprise. After introducing the girls, Mrs. Fabian mentioned the fact that Polly and Eleanor took advantage of every sale in or about the City, in order to familiarize themselves with such articles as they would need in their profession.

“Oh, are you studying this line of work?” asked the lady, deeply interested at once.

“Yes, we have given several years to the study, already, and last Summer we went abroad to visit the best known places where antiques and collections were to be seen,” replied Polly.

“Well then, my dears, this is my lucky day. I want someone to do this sort of work for me, but I want only such interested individuals who love the collecting for itself, and not alone for wages. Also, I want someone who can tell a Sheraton piece from Empire. If you girls will accept a proposition from me, I will be glad to talk it over, some morning, with you.”

Polly smiled and said: “If your orders do not interfere with our studies and other work, we will gladly accept the work.”

So, by the time Jack Baxter hurried down the stairs, Polly and Eleanor had made a new connection with one of New York’s social leaders. Jack looked about for his friends, for a moment, and then smiled in surprise as he rushed forward.

“Why, Mrs. Courtney! I am delighted to see you here. Did you just arrive?”

“Well, if it isn’t Jack Baxter! No, my boy, I came out this morning thinking this was a *bona fide* antique sale. To my disgust, I found it was ‘fixed’ by a clever dealer from the city, who chooses just such suburban towns as are famous for its millionaire residents, then he plans a campaign. He was wise enough, this time, to engage Mr. Van Styne to do the selling for him, as the old man is so popular with the people of his town, and he is a splendid auctioneer, at the same time.”

Polly was dumbfounded. “Do you mean to say that anyone would take the trouble to ship out all these antiques, so far from the city, just to catch a lot of

buyers?”

Mrs. Courtney laughed. “Of course, my dear. People will take any amount of trouble to make a few extra dollars. This dealer owns his own trucks, and why not let them put in a day’s work carting a load of furniture here, if he can get twice as much for his goods as in New York? All he has to do, is to find the right type of old house conveniently near the city for motoring and large enough to show off his wares to the best advantage. This man is clever enough, too, to select only such places as are rich with Revolutionary lore, and near enough to the estates of the rich to be an attraction to owners to come. Then he mails announcements to his city clientele, also. That is how I heard of the sale.”

Jack frowned angrily. “I suppose that darned old high-boy I just bought for a top-notch figure, could have been purchased at this man’s city shop for half the price! Now I have to pay to have it crated and shipped back to New York.”

“Oh, this ‘fixer’ will move it back in his trucks for a neat sum,” said Eleanor.

Her companions laughed. Polly then reminded him: “I said *not* to bid on it! I knew it would go too high for us to bother with.”

Carl now drove up to the house, and Mrs. Courtney bid them good-day, having reminded Polly that she and Eleanor were to telephone her at their first opportunity.

Polly could not help speaking of the “fixed” sale of antiques, and Eleanor said: “That is why everything brought such awfully high prices. The articles must have had a set price on them to begin with, and when Mr. Van Styne offered a thing, the dealer was there to run it to a figure beyond the given price on the books. I am surprised that the old auctioneer would do such a thing.”

“I don’t believe he knew the sale was what we call ‘padded’; for he seems too conscientious a man to lend himself to such a deception,” remarked Mrs. Fabian.

“If he was just hired to sell the stuff, regardless of how it got out to Parsippany, and told to follow book-orders, he had no choice, had he?” asked Polly.

“He looks such an honest old fellow, I don’t believe he even knew the goods came from a New York dealer. Just because he *is* so honest, is one reason why people who knew him will listen to his advice and for the same reason a clever New York dealer would hire him. I wouldn’t be surprised, if you girls hear from him, some day, to the effect that he is shocked to learn that this sale was not on the level as far as the yarn went,” said Jack.

“Well, I’d feel better if he did. I really feel hurt, now, to think he might be as tricky as that other dealer,” said Polly.

“But it would not be called ‘tricky,’ Polly, in clever business circles,” said Mrs. Fabian.

“Maybe not, but to me it looks a lot like selling goods under false representations. I’d rather not sell anything than have to sell that way.”

“When you come right down to ‘brass tacks’ and study out the whole scheme of things, Polly, we might be accused of tricky works, too,” remarked Eleanor.

“What do you mean?” demanded Polly, astonished.

“Well, when you think of how we got that pair of old candle-sticks in exchange for a brass lamp! We had no lamp to exchange, but Mrs. Fabian rushed off to a store and got one. Then there were those old pictures at Van Styne’s. We were afraid he’d suspect them of being valuable, so we dusted them well again, as they had been originally, and placed them with two others to make a ‘job lot’ of them, to hide the facts about them.”

“But,” remonstrated Polly, “the lady who had no use for the candle-sticks *did* want a brass lamp the worst way. And Sally Dolan, who never appreciated the pictures when she had them, *did* appreciate the money we paid for them—while we appreciated the old things other folks failed to value.”

“Polly is right, there, Nolla,” added Mrs. Fabian. “I do not see a trick in giving a person exactly what they ask for a thing—whether they realize the true value of it, or not. That is their affair. In Law, the Judge says there is no excuse or cause, for mitigating a sentence because the prisoner claims he was ignorant of consequences of a deed. So it is in other lines: Ignorance can never claim excuse from consequences—whether it be a sale of a candle-stick or a piece of old land that turns out to have gold on it.”

“Then I should say, ignorance on the part of the buyers at this vendue, exonerates the dealer from all blame,” said Eleanor.

“Legally it does, but we were thinking of the moral,” explained Mrs. Fabian.

When the collectors reached the Fabian house, Jack seemed loath to go on, so Mrs. Fabian invited him in to have a bite with them at an informal dinner.

It had been plainly evident for some time, that the only interest Jack Baxter had taken in furnishing his apartment, or in going about to hunt out old antiques, was because it gave him plenty of opportunities to be with Polly. And as is often the

case, when one is completely absorbed in a pursuit, Polly was the last one to suspect the truth of this.

But he forgot discretion that evening, at dinner, and permitted too much of his attention to be directed Polly's way. Even this might have been overlooked had not an interruption occurred while at the table.

The telephone bell was heard, and shortly afterward, the maid came around to Polly's side and said:

"A Mr. Latimer on the wire, Miss Polly."

Eleanor was all interest at once: "Can it be Jim, or Tom, I wonder?"

Polly was excusing herself at the moment, but turned to add: "You know very well that Tom has his hands full at the mines."

Eleanor flushed, for she had almost given away a secret that Paul had told her in his last letter. Thus far she had kept quiet about the confidence.

Polly ran from the room, and Jack Baxter scowled at his plate. Mr. Fabian smiled at his face and tried to engage him in conversation. But Polly's continued absence annoyed the youth, so that he lost his appetite, and, in fact, all interest in any subject started.

Polly skipped back after a time, her face wreathed in smiles. "You will never guess who I was talking to?"

Everyone but Jack pretended not to know, but he blurted out: "When I was out at the ranch, that Tom Latimer said something about coming East for the Winter months—as long as Alexander proposed to stay out there and take a hand in the work."

"Why, this is the first word you've said about it," said Polly, amazed.

"Had I known you were so deeply interested in the plans of young Latimer, I would have told you immediately," said Jack, with sarcasm born of jealousy in his voice.

Polly refused to answer him, and immediately asked Mrs. Fabian to excuse her from dinner as she wished to dress for the evening.

The rest of the family finished the meal with the uncomfortable sense of Jack's having lost caste in Polly's estimation. He felt it himself, and it certainly did not tend to make him more agreeable that evening.

As soon after dinner as could be politely managed, Jack spoke of a theatre

engagement and excused himself. His hostesses felt easier when the door slammed upon him, for they dreaded having Tom announced while his rival was there, and then have the whole evening spoiled by both young men glowering at each other.

While Eleanor and Nancy ran upstairs to dress for the evening, the former whispered: "If Tom remains in New York all this winter, I bet he'll *get* Polly before he goes back to the mines, or else he'll 'cook his goose' for all time!"

Nancy laughed merrily, and said: "No goose will be cooked if Polly knows it! But I'll wager you a box of candy, Nolla, that Tom will *not* get his girl before he goes back to the mines."

"All right, Nanc! That's a wager; a five-pound box of the best *bon bons*, that Tom and Polly will be engaged before the end of this winter season!"

CHAPTER XIII

TOM MEANS BUSINESS

Polly's friends had not completed their dressing when Tom was announced, but she was waiting in the cozy library; so Tom crossed the long formal parlor in a few strides, when he caught sight of her in the softly shaded light of the floor-lamp.

"Polly! Oh, but I'm glad to see you again!" breathed he as he caught both hands and devoured her smiles with his eyes.

"I should hope you would be glad! Isn't everyone I know glad to see me after they have been absent a long time?" laughed Polly, in a matter-of-fact tone.

But Tom glanced hastily about the room. Then he quite unexpectedly leaned forward and caught her face between his palms. "Polly Brewster, I'm going to salute you with a brotherly kiss!" whispered Tom, and immediately, he pressed a kiss upon her red lips—but Polly felt sure it was *not* like John's kisses.

She tried to free her head from his powerful hands, but he laughed masterfully and held her under the light while he gazed into her eyes. Finally Polly felt herself growing warm and flushed, and to stop his look she closed her eyes and began kicking at his shins.

With a happy laugh, Tom freed her face and picked her up in his arms. In three long strides he was over at the divan where he placed her, sitting upright. Then he sat down beside her.

"Why—Tom Latimer!" gasped Polly, angrily, trying to rearrange her hair which had become tumbled in the fray.

"Why—Tom Latimer!" laughed he, mimicking Polly very cleverly. "You don't know *this* Tom, do you, girl! But this is the Tom that you'll know hereafter. I'm through acting like a woolly lamb just because Anne says that's the only way to get a girl! You're a Rocky Mountain girl and the only way to make you notice, is to use ranch methods to lasso you. That's why I'm here in New York. Catch me

letting a rich society darling like that Baxter spend the winter months making love to you, when I'm wasting my heart away at Pebbly Pit, hoping against hope for a nice long letter from you!"

TOM PICKED POLLY UP IN HIS ARMS.
Polly's Business Venture. Page 200

Tom's frown and the tone in which he declared himself, made Polly want to laugh albeit she shrunk away, somewhat, for fear of a plot in his mind.

Tom had, in his fervor, lost control once, but he was too wise to indulge himself again, in such a manner. Tom had spent a great deal of time in studying, during the past year, the psychology of love, and now he was going to test his knowledge. He told John, just before he left the ranch, that once a girl liked a fellow, it was easy to make her love him, by judicious treatment. In explanation, he said:

"When Jeb wants to coax one of the burros to the barn, he doesn't give him the measure of oats to eat out on the range—no, he leads the burro to the barn by holding the box of feed ahead of his nose!"

The Brewsters laughed at Tom's idea, but he declared that that was the way he was going to get Polly. And all their arguments about giving Polly a chance to finish her studies and try out her beloved work, fell on dull ears. Tom started East!

"Polly, let's all go to a good show, shall we?" was Tom's unexpected invitation, just as his companion began to worry because he sat so close beside her.

"Oh! Yes—I think that will be lovely!" said Polly.

"All right! Run up and tell the others to get their caps and jackets on. I'll telephone an agent and see what's good."

Polly ran out of the room, glad to have the problem of the evening's entertainment solved for her, but still she felt a little disappointed because Tom could so eagerly suggest taking the family out when she wanted to have a tête-à-tête with him to ask about the mines. Tom's plan about holding the temptation before a burro instead of surfeiting him with goodies, was evidently beginning to work.

The play was one of the most popular ones, and seats were in great demand. But money does anything in New York, so Tom secured splendid orchestra seats, and they reached the theatre just as the curtain went up on the first scene. The interior was darkened when they entered, and Polly could not tell who sat in front of her, until the first act ended and the lights were turned on.

Tom sat beside her, and began whispering in his free western voice, when a young man seated directly in front, turned deliberately around and stared at him. Polly gasped, and Eleanor nudged her in the side. It was Jack Baxter!

Without taking his eyes from Tom, Jack reached under the chair and got his hat. Then he dragged his coat over his arm, and got up. He bowed stiffly to the girls in Tom's party, and went out. Tom waited until he was gone, then he looked down at Polly.

"Um! It was high time I came East, I see!"

"Why?" was Polly's smiling rejoinder.

"By next Spring it might have been Tom who sat alone and felt like the fifth wheel in a wagon instead of Baxter. My, but I'm glad I came!"

Polly frowned, and Eleanor did her best to hear what was said between these two *apparently* phlegmatic companions. But Tom meant his words for Polly's ears only.

Once during the evening, when the light was so low that the theatre was almost dark, Tom changed his position in such a way that his arm rested over the back of Polly's chair. In his interest in the scene on the stage, his hand dropped carelessly upon her shoulder. And Polly was too engaged with the play to remove it, or even change her position to allow it to fall back again.

