

Speed Nell

Molly Brown's Post-Graduate Days



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BOOK I

CHAPTER I. – THE ARRIVAL

“Oh, Judy, almost home! I wonder who will meet us,” cried Molly Brown. “I feel in my bones that you and my family will be as good friends as you and I have always been. You are sure to get on well with the boys.”

Judy responded with a hug, thinking, with a happy twinkle in her large, gray eyes, that, if by any chance the rest of the Brown boys could be as attractive as Molly’s brother, Kent, and should find her as fascinating as Kent had seemed to, when she met him in the spring before the college pageant, she bade fair to have an exciting visit in Kentucky.

Molly Brown and Julia Kean (Judy for short), after four busy years of college life, had just graduated at Wellington, and were on their way to Molly’s home in Kentucky, where Judy was to pay a long visit. As Molly had been looking forward to the time when she could have some of her college chums know her numerous and beloved family, she was very happy at the prospect. Judy, who was ever ready for an adventure, was bubbling over with anticipation.

The girls sat gazing out on the beautiful rolling fields of blue grass and tasseling corn, which Molly knowingly remarked promised an excellent crop. Molly’s blue eyes were misty when she thought of dear old Wellington College, the four years of hard work and play, and the many friends she had made and left, some of them, perhaps, never to see again. Her mind dwelt a long time on Professor Green, the delightful old, young man, who had opened up a new world to her in literature; who had been so very kind to her through the whole college course, often coming to her rescue when in difficulties, and always sympathizing with her when she most needed sympathy; and who had, finally, proved to be her real benefactor, when she discovered that he was the purchaser of those acres of perfectly good orchard that had to be sold to keep Molly at college. On bidding him good-by, she had extended to him an invitation from her mother to make them a visit in Kentucky, and she had already speculated much as to whether the young, old man would accept. Molly never could decide whether to think of him as an old, young man, or a young, old man. Professor Green was in reality about thirty, but, when one is under twenty, over thirty seems very old.

Molly smiled when she thought of her parting scene with him, and made a mental note that that was one of the things she must be sure to confess to mother. The smile was enough to dispel the mist that was in her eyes, and her mind turned to Chatsworth, her dear home. She thought of her mother, her brothers and sisters; the decrepit old cook, Aunt Mary Morton; Shep and Gyp, the dogs; her horse, President, no longer young, having lived through four administrations, but still having more go in him than many a colt, showing his fine racing blood and the “mettle of his pasture.”

“Only two miles more,” breathed Molly jubilantly. “We must get our numerous packages together.”

The girls had planned to have no bundles to carry on the train, nothing but two highly respectable suitcases; but the fates were against anything so unheard of as two females going on a journey with no extras. They had seven boxes of candy presented at parting by various friends. A large basket of fruit was added to their cares, put on the Pullman in New York by the resourceful Jimmy Lufton, with instructions to the porter to give it to the two prettiest girls who got on at Wellington, with through sleeper to Kentucky. There were the inevitable shirtwaists found in Molly’s bottom drawer;

books and what not, lent to various girls and returned too late to pack; and some belated laundry that Molly had not had the heart to worry her old friend, Mrs. Murphy, about – collars, jabots, and the muslin sash curtains from her room at college that Molly could not make up her mind to put in her trunk in their dusty state. These things were put in a bulging box and labeled by Judy, quoting the immortal Mr. Venus, “Bones Warious.”

“I wish we could forget it and leave it on the train,” said Molly. “The things in it are all mine, and, now I come to think of it, I believe there is nothing there of any real value except the jabots Nance made me – those that Mrs. Murphy called my ‘jawbones.’ I could not bear to lose them, and we have not time to dig them out. If Kent meets us he is sure to tease me, and you know how badly I take a teasing. He says he is lopsided now from carrying his sisters’ clothes that they have forgotten to pack in their trunks.”

“Let me call the ‘foul, hunch-backed toad’ of a bundle mine,” offered Judy. “Your brother does not know me well enough to tease me.”

“Don’t you believe it! Besides, you can’t fool Kent. He knows me and my bundles too well. Here we are,” added Molly hastily, “and there is Kent to meet us, driving the colts, if you please. It is a good thing you are not Nance Oldham. She will not consent to ride behind any colt younger than ten years old!”

The train stopped just long enough for the girls to jump off, the porter depositing their numerous belongings in a heap on the platform.

“Hello, girls,” exclaimed Kent, hugging Molly, on one side, and shaking hands with Judy, on the other, while a diminutive darkey swung on to the colts’ bits, occasionally leaping into the air as the restive horses tossed their proud heads. “My, it is good to see you! And your train on time, too! That is such a rare occurrence that I have an idea it may be yesterday’s train. You don’t mean to say that this is all of the emergency baggage you are carrying?” grabbing the two highly respectable suitcases and stowing them in the back of the trim, red-wheeled Jersey wagon. The girls giggled, and Kent discovered the conglomerate collection of packages that the porter had hastily dumped by the side of the track.

Molly beat a hasty retreat into the station, declaring that she must speak to Mrs. Woodsmall, the postmistress, thus hoping to avoid the inevitable teasing from her big brother. Judy, with the spirit and somewhat the expression of a Christian martyr, picked up the aforesaid despised, bumpy, bulging bundle, and, with a sweet smile, said: “This is mine, Mr. Brown. Will you please take it? The rest of the things are boxes of candy and parting gifts from various friends.”

Kent took the disreputable looking package, which was not at all improved by its long trip on the Pullman and the many disdainful kicks the girls had given it. Now, in the last hasty handling, the porter had loosened the much knotted string, the paper had burst, and from the yawning gash there had crept a bit of blue ribbon, Molly’s own blue. Judy, with her ever-ready imagination, had been heard to call it “the blue of chivalry and romance, the blue of distant mountains and deep seas.”

Kent took the package, smiling his quizzical smile; the smile that from the beginning had made Judy decide that he was very likable; a smile all from the eyes, with a grave mouth. In fact, the young lady had been so taken with it that she had practiced the expression before her mirror for half an hour and then held it until she could try it on the first person passing by. That person happened to be Edith Williams, who had remarked: “Gracious me, Judy, what is the matter? I feel as though you were some one in a hogshead looking through the bunghole at me.” Judy was delighted. It was exactly the expression she was aiming for, but she was sorry that she had not thought of the apt description herself.

“Now, Miss Judy, I have known for four years from Molly’s letters what a bully good chum you are, and have observed before now how charming and beautiful, but this rôle of Christian martyr is a new one on me. Don’t you know you can’t fool me about a Brown bundle? I could pick one out of the hold of an ocean liner in the dark, just by the lumpy, bumpy feel of it. Besides” – pointing to

the bit of blue ribbon spilling through the widening tear – “there are Molly’s honest old eyes peeping out, telling me that this little subterfuge of yours is just an act of true friendship on your part, to keep me from teasing her about her slipshod method of packing. I tell you what I will do, Miss Judy, if you will do something for me. I’ll make a compact with you, and promise to go the whole of this day without teasing Molly.”

“Well, what am I to do?”