Then Tom moved, so that his arms touched hers, and his hand that rested upon one knee, could cover Polly's hand while the audience was enthralled by the burglar's escape, and no one but Eleanor had the slightest idea of what was going on in these two orchestra chairs. But Polly grew restive and tried to free her hand.

Then the lights went up again, and Tom moved away and said apologetically: "These seats are so cramped for such a great fellow as I am!"

And Polly replied tartly: "Yes, they really ought to allow more room for people's hands and arms."

Eleanor smiled wisely, and sent Tom a teasing look.

John Baxter did not come back to claim his seat that evening, and the play ended without Polly having given him another thought. Poor Jack!

After Tom reached New York, there seemed very little time for Polly in which to hunt up antiques in the country, or to attend sales that were advertised at various places. Then Winter weather set in, and that gave her the necessary excuse that the automobile could not travel in snow or mud.

All but Tom and Polly thought that Tom's plot to win Polly from her chosen profession seemed to be succeeding. But Tom felt that he had not had much encouragement as yet; and Polly was having a very nice time with an old friend she liked better than other young men, without feeling unduly indebted for the pleasure.

Although the Latimers lived uptown in New York, they saw little of Tom during the first weeks of his return to the City. He stopped at a hotel not far from the Fabian's place, and made duty-calls on his father and mother at regular intervals, but they understood what he came East for, and they wished him all success.

Time passed quickly, with a new pastime planned by Tom, for each day. And most of these pleasures included the other girls, as well as Polly. So the enjoyment was general, and Polly could not say that Tom tried to get her company for himself, by leaving her friends out of any fun.

December came in, and the Christmas season advanced, with Tom still leading a gay life and escorting the girls to every pleasure or entertainment they heard of; and Polly was still the kind little "sister" to him in every way, but nothing more.

Tom had selected his Christmas gift for Polly, but no one had been told about it. This he had kept absolutely secret. The Christmas Holidays came and all schools closed, so that the girls had no studies to attend to, and no art work to prepare. Jim Latimer and his chum Kenneth came home from Yale for the two weeks' vacation, and they immediately called on Polly and Eleanor.

Tom saw how gladly Polly welcomed Jim and Kenneth, and he began to wonder if she really preferred a young boy's society to his. Polly and Jim were about the same age—not quite eighteen, while he—Tom, was almost twenty-four. Such a decrepit old age!

The evening Jim planned to visit Polly and take Kenneth along for Eleanor, Tom, to the surprise of his parents, spent the entire evening with them; but he was not very attentive to what his mother said, nor did he seem over-pleased with being at home.

Jim and Kenneth were noisy, active young college boys, and they furnished lots of fun that evening, of the energetic, “center-rush” kind. But Polly was relieved when they had said good-night and were gone.

Eleanor laughed at the way Jim “rough-housed” both girls when he tried to kiss them good-night, and Polly indignantly told him he would never be invited there again! Jim laughed and caught hold of Polly to shake her for such a threat, but he smacked her loudly on the lips, instead.

As the two girls went upstairs to retire, Polly said: “I’m sure Jim wouldn’t have acted so silly if his big brother had been here!”

Eleanor then added: “We have such lovely evenings with Tom, that this sort of horse-play gets on my nerves!” Then she slyly watched her friend’s expression to try and read her mind.

“I wonder why Tom never came in tonight?” said Polly.

“Jack Baxter met me this afternoon, and he says Tom goes uptown regularly, to see a girl. Jack shadowed him and knows exactly where the girl lives. But he didn’t say I must not tell you,” said Eleanor, confidentially. Neither did she add that she had heard the address of this “girl” and knew it to be Tom’s home and mother.

Polly flushed, but said nonchalantly: “Poor Tom! He feels awfully bored with us girls, at times!”

“I should think so! especially if he came home for a visit with the idea of finding a nice girl to propose to. Now Jack thinks that Tom, with his good looks, his wonderful intelligence, and his family-tree, to say nothing of the Latimer fortune, ought to be able to take his pick of any New York girl that is looking for an ideal husband,” remarked Eleanor, guilelessly.

Polly flashed her a look. “Since when has Jack Baxter dropped his maligning of Tom Latimer, and started to admire him?”

Eleanor bit her lips to prevent a smile, but she replied, innocently: “Why, Jack always did admire Tom, even when he met him at Pebbly Pit. But he is jealous of him, for all the admiration he has for him. But I’ll tell you, Polly: I wouldn’t trust Jack in a case of ‘love or war.’ He’d as soon make Tom believe you were in love with another man, as anything else, if he could win a point by it.”

But Eleanor over-stepped her ambition this time. Polly quickly replied: “Then Jack must be trying to ‘win a point’ when he got you to tell me that Tom was

calling on another girl, uptown.”

Eleanor realized her error and had common sense enough not to endeavor to explain it away. She merely said: “Oh well, Tom is too handsome a fellow to be wandering about New York these nights without a guardian. Some wide awake girl is going to snap him up the first chance!”

“Seems to me, Nolla, that Tom has been wandering about since he arrived in the City, with a whole bevy of guardians to keep him from snares and pitfalls. With all of us girls surrounding him, a fine chance any other girl could have found to snap him.”

Eleanor was evidently getting worsted in her well-meant plan to further Tom’s case, so she wisely decided to keep still.

Nothing was heard from Tom the next day, although Polly was sure he would call, or telephone, before evening. Then the telephone did ring, but it was Mr. Dalken, inviting the entire family over to his apartment for a party that evening.

“Just an impromptu affair, you know, with some of our old friends coming in to spend the evening.”

Mrs. Fabian accepted for herself and husband, and said she would see if the girls had any engagement. She came back to the living-room where they were waiting for dinner to be announced.

“Are you girls going out this evening, or have you any engagement at home?” asked she.

Nancy shook her head, and Eleanor replied: “For a great wonder, we haven’t a blessed thing on for tonight! First evening free in months!”

“Mr. Dalken wants us to come over and join some old friends, just for a nice visit,” ventured Mrs. Fabian, looking from one girl to the other.

“Fine! Anything but sitting here staring at Polly’s concerned face,” retorted Eleanor.

Mrs. Fabian smiled and went to answer Mr. Dalken, but Polly sat up and asked Eleanor what she meant by that.

“Oh, ask yourself, Polly, you’ve been mooning around all day looking like ‘Gottschalk’s Last Hope.’ One speaks to you, and you never hear what’s said. The very house could burn down but you’d never know it. You’d roast without feeling any sensation in it!” declared Eleanor, impatiently. Nancy laughed at

both girls.

After dinner, while the girls were dressing to go to Mr. Dalken's, Eleanor went to Polly's room to be hooked up. When she saw Polly arrayed in one of her most fetching Paris dresses she stood and stared.

"Why! we're not going to the Opera!" said she.

"We're going to Mr. Dalken's, aren't we?" asked Polly.

"Yes, but Jack won't be there—nor Tom, either," was Eleanor's smooth reply.

"I hadn't thought of who might be there, I dressed for my old friend, Mr. Dalken. He is so correct in these matters, so I want to do justice to his friendship," Polly scored this time.

Eleanor did not wait to be hooked up but rushed back to her own room, and when Polly met her again, down in the hall, she had changed her gown, also, and looked very attractive, indeed.

Because of the delay occasioned by Eleanor, the Fabian party was late in reaching Mr. Dalken's. The other guests were already there, and to Polly's intense gratification, not only was Jack assisting the host for the evening, but Tom sat in one corner of the large living room, looking at a book of snap-shots taken by Mr. Dalken while out in the Rockies. So engrossed was Tom in the pictures, that he did not lift his head when new-comers were welcomed.

Polly glanced over at the corner and finding Tom so interested in mountain charms, while female charms abounded so near him, she felt peeved and smiled radiantly on Jack. Eleanor saw, and determined that she would not permit matters to go astray again, as she had taken such trouble to get Mr. Dalken to plan this impromptu gathering just to give Polly the opportunity to see both suitors together—to the advancement of one or the other's interest. Eleanor had no doubt that it would be Tom's advancement.

So she flirted outrageously with Jack, to the amusement of Mr. Dalken who understood how matters were with all the young people. Thus Eleanor was cozily cornered with Jack in the den, doing her utmost to make him forget Polly for the time being, when the Jap came to the living-room door and announced a new caller.

CHAPTER XIV

NECESSARY EXPLANATIONS

Eleanor was not to be seen when a young man came in the room and was joyously welcomed by everyone present. Tom Latimer had disappeared also, a short time before this, and Polly was sitting in the wide seat built in the window, staring out over the roofs of the buildings without seeing a thing.

The delighted exclamations from those in the room, however, drew her attention, and she was rejoiced to see Paul Stewart shaking hands with those crowding about him. So Polly left her shadowy retreat and ran over to welcome him, too.

Paul was saying: "Isn't it too jolly of John to send me East for the Holidays, by making me power-of-attorney for the Stock-holders meeting the first of January. That was the only way I could have come—by having my fare paid!" Paul laughed because they all knew of his financial problems, and how he was striving to win success that he might propose to Eleanor.

Polly felt annoyed because she was sure Eleanor had led Tom to the den that she might advise him further in his love-affairs. And it was this interference by Eleanor, that roused much of Polly's indifference or impatience towards Tom. Now she felt she had been given a good opportunity to square accounts with her chum.

Paul and she were standing alone for a moment, when she saw him looking about for someone. She gave the desired cue: "You'll find Nolla with Tom, enjoying a tête-à-tête in Mr. Dalken's little den across the hallway, Paul."

As she watched Paul hurriedly excuse himself, she experienced a new sensation—that of gratified revenge on a friend. She walked about the room, apparently looking at the pictures, but really to reach the hall without attracting attention. Once she got out of the room, she made a dash for a shadowy corner made by an old ormolu secretaire between the two doors. She could see into the den and watch Paul's next action.

Two huge Turkish chairs were drawn up before the fire-place but the electric lights were out and only the candles on the tables near the door were lighted. The leaping flames of the logs burning in the fire-place threw dancing shadows over the two occupants of the chairs, but anyone standing near the door could not see who these occupants were.

Paul crept stealthily over to the chairs, planning to surprise his two old friends—believing Tom to be one, and Eleanor the other. He lifted his hands with the intention of clapping them over Eleanor’s eyes to make her guess who was there, when he heard words that rooted him to the spot. Polly saw but could not hear, so she lost the best part of her retaliation on Eleanor.

Just as Paul was about to bring down his palms over Eleanor’s eyes, a strange voice murmured intensely: “You know how I feel about it, Nolla. This love is so absorbing that I cannot give my attention to studies, or to any other important matter. If I am treated to second place, now that another lover is at hand, I will clear out of New York and never be heard from again. In fact, I am going to purposely throw myself in the way of danger and end it all!”

Paul realized that another man had found his treasure and had been encouraged, or why should he be saying “given second-place now that another lover is at hand?” And it was evident that someone knew of his, Paul’s, proposed visit, as *this* young man knew of his coming to see Eleanor.

Such is the mortal’s egotism! One never thinks of others in connection with a selfish hope or idea, but believes that anything seen or heard must appertain to that one thing. So Paul thought Eleanor was the love this young man referred to, and that she had given him second-place because of Paul’s coming.

These thoughts flitted through his mind as young Baxter concluded, and Eleanor waited a moment before answering. Then she said with a sigh: “Dear Jack, a mild little flirtation never hurt any real case of love, and I’ve told you many times, that a game of love like this would improve or become fatal, because of such a flirtation. Like anti-toxin—it *kills* the germs or makes them wild so that no further doubt remains about the patient. Let’s use the hypodermic courageously and watch results. If the love-germ dies, then go and throw yourself on the railroad track and end your troubles. But should the opposite effect result, you can always think of me as the specialist who advised the heroic treatment!”

Paul was shocked to hear his “angel-girl” talk of her love in such a dreadfully frank way, but the suitor’s next sentence left no doubt in Paul’s mind that

Eleanor was a horrid flirt.

“Well, Nolla, you must know best. Paul has been in love with you for a long time, now, and you’ve had many young admirers since you came to New York; so you understand and appreciate my present position and my right to demand one thing or the other—either *I* am the accepted one, or the other man. Both of us cannot be kept dangling about, nor take turns in loving when the other is absent from New York.”

Paul was distressed at hearing this—that Eleanor could accept the attentions of other men when he, Paul, was so hard at work out West, trying to succeed in his profession that he might offer her a suitable home! Now she was flirting with others, and this young man was heart-broken over her short-comings, even as he, Paul, was.

Polly saw Paul wheel and rush from the room, and immediately after that, Eleanor and Jack jumped up from the chairs and gazed at the door where the intruder had disappeared. When Polly saw who Eleanor’s companion was, she gasped in astonishment, for she believed it was Tom sitting before the fire.

Had Polly hurried after Paul, to explain matters to him, all would have ended well that evening, but she went to the room where her wraps had been left and sat down to think out the problem. Meantime, Paul found Mr. Dalken and drew him aside to say:

“Don’t ask questions, and don’t try to stop me, but I am going away as quick as I can. I’m through with girls for all time. They’re not to be trusted when a man’s absent. I’m going to live for my mother, hereafter, and make her life happy.”