“Oh, it’s easy enough. Don’t call me Mr. Brown any more. Kent, from your lips, would sound good to me. You see, there are four male Browns, and every time you say ‘Mr. Brown’ we are liable to fall over one another answering you or doing your bidding.”

“All right; ‘Kent’ it shall be for this day and every day that you don’t tease Molly.”

“I meant just for the one day. The strain of never teasing Molly again would shatter my constitution.”

“Very well, Mr. Brown; just as you choose about that.”

“Oh, well, I give up.”

“All right, Kent.”

Molly emerged from the postoffice, with Mrs. Woodsmall following her. Such a stream of conversation poured from the latter’s lips that Judy felt her head swim.

“Glad to meet you, Miss Kean. I have long wanted to see some of Molly’s correspondents. What beautiful postals you sent her last year from Maine; the summer before from Yellowstone Park; and those Eyetalian ones were grand; one year, even from Californy. You are the most traveled of all her friends, I believe, but Miss Oldham can say more on a postal than any of you, and such a eligible hand, too. Now-a-days all of you young folks write so much alike, since the round style come in, I can hardly tell your writin’ apart. It makes it very hard on a lonesome postmistress whose only way of gitting news is from the mail she handles. And now, since Uncle Sam has started this fool Rural Free Delivery, I don’t git time to more than half sort the mail before here comes Bud Woodsmall and snatches it from under my nose with irrevalent remarks about cur’osity and cats. Gimme the good old days when the neighbors come a-drivin’ up for their mail, and you could pass the time o’ day with them and git what news out of them you ain’t been able to git off of the postals, or make out through the thin ornvelopes, or guess from the postmarks. Anyhow, I gits ahead of Woodsmall lots of times. Jest yistiddy I ‘phoned over to Mrs. Brown that Molly would be in on this two train. To be sure, Woodsmall had the letter in his auto, but he has to go a long way round, and he’s sech a man for stopping and gassin’, and Molly’s ornvelope was some thinner than usual, and I could see mighty plain the time she expected to come. Said I to myself, said I, ‘Now, ain’t Mrs. Brown nothing but a mother, and don’t she want the earliest news of her child she can git? And ain’t I the owner of that news, and should I not desiccate it if I can? It so happened that Woodsmall had a blow-out, and didn’t git yistiddy’s mail delivered until to-day. Now, tell me, wasn’t I right to git ahead of him?’” She did not pause for a reply, but plunged into the stream of conversation again.

“I don’t care if he is my own husband. He asked my sister first, and I never would have had him if there had been a chance of anything better offering. I wouldn’t have had him at all if I had foresaw that he was going to fly in my face by gitting app’inted to R. F. D., and then fly in the face of Providence by trying to run one of them artemobes.”

Kent stopped the flow of words by saying: “Now, Mrs. Woodsmall, you are giving Miss Kean an entirely wrong idea of you and Bud. She will think you do not love him, and I am sure there is not a man in the county who fares better than your husband, or who shows his keep as well.”

The thin, hard face of the postmistress broke into a pleasant smile, and Judy thought: “After all, Kent and Molly are very much alike in understanding the human heart and in trying to make all around them feel as happy as possible.”

“Well, you see, Kent Brown, it’s this way: I jest natchally love to cook, and Bud he jest natchally loves to eat, and I’ve got the triflingest, no-count stomic that ever was seed. What’s the use of cooking

up a lot of victuals for myself, when I can't eat more'n a mouthful? And so," she somewhat lamely concluded, "I jest cook 'em up for Bud."

The colts could not be persuaded to stand still another minute, so they had to call a hasty goodbye to the voluble Mrs. Woodsmall. Then the girls gave their attention to holding on their hats and keeping their seats, while the lively pair of young horses pranced and cavorted until Kent gave them their heads and allowed them to race their fill for a mile or more of macadamized road.

Judy was hardly prepared for such a trim turnout as the Jersey wagon, and such wonderful horses, to say nothing of the road. She had yet to learn that Mrs. Brown would have good, well-kept vehicles on her place; that all the Browns would have good horses; and that all Kentuckians insist on good roads. The number of limestone quarries throughout the state make good macadamized roads a comparatively easy matter.

What a beautiful country it was: the fields of blue grass, with herds of grazing cattle, knee deep in June; an occasional clump of trees, reminding one rather of English landscapes; and then the fields of corn, proudly waving their tassels and shaking their pennant-like leaves, as much as to say, "roasting ears for all."

"News for you, Molly," said Kent, as soon as he could get the colts down to a conversation permitting trot. "Mildred is to be married in two weeks."

"Oh, Kent, why didn't they write me?"

"Mother thought it would be fun to surprise you."

Judy's glowing face saddened. "Why, I should not be here at such a time. I know I shall be in the way. I must write to papa to come for me sooner."

"Now, Miss Judy, 'the cat is out of the bag.' You have hit on the real reason why mother would not let any of us write Molly of the approaching nuptials in the family. She was so afraid that you might fear you would be *de trop* and want to postpone your visit to us, and she has been determined that nothing should happen to keep her from making your acquaintance, and that at the earliest. You see, poor mother has had not only to listen to Molly's ravings on the subject of Miss Julia Kean for the last four years, but now she has to give ear to Mildred and me, since we met you at Wellington, and she thinks the only way to silence us is to have something to say about you herself."

Judy laughed, reassured. "You and Molly are exactly alike, and both of you must 'favor your ma.' Well, I'll try not to be in the way, and maybe I can help."

"Of course you can," said Molly, squeezing her. "You always help where there is any planning or arranging or beautifying to be done. But, Kent, tell me, why is Milly in such a rush?"

"Why, Molly, I am surprised at you, laying it on Mildred. It happens to be old 'Silence and Fun' who is so precipitate."

"Who is 'Silence and Fun'?" asked Judy.

"Oh, he is Milly's *fiancé*, but the Brown boys call him that ridiculous name. He has a fine name of his own, Crittenden Rutledge. But, Kent, please tell me, why this haste?"

"Well, you see Crit has been ordered out to Iowa by his steel construction company, on a bridge-building debauch, and he thought Milly might just as well go on with him and hold the nails while he wields the hammer. Here we are, so put your hat on straight, and look your prettiest, Miss Judy. I should hate for mother to think that we had been misleading her."

CHAPTER II. – MY OLD KENTUCKY HOME

They turned into an avenue through a gate opened from the wagon by means of a rope pulled by the driver.

“How is that for a gate, Molly? I began my holiday by getting the thing in order. It works beautifully now, but the least bit of rough handling gets it off its trolley.”

“It is fine, Kent. But tell me, are you to have your holiday now?”

“Yes; you see I can help with the harvesting this week, and next week the wedding bells have to be rung. And I thought any spare time I have I could take Miss Judy off your hands.”

“I am afraid that your holiday will be a very busy one,” laughed Judy; “but maybe I can help ring the wedding bells, and, if I can’t do much toward harvesting, I can at least carry water to the thirsty laborers.”

Kent Brown was in an architect’s office in Louisville, working very hard to master his profession, for which he had a fondness amounting to a passion. Mrs. Brown had secretly hoped that one of her boys would want to become a farmer, but they one and all looked upon Chatsworth as a beloved home, but not a place to make a living. Their earnest endeavor, however, was to keep up the place, and often their hard-earned and harder-saved earnings went toward much needed repairs or farm machinery. Mrs. Brown had to confess that a little ready money earned irrespective of the farm was very acceptable; and, since her four boys were on their feet and beginning to walk alone, and stretch out willing, helpful hands to her, she found life much easier.

Not that money or the lack of money had much to do with Mrs. Brown’s happiness. She was a woman of strong character and deep feelings, with a love for her children that her sister, Mrs. Clay, said was like that of a lioness for her cubs. But that remark was called forth when Mrs. Clay, Sister Sarah, one morning found Mrs. Brown making two pairs of new stockings out of four pairs of old ones, after a pattern clipped from the woman’s page of a newspaper. With her accustomed bluntness, she had said: “Well, Mildred Carmichael, if you had only three and a half children, instead of seven, you would not have to be guilty of such absurd makeshifts.”

Mrs. Brown had risen up in her wrath and given her such a talk that, although ten years had elapsed since that memorable morning, Sister Sarah still avoided the subject of stockings with Sister Mildred.

Mrs. Brown was a great reader, and loved old books and old poetry. One of Molly’s earliest remembrances was lying on the otter-skin rug in front of the great open fire, with brothers and sisters curled up by her or seated close to the big brass fender, while mother read Dickens aloud, or the Idyls of the King, or something else equally delightful. One by one the younger children would drop to sleep; and then Mammy would come and do what she called “walk ’em to baid,” muttering to herself, “I hope to Gawd that these chilluns won’t be a dreamin’ all night about that stuff Miss Mildred done packed in they haid.”

Just now, however, Molly’s memories were merged in anticipations, and she watched eagerly for the first signs of welcome.

As they approached the house, the colts neighed, and were greeted by answering whinnies from two mares grazing in a paddock. The mares ran to the white-washed picket fence and stretched their necks as far over as they could, gazing fondly on their handsome offspring, trotting gaily by, tossing their manes and tails.

“The mothers are all coming out to meet their babies, and there is mine!” cried Molly.

It was mother. Oh, that beloved face; that familiar, spirited walk and bearing of the head; those wide, clear, far-seeing gray eyes, and that fine patrician nose, with the mouth ever ready to laugh in spite of a certain sadness that lurked there! She folded Molly in her arms, but did not forget to keep a hand free to clasp Judy’s, and, before Molly was half through her hug, the older woman drew the

young visitor to her, and kissed her fondly. Then, with an arm around each girl, she said: "I am truly glad to know my Molly's friend, and gratified, indeed, to have her with us."

"It means a great deal to me, too, Mrs. Brown, to see Molly's mother and home." Judy feared that it would be forward to say what she had in her mind, and that was "such a beautiful mother and home."

The house was of white-washed brick, with a sloping gray shingled roof and green shutters, and a general air of roominess and comfort. A long, deep gallery or porch ran across the front, which Architect Kent explained to Judy was not quite in keeping with the style of architecture, but had been added by a comfort-loving Brown to the delectation of all who came after him. The lines of the old house were so good that the addition of a mere porch could not ruin it, and certainly added to its charm and comfort. To the left, in the rear, well off from the house, were the barn-yard and stables, chicken houses, smokehouse, and servants' quarters; to the right, a tan-bark walk led to the garden. Down that path came Mildred, by her side a young man who seemed to be so amused by her lively chatter that he could hardly contain himself.

"Molly, Molly, I'm so glad to see you, and so is Crit, although he has no words to tell you how glad he is. And, Miss Kean, Judy! It is splendid for you to come just now. I am certain that Kent could not keep the news, and you know by this time that Crit and I are to be married the last of next week. Mr. Rutledge, let me introduce you to Miss Kean."

Although Crittenden had never uttered a word, he seemed to be able to let Molly understand that he, too, was glad to see her, as he was vigorously hugging her and two-stepping with her over the short, well-kept grass. But, at Mildred's call, he suddenly stopped, made a low and courtly bow to his partner, and turned to Judy, clasping her hand in a warm and friendly grasp, and giving her such a smile as she had never before beheld. In it he made her feel that she was welcome to Kentucky; that he intended to like her and have her like him; and had his heart not been already engaged, he would lay it at her feet. Never a word did he utter. He was tall, rather soldierly in bearing, with the most beaming countenance Judy had ever seen, and such perfect teeth she almost had her doubts about them.

"Where is Sue, mother?" said Molly. "And Aunt Mary and Ca'line? Of course the other boys are not home so early."

"Sue has gone over to Aunt Sarah Clay's. She sent for her in a great hurry. Sue was loath to go, fearing she could not get back before you arrived, but you know your Aunt Clay and how autocratic she is. Sue seems to be in great favor just now. Here is Aunt Mary, however."

Molly ran to meet the decrepit old darkey, embracing her with almost as much fervor as she had her mother. Aunt Mary Morton was surely of the old school: very short and fat, dressed in a starched purple calico, with a white "neckercher" and a voluminous gingham apron, her head tied up in a gorgeous bandanna handkerchief.

"Oh, my chile, I'm glad to see you. I hope you done learned 'nuf to stay at home a while. Yo' ma's so lonesome 'thout you, with Mr. Ernest 'way out West surveyin' the landscape." (Ernest, the oldest of the Brown boys, was employed by the government on the geological survey.) "Mr. Paul so took up wif sassiety in Lou'ville he can't hardly walk straight, and jes' come home long 'nuf to snatch a moufful – but I done tuck 'ticular notice he do manage to eat at home in spite er all his gran' frien's. And now, Miss Milly gwine to step off; an' 'mos' fo' we git time to cook up any mo' victuals, Miss Sue'll be walkin' off. Praise be, she ain't a-goin' fur. How she eber made up her min' to gib her promise to a man what lib up sech a muddy lane, beats me; an' Miss Sue, the mos' 'ticular of all yo' ma's chilluns 'bout her shoes an' skirts an' comp'ny! Now Mr. John ain't been a full-fleshed doctor mo'n two weeks befo' he so took up wif a young lady's tongue what stayin' over to Miss Sarah Clay's, and so anxious 'bout feelin' her pulse, dat yo' ma an' I don' neber see nothin' of him. He jes' come home from dat doctor's office in town long 'nuf to shave and mess up a lot er crivats an' peck a little eatin's, an' off he goes. My 'pinion is, dat's what Miss Sarah done sent for Miss Sue in sech a

hurry 'bout, but you' ma say fer me to hesh up, no sich a thing, she jes' wan' to talk 'bout a suit'ble weddin' presen' for little Miss Milly."

"Oh, Aunt Mary, isn't it exciting to have a wedding in the family? You always said Milly would be the first to get married, if Sue was the first to get born," said Molly, giving the old woman another hug for luck. "Now I want you to shake hands with my dear friend, Miss Judy Kean."

Aunt Mary made a bobbing curtsey to Judy, then gave her a friendly handshake, looking keenly in her face the while. Then she nodded her head, until the ends of the bright bandanna, tied in a bow on top of her head, quivered, and said: "I don' know but what that there Kent was right."