Mr. Dalken was taken by surprise, because he had no key to this new puzzle, but he said: “Do wait, my boy, and have some refreshments with us. I have so much to ask you about the mine.”

“No—no! I can’t stay. The mine isn’t my affair anyway, and I was a fool to coax John to give me power-of-attorney to come East for him. Now I’m rushing back and he can send Tom Latimer the affidavit necessary for the meeting in January.”

“Now, now, Paul! You are a hot-headed young fellow and I feel sure matters can be explained quickly, if you will but wait!”

Paul scowled and stiffened his spine as he replied: “Mr. Dalken, I heard with my own ears, that Nolla is infatuated with another young man. She said, *and I* heard her say it: ‘She was not certain which one of us she preferred but the test would show if she used a good dose of anti-toxin to help the germ! But I’m no ‘second

fiddle' even if that other fellow is! If a girl can't tell whether she loves me without using hypodermics to help her find out, then she's no wife for me! Maybe I'm a wild and woolly westerner from Denver, but believe me! we westerners never stand around waiting for a bit to be forced between our teeth."

Mr. Dalken could hardly restrain his sudden desire to laugh, but he averted his head for a moment and covered his face with a handkerchief until he composed his risibles, then he said: "Still, I am sure I can mediate in this case, Paul. Only stay and let me inquire."

"I guess not! No one can mediate between me and a flirt! I am through, I say, and I'm going home!"

So saying Paul thrust out his hand and Mr. Dalken had to take it. "Good-by, and say good-by to the others for me. This much I want you to do, as I will not see them again!"

Mr. Dalken went to the door with his excited guest and saw him go down on the elevator, then he rushed madly back to the telephone and ordered the man to detain the departing guest. Back to the den where he had seen Eleanor standing with Jack, was his next act, and dragging both out of the apartment and along the hall to the elevator, he pushed the button furiously.

While the wondering attendant was coming up, Mr. Dalken said: "What in the name of conscience did you two crazy creatures do or say to Paul Stewart, to drive him frantic?"

Jack stared in ignorance of what his guardian meant, but Eleanor gazed as if she thought Mr. Dalken had suddenly gone mad. The elevator stopped at their floor, and the man opened the gate. Mr. Dalken pulled his two companions on, and the man started down again.

All this time, Eleanor was speechless with doubt of Mr. Dalken's sanity but the elevator man turned to him and said: "The young man I just took down, refused to remain. He said he would arrest anyone who tried to detain him against his will."

Mr. Dalken ran his hands through his hair and rolled his eyes upward. Turning to Eleanor he hissed: "What *did* you say to Paul to make him act like a man in torment?"

"Paul! Are you crazy, Mr. Dalken?" asked Eleanor, fearfully.

"No, but *you* must be to throw over such a sweetheart. You'll wait a long time

before you get another like him, even though I do like Jack immensely, and will further his case when he meets the right girl. I'm sure you are not the right one, and you ought to know it, from what you told me yourself, yesterday. Can't you see that Jack thinks he loves Polly, just because she won't have him?"

"Of course I understand!" retorted Eleanor, but annoyed that her plot to bring Polly and Tom together again was exposed.

"Then why in the name of heavens did you send Paul away believing it was *you* that Jack wanted?"

Before an answer could be given, the elevator reached the ground floor and the man quickly opened the doors. Out in the vestibule the telephone-operator was button-holing a young man and using every persuasion to detain him.

Jack Baxter had never seen Paul so he did not recognize him now. But Eleanor did, and she stood stock-still in such surprise that Mr. Dalken ran ahead without her.

"Paul, Paul! I knew you had made a mistake. Eleanor is here to explain everything," said he, taking the place of the amazed servant.

"What can she explain that will change my opinion of her?" scorned Paul, sending a cold look at poor Eleanor.

"Nolla, come here, Paul wants you to explain," begged Mr. Dalken, beside himself.

Her first surprise at finding Paul Stewart in New York *and in the house*, passed over and Eleanor forgot Jack and everything else, as she rushed forward to welcome her old sweetheart.

"Paul—Oh Paul! When did *you* come?" cried she.

But Paul's haughty stare stopped her when she was not ten inches from him. He turned to Mr. Dalken and said: "Now that you've broken your word with me, you had best explain."

"I broken my word! I never gave my word to anything that is broken. Remember, Paul, you may be a hot-headed impulsive youth, but you cannot make such sweeping accusations without grounds for them. I am so sorry for you in your disappointment that I will excuse you this time, however, and explain for your benefit, that I caught hold of Jack and Nolla after you left and dragged them down here without 'breaking my word' as you claim, or any other unhonorable deed. Unless you consider getting at the truth is unprincipled." Mr. Dalken was

stern and dignified in his self-justification, and Paul had the grace to flush uncomfortably.

Eleanor was standing, uncertain of what was best to do in this strange meeting. She had felt over-joyed a moment before, to find Paul there, but now she wondered why he was so angry, and why he had not waited to greet her, as long as he had been up in the apartment. Baxter, not feeling at home in this group, turned and asked the man to take him up again.

Mr. Dalken had not seen Jack leave again, so he turned to call him, but found he had disappeared.

“Nolla, what did you say to Paul when he met you?” demanded the older man.

“I? Why, Mr. Dalken, I never knew Paul was here. The first hint I had of something unusual was when you rushed in to drag us downstairs.”

Mr. Dalken was puzzled so he turned to Paul. “Then why did you say Nolla was a flirt and had made a fool of you? I thought she met you and began to tease, as she does everyone.”

“There was no need of her saying anything to me, as I heard her tell, when she was not aware of my standing behind her chair, that the young man she was with might prove to be the accepted love after all.” Then Paul repeated the substance of the talk he had overheard between Jack and Eleanor.

As he concluded, Eleanor laughed hysterically and held out her hands to Mr. Dalken beseechingly. “Oh, dear Dalky! Can’t you see how Paul misunderstood everything! I was speaking of Jack’s case with Polly, and advising him in regard to Tom. I know Jack is not seriously in love with Polly, but he fancies himself so, because Polly is so attractive and indifferent to him. As Jack has always been flattered and made love to by society girls, this unexpected attitude of Polly’s piqued the boy. I did my best tonight, to show all three of these silly young things where they stood in this serious matter. And *to think*, I got myself in hot water for trying to help my friends!” Eleanor unexpectedly broke out in sobs and leaned her head against Mr. Dalken’s shoulder.

Paul began to accuse himself for being a brute, and Mr. Dalken patted Eleanor’s head and said comfortingly: “Never mind, Nolla dear. You’ll learn by bitter experience that the more one interferes in these love tangles for the sake of helping friends out of their troubles, the more our friends detest us and we end in falling into snares ourselves.”

“Um—don’t I know it now!” wept Eleanor, in a muffled voice, because her

mouth was hard against her comforter's coat.

Paul stood uncertain of what to say or do. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other, and glanced around, but always brought his wandering eyes back to Eleanor's shaking form.

An interruption, in shape of the entrance of some merry tenants of another apartment, suddenly caused Mr. Dalken to lift Eleanor's head and hurry her, with Paul, into the reception room at one end of the main hall. Here they sat down to have an understanding.

When the facts were fully revealed, Paul was as grateful to Mr. Dalken for restraining him in his plans to run away, as Eleanor was for his hasty removal of her from upstairs, to the hall downstairs. And poor Mr. Dalken was *most* grateful to find he had made peace between two disturbed young hearts. He got up and said: "Let's hope you won't curse me in the future, for this reconciliation. And for goodness' sake! Let me get upstairs to my guests, and help Taki serve refreshments, or the oysters will be ruined with stewing, while the wonderful French patties I got from Del's, will be cold and clammy."

Eleanor laughed, and beckoned Paul to come up again. So the grinning elevator man carried them up and very considerately accepted the tip Paul slipped into his palm as he stepped from the lift.

The Japanese butler had not waited for Mr. Dalken, however, and was passing the famous patties and sandwiches when the three absent members of the party entered again, and tried to act as if nothing unusual had happened.

Polly had witnessed Paul's flying departure, and thereafter saw Jack and Eleanor astounded in the darkened library. When Mr. Dalken rushed in and dragged them both away, Polly stood open-mouthed and stared after them. The Jap wisely hurried forward and carefully closed the front door, then went back to his duties without showing that he had seen the queer performances of his master, or found Polly standing there, the single witness of the scene.

Polly still stood in the hall deeply perplexed, when Tom sauntered from Mr. Dalken's bedroom where he had been smoking a cigarette to steady his nerves. Now he joined Polly and began a conventional phrase, but was suddenly interrupted by her.

"What does all this silly behavior mean?" demanded she.

"Do you refer to my behavior?" asked Tom, blandly.

Polly's eyes snapped. "Of course not! Must you always think yourself first and foremost?"

As this was an unexpected and undeserved slap for Tom, he was still groping for a clue, when Polly's angry impatience with herself for having made such a blunder in her calculations about Eleanor and the others, made her exclaim:

"Well, I can plainly see that Nolla will never make any sort of a business partner for me! Her foolish head is so turned by beaux, that she will never settle down until Paul has either spurned her love, or she is married and divorced again. *Then* there may be hopes of her attending to our work."

As Tom was not aware of Paul's sudden appearance and hasty departure, he still pondered what was best to say to Polly, in her unusual pettish mood. But she paid no heed to his silence and continued, like most women will when they have been mistaken, and fear the consequences of an ill-advised step.

"I declare! if Paul does come back and makes up with Nolla, I shall move heaven and earth to see that they are safely engaged this time! And that Jack Baxter, well, I'll make Dalky ship him off to some distant college so there'll be no further wasting of valuable time with him!"

This last declaration so over-joyed Tom that he found courage to offer a suggestion. But he was too unwise this time. "You're absolutely right, Polly dear. That Baxter has nothing better to do than kill time. He never did a stroke of work in his life, nor did his father before him. Those young 'lady's men' who live on their ancestor's rewards of labor, never amount to a row of beans."

Polly stared freezingly at Tom, but he was completely mesmerized with the romantic picture he was presenting, and so he continued oblivious of his companion's expression.

"We'll send Baxter flying, after this, and help poor Paul to hold his place with Nolla. I'll wire Paul to fix it so he can come East for Christmas, and surprise Nolla. Then we'll all announce a double engagement, eh?" Tom turned to watch Polly's face as she surely must second his plan, but he changed his mind when he saw her frown. "As usual, Tom, you're much too late in your brilliant ideas. Others are ahead of you. Paul has been here tonight and gone again, and Nolla will never have any engagement to announce—if she waits for Paul's declaration.

"As for *me*! My announcements are being engraved now."

Tom caught his breath in consternation at this news. "Your announcements,

Polly! *Oh*, and you jilted me, after all!”

Polly enjoyed turning the knife in the wound, because she felt so wretched herself for having ruined Eleanor’s happiness.

“I could not jilt anyone who never proposed, could I? I have maintained for a long time, and everyone who knows me is aware of it, too—that I am engaged to my profession and I have ordered my announcements to that effect. I propose sending out my business cards the first week of January!”

The relief to Tom was so great that he sighed aloud: “Oh, thank heavens for that!”

“I knew you would be glad, Tom; so you see you are sensible after all, and can thank heaven that you had no cause to be jilted!” laughed Polly, maliciously, but she felt no satisfaction in this outcome of her understanding with Tom.

CHAPTER XV

MUTUAL CONSOLATION

It was at this point in Polly's independent speech that the door opened and Mr. Dalken came in with his two repentant lovers. Tom saw that the clouds had been dispersed and now there seemed to be a clear sky for Paul. But he was curious to hear what had happened during the short time he had been smoking that cigarette.

Polly also saw Paul return with Nolla, and when she saw the happy smiles on both faces, she groaned, and turned to go to the library where, so little time before, the tragic lover had escaped with a determination to never look at another girl as long as he lived—excepting his mother.

Tom followed Mr. Dalken to the dining-room to learn the particulars about the two individuals who had meekly followed the host back to the apartment; while Polly sank down in one of the Turkish arm-chairs recently occupied by the two plotting match-makers.

Mr. Dalken rolled his eyes ceiling-ward and complained: "I can't understand why I should be chosen by Providence to act as peace-maker between jealous lovers, or quarrelsome husbands and wives. It is one of the most thankless jobs a man can have."

Tom laughed in spite of his eagerness to be told the details. "Maybe it is because you have so much *feeling* for heartsick mortals," said he.

Mr. Dalken looked serious. "Yes, Tom my boy, you spoke the truth there. If anyone knows the misery caused by fools and faithlessness, I'm that one. Perhaps that is the reason I can mediate for my friends."

"I was going to ask you to mediate for me, with Polly, but I haven't the heart to ask you, now," ventured Tom.

"Why, you big ninny, I've done nothing else but try to mediate between you two for the past two years. If matters haven't reached a crisis by this time, I'd better

give up the case and let you get a specialist,” exclaimed Mr. Dalken.