"Aunt Mary, I am truly glad to meet you. If you could hear the blessings that are showered on your head when Molly gets a box from home, and could see how hard it is for all of those hungry girls to be polite when the time comes for snakey noodles, you would know how honored I feel that I am the first to make your acquaintance."

"Well, honey, what makes all of you go 'way from yo' homes to sech outlandish places as collidges where the eatin's is so scurse? Can't you learn what little you don' know right by yo' own fi'side?"

"Maybe we could, Aunt Mary, but you see I haven't any real fireside of my own."

"What! did yo' folks git burned out?"

"Oh, no; but you see my father is an engineer, and mamma travels with him, and stays wherever he stays; and, when I am not at school or college, I knock around with them. Of course, I'd like to have a home like Chatsworth, but it is lots of fun to go to new places all the time and meet all kinds of people."

"Well, they ain't but two kin's, quality an' po' white trash, an' I'll be boun' you don't neber take up wid any ob dat kin', so you an' yo' ma 'n' pa mought jes' as well stay in one place."

While the girls were up in Molly's room, which Judy was to share, getting ready for a belated dinner, they heard the sound of a piano, cracked but sweet, like the notes of an old spinnet, then a male voice, wonderful in its power and intensity, and at the same time so sweet and full of feeling that Judy, ever emotional where art was concerned, felt her eyes filling.

"Shed no tear, oh, shed no tear!
The flower will bloom another year.
Weep no more! Oh, weep no more!
Young buds sleep in the root's white core.
Dry your eyes, oh, dry your eyes!
For I was taught in Paradise
To ease my breast of melodies,
Shed no tear.

"Overhead – look overhead
'Mong the blossoms white and red.
Look up, look up! I flutter now
On this flush pomegranate bough.
See me! 'tis this silvery bill
Ever cures the good man's ill.
Shed no tear, oh, shed no tear!
The flower will bloom another year.
Adieu, adieu – I fly. Adieu,
I vanish in the heaven's blue,
Adieu, adieu!"

“Oh, Molly, Molly, who is that?” cried Judy, weeping copiously, in spite of the repeated request of the singer to “shed no tear.”

“Why, that is Crit. Isn’t his voice wonderful?”

“Do you really mean it is Mr. Rutledge? I thought he was dumb, and have been feeling so sorry for Mildred.”

“Dumb, indeed! He has the most beautiful voice in Kentucky, and can make such an eloquent speech when roused that we have been afraid he would go into politics. But, so far as passing the time of day is concerned, and the little chit-chat that fills up life, he is indeed as dumb as a fish. When he was a little boy he stammered and got into the habit of expressing his feelings in silence, and he can still do it. He had a teacher who cured him of stammering, but nothing will ever cure him of silence, unless he has something important to say, and then nothing can stop him. Mother tells of a man who stammered in talking but not in singing. One day he was passing a friend’s house, and saw that the roof was in a blaze, the inmates perfectly unconscious of the conflagration. He rushed in, tried to speak, could only stutter, and then in desperation burst into song. To the tune of ‘The Campbells Are Coming,’ he sang, ‘Your house is on fire, tra-la, tra-la!’ Kent declares that Crit proposed to Milly in song, but Milly herself is dumb about how that came about.”

“Well, anyhow, I have never heard such scintillating silence as his, and I think that Milly ought to be a very proud and happy girl.”

CHAPTER III. – WEDDING PREPARATIONS AND CONFIDENCES

The next two weeks were busy ones for all the Brown household: first and foremost, the ever-crying need of clothes to be answered; second, the old house to be put in apple-pie order; all the furniture rubbed and rubbed some more; the beautiful old floors waxed and polished until they shone and reflected the newly scrubbed white paint in a way Judy thought most romantic. (But Judy thought everything was romantic those days.) She was “itching to help,” and help she did in many ways. Molly would not let her rub furniture or wax floors, but she had the pleasure of hanging the freshly laundered curtains all over the house, and she was received with joy in the sewing room by Miss Lizzie Monday, the neighborhood seamstress. Miss Lizzie was of the opinion that the Browns thought entirely too much about food and not nearly enough about clothes. Indeed it was a failing of the mother, if failing she had, to have good food, no matter at what cost, and then, since strict economy had to be practiced somewhere, to practice it on the clothes.

Miss Lizzie had once been present when they were packing a box to send to Molly at Wellington, and had sadly remarked: “In these hard times, with the price of food what it is, poor little raggedy Molly could have had an entire new outfit from the contents of that box.” Mrs. Brown had indignantly denied that she was spending any money at all on the box, but the fact remained in Miss Lizzie’s mind that the food in the delightful box, so eagerly looked for by the hungry college girls, represented so much money that had much better be put on Molly’s outside than her inside.

“Not that much of it goes on her own inside. I know Molly too well, bless her heart. Can’t I just see her handing out that good old ham and hickory-nut cake and Rosemary pickle to those Yankees? And they, raised on pale, pink, ready-cooked ham and doughnuts and corner grocery dill pickles, don’t know what they are getting. Molly, in her same old blue that I have made over twice for her! – and that ham would have bought the stuff for a new one (not that I would have had it anything but blue). The half gallon of Rosemary pickle would have trimmed it nicely, and the hickory-nut cake would have made her at least two new shirtwaists, and the express on the box would more than pay me for making the things.”

Judy loved to hear Miss Lizzie talk, and used to encourage her to praise her friend, while she sat helping to whip lace or planning the bridesmaids’ dresses for Molly and Sue. These dresses were flowered French organdies. Molly’s was covered with a feathery blue flower, that never was on land or sea, but it was the right color, which was the important thing; and Sue’s bore the same design in pink. The bride’s dress, a lovely simple gown of the finest Paris muslin, was all done and pressed and neatly folded in a box by the careful Miss Lizzie, with one of her own sandy hairs secretly sewed in the hem, which is supposed to bring good luck, and a “soon husband” to the owner of the hair.

There was some doubt and much talk about how the bridal party was to enter the parlor and where the minister was to stand. The parlor at Chatsworth was not very suitable for an effective wedding, as it was in the wing of the house and opened only into the hall, giving, when all was considered, not much room for the growing list of guests. Although it was a very large room, having only one entrance made it rather awkward. It was only a few days before the wedding and this important subject was still under discussion.

“I can count at least ninety-eight persons who are sure to come,” said Mrs. Brown, “all of them kin or close friends, and how they are to get in this room and leave an aisle for the wedding party, goodness only knows; and if the hall and porch are full, it will be very uncomfortable.”

Judy and Kent were pretending to be the bride and groom, grave Sue was the minister, John and Paul, flower girls, and Molly, boss. Mildred and Crittenden were not allowed to practice for their own wedding, as Miss Lizzie said it was bad luck, and Miss Lizzie was authority on all such subjects. So

the two most interested were seated at the piano, pretending to be the musicians doing “Chopsticks” to wedding march time.

“Crit, I believe you will have to give Milly up. There is no way to have a decently stylish wedding in this joint,” said Paul. “Let’s stop the festive preparations and all of us go to Jeffersonville. It would make a grand story for my paper.”

Judy had been very quiet for some minutes and her face wore what Molly called her “flashed upon that inward eye” expression. Suddenly she cried, “I have it. Come on and let’s get married out of doors.” She seized Kent by the hand and dragged him out on the lawn, the rest following in a daze.