“Tell me exactly where I stand now, and I’ll excuse you from further annoyance on my part.”

“Great Scott, Man! Can’t you tell where you stand? How can *I* judge. You surely don’t want me to propose for you, do you?”

Tom couldn’t afford to feel indignant, as he had to ask his friend what had happened to Paul and Eleanor, during his temporary absence from the others. So Mr. Dalken told as much of the story as he had been able to understand, concluding with the admonition: “Now that Jack can’t wile away time with Nolla, he will, doubtless, turn his full attention to Polly.”

That was the only malicious remark the poor man permitted himself to indulge in. But Tom took it seriously and said: “Thanks awfully, for the hint. I’ll keep after Polly myself, until Baxter gives up the chase.” And with that he hurried away to find Polly.

He found Paul and Eleanor sitting in the deep window-seat where Polly had been the early part of the evening, and as he wandered about for a glimpse of his “Heart’s Desire,” the Jap came over with a tray and said:

“Mis’r Tom look fer supper? Taki keep nice patty for him.”

Jack Baxter was near enough to hear Taki, and he laughed jeeringly as he said: “Oh, what a fine man you are, Taki! You know exactly what your master’s guests are wanting—patties or Pollies!”

Taki grinned but failed to grasp the young man’s meaning. Tom did, however, and leaving the oyster patty on the tray, he stalked across to Jack and said, threateningly:

“How dare you speak like that? Mentioning Miss Brewster’s name in the same breath as an oyster patty or a poll-parrot.”

But the truth of the matter was, Jack had never meant to convey the meaning, when he said “Pollies,” that he spoke of parrots. So he instantly took the stand of the offended one.

“How dare you even hint at such an insult to a friend of mine? I consider Miss Brewster too far above either you or me to discuss her with you, about such matters.”

Wise Taki had disappeared quickly and in another moment the harassed host

came hurrying from the serving board. He glowered upon Tom and Jack, and grasping each one by the arm, he hustled them out into the main hall of the building and then spoke.

“You two bullies go down in the street and fight it out. I’ll do you the favor to ring up the police station and call a cop to come around and take you both in custody—that’s where you belong, until you come to your senses. If *I* were a girl I’d never look at either of you again.”

But this advice cooled their anger, and the moment Mr. Dalken turned to go back to his apartment both men laughed at the situation. Tom offered his hand and Baxter shook it. Then each apologised to the other, and in a few minutes they started for the door of the apartment.

But the door was locked, and, in front of it on the mat, were two small heaps: one was composed of Tom’s coat and hat, with a patty and sandwich on a wooden plate, on top of it. The other small heap was Jack’s dress-cape, with his silk hat topping it, and in the hat, were his gloves and the plate with refreshments. His cane hung on the door-knob.

All the bell-ringing Tom indulged in, thereafter, failed to bring any answer. So the two young men, highly amused by their host’s farewell act, ate the scanty refreshments handed out, and then left the two wooden plates in front of the door, with a note on each. The pencilled scrawls said: “Two hungry beggars thank the rich man who threw them the crumbs from his table.”

After they had gone down to the ground floor, Jack said: “I’ll try to get Dalken on the telephone and ask him to send us down enough company to keep us from going to sleep in the reception room.”

Tom laughed and stood eagerly waiting to hear the reply. But the operator smiled and reported: “Mr. Dalken called down a few minutes ago, and said that he was not at home to anyone—not even to friends—until tomorrow morning.”

So the two chagrined young men left, and whatever they did during the next few hours, no one ever knew, but from that evening both forgot their rivalry and became fast friends. Jack suddenly decided to go West and finish his engineering studies in the mountains about Pebbly Pit. And Tom decided to make one last stand for Polly, and should she still refuse him on the basis that she must finish a business experience first, then he would knuckle down to hard work and forget all about her, forever.

It was easier for Jack to carry out his purpose than for Tom to leave New York

and forget Polly. But Jack managed to do as he had outlined, and before Christmas Day he had said good-by and was on his way to Denver.

Tom spent so much time and preparation before the mirror in his room, perfecting himself in the art of proposing to Polly, in such a way that she would be impressed, that he became quite self-conscious of his pose and words. On Christmas Day, he planned to coax her away by herself, and then fall upon his knees and tell his story. He had a magnificent solitaire in his pocket, waiting to be displayed at the right moment.

No one saw Tom all that Christmas morning, although his friends called on the telephone, both at his home and at the hotel. He did not reply to any calls. But late in the afternoon he sauntered forth from his room, looking more like a silly dandy than a big sensible young man who was one of the best engineers in the West.

He got in a taxi and gave directions. In front of Mr. Fabian's house, he paid the driver and went up the steps. After he had rung the bell, he felt in his pocket to make sure the ring-box was there. This was about the twentieth time he had assured himself.

The maid opened the door, and looked sorry for him.

"Miss Polly? Are the ladies in?" stammered Tom.

"No'm—no-sir, I mean," returned the maid, confused at his certainty of finding them at home. "They went out an hour ago, after tryin' to get you on the 'phone. They says they won't be back till after midnight, sir."

"Did they say where they were going?" asked Tom.

"No'm—No-sir! But I hear'n Miss Polly talk to someone on the 'phone and she says: 'Oh how lovely! We'll all go with you. And we'll meet you there for dinner,'" repeated the maid. "You see, I was openin' th' door to take more presents for the young ladies, so I hear'n that much of the talk from the table 'phone in the back hall."

Tom thanked her with a sinking heart, and turned away. Once more his fingers mechanically felt for the ring box but he experienced no thrill this time, when he found it was safe.

He walked slowly cross-town and recklessly passed over Broadway with its traffic in full swing, looking neither to the right nor to the left. The officer shouted to rouse him from his apathy, but it failed to work.

He reached the park and found a bench. There he sat down without looking at the seat. A frantic boy ran over and yelled: "Get up, mister! Get up—you're sittin' on my Chrismus candy!"

Tom got up as mechanically as an automaton, but a few of the gummy candies clung to his coat-tails, while the boy fearful of losing such treasure ran after the man to pick off the sticky sweets.

When he found another bench that was clear, and no boys nearby to worry his soul, Tom sat down and sulked. Having practised so faithfully all that day, in adding the finishing touches of grace to his lesson of proposing, it was a bitter dose to find all his work was wasted. Polly had joyfully accepted someone else's invitation to go away and have a good time, leaving him alone and heart-broken.

Sleet and drizzle began falling, and Tom was soon soaked through, but he was heedless of clinging clothes and wet shoes.

After an hour of self-pity, he got up and started down the drive. By this time he was almost frozen, but he congratulated himself on the fact that he might have pneumonia and die. Then Polly might feel sorry for her coldness!

Following the suggestion this idea presented, Tom wilfully waded through the slush in the gutters, and thoroughly drenched his patent-leather shoes in crossing the streets, until his feet were not only wet but freezing inside the shoes.

He found a cheap restaurant where the show-windows displayed baskets of artificial fruit; and as a center-piece of this decoration, there was a great block of ice holding up a dressed goose, with red holly twined about it.

Tom detested quick-lunch places where the steam satisfied a man's hunger, the moment he came in contact with its heavy odors, but he reveled in this evening's opportunity to be a martyr, so he sat down and ordered corn-beef and cabbage because he loathed it.

Although he could not eat much of the delectable dish he had ordered, he was determined to finish his day accordingly. So he ordered Neapolitan ice-cream and coffee. The ice-cream was served with the tissue paper still wrapped about the cake—to prove that no hands had been in contact with the dessert before serving it. But the highly colored stripes of the soapy cream that refused to melt, even when he dropped a spoonful into his oily coffee, cured him of further martyrdom to the cause of love.

He hastily got up from the table, paid his ticket and ran out. By this time, he felt so sick and chilled that he gloated in the assurance that soon he would be in a

raging fever. He pictured Polly's regrets when she should return home at midnight and hear that he had been taken to a hospital, with a fatal case of double pneumonia. He had decided on having it double, after he left the restaurant, as that would kill him sooner. In this state of mind he had to dodge a taxi and slipped to fall into a mud puddle.

But Tom could not resist the desire to see his mother once more, before he died; and after fighting off this inclination for another hour or two, he was feeling so perfectly awful, that he knew his last call had come for him.

He had been sneezing every few minutes for the past hour, and his eyes were running like twin rivers. His nose was so stuffy that he could hardly enunciate the words, when he told a cabby to "Ta-ge me to sig siggy-sig West End Avenoo."

During the short time he was in the cab, he could not breathe, and he had to keep his mouth open to be able to inhale any air at all. He paid off the taxi, and went to his mother's apartment. Before he could change his mind about calling, he had pushed the bell-button.

He heard someone coming down the hall, and at the same time a door in front opened and the laughter and noise of many merry voices reached him as he stood waiting on the doormat.

"Good evening, Mr. Tom—a merry Christmas," said the maid, smilingly.

"Goo' ebeneeg, Kadrina," mumbled Tom, scowling as he looked towards the front room whence came the merry-making.

"Don' dell anyone I'm here, but dell Modder I'm sig and wand do see her ride away," explained Tom, snuffingly.

"You got a bad cold in your nose, ain't chew?" said Katrina, sympathetically.

"No!" shouted Tom, furiously. "I god'da case ob double pneumonia!"

Katrina jumped at the unexpected shout, and hurried to the front room to call her mistress. Instead of remembering to keep Tom's presence a secret, she whispered loud enough for Polly to hear:

"Mr. Tom jus' come in an' his nose is red as a beet. His eyes is runnin', too, an' he needs a atmosizer to blow in his head, to clear out the snuffles so's he kin open his lungs, widdout keepin' his mouth open all th' time."

Instead of fainting with horror as Tom had pictured she might, Polly laughed at

Katrina's description, and Mrs. Latimer smiled and turned to her guests to excuse herself, by saying:

"Tom just came in, poor boy, with a stuffy cold in his head. I'll put his feet in mustard and see that he drinks a hot glass of doctored lemonade, then I'll be back."

So Tom, instead of bidding his mother an eternal farewell and dying alone and abandoned, as he had planned, in a hospital ward, was soon made to scald his feet in hot mustard water, while his mother's flannel kimono replaced his bedraggled clothing, and a heavy blanket was wrapped about him, and he was offered a nasty drink of lemonade, but what else was in it other than lemon only his mother knew!

By this time he felt so wretched that he cared nothing for solitaires or fiancées; all he wanted was to get one good long breath through his nose once more before he choked to death.

His mother had returned to the merry-making in the parlors, and Tom sat huddled in his unbecoming bedding in his mother's dressing-room. Every few minutes he had to use Katrina's "atmosizer" for his nose, or gasp for breath.

Just as the perspiration began to pour out of every pore, and his feet felt like scalded lobsters, and the vaseline his mother had smeared in his eyes and over his nose, to void any chaffing, had been trickled all over his face, Polly tiptoed into the room that opened to the dressing-room where he sat.

He held his breath, fearing lest she hear him gasp and find him in this awful predicament. He could not see her after she closed the hall-door, but he wondered what she was doing. At this moment, a tickling in his nose began and he knew it portended a sneeze! He must prevent it, or Polly would track him down. If she ever saw him in this condition, after all his hard study to propose gracefully, he would take poison!

But the sneeze was imperative, and it burst forth in such an explosion, that Polly screamed faintly from just behind the door of the little room.

"Go'way! I won'd see anyone," commanded Tom.

"But you'll let me come and see how you are, won't you, Tom dear?" coaxed Polly, appearing at the open door.

"No! You above everyone. I'm goin' to a hozpital as zoon ads the ambulance gomes, and I never wand to zee any ob my frien'z again. I'll leave word no one

ids to come to my funeral, eider.”

“Tom, dearest, don’t talk like that! Where have you been today, to catch such an awful cold in your head?” said Polly.

“Id’z my lungz, I dell you! Double pneumonia. Leabe me to my fade, and forged me, Polly!” tears rose in his eyes at this pitiful picture of his lonely demise.

But Polly was practical, and stubborn to a degree. She refused to go, and when Mrs. Latimer came back, she told her that Tom ought to be in bed and given a great big dose of quinine—then he’d be all right in the morning.

“That’s exactly what we planned to do, Polly,” said Mrs. Latimer. “I sent Katrina to the drugstore for the pills, just now. But you run back and enjoy yourself, dear, as you can do nothing for Tom. He’s like all men—as grouchy as a bear with a sore head, the minute anything ails them.”

His mother laughed, and Polly stood smiling. Tom fumed. “Was this all the sympathy he was to win for his self-appointed martyrdom?”

Just as he had lost the last vestige of hope in life, Polly said to his mother: “I haven’t seen Tom before, today, to wish him a merry Christmas and to give him my present.”

“Oh!” ejaculated Mrs. Latimer, wisely, and slipped from the room, closing the hall door very quietly after her.

Tom opened one eye and began to wonder if it was worth while—this living business? When Polly smiled so angelically upon him, in spite of his ludicrous pose and appearance, he thought he might make one more trial of temporal existence.

Then Polly said, “I am sorry I could not reach you by telephone today, Tom. I had a little surprise for you, that I’m sure you will like. Shall I show you now?”

“Maybe it ids egsadly wha’d I wads plannig to ags you?” said Tom, sitting up with interest, and forgetting the tub of hot water with his feet slowly par-boiling in it.

“Here it is. Isn’t it neat and business-like?” said Polly, as she handed him a small paste-board card.

Tom read:

“POLLY BREWSTER
DECORATOR

NEW YORK CITY
Representing Ashby Shops, New York and London.

Tom's shocked surprise at the unexpected announcement, so different from what he had expected, rendered him speechless for a full minute. During this pause, Polly patted his damp hair just as she might have patted her brother John's head, or a faithful Newfoundland's shaggy dome. This latter was Tom's thought.

The gentle touch, combined with his resentful feelings about the business announcement, made him lose all self-control. He was so furious that he could not find his voice, and if he had, his words would have been unintelligible because of the head-cold. He sprang up from the chair, forgetful of his blanket swaddlings, and the large basin in which his feet were still immersed.

He lifted his hand above his head in a melodramatic way of denunciation, but the tragic effect was completely ruined when the porcelain basin began slipping across the hard-wood floor. He wildly threw out both hands to clutch at something for support, but the low chair he had occupied was not near the dressing table nor any other article of furniture in the room.

Polly tried to save him from a fall, but he threw off her rescuing hands; and thus he was falling to his ungraceful finish, when he managed to free one foot and planted it on the rug as a balance. But the basin with its wet porcelain bottom kept sliding ever farther away, and Tom still rolled in the swaddling robes suddenly sat down unceremoniously upon the floor.

Polly faintly screamed when the basin overturned and the mustard water ran in numerous streamlets across the waxed wood and center rug. Just at this critical moment, Mrs. Latimer came back to give her son the dose of quinine.

"Why, Tom! Why are you sitting on the floor?" asked she, in amazement.

That was the last straw. Polly had to smother a laugh but Tom flared out and the thick denunciations of all the female sex, particularly western girls, would have driven such a girl mad with anger. But Polly understood her friend too well to believe a word he said.

Even while he still hurled every expletive he could remember and try to enunciate, Polly sprang over to help Mrs. Latimer raise the beswaddled young man back into the chair. He fought off her assistance, but she stubbornly held on to his arms until he was seated in a proper position once more.

Then she said: "Tom dear, I'm so sorry you have had such a wretched Christmas Day. Had we but known you had such a cold we would have called and taken

you home with us. But now that Christmas is over, and I haven't had time to say a word to you, I'll just whisper that, as a sort of late greeting: 'If I don't find anyone I like better than you, during the next two years, I'll make a partnership proposition to you.'"

"Oh, Bolly! Whad do you mean?" gasped Tom, expectation high once more.

"I like you better than any other friend I ever had, Tom, but I am determined to try business first. Then, in two years' time if you are still of the same mind as now, I will consider what you have so often planned. But not before then. Until that time we will be the best of good pals."

"Oh, Bolly! Whad a Gridsmad's gifd you habe giben me!" exclaimed Tom, his face shining radiantly with love and vaseline.

CHAPTER XVI

BEAUX OR BUSINESS

It was very late when the Fabian party reached home that Christmas night; thus there were no confidences given or taken between the girls until the following morning. To Eleanor's keen sight Polly appeared ill at ease; and in the morning, after breakfast, the cloud seemed heavier than before. Then Eleanor decided to find out what unpleasant experience had occurred while at Latimers.

"I had a glorious time, last night—didn't you, Poll?" began Eleanor, guilelessly.

"Oh, yes! Until poor Tom came in with that nasty cold in his head. His condition was enough to ruin any one's enjoyment, once you saw or heard him," replied Polly, absentmindedly.

"A mere cold in the head is nothing to worry about. He will probably be here, today, as fresh as ever. That is, if the quinine he took last night permits him to see straight." Eleanor laughed in order to show her friend how unconcerned she was about anything which might have happened at the Latimers.

"Had you seen him, with his feet in boiling water and mustard, his face coated with vaseline, his eyes like Bear Forks, and his temper like a sore hyena's, you wouldn't sit there and say he'd be fresh as ever today," Polly retorted with a reminiscent smile.

"It's a wonder to me that he permitted you to visit him after he had been doctored by his mother as you say he was," returned Eleanor, musingly.

"He never would have, Nolla, had I not marched right into the room without his being aware of my presence. I never even knocked, because his mother told me he was in her dressing-room, off the large room. I waited in the large room until I heard him speak, then I pretended to be surprised and pleased to find him there."

Eleanor laughed. "Yes, I can see you pretend anything, Poll. I just know your face was as serious as crêpe, and your pretence a thing any child could see

through.”

“Now, Nolla, you are all wrong! I can prove it. But the great trouble is, how shall I get out of what Tom believes to be true? I pretended so well that I almost fooled myself into believing that I was doing right. This morning I know it is not true,” said Polly, impatiently.

Eleanor now felt her curiosity rising for she realized she was on the verge of hearing what had caused Polly’s concern. But she knew she must be circumspect in her replies, or her friend would take alarm and not say a word.

“Polly, there speaks the born actress. When on the stage, acting in a play, the artiste is carried away by her own depth of feeling and faith in the truth of what she is saying or doing. Now, you see, you did the same and that proves you should study stage-craft instead of interior decorating.” Eleanor spoke in a jocular tone.

Polly smiled at her friend, but she was too preoccupied with her problem to pay attention to Eleanor—whether she was in earnest or whether she was speaking in fun.

Suddenly Polly asked: “Nolla, are you engaged to Paul?”

Eleanor was taken off her feet. She never dreamed of having Polly ask her bluntly about her private interests in any one.

“W-h-y, n-o-o—not ex-actly!” stammered she in reply.

Polly sat and stared at her companion as if to search out the truth. Then she said: “Have you any idea of being engaged within the next year or two?”

“Well, now, Poll,” returned Eleanor, finding her depth once more, and treading water to get her breath, “you know how I admire Paul, and you also know that Paul says he loves me. That was most obvious at Dalky’s party, the night Paul arrived so unexpectedly. But when you speak of engagements, I must remind you of the law you laid down for me—not to tie myself to any such entanglement until after we had had our fill of business. Am I right?”

“Exactly!” sighed Polly. “But that does not go to say that you obeyed my law. There may be a secret understanding between you and Paul, and that is what I want to hear about.”

“It may be the same sort of a secret understanding as now exists between you and Tom Latimer,” retorted Eleanor, taking a wild chance that such was the fact.

“Then I pity poor Paul from the bottom of my heart,” was Polly’s unexpected reply.

“Paul doesn’t seem to think he is in need of any pity,” smiled Eleanor, as she thought of his joy the preceding evening as he escorted her from the Latimer’s apartment to the automobile.

“Well, then it is not the same sort of secret understanding. Now come out with it, Nolla, and tell me just how far you have complicated yourself with Paul in love, and with me in our business venture?”

“Not at all, Poll. That is what I wish to impress upon you—that I am no deeper in the love tangle than you are with Tom.”

“All right, then, Nolla. Now I’ll confess, if you promise me to do likewise. Is it a bargain?”

“If you wish. But let me say beforehand, I have no more to confess than you know of already.”

“It’s a pact! Shake, Nolla,” exclaimed Polly, holding out her hand.

Of course Eleanor was more than amazed at such a to-do over what she considered a natural outcome of human attraction for Polly, and she shook the hand extended to seal the compact.

“There now! I’ll confess first. Last night, when I found poor Tom in such dire condition and wanting to die at once, I told his mother I would comfort him, somewhat, by wishing him a merry Christmas and showing him my business card. You know, the ones we just got back from the engravers late Christmas Eve.

“Well, I found him in such a pitiable way that I was sorry the moment I handed him my card. He took it so differently from what I had expected. When he raved about dying and nothing to live for, I was at my wit’s end. Finally, just after the basin in which he was boiling his feet slipped from under him, and sat him down unkindly upon the floor, I was moved to encourage him if he would but cheer up and think of living a little longer.

“Nolla, he took advantage of my weakness and wormed a promise from me to consider myself engaged to him, unless I found some one I liked much better within the next two years. Now tell me, Nolla, because you are educated in affairs like this—where do I stand?”

Polly’s anxiety was so amusing to Eleanor and the whole situation so like a farce

to her maturer love-affair, that she laughed merrily. But Polly was too concerned to take offence at the merriment.

“Oh, Polly! What a little lamb you are, to be sure! How lucky for you that I am always at hand to keep you from being led to the slaughter—not altar!” Eleanor laughed again at her clever play on the hackneyed phrase.

“That doesn’t answer my question, Nolla. I am most serious in this matter and I do not wish to hear more ridicule from you.”

“I’m not ridiculing you or the awful mess you have made of your life,” retorted Eleanor with a sly grin, “but I cannot help giving vent to my risibles when you take it all so seriously. I wonder how you would take the measles, Poll.”

“Oh pshaw, Nolla! What has measles to do with me, right now!” was Polly’s impatient rejoinder.

“I don’t know, I’m sure. I was only wondering why you take everything so dreadfully in earnest. Now as far as your love tangle appears to be, I should prognosticate—hear that word, Polly? I am trying to act the wise magistrate for you—that there will be no suit for breach of promise, although there may be a case made out against you for alienating Tom’s affections from Choko’s Find Mine. On the other hand, you can serve a counter suit on Tom for alienating your affections from your first love—your business venture.”

While Eleanor had been explaining the law to her friend, the latter grew more and more impatient, and when the self-appointed magistrate concluded her version of law, Polly sprang up angrily.

“I declare, Nolla, you will never be serious even at death! I’m disgusted with you, so there!” and Polly made for the door.

Eleanor made after her, saying as she ran: “I’m sure I’ll never want to take death seriously, Polly, for that is the time of all times when we need to be cheerful and prove to our dear ones that they have nothing to weep over—because I am of the firm belief that no one goes into oblivion. It is simply progression, you know.”

The sudden change from laughter to seriousness halted Polly’s exit at the door, and she turned to look at her friend with a strange expression in her eyes.

“Nolla, you should have been born in April—with the most changeable weather of the year. One moment you are too silly for words and the next you discourse on the most serious of all subjects.”

Again Eleanor laughed, teasingly: “Perhaps I should not have been born at all.

Then, my family and friends would have been saved many trials. But I am here, you see, and they have to make the best of me.”

“That is exactly what we want to accomplish, don’t you see? We want to make the best of you, but you just won’t let us do it. You prefer to act like a big ninny instead of the cleverest girl in the world.”

“Always excepting you, dear!” and Eleanor bowed low.

“There you go again! Now I *am* mad!” and Polly tried to get through the open doorway, but her friend clung to her arm and refused to let her go.

“Wait a moment! I’ll let you go as soon as I have a word with you. This is going to be a real serious word, too,” promised Eleanor.

Polly turned back. Eleanor stood pondering for a moment, then said, “About Tom’s affair, I would advise this: treat him brotherly—that is be sisterly to him; if you are not madly in love with him, so madly that you will jump into the Hudson or throw yourself upon the subway track unless you know he loves you the same way, then let Cupid manage the whole affair. Believe me, child, Cupid can do it far better than you or I!

“Concerning Paul and myself: I told the darling that I had a contract with you which had to be fulfilled before I could sign up with another one—even though that other one *seemed* to be offering me easier work and better wages. So I’m in for the business venture for all it is worth for the next two, perhaps more, years. I refused to place any time limit on a promise to sign up with Paul. Satisfied?”

“Most assuredly! That is the first practical speech I’ve ever heard you make, Nolla!” was Polly’s emphatic reply.

“I trust you have sense enough to make the same speech to Tom Latimer. Then he will follow Paul’s example: be filled with ambition to go back to Pebbly Pit and straighten out that caved-in mine.”

But both the girls were to learn that it is much easier to talk how events should follow in sequence, than it is to compel fate to do as she is expected to with such events.

That evening, despite his parents’ advice to remain in bed, Tom drove up in a taxi and stopped before the Fabians’ house. He paid the driver, rushed up the steps and pulled at the doorbell.

Polly had just finished dinner and was slowly walking out of the dining-room when the maid opened the door. Tom fairly leaped in when he saw Polly

stopping suddenly under the hall-light.

“Oh, my little—” he began, but Polly held up a warning hand and frowned him to silence; then she hurried him to the library across the hall from the dining-room.

“What’s the matter? Didn’t you tell them we were engaged?” asked Tom, impetuously.

“I didn’t know we were what one calls engaged, Tom. You are misunderstanding me. Of course, I did not tell them about what never happened.” Polly was annoyed.

“But,” began Tom, arguing for himself, “I felt sure you meant it the way I said: that you would wear my ring and consider I had a prior right to your love or affections.”