“Look at that natural place to be married in: the guests under the trees; room for everybody; a living altar of shrubs and flowers at the end of the tan-bark walk; minister entering from the grass walk on one side and Mr. Rutledge with his best man from the other; down the steps Mildred on Ernest’s arm, followed by Molly and Sue. Can’t you see them coming up the tan-bark walk? Just at sunset, the people in their light festive clothes, your mother beautiful in her black *crêpe de Chine*, with Paul and John and Kent standing by her making a dark note near the bride? Oh, why, oh, why did they not have holly-hocks up this garden walk instead of by the chicken yard fence? It would have made the color scheme simply perfect.”

Judy paused for breath. She had carried the crowd by her eloquence, and so perfectly had she visualized the whole thing that each one was able to see what she meant, and absolute and unanimous approval was given the scheme. Kent, with his artistic eye, was in for it heart and soul, and began to plan Japanese lanterns to be lit after the ceremony in the rustic summer-house beyond, where supper was to be served, observing that their color might somewhat take the place of the holly-hocks that were in the wrong place.

“Just where did you want the holly-hocks, Miss Judy? We might do better another year if we knew just what your orders were.”

“On both sides of the tan-bark walk, just beyond the intersection of the grass walk. Can’t you see how fine and stately they would look, and what a wonderful mass of color?”

“Right, as usual. What an architect you would make! That power of ‘seein’ things’ is what an architect needs above everything. Any one can learn to make it, but it is the one who *sees* it who is the great man or woman, as in the present case.”

Things had been humming so since Molly’s return that she had had no time for the confidential talk with her mother that both were hungering for. The Browns always had much company, but at this season there seemed to be no end to the comings and goings of guests, principally comings: many parting calls being paid to Mildred by old and young; Molly’s friends hastening to greet her after the eight months’ absence at college; a steady following of young men calling on Sue, in spite of her suspected preference for Cyrus Clay, the nephew of Aunt Sarah Clay’s deceased husband, and the one Aunt Mary objected to because of his living up such a muddy lane. Presents were pouring in for the bride; notes had to be answered; trains to be met; express packages to be fetched from the station; and poor little Mrs. Woodsmall kept in a state of constant misery over the Parcel Post business Bud was doing, and she with “never a chanst to take so much as a peep.”

Molly, ever mindful of others, hitched up President one off day and drove over to the postoffice and got the poor thing. Then she let her see every single present; and feel the weight of every bit of silver; and hunt for the price mark on the bottom of the cut-glass; read all the cards; and even go into the sewing-room where Miss Lizzie Monday proudly showed her the clothes, and let her take a good look at the wedding dress all folded up in its box. But when Mrs. Woodsmall began to pick at the hem where her sharp eyes discovered an end of the stiff sandy hair, sewed in to bring a “soon husband,” Miss Lizzie snapped on the top and told her sharply to stop rumpling up Miss Milly’s dress.

The night after Judy had solved the problem of where the wedding was to be, Molly felt that she must have her talk with her mother. Judy was tired and a little distraught, visualizing again no doubt; seeing the wedding in her mind’s eye; regretting the holly-hocks; wondering if she really did have

the power that Kent attributed to her, that of a creative artist. If she did have it, what should she do about it? Was it not up to her to make something of herself if she had such a gift? Was she willing to work, as work she would have to, if she really expected to do something? At the back of it all was the thought, "Would Kent like her so much if she should turn out to be a woman with a purpose?" Judy was obliged to confess to herself as she dozed off that what Kent Brown thought of her made a good deal of difference to her, more than she had thought that any man's opinion could make.

Molly waited until she thought Judy was asleep and then crept softly downstairs to her mother's room. Mrs. Brown was awake and glad indeed to see her "old red head," as she sometimes lovingly called Molly, coming to have a good talk. It is funny what a difference it makes who calls one a red head. Now that horrid girl at college, Adele Windsor, had enraged Molly into forgetting what Aunt Mary called her "raisin'" by calling her a red head, and yet when mother called her the same thing it sounded like sweet music in her ears.

Mother had some things to tell Molly, too. She did not altogether approve of John's inamorata, the girl visiting Aunt Clay. It was a case of Dr. Fell with her.

"I do not love thee, Dr. Fell.
The reason why I cannot tell;
But this I know, and know full well,
I do not love thee, Dr. Fell."

Then she did think if Sue intended to marry Cyrus Clay she should not lead on the other two young men, who seemed quite serious in their attentions. She hated to say anything, because Sue was so dignified.

"Now if it were you or Mildred, I would speak out, but you know Sue always did scare me a little, Molly."

And Molly and her mother giggled like school girls over this confession. Sue was very handsome and lovely and good, but she was certainly a little superior, and Mrs. Brown found that, if she had any talking over of things to do, she wanted either Molly or Mildred, who were "not too pure or good for human nature's daily food."

Molly was eager to know what her mother thought of Judy, and was delighted at her frank liking for her friend. Then Molly had to tell her mother of her hopes and ambitions; of her triumphs and disappointments at college; and of her growing friendship for Jimmy Lufton, the clever young journalist from New York who was trying to persuade Molly to go into newspaper work; of his liking for her that she did not want to ripen into anything more serious, but his last letters were certainly growing more and more fervent.

"Don't flirt, little girl, don't flirt. It would not be my Molly if she deceived any one. Have all the fun you can and as many friends as possible and enjoy life while you are young. You are sure to be popular with every one, men and women, boys and girls, but don't be a coquette."

"Mother, I don't mean to be ever, and really and truly I have done nothing to mislead Mr. Lufton, and maybe I am mistaken and conceited about his feeling for me, and I truly hope I am. I have never done anything but be my natural self with him."

Mrs. Brown smiled, well knowing that just being her natural self was where Molly did the damage, if damage had been done.

"Mother, there is something else." Mrs. Brown knew there was, and was patiently waiting. "You know Professor Green? Well, I gave him your invitation to come to Kentucky."

"And what did he say?"

"He said, 'Thank you.'"

"Is he coming?"

"I don't know." Molly found talking to her mother about Professor Green more difficult than she had imagined it would be. "When you wrote me two years ago that some eccentric person had bought the orchard and I could finish my college course, I told Professor Green about it, and also told him I should like to meet the old man who had saved me from premature school-teaching. And when he asked me what I'd do if I should happen to meet him, I told him I would give him a good hug." Molly faltered. "Well, mother, when I told him good-by and gave him your invitation, I went back and – I just gave him a good hug."

Mrs. Brown sat up so vigorously that Molly, sitting by her side, was almost jolted off the bed.

"Why, Molly Brown! And what did Professor Green do?"

"He? Oh, he took it very philosophically and bowed his head 'til the storm was over."

Mrs. Brown gave a gasp of relief.

"He must be a good old gentleman, indeed. About how old is he, Molly?"

"The girls say every day of thirty-two."

"Why, the poor old thing! Do you think he could take the trip out here to Kentucky all by himself?"

"Mother, please don't tease. There is something else. Jimmy Lufton wrote a little note which I found in the bottom of the basket of fruit he had put on the train for us. It was wrapped around a lemon and said, 'Here is a lemon you can hand me if, when I come to Kentucky this summer, you don't want me to stay.'"