“You’re all wrong! Because that is exactly what I wish to retain for myself—prior right to follow my own life-line. I did say that I liked you more than any other friend I know, and that I might consider you as my future fiancé if, in two years’ time, I came to the conclusion that I would give up a business career. That’s all; and that holds no ground for your giving me an engagement ring, nor for me to take one and wear it. I simply refuse to be bound in any way. Better understand this, once for all, Tom!”

The other members of the family now came in and welcomed Tom and also insisted upon having him tell them how much better he felt. The ring-box which Tom had so eagerly pulled from his vest pocket as he sat upon the divan with Polly, he now managed to slip back again without having been discovered in the act. Even Eleanor failed to see the action.

Before Tom had had time to conclude his polite answers as to the state of his health, the bell rang a second time and the maid admitted Paul Stewart. Nor did the evening advance far before Jim and Ken dropped in, then came Dodo and Mr. Dalken, and last but not least the Ashbys stopped in to inquire how everyone was. Such “stoppings” usually ended, as on this evening, by their remaining until midnight.

Mr. Ashby had news for his two new assistants in business. “Late in the afternoon before Christmas, I had a ’phone call from Mrs. Courtney, girls. She asked me to make an appointment with you to meet her at my shop, tomorrow morning at eleven. I promised to let you know.”

“Oh, that’s the lady we met at the Parsippany sale,” exclaimed Eleanor. “I

wondered what had become of her since then.”

“Maybe she wants us to find her a few antiques,” suggested Polly, eagerly.

“I believe she plans to redecorate her boudoir, and wants you two beginners to take the commission. She seems to place a great deal of confidence in your ability to please her,” said Mr. Ashby.

Eleanor smiled at her superior in business. “Feeling any jealousy at our popularity?”

“Not a whit!” laughed Mr. Ashby. “It only adds more glory to my brilliant fame, because I was astute enough to secure such talent!”

Mrs. Courtney’s appointment to meet the two young decorators in a business conference came at just the time when both Eleanor and Polly were half-persuaded to give up their art and turn aside to marriage, although neither girl really wanted to take the husband instead of the career, at that time. When Paul and Tom would be out of sight once more, and their magnetic presences removed so that calm business atmosphere might control again, both girls would see they had been wise in deferring their engagements for the present. Hence the visit of Mrs. Courtney came at just the critical time.

Polly and Eleanor were at the Ashby Shops a full hour before the lady could be expected. But they put in the hour in going over the latest samples of boudoir textiles, new ideas in furniture, and fascinating designs of cushions, draperies and other accessories for a boudoir.

Mrs. Courtney was very frank and pleasant in her cordial greeting. For all her fame as a social leader in New York and the fabulous wealth accredited to her, she seemed very plain and friendly. Eleanor could not help contrasting her with her mother and Barbara.

“Well, girls, how many millions of dollars have you made in your profession since I saw you at that farce of a sale in New Jersey,” said she smilingly after they had seated themselves in the small reception room.

“That was too bad, wasn’t it?” said Eleanor.

“We mean, it was too bad for that nice old auctioneer to be used by the city man as he certainly was. We met old Mr. Van Styne before that sale, you know, and he was so honest!” said Polly.

“So I learned. But I was annoyed at the city man’s methods of getting his regular customers so far from the city in order to make money out of them; I went down

to his office and told him very plainly what I thought of such trickery as he had played on me. He apologised in every way when he learned that I would never buy another thing of him; but I knew his apologies were the result of his fear of losing a good customer. I told him frankly that I would not accept his regrets. I have heard from him several times since then, but I have paid no attention to his requests to allow him to explain the circumstance which ended in that sale in the country.

“I did take time to write to this Mr. Van Styne, however, and ask for the truth, as I did not want to condemn the city man if there might be extenuating reasons for the sale. The old man in Morristown answered that he had been used as an instrument in the padded sale. He had known nothing of the manner in which the antiques had been brought from the City and placed in the house, until afterward. He had sent letters to his clientele who favored him with confidence, and many were at that sale, much to his discomfiture when he learned the truth.

“Mr. Van Styne added that he had taken the trouble to find out from a few of his trusting customers that the articles they had purchased at that sale, and which were claimed in the catalogues to be genuine antiques, were clever imitations. In fact, a refectory table said to be of genuine Jacobean period, was manufactured in the man’s factory on the East Side. Even the worm-holes had been drilled in the wood and the worn slab of wood of the top was done by the plane. To keep himself out of Court, the clever fellow had to give back the buyer’s money and send up to Morristown and get the articles of ‘newly-made antique’ furniture.”

“I’m glad of that!” exclaimed Polly.

“But those buyers should have prosecuted the cheat!” declared Eleanor, impatiently.

“That’s exactly what I said, but one of them wrote me she was going away for the winter; she could not postpone her trip to try the case at Court. Thus she took the easiest way out.” Mrs. Courtney’s determined expression showed what she would have done had she been the dupe of such a clever dealer.

The subject was abruptly changed when Mrs. Courtney added: “Now we must talk business, young ladies. I am sure you cannot spare your valuable time in gossip.”

Polly and Eleanor glanced at each other and smiled at the idea of their “valuable time,” but Mrs. Courtney launched at once into the cause of her call that morning.

“I never felt at peace with the atrocious decorations in my boudoir, although one of the highest-priced firms in New York did the room for me. I know it was a case of making me take the costliest materials without regard to harmony or temperament. Now I wish to have you girls see what *you* would do with the suite. While I am here, I thought you might show me several suites exhibited on the floor and tell me which you would prefer for a woman of my age.”

Polly immediately signified that she was ready to escort Mrs. Courtney to the elevator, thence to the exhibition rooms where every conceivable period and price of boudoir furnishings were to be seen and examined.

The three stepped from the elevator, and Polly was leading the way to the boudoir suites; Mrs. Courtney watched with deep interest as she spoke in a low voice, to Eleanor.

“Jack Baxter called on me, one evening before he went West; he told me that your remarkable young friend had everything in life to make a young girl want to have a good time, yet she chose a profession for herself in place of gayety and beaux.”

Eleanor smiled and nodded affirmatively but said nothing.

“That is one of the reasons I wanted to meet you young ladies again. It is so gratifying to find any young girl, these days, who takes life in earnest. Of all the flippant, mothlike creatures I find flapping about at receptions or teas, I have yet to find one in every thousand who really thinks of anything other than cigarettes, matinees, and dress. It is positively revolting to me to have my rooms clouded with cigarette smoke, yet what can a hostess do? The women have gone mad over the habit. The danger lies in their not being able to break the influence as readily as they form it.”

Polly overheard the latter part of this speech and smiled admiringly at her client. Then they came to the boudoir exhibit.

A very pleasant hour passed while Polly and Eleanor told Mrs. Courtney of their visits to galleries in Europe, and in hearing Mrs. Courtney speak of her amusing excursions in quest of the antique. Finally the lady remembered an appointment, and in amazement found her wrist-watch told her it was twelve.

“Oh, oh! I had an imperative engagement at the dentist’s at twelve-fifteen. How could this hour have passed so rapidly?” said she, hurrying to the elevator in advance of the girls.

While waiting for the man to come for them, the two young salesladies

wondered if their customer would leave without an order, or word of encouragement regarding the future of her boudoir.

On the elevator going down, Mrs. Courtney said: "When you have time to come to my address and look at the suite, just let me know by telephone and I will make it a point to be at home to meet you, to go into the work in earnest. I am confident you can give the right atmosphere to my boudoir." Just as the elevator reached the ground floor, Mrs. Courtney handed Polly and Eleanor each a card upon which she wrote her private telephone number.

"Now, good-morning, my friends. Remember what I said to you about having chosen the right pathway, for the present. You will make all the better wives and mothers for having had a genuine business experience. How superior is your ideal to those of empty-headed society misses who live but to dance or drink or waste their true substance."

With such praise of their endeavors, the lady left Polly and Eleanor; and they stood where she left them, holding her cards in their hands, but still gazing at the revolving doors through which she had passed and then disappeared.

CHAPTER XVII

BUSINESS

Ruth and Dodo had been sadly neglected during the Christmas Season, but after Paul returned to Denver and Tom accepted his verdict that Polly would give no valuable thought to lovers for the next two years, the two young decorators took time to encourage their younger partners in the work they had chosen.

Ruth and Dodo were not as deeply in earnest as Polly and Eleanor had been in applying themselves to the studies given at Cooper Union; they considered themselves martyrs to the cause of womanly work. Mr. Fabian often sighed in despair over Dodo's ideals in ancient architecture, or Ruth's recitations of applied designs. Polly and Eleanor laughed at these trials of teacher and student and kept urging both sides not to lose faith but to keep on until they won the prize.

Meanwhile, the two advanced students visited every exhibit or lecture given on their beloved work, and thus acquired more of the idealistic experiences in art. For business application of their understanding of decorating, Mrs. Courtney supplied one channel of such testing; and Mr. Dalken offered another outlet for their wisdom, for he had decided to erect a magnificent office building on upper Fifth Avenue, and keep the entire top floor as a private apartment for himself.

The girls had many interesting mornings in Mrs. Courtney's home, listening to her accounts of trips to every country in quest of curios and antiques. Her residence was filled with the results of her travels, and her memory teemed with thrilling stories of adventure for the rare and beautiful trophies she secured.

"There is still one interesting spot on this globe which I am keen to visit, but I have never had the opportunity to go as I wish to go," said Mrs. Courtney, one day, after she had been showing the two girls the collection of Filipino curios she got during a six months' stay at the Philippines.

"I should have said there was no spot where you have not been," laughed Eleanor.

“But there is, and that is the South Sea Isles. I have——”

“Where?” gasped both the girls, unconsciously interrupting the speaker.

Mrs. Courtney laughed. “Yes, the South Sea Isles. Do not think them so cannibalistic as report has it, my dears. I know an American who has lived there more than twenty years and he says that for climate and interesting life, give him the South Sea Islands. He almost persuaded me to take the trip when he was here last.”

“Is he an old friend?” asked Polly.

“No; he is a man I used to commission to find certain curios for me. He tells me that textiles woven and colored by the natives of those islands are the most beautiful things ever seen. The carvings and hammered brasses are more gorgeous than those of Benares or of the East. He has made quite a fortune out of exporting selected articles from the Isles to the United States, but the great difficulty in such trade is the uncertain transportation methods. His goods may reach their destination and again they may not. It depends on the character of the owner or captain of the vessel. He all but persuaded me to buy or lease a sea-going yacht and make the trip for a year’s outing. He promised me that all costs would quickly be defrayed by the valuable cargo which could be stored away in very small space on board the yacht.”

“If you were so keen about visiting that place why did you renounce it?” queried Eleanor, wondering.

“Because I could not induce any of my friends to accept my invitation to join my party for such an outing.” Mrs Courtney laughed as she remembered the expressions on the faces of her friends when they heard of the proposed voyage.

“Actually, girls, some of my invited guests asked me to go to Monte Carlo, or to the Orient, instead. So that broke up the plan.”

“Goodness!” sighed Polly, “I only wish I had been invited!”

“Would you have gone willingly?” asked Mrs. Courtney, eagerly.

“Would I? Say, Nolla, would you have gone with me?” was Polly’s instant retort.

“Try me now and see?” laughed Eleanor to Mrs. Courtney.

“Really, girls, do not joke! I am seriously inclined to take that trip, providing I can induce the right group of friends to accompany me. The cost of a yacht would be no small matter in these days of high costs, but I would have a year’s

intense satisfaction out of such a trip, and Mr. Needham said he felt sure the costs would be met by the cargo I could carry out and another I could bring back on the round trip.”

“If our gold mine gets to working again, or should the lava cliffs open soon, both Polly and I would love to enlist for just such an adventure. But there would be no opportunity to add to our knowledge of decorating, would there?” suggested Eleanor.

“Not unless you took your lessons with you, and found clients out there who wanted you to decorate their grass huts in the good approved American way,” suggested Mrs. Courtney.

“Nolla, we ought not to dream of such a trip, because we are tied to a two-year agreement with each other, you know. Then we’ve got to give a definite answer to those life-partners, you know,” was Polly’s lugubrious reply.

“I don’t know, Polly! In such an unexpected matter as our going to the South Seas, a mere beau will have to bide his time. We may find a Fiji Islander more interesting to us than one of our Yankee beaus,” laughed Eleanor.

Mrs. Courtney heard and pondered what had just been said; her next words did not hint of her having heard the discussion, however.

“If I do take such a trip, it shall not be in the approved line of Cook’s Tours. I want to adventure in absolute freedom, with no tagging tourists or other obstacles to a perfect adventure. I would carefully select a party of fifteen or twenty harmonious souls and charter or buy a private yacht. Then start and stop as we pleased. No hurry, no lagging, unless we chose. It seems to me that such a wonderful outing would bring peace, at last, to my restless spirit.” Mrs. Courtney sighed.

The girls laughed because they thought she was joking. But Mrs. Courtney was in earnest, as they were to find out. However, the topic now being discussed was the South Sea Isle trip so she was determined to conclude that before she launched another.