"Oh! The plot thickens! So he is coming, too."

"Yes, but he lives in Lexington, and is coming out to see his family, anyhow."

"Well, Molly, darling, you must go to bed now, but before you go tell me one thing: do you want Professor Green to come to Chatsworth?"

"Yes, mother, I think I do," and giving her mother a hug that made that lady gasp again and say, "Molly, what a hugger you are," she flew from the room and raced upstairs two steps at a time.

CHAPTER IV. – BURGLARS

Judy was sitting up in bed, the moon lighting her enough for Molly to see a wild, startled look on her face.

“Molly, Molly, I hear something!”

“You hear me making more noise than I have any business to at this time o’ night. I have been having a good old talk with muddy.”

“Oh, no, it wasn’t that. I knew you were downstairs. I haven’t been truly asleep. I was ‘possuming.’ It is out by the chicken yard, and I am so afraid it is burglars after the pullets Aunt Mary told me she was saving for chicken salad for the wedding supper. Lewis was to kill them to-morrow.”

Judy had entered so intensely into the Browns’ household affairs that Molly herself was no more interested in the festive preparations than was her guest. Molly drew cautiously to the window and peeped out; she beckoned Judy, and the excited girls saw a sight to freeze the marrow in their chicken-salad-loving bones: the thief had a wheelbarrow, and some great gunny sacks over his arm, and was in the act of boldly opening the chicken-yard gate.

“If we call he will get away, and how else can we let the boys know? The wretch may have those sacks full of chickens even now,” moaned Molly.

There was a three-room cottage or “office,” as they called it, on the side of the house next the garden where all of the young men slept in summer. The girls feared that, in trying to let them know of the burglar, if they went out of the front door they would startle Mrs. Brown. And if they should try to go out the back door, in getting to the cottage they would have to run across a broad streak of moonlight in plain view of the thief, and thus give him ample time to get away with his booty before they could arouse the boys.

“Why shouldn’t we take the matter in our own hands and make him drop his sacks and run?” said Molly. “I am not afraid, are you?”

“Me afraid? Bless your soul, no. I am only afraid he will get off with the chickens,” replied the intrepid Judy. “I have my little revolver in the tray of my trunk, the one papa gave me when we were camping in Arizona. I can load it in a jiffy. But what weapon will you take?”

“I don’t see anything but my tennis racket. I’ll take that and some balls, too, in case I have to hit at long range. There is really no danger for us, as a chicken thief has never been known to go armed with anything more dangerous than a bag.”

They slipped on their raincoats, as they were darker than their kimonos, and crept softly down the back stairs, out on the back porch, and down the steps into the yard, keeping close in the shadow of the house until they came to an althea hedge. Skirting this, still in the shadow, they got near enough to the chicken-yard gate to have a good look at the burglar. That burly ruffian, instead of bagging the pullets that were peacefully roosting in a dog-wood tree, totally unconscious that they were sleeping the last sleep of the condemned, had taken a spade from his wheelbarrow, carefully spread out his gunny sacks and was digging with great care around the holly-hocks, digging so deep and so far from the roots that he soon got up a great sod without injuring the plants. This he placed with great care in the barrow, and as he stepped into the broad moonlight the girls recognized Kent. They clutched each other and were silent, except for a little choking noise from Judy which might easily have come from one of the condemned, having premonitory dreams of the morrow.

Kent worked on until his wheelbarrow was full of the lovely flowers. Then he stuck in the spade and trundled it away toward the garden, the girls silently following, still keeping as well in the shadow as was possible, and holding tight to their weapons, although they no longer had any use for them. On reaching the garden, they realized that Kent must have been working many hours. He had already moved dozens of the stately plants, and they now stood in the garden where they belonged, no doubt glad of the transplanting from their former homely surroundings. So deeply and well had Kent dug

that they were uninjured by the move, and he completed the job by dousing them plentifully with water from a great tub that he had filled at the cistern.

The effect was wonderful, as Judy had known that it would be, but her surprise and pleasure that Kent should be so anxious to gratify her every wish was great. She felt her cheeks glowing with excitement and her heart pit-a-patting as it would not have done, even had Kent proved to be the chicken thief they had imagined him to be.

That young man finished his job, cleaned his spade, shook out the gunny sacks, raked the débris from the walk, and then, giving a tired yawn and stretching himself until he looked even taller than the six feet one he measured in his stocking feet, he said out loud in a perfectly conversational tone:

"Now, Miss Judy, you may have the master mind that can imagine things and see beforehand how they are going to look, but I'll have you know it takes work to create and drudgery to accomplish; and only by the sweat of the brow can we 'give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name.' You and Molly can step out of the bushes and view the landscape."

"Oh, Kent, did you know we were there all the time?"

"Certainly, little Sister, from the time Miss Judy went like a chicken with the gapes, I have known you were with me; but you seemed to be having such a good time I hated to break it up. You might have stepped in and helped a fellow, though."

"Oh, we were doing the head work," retaliated Judy.

Kent laughed, and then he had to tease them about their adventure and their weapons, especially Molly's racket and balls.

"We had better crawl into the hay now, however. It is getting mighty late at night, or, rather, mighty early in the morning, and where will our beauty be if we don't get to sleep? I'll see you to the back door."

"You needn't," said Molly. "You must be dead tired, and here is the office door open for you. There is no use in your coming any farther. We can slip around the front way and be in the house in no time."

"Well, good morning. I am dead tired, and such brave ladies as you are need no escort. Better luck to you next time you go burglar hunting."

It was a wonderful night, or rather morning, as Kent had indicated. The moon hung low on the horizon ready for bed, as an example to all up-late young ladies. The stars, with their rival retiring, were doing their best to get in a little shine before daylight. Everything was very still. The tree frogs and crickets and Katy-dids had suddenly ceased their incessant noise. There was a feel in the air that meant dawn.

What was it that greeted the ears of the tired Kent? Old tennis player that he was, it sounded to him like the twang of a racket in the hands of a determined server who means to drive a ball that the champion himself could not return. Then came the dull thud of the ball, a groan, a scream; then the sharp crack of a pistol, more screams from inside the house; lights, doors opening, all the household awake, and Paul and John and Crit, who had spent the night at Chatsworth, tumbling out of the office almost before Kent could get around the house. There he found Judy fallen in a little heap on the grass, and Molly carefully and coolly aiming a second tennis ball, this time at a real burglar.

The man climbing from the upper gallery of the house had been surprised by the girls as they came from the garden. At Molly's first ball he had dropped to the ground, and Judy had caught him on the fly, as it were. The second tennis ball got him square on the jaw, but he was already down and out. Kent declared afterward, when the smoke of battle had cleared away, that it was not like Molly to hit a fellow when he was down. She had always been a good sport until now.

Mrs. Woodsmall, it seems, had talked too much about the weight of Mildred's silver, and had dwelt too long on the recklessness of the Browns in having all of those fine things in the little hall room with the window opening on the upper gallery, where anybody with any limberness could climb up that twisted wisteria vine and get away with anything he had a mind to. A tramp, hanging around

the postoffice window, had overheard her and, having more limberness than any other commodity, had endeavored to help himself.

Dr. John came with first aid to the injured, and found the man more scared than hurt. It was hard to tell which ball had done most damage; certainly Molly's was the more effective in appearance. Her first she had served straight at his nose, so disfiguring that member that the rogues' gallery officials would have had difficulty in identifying him. The second found his jaw and gave him so much pain that John feared a fracture. Judy's little pistol had done good work. A flesh wound on the arm was the verdict for her.

The ground was strewn with silver in every kind of fancy novelty that a bride is supposed by her dear friends to need – or why else do they give them to her?

Then Crittenden Rutledge opened his mouth and spoke. As usual when he did such a thing it was worth getting up before dawn to hear him.

“Don't you think, Mildred, darling, we might give the poor fellow three or four cheese scoops and several butter knives and a card tray or two? A young couple could easily make out for a while with one of each, and if he will promise to go back to Indiana and stay – You did come from Indiana, didn't you?” The man gave a grin and nodded. “Well, if you promise to go back and never put your foot in Kentucky again, I'll go wrap up Aunt Clay's vases for you.”

Mrs. Brown, thankful that her brood was safe and no more damage done the poor, wicked tramp than a sore shoulder, a swollen nose and a fractured jaw, sent them all to bed with instructions to sleep late, and told Molly and Judy to stay in bed for breakfast. The burglar was put in the smokehouse for safekeeping until sun-up, when John and Paul expected to take him to Louisville, swear out a warrant against him and land him in jail. When the time came, however, to transfer their prisoner from smokehouse to jail, they found the door open, the man gone and a fine old ham missing.

“An' they ain't a single pusson in the whole er Indianny what knows how ter cook a ham, either,” bewailed Aunt Mary.

“To think the ungrateful wretch went off without Aunt Clay's vases,” muttered Crittenden Rutledge.

CHAPTER V. – THE WEDDING

The wedding came off so exactly as Judy had planned it that it seemed to her to be a proof of the theory of transmigration of the soul, and that in a previous incarnation she had been to just such a wedding. The eldest brother, Ernest, arrived from the far West just in time to change his clothes and give the bride away. There were three understudies for his part, so there was not much concern over his non-arrival until he got there with a blood-curdling tale of wrecks and wash-outs that had delayed him twenty-four hours. Then all of them got very much concerned and Mrs. Brown reproached herself for being so taken up with Mildred's wedding that she had forgotten to worry about the absent one for the time being. Ernest resembled Sue more than any of the rest of them, and had a good deal of her poise and dignity. "But I'll wager that he is not as serious as he seems," thought Judy, detecting a twinkle in the corner of his sober eyes.

Mildred looked lovely, and she had such a sweet, trusting look in her eyes as she came down the steps and up the tan-bark walk on Ernest's arm, that Crittenden Rutledge, waiting for her at the end of the walk, broke away from his best man and went forward several yards to meet his bride. Sue and Molly brought up the rear; Sue, composed and calm with her sweet dignity; but Molly, so deeply moved by this beloved sister's marriage and the break in their ranks, the very first, that she felt her knees trembling and wondered if it could be possible that she was going to ruin everything and burst into tears or fall in a faint or do something terrible. But she didn't. The familiar voice of their old minister in the opening lines of the Episcopal marriage service brought her to her senses, and she was able to follow the ritual in her mind, but she dared not trust herself to look up. She kept her eyes glued to her bouquet of "love-in-the-mist," that Miss Lizzie Monday had brought her that morning, picked from her own old-fashioned garden.

"I know the groom will send the bridesmaids flowers, but somehow, Molly, I don't want you to carry hothouse flowers. These 'love-in-the-mists' will look just right with your dress and your eyes and your ways."

So Molly carried Miss Lizzie's "bokay" and put the flowers that the groom sent her in a vase in the parlor. But Molly was not thinking of her dress or her eyes, except to try to keep the tears in them, since come they would, and not let them run out on her cheeks. Mildred's responses were inaudible except to dear old Dr. Peters, the minister, but Crittenden's were so loud and clear and resonant that it was almost like chanting, and Judy had to smile when she could not help thinking of the stammering man's "Your house is on fire, tra la, tra la."

"I pronounce you man and wife."

All is over. Molly can let the tears fall now if she wants to, but, strange to say, she does not seem to want to any more. Such a rejoicing is going on. Everybody seems to be kissing everybody else. Aren't they all more or less kin? Mildred and Kent, the center of a gay crowd, are fondly kissing the ones they should merely shake hands with, and formally shaking hands with their nearest and dearest, just as in a fire people have been known to carry carefully the pillows downstairs and throw the bowls and pitchers out of the window. Kent has his wits about him, however, and kisses Judy, declaring it is all in the day's work.

A stranger standing on the outskirts of the crowd during the whole ceremony seemed much more interested in the bridesmaid dressed in blue than in the bride herself, and when this same bridesmaid felt herself swaying a little as though her emotion might get the better of her, if one had not been so taken up with the central figures on the stage he might have noticed the stranger start forward as though to go to her assistance. But he, too, was brought to his senses by the calm voice of Dr. Peters in the opening words of the service, and saw with evident relief that the bridesmaid had gained control of herself. He was a tall young man with kind brown eyes and light hair, a little thin at the temples, giving him more years perhaps than he was entitled to.

When the service was over and the general confusion ensued, he made his way swiftly to where Molly stood, and without saying one word of greeting he put his arm around her and tenderly kissed her. Molly was so overcome with astonishment that she could only gasp, "Professor Green! What are you doing here?"

"I am having a very pleasant time, thank you, Miss Molly. I got your mother's kind invitation to attend your sister's wedding, and – here I am. Didn't your brother Paul tell you that I had come?"

"No, we have been so occupied, I believe I have not seen Paul to-day."

"I went to his newspaper office in Louisville to find out something about how to get here, and he asked me to drive out with him. Are you sorry I came, Miss Molly?"

"Sorry? Oh, Professor Green, you must know how glad I am to see you! But, you see, I was a little startled, not expecting you and thinking of you as still at Wellington."

"If you were thinking of me as being anywhere at all, I feel better. Were you really thinking of me?"

"Yes," said the candid Molly, "and wasn't it strange that I was thinking of you just as you came up – and – and – " but, remembering his manner of greeting her, she blushed painfully.

"You are not angry with me, are you, my dear child? I felt so lonesome. You see everybody seemed to know everybody else, and there was such a handshaking and so forth going on that before I knew it I was in the swim."

"Almost every one here is kin or near-kin, and weddings in Kentucky seem to give a great deal of license," said Molly, recovering her equanimity. "Of course I am not angry with you. I could not get angry with any one on Mildred's wedding day."

But Molly felt that in a way Edwin Green had paid her back for the hug she had given him. She had hugged him because he was so old that she could do so with impunity, and he in turn had kissed her because he felt lonesome, forsooth, and she was so young that it made no great difference. His "My dear child" had been a kind of humiliation to Molly. What is the use of being a senior and graduating at college if a man very little over thirty thinks you are nothing but a kid?