“If I invited you two girls to accompany me as private assistants during the trip, and should we find a score of kindred spirits willing to take a trip such as I plan, why could you not steal six months or a year from your profession, in order to see the world? Surely it would do you no harm, and you are still young enough to go on with your work when you return to New York?”

Polly and Eleanor seemed to have exactly the same idea. But Eleanor spoke

impetuously of it, while Polly pondered seriously. “Dear me! If only Mr. Dalken could spare the time to take *his* yacht and invite us to accompany him on just such a voyage—what a wonderful trip it would be!”

Mrs. Courtney glanced at the girls, then said: “I’ve heard so much of your great Mr. Dalken but I’ve never seen him. How old a man is he, and what does he look like?”

“Oh, Dalky is not as old as he looks, because he has had such an unhappy life, you know; that is how we came to love him so! We felt keenly for him,” exclaimed Eleanor, regardless of the sharp nudge Polly gave her as a warning to hold her tongue.

“Yes, I know his silly wife, poor man!” murmured Mrs. Courtney. She seemed to be lost in a sad strain of thought for a short time, and the girls hesitated to speak, just then.

Soon, however, she heaved a deep sigh and looked up to smile at the serious faces opposite her. “Well, perhaps there is a great happiness in store for your good friend, to repay him for all he has silently endured these past years.”

“We sincerely hope so!” affirmed Polly, earnestly. “If anyone deserves peace and joy, dear Dalky does.”

“How little the world really knows of the sorrows of those who bear their cross in silence!” sighed Mrs. Courtney. “Now, I have heard said that Mr. Dalken is a very gay personage who knows how to make the most of his money and time. But that report came from his wife, so I took it with a grain of salt. I know from my own experience just how the sinner tries to smear the saint with his own crimes although I do not mean by that that I am a saint.”

“Surely you had no unhappy experience in your life, Mrs. Courtney!” exclaimed Eleanor, not from curiosity but from the desire to hear her esteemed friend declare that she had had only joy in her days. Mrs. Courtney understood the motive that urged the question.

“My dear children, my married experience was much like that of your beloved friend. The difference being that my gay husband used my position and wealth to boost himself to the place where he found more agreeable companions than I proved to be. Out of sheer self-respect I was forced to divorce him. Then I began my wanderings over the globe, and finally settled in this city where I was practically unknown. You see, my pride could not brook the pity of my friends although they approved the only course open for me when my husband eloped

with another man's wife."

"Oh, dear Mrs. Courtney!" sighed Eleanor, ready tears springing to her eyes. But Polly crept over and placed a sympathetic hand upon that of her hostess.

"It seems ages ago, my children," added Mrs. Courtney. "I was only eighteen when I married and I was twenty-one when I divorced my husband. I never had a child, and I have always felt as though I had been given a very wretched deal in life, for I love children. Because of my experience, I can advise other young girls—not to marry too young, nor to accept a man for his looks or manners. A girl needs to be experienced from business, or travel and association with men, before she is capable of judging wisely and selecting the proper mate for life."

The bond created that morning between the mature woman and the two young girls, proved to be of such quality as would last. And such a friend as Mrs. Courtney would be for two young girls, was one of the benefits both Polly and Eleanor received by visiting country auctions of a higher class. Not that the particular sale at Parsippany was "higher class," because it was proved to have been a fake sale, but the type of buyers it attracted were of an advanced type of mentality.

"But, children, you have told me nothing more about your good friend Dalken! Tell me more of him. I just heard of his wife's latest project, and I wish to be informed first hand."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Courtney? His wife's latest project?" asked Polly, fearfully.

"Oh, perhaps you were not aware that she is in Reno? She found an affinity, it seems, during her visit abroad, last summer, and it became necessary for her to sever her legal ties if she wished to marry this other man. I heard of the scandal but not being interested in the woman, and not knowing the man, I paid no attention to the suit. Divorce cases are so common in these degenerate days." Mrs. Courtney sighed again, and showed her disapproval of the modern style of marriages.

"Poor Dalky! I wonder if he knows of this?" cried Polly.

"He would have to, dear, because she would have to serve him with papers, you see," explained Mrs. Courtney.

"And he never said a word to any one nor did he let us see he was disturbed in any way," added Eleanor.

“Maybe the poor man is relieved to have it so. At least, he will be exempt from paying her such an outrageous income, you know. I take for granted that he will put in his defence, thus absolving himself from alimony,” explained Mrs. Courtney.

“It would be exactly like him to keep quiet and let that horrid woman get all she can. He is so magnanimous, you know, that he would think to himself ‘She was the mother of my children, and as such I must not deprive her of what she may need’.” Polly’s voice had a dual tone as she spoke: one of sympathy for Mr. Dalken, one of scorn for Mrs. Dalken.

Mrs. Courtney laughed softly. “I am getting my impressions of your friend in piece-meal. You have not yet told me about him.”

“That is because you’ve told us such astonishing news. But now I’ll tell you all about good old Dalky,” said Eleanor. “He is a handsome man of about forty-two or four, I think. Isn’t he, Polly?”

“Yes, about that age,” agreed Polly.

“Well, besides his being handsome and middle-aged, he is loving, awfully rich, both in money and good friends, and one of the most intelligent mortals I ever met!”

Eleanor’s description made Mrs. Courtney smile. “One would be led to think you had met all kinds and conditions of mortals in your long, long life, child,” remarked she.

“Sometimes I think I am very much older in life than *seems* to be,” mused Eleanor. “I feel somehow, that I have lived many centuries before this queer modern experience.”

“You must have been reading theosophical books, my dear,” remarked Mrs. Courtney, eyeing Eleanor closely.

“No, I never have. I’m not interested in any such form of research—not yet,” she laughed.

“Nolla, we ought to be going—really! Every time we come here to talk boudoir decorating we switch off into some byway of personal interest, and that makes us come again to get down to work,” said Polly, rising and adjusting her hat, preparatory to saying good-by.

“But what about our round-trip to the South Sea Isles?” was Mrs. Courtney’s query.

“It isn’t coming off, at once, is it? You’ve got to find a group who are companionable, and you’ve got to get the yacht,” said Eleanor.

“It may not take me more than a week to do both. When I make up my mind to a thing, I generally do it,” returned Mrs. Courtney.

“We’d have to gain the consent of our parents before we could even *think* of taking such a marvellous voyage,” declared Polly.

“But the main point is this: would you really care to go, or would you prefer staying in New York to continue your profession?” asked Mrs. Courtney.

“We’d love to go with you, but I’m not sure I’d want to remain away from my work for a whole year,” was Polly’s thoughtful answer.

“If we entertained any ideas of taking the voyage, the best time for us to start would be next Fall. Then we could spend our entire winter in the tropics and escape the heat in the equator in the summer, or rainy season, by sailing home again.”

“Oh, it sounds great! It remains to see who would go,” said Eleanor. Then the girls said good-by, and started away, full of the unusual invitation they had heard that afternoon.

“I’m sure mother and father would not wish me to go,” said Polly, after the subject had been exhausted.

“Of course, you couldn’t offer the excuse that you were going for advancement in your profession—as we did when we wanted to tour Europe, you know.”

“Leaving the thrilling trip out of our minds for a time, I want to ask you if you suspected anything troubling Dalky, lately?” said Polly, seriously.

“Not a thing. He has seemed just the same as ever.”

“That’s what I should have said. Then he may not know about his wife’s perfidy, and I think we ought to prepare him for such news, Nolla.”

“Polly, we tried to force an adopted son on him, once, and since that time I have been wary of trying to interfere in any other of his personal affairs.”

“Then let us talk it over with Prof. and ask what he thinks about telling Mr. Ashby,” suggested Polly.

“That’s more like sense. We’ll tell Mr. Ashby ourselves, when we get back to the Shops.”

Thus Mr. Ashby was told the story as told by Mrs. Courtney but he seemed not surprised as the girls expected him to be. He merely shook his head sympathetically and said nothing.

“Did you know it?” asked Polly, amazed.

“We all knew of it a few weeks ago. Poor Dalky refused all our advice to fight the divorce and exempt himself from paying alimony—as he will have to do for not putting in a defence. He smiled tolerantly and explained: ‘If she wants any of my money she is welcome to it. I have more than I can use, you know’.”

“There! That is exactly what I said he would do!” declared Polly, vehemently.

“Oh, why does he let her have it? There are so many ways he could make poor people happy, instead of throwing his wealth away on such a mercenary creature!” wailed Eleanor.

“We have no right to question his motives, Nolla,” said Mr. Ashby, seriously. “I do not wish to speak of this again, unless he himself mentions the subject to you girls. He has seemed anxious to keep the news from you, for some reason. But I firmly believe the poor man still has a shred of love for his wife alive in his bosom, and that is why he will not oppose her in any way she wishes to secure happiness.”

That night when Polly and Eleanor sat together doing some home-work on decorating, Polly suddenly looked up and said: “Nolla, if only our dear Dalky could meet our dear Mrs. Courtney—wouldn’t they make a fine couple?”

“Oh, Poll! There you go again! I have tried to keep from thinking that very thing, ever since I heard Mrs. Courtney tell us of that horrid woman’s being in Reno. Our Dalky will be free, and what so great as to have him fall in love with a really appreciative woman.” Eleanor clasped her hands and expressed ecstatic joy at the very idea of such bliss.

“But the whole plan would be ruined if it turned out that Dalky was still in love with his first wife, you know,” argued Polly.

“It wouldn’t take long to get him out of it,” retorted Eleanor. “With such a lovely woman as Mrs. Courtney to be had for the loving and asking, I’d like to wager all I have that Dalky would walk into the snare.”

“What snare? Who’d set it for his faltering steps?” laughed Polly, enjoying this romancing to the utmost.

“Why, we would, to be sure. Now look at it in a practical way, Poll. There is

Mrs. Courtney: very good-looking, rich, refined, lonely, about thirty-five or thirty-eight, at most. Here is our Dalky, also handsome, rich, refined, lonely (but for us) about forty years old, and just the man to have a wonderful wife to make him happy. Is that not an ideal match?" Eleanor tossed her head wisely.

"That's what we think! But we are not going to marry Dalky nor Mrs. Courtney. They may not agree with us, you know."

"Polly, nothing like trying out a thing to see how it works. Now we must scheme to bring those two together and let them find out how desirable each is for the other," suggested Eleanor.

"I think that is a good plan—bring them together and see how they seem to get along," said Polly, musingly.

"All right, then. How shall we do it?"

"Could we not invite Mrs. Courtney to inspect some of the materials we are going to order for Dalky's apartment? We could so plan that Dalky would be there at the same time. Then they would meet and hear that each one is the great and only friend the other has heard so much about from us?"

"Yes, that's a fine way to get them together," said Polly. "Now when shall it be?"

"The sooner, the better," retorted Eleanor.

"We are going to get that book of new imported samples of damask, this week, Nolla. Why not ask Mrs. Courtney to look at them. As they are ordered for Dalky's apartment, what more natural than he should drop in to look them over?"

Eleanor clapped Polly on the back with approval, and both girls then put their heads together and romanced about the great match they would bring about.

A few days after this conversation, the much-desired package came by European post. It was the book of imported samples which had been ordered for Mr. Dalken's inspection before he would place an order for the materials. The work at Mrs. Courtney's residence had been delayed because the youthful decorators said they wished to look over the magnificent materials from Paris. When they were sure of Mr. Dalken's visit to the Shops that morning, they also insisted upon Mrs. Courtney coming in to look over the materials.

The two plotters could hardly keep from hugging each other when they knew that both friends were coming, and the opportunity of having them meet and fall in love with each other was given at last.

But they did not allow for Fate.

There happened to be a socialistic parade of demonstration against work, or some such complaint, that noon; and just as the parade reached that section of Fifth Avenue where the Ashby Shops were located, the police held up all vehicular traffic. All cars were diverted from the Avenue to side streets, but those unfortunate cars caught just at the point of crossing the street, had to back and wait until those behind had backed out of the congestion, before they could slowly make their way out.

Mrs. Courtney's chauffeur had just attempted to cross the Avenue in order to turn in front of the Ashby Shops, when the signal came and all traffic, up or down or cross-town, was held up until the parade should have passed. Mrs. Courtney was furious.

"Back out and we'll go around a side street to get to my destination," spoke she to the chauffeur.

The man glanced in the mirror to see if the way behind was open, and finding no car directly in his pathway, he began to quickly back out. In the moment he took his eye from the reflector, another car shot up close to Mrs. Courtney's automobile; thus her driver backed suddenly into the newly arrived car behind.

There was a smash of lamps, a grinding of fenders and the interlocking of back and front bumpers. The passengers were rudely thrown from the luxurious cushioned seats, and Mrs. Courtney had her new imported hat crushed out of shape.

The two chauffeurs jumped down and began to blame each other for the accident; Mr. Dalken managed to pick himself up from the floor of his limousine and step stiffly out to learn who was to blame. Mrs. Courtney was sure she was in the right; and when the handsome gentleman came up to her car to tell her she had a stupid chauffeur, for he should have looked well before backing so recklessly into the congested tangle of cars behind him, she resented his charge.

While Mr. Dalken stood beside Mrs. Courtney's car trying to convince her she was in the wrong, the two chauffeurs began to use their fists upon each other. Then, in a few minutes' time, the officer stationed at the corner to maintain order for the paraders, rushed up and arrested both combatants. Naturally, this caused their employers to see that justice was done, and thus it happened that all contestants accompanied the officer to the police-station.

Meantime Polly and Eleanor waited and waited, but no one came to inspect their

sample book. They telephoned Mrs. Courtney's house and were told she had left, in her car, fully an hour before. Then they telephoned Mr. Dalken's office and heard that he had driven away in his car fully an hour before.

"The old parade must have held them up," suggested Polly.

"But that's over, now, and they surely could have been here if they were detained at one of the nearby cross-streets," said Eleanor.

Another half hour passed and then two cars drove up and stopped before the Ashby Shops. Two people stepped from their individual cars and two angry people stood and stared at each other. Then Mr. Dalken, recovering first, bowed stiffly and walked across the pavement to enter the Shop door. Mrs. Courtney had started to cross the sidewalk before she realized that her unknown opponent was entering the same Shop she was bound for. She passed through the door he held open, and sent him a careless glance of thanks, then looked around for the girls whom she had expected to meet there.

Neither girl was in sight, and the lady now asked one of the salesmen, "Where shall I find Miss Brewster or Miss Maynard?"

"Just step this way, Madam. I'll take you to their private office," was the polite reply.

Mrs. Courtney glanced in a large mirror to assure herself that her hat was presentable, then followed her escort. As she reached the partly closed door of the office used by the young decorators, she heard a man's voice. The same voice which had been accusing her chauffeur of bad judgment and ignorance of city laws. Before she could change her mind about entering the room, however, the escort had knocked and Polly flung the door open. She welcomed the new visitor.

Both girls were tickled to pieces to find how their plot was coming on apace: both dear friends were now together at the same time, and all that was needed was for them to be introduced.

"Oh, isn't this just lovely!" cried Eleanor, acting her part very well. "To find both our friends here at the same time!"

"Dear Mrs. Courtney, this is our dear Mr. Dalken," said Polly, politely.

"And *this* is the dear friend we have told you of so often, Dalky!" added Eleanor, effusively.

The lady and gentleman bowed distantly but never smiled; the girls wondered at

their strange behavior. Then Mr. Dalken said sarcastically:

“We have met before. In fact, the lady is obliged to me for having spared her chauffeur a fine.”

“What do you mean?” gasped Polly, all at sea.

“He means, my dears, that he took us to the police station a short time ago, just because his stupid chauffeur wouldn’t back out of the congestion. Naturally, when my man tried to back out the car grazed the one behind, and that started the fight,” explained Mrs. Courtney.

“I beg pardon, Madam. *I* did not take you to the station house. You took yourself in order to save your chauffeur. And I went to see that my poor man had simple justice in the case,” said Mr. Dalken, bowing low in mock humility.

“Oh, oh! Isn’t this dreadful after all we hoped for!” cried Polly, throwing herself in a chair and burying her face in her arms.

“What is so awful, Polly dear?” asked Mrs. Courtney, springing over to the troubled girl and placing an arm about her.

“Oh, oh! I am so heart-broken over this misfortune!” cried Polly.

“What misfortune, Polly dear?” now asked Mr. Dalken, coming close to the girl.

“Oh, oh, oh! I can’t speak of it!” sobbed Polly.

“Perhaps I can comfort her, Madam, if you will allow me,” suggested Mr. Dalken, anxious to take Mrs. Courtney’s place as comforter.

She sent him a glance that said as plain as could be: “I can comfort her myself—you need not mind!”

Meanwhile Eleanor stood and rapidly pondered the situation. She felt like laughing outrageously at the prank Cupid had played on them, but she dared not utter a sound of mirth because that might spoil everything. And there might be a possible chance of saving the day, after all.

Suddenly, without any previous notice, Eleanor fell upon the other chair by the table and dropped her head upon her folded arms. Her body shook nervously, and Mr. Dalken believed her to be crying, too. He hastened to assure her that there was really nothing to cry about, but his assurance only caused the girl to quake the more.

Eleanor was not crying, but had felt that she must laugh or leave the room. As she had no desire to leave, she tried to hide her laughing in her arms upon the

table. But when Mr. Dalken began to comfort her, she lost all control of herself and had an attack of hysterical laughter.

The two distraught adults were not able to cope with the situation, and they looked at each other in mute appeal. Mr. Dalken was the first to speak.

“We’d better bury the hatchet and do something for the children,” said he, anxiously. “Do you know what to do?”

“Had I better get a doctor, or something?” added he.

“Better get *something*,” replied Mrs. Courtney, without thinking how silly it must sound.

This sent Eleanor off into another wild spell of laughter, but Polly began to quiet now that she heard her friend making such a disturbance. The ungoverned laughter attracted Mr. Ashby who had just entered the Shops.

“Well, well! What has happened?” was the natural thing for him to say, the moment he entered the room.

Mr. Dalken tried to explain that a slight shock had occasioned the hysteria, and then Mr. Ashby ran for the jug of icewater on the small stand by the door. Eleanor was liberally soaked with water before she could control her nerves, but once she could gasp again, she cried, “Oh, Mr. Ashby! make our two dear friends patch up their quarrel! I shall have another fit unless they shake hands right before my face and promise never again to act like children!”

As the logic of this accusation seemed apparent to all present, Mr. Dalken smiled graciously upon Mrs. Courtney and she held out her hand without further animosity. Then Mr. Ashby had to hear the story of the accident.

As it was concluded he laughed heartily and said, “When I came in, just now, I saw two chauffeurs sitting on the running board of Dalky’s car, smoking cigarettes and laughing together as if they were twin brothers. No sign of disagreement *there*.”

“Oh the wretches! And in the station house they called each other all sorts of bad names and swore to do away with each other the moment they found an opportunity,” complained Mrs. Courtney.

The others laughed at her pathetic voice, and Mr. Dalken said, “When they discovered they were both Swedes they decided they had best combine their forces against the common enemy-employer.”

Now that reconciliation had been brought about between these two good friends, Eleanor wondered what next to do to further the match she had determined to bring about. She looked at Polly for inspiration, but Polly seemed to lack any initiative.

“Well, girls! Now that you have agreed to remain yet a little longer on this earth with us, I shall have to be saying good-by,” declared Mr. Dalken, bowing before Mrs. Courtney in his most dignified manner.

“Oh, no, Dalky! Wait just a minute!” cried Eleanor. Then turning to Polly for help, she added, “We want Mrs. Courtney and you to come and dine with us, some evening, this week. Not at Mr. Fabian’s, you know, but at a nice quaint little place we know of.”

This was news to Polly, but she waited to hear more before she spoke. Mr. Dalken laughed and waited for Mrs. Courtney to speak.

“What is this? Do you need a chaperone for an evening?” said she, trying to fathom Eleanor’s thoughts.

“No, no! But you see, Mr. Ashby always takes his important clients to a famous restaurant for dinner, so we have to do the same. You two are our first big customers, and I want to do the business up as it should be done.” Every one laughed at Eleanor.

“Under the circumstances, I think I should be the host and you three ladies my guests,” suggested Mr. Dalken.

“Well—anyway you say, Dalky, just so long as we get together for an evening,” sighed Eleanor, as if relieved at the change of plans. This called forth another, heartier, laugh at her expense.

One evening, therefore, the four, now good friends, met at one of the new unique cabarets, and having enjoyed dinner and the dancing, they spoke of Mrs. Courtney’s idea of taking a trip to the South Sea Isles. Mr. Dalken laughed immoderately at the mention of the place selected for a pleasure trip.

“Now I am truly sorry you have set your hearts on going to the South Seas, for I had been secretly planning a little jaunt on my own account. One reason I bought that sea-going yacht was to have my best friends take short voyages with me, whenever we could get away from business.

“I find that I must try to break away from New York in early Spring, and the doctor says a sea-voyage is the best vacation I can possibly take. Hence I wanted

to have my two girls with me. If you are planning to go to the South Seas I suppose it will be out of the question for you to go to the Orient, on *my* planned trip?"

As Mr. Dalken paused to watch the effect of this speech, both the girls "Oh'ed and Ah'ed" and glanced at Mrs. Courtney. She said nothing and her face was a blank so no one could read her mind.

"I had jotted down a list of names of sociable spirits, such as the Fabians, the Ashbys, the Alexanders, the Brewsters, the Maynards, the Latimers, the Evans, the Stewarts, and Mrs. Courtney with Jack Baxter to look after her in lieu of other escort. It may be impossible for all members in the families I mention to continue with us on the voyage, but they can accompany us part way and then come back home. I planned to go via the Panama Canal, and thus on to Hawaii, touching there for a short visit to the Islands, and those of our party who must return to the States, can get back by steamer to California and thence to their respective homes. We will sail on to the land of cherry blossoms and pigtails. But you girls with one short sentence blast all these cherished dreams."

"Oh, no, Dalky! We wouldn't change your plans for the world!" exclaimed Polly, anxiously. "You see, the South Sea Isles will wait until we can get there, but you and your plans are apt to change—as the railroad guides read—without notice at any time!"

A laugh followed Polly's remark, and Mr. Dalken added, "Well just mull over this project for a time and give me your individual opinions about it. Of course, we would be crowded if everyone in the families mentioned were to accept my invitation and take the round trip; but I feel quite safe in inviting all because I am sure I can bank on certain ones refusing to go."

"I don't believe you could tear father or mother away from Pebbly Pit," remarked Polly, wistfully.

"And I know for certain that mother and Bob wouldn't give up their summer season at a fashionable resort, just to join a party of old-fashioned sea-farers," laughed Eleanor.

"Do you think you could persuade your father to join us?" asked Mr. Dalken.

"I bet he would go as far as Honolulu, anyway!" said Eleanor.

"That's one for certain to start with!" laughed Mr. Dalken.

"Then there is Polly and myself and Mrs. Courtney, for certain—and that makes

four; with yourself, we are five!” exulted Eleanor, drawing forth another laugh.

“Then it is settled, eh? We sail for the Orient without more ado, just as soon as your extensive business deals are done and you will need a long rest in order to recuperate for next year’s work,” chuckled Mr. Dalken.

“If our two clients would postpone their decorating for a year, we might be able to start tomorrow,” remarked Polly, smilingly.

“But the clients are obdurate, especially when the decorators need payment and prestige to succeed in their profession. Besides, the owner of the yacht is not keen on sailing the seas in the middle of winter and then land in China in the wet season.”

“Yes, he is right,” admitted Polly.

“If we should really take such a trip, Dalky, what is the best time of the year to start?” asked Eleanor.

“Well, we could leave New York in May or June, dawdle along the route until we reach Southern California. Those who cannot take time to go to Hawaii, can railroad themselves back home, and we can sail leisurely across the Pacific to visit the Hawaiian Islands. There again, those who cannot go on to the Orient with the decorators who need to study customs and periods in the Far East, may say good-by to us and watch us go west, while they go east back to business.

“If we take our time, stopping at the Philippines on the way, we ought to do Japan and China and even the principal parts of India, in a few months. We can bid the East good-by about March and escape the unpleasant season there. By taking a direct route home we might reach New York in June. It all depends.”

“Oh, wouldn’t it be wonderful! And all our dearest friends with us!” cried Polly, clasping her hands in ecstasy.

“Dear, dear! If only Tom will let you go, Polly!” sighed Eleanor, mischievously.

“Tom! What has Tom got to do with it?” demanded Polly.

“Well, you know, he says you ought to consider his wishes more, since he is sure you are his soul-mate,” teased Eleanor.

“The sooner he finds out that I propose keeping my own soul in custody the better it will be for Tom!” declared Polly.

“There, now! That doesn’t sound much as if our Polly was deeply in love, does it, Dalky?” laughed Eleanor, clapping her hands.

“I never thought she was! She was moved by compassion for Tom, to partly agree to consider his proposal. I knew she would not forfeit her profession for the doubtful result of conjugal bliss,” remarked Mr. Dalken.

“Hem—she’s right!” asserted Mrs. Courtney. “When two people, as you and I are, are on hand to prevent our young friends from precipitating themselves into double harness before they have thoroughly studied their own minds and desires, we ought to succeed in the work because we speak from experience.”

“Yes,” agreed Mr. Dalken, reminiscently; “I would never marry the finest woman on earth, after my first venture.”

“Nor would I accept a man, even though he presented himself to me in guise of a saint! Even saints have their bad days,” laughed Mrs. Courtney.

Polly and Eleanor exchanged troubled glances for it was evident that their match-making was hopeless. But the voyage to the Orient might develop many interesting things which were not revealed to the actors then. Thus we leave Polly and Eleanor for the time, and return to our own affairs until it is time to go on board Mr. Dalken’s yacht for the long trip half-way around the world.

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