"Professor Green is not so very much older than Ernest," thought Molly, "and I wager he will not treat Judy with that old-enough-to-be-your-father air! Here am I getting mad on Mildred's wedding day when I just said I could not! And, after all, Professor Green has been very kind to me and means to be now, I know." Turning to him with one of "Molly's own," as Edith Williams termed her smile, she said, "Now you must meet my mother and all the rest of them."

Mrs. Brown looked keenly and rather sadly at the young professor. This coming of men for her daughters was growing wearisome, so the poor lady thought; but she liked Edwin Green's expression and found herself trusting him before he got through explaining his sudden appearance in Kentucky.

"After all, maybe he is only thinking of Molly as one of his pupils. His buying the orchard meant an interest in her college course and nothing else."

Mrs. Brown introduced him to the relatives and friends near her, and Molly had to leave him and make herself useful, as usual, in seeing that the refreshments were forthcoming.

When they had decided to have the wedding out of doors, it had seemed best to have the supper *al fresco*, and now brisk and very polite colored waiters were busy bringing tables and chairs from a side porch and placing them on the lawn. An odor of coffee and broiled sweetbreads, mingling with that of chicken salad and hot beaten biscuit, began to rival the fragrance of the orange flowers and roses.

The crowd around the bride thinning out a little to find seats at the tables, Professor Green was able to make his way to Mildred and Crittenden. After greeting them, he espied Judy talking sweetly to a stern-looking woman with a hard face and a soft figure, who was dressed severely in a stiff black silk, with most uncompromising linen collar and cuffs. Her iron-gray hair was tightly coiled in a fashion that emphasized her hawk-like expression, but with all she looked enough like Mrs. Brown to establish an undeniable claim to relationship with that charming lady. Mrs. Brown

herself, in a soft black *crêpe de Chine* and old lace collar and cuffs, with her wavy chestnut hair, was more beautiful than any of her daughters, the bride herself having to take a second place.

Judy was delighted to see the professor, and not nearly so astonished as Molly had been, the truth being that Paul had told that young lady of Edwin Green's arrival, with the expectation that she would inform Molly. But Judy, realizing the state of excitement that Molly was in, determined to keep the news to herself and not give Molly anything more to feel just then, even if in doing so she, Judy, would appear to be careless and forgetful. Judy understood the regard that Molly had for Professor Green – better than Molly herself did. She remembered Molly's expression and misery when little Otoyō, their Japanese friend at Wellington, had told them of his being so dangerously ill with typhoid, and how Molly had lost weight and could neither sleep nor eat until the crisis had passed.

"Did you ever see such a beautiful wedding in your life?" said Judy.

"Never, and I am told it was all your plan, even to the holly-hock background."

"Well, you see the idea was floating around in the air, and I was just the one who had her idea-net ready and caught it. Ideas are like butterflies, anyhow – all flying around waiting to be pounced on – but the thing is to have your net ready."

"Yes, and another thing, not to handle the butterfly idea too roughly. Many an idea, beautiful in itself, is ruined in the working out," said her companion.

"That is where taste comes in."

Judy would have liked to chase the metaphor much farther with the agreeable young man, but she remembered that she had set out to fascinate Aunt Clay, and it was Aunt Sarah Clay to whom she had been talking when Professor Green had come up. She introduced him, and Mrs. Clay immediately pounced on him with a tirade against innovations of all kinds.

Looking very much as we are led by the cartoonists to expect a suffragist to look, Mrs. Clay was the most ardent "anti." Opposed to all progress and innovations, and constantly at war on the subject of higher education of women, she carried her conservatism even to the point of having her grain cut with a scythe instead of using the up-to-date machinery. Professor Green was her natural enemy, for was he not instructor in a girls' school where, she was led to understand, belief in equal suffrage was as necessary for entrance as the knowledge of Latin or mathematics?

Professor Green, ignorant of the antagonism she felt for him and his calling, endeavored to make himself as agreeable as possible to Molly's aunt. He listened with seeming respect to her attack on modernism and then turned the subject to the wedding, her pretty nieces and fine-looking nephews.

"I never heard of any one getting married out of doors before in my life, and had I known they were contemplating such a thing I certainly should not have set my foot on the place, nor would I have sent them the handsome wedding present I did. I shall not be at all astonished if the bishop reprimands that sentimental old Dr. Peters for allowing anything so undignified in connection with the church ritual. They had much better jump over a broomstick like Gypsies and not desecrate our prayer book in such a manner. Mildred Carmichael has brought all her children up to have their own way. The idea of none of those boys being willing to stay on the farm where their forefathers managed to make a living, and a very good one! They, forsooth, must go as clerks or reporters or what not into cities and let their farm go to rack and ruin, already mortgaged until it is top-heavy. Then when they do make a little, they must squander it in this absurd new-fangled machinery, labor-saving devices that I have no use for in the world. And now Molly, not content with four years wasted at college, to say nothing of the money, says she wants to go back to fit herself more thoroughly for making her living. Living, indeed! Where are her brothers that she need feel the necessity of making her living?"

"But, Mrs. Clay," Judy here broke in, "my father says that there are only three male relatives that a woman should expect to support her: her father, her husband and her son. Since Molly has none of these, she, of course, wants to do something for herself. Even with a father, unless the father is very well off, it seems to me a girl ought to help after a lot has been spent on her education. I

certainly mean to do something, but the trouble is, the only thing I can do will mean more money spent before I can accomplish anything.”

“And what does such a charming person as Miss Kean expect to do?” asked the irascible old lady.

“I want to go to Paris and study to become a decorator.” This was too much for Mrs. Clay. Without saying a word, she turned and stalked across the lawn where the waiters were carrying trays of food.

“Hateful old thing! I hope food will improve her temper. It would certainly be acceptable to me. See, here comes Kent with a table! I’ll find Molly and we can have a fine foursome, and you shall taste Aunt Mary’s beaten biscuit, hot from the oven. No wonder Molly is such an angel. If, as the cereal ads. say, we are what our food makes us, any one raised on Aunt Mary’s cooking would have to be good. Goodness knows what Aunt Clay eats! It must be thistles and green persimmons!”

CHAPTER VI. – BUTTERMILK TACT

Mildred, dressed in her pretty brown traveling suit, off to Iowa; the last slipper and handful of rice thrown; the last lingering guest departed; daylight passed and the moon well up; and at last Mrs. Brown and Judy and Molly were free to sink on a settle on the porch, realizing for the first time how tired and footsore they were.

“Oh, my dears, I feel as though I could never get up again! It is a good thing I am so tired, for now I shall have to sleep and can’t grieve for Mildred all night. I begged Professor Green to stay, but he had to go back to Louisville. However, he is coming out to Chatsworth to-morrow to pay us the promised visit. We shall have to pack the presents in the morning to send to Iowa, and glad I’ll be to get them out of the house. Did I tell you, Molly, that Aunt Mary, Ca’line and Lewis are all going off to-morrow to Jim Jourdan’s basket funeral? We shall be alone, you and Judy and I. Sue goes to your Aunt Clay’s for a few days, and Kent starts back to work, the dear boy. Such a comfort as he has been! Ernest has to look up some friends in town, but will be out in time for supper. I fancy he will drive Professor Green out from Louisville. Good night, my dear girls, I know you are dead tired.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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