

Speed Nell

Tripping with the Tucker Twins



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CHAPTER I

ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

After our boarding-school burned on that memorable night in March, it seemed foolish to start to school again so late in the season; at least it seemed so to the Tucker twins and me. Their father and mine were rather inclined to think we had better enter some institute of learning in Richmond or take extra classes, do something besides loaf; but we earnestly pleaded to be let off for the rest of the year, and they succumbed to our entreaties.

My ankle gave me a good deal of trouble. You remember, no doubt, how I sprained it getting out of the second-story window when the false alarm of fire rang, the afternoon before the real *bona fide* fire. Dee's first aid to the injured was all very well for the time being, but when we arrived in Richmond a surgeon had to be called to attend to it, and the ankle was put in plaster.

"A sprain can be much more serious than a break," the surgeon said solemnly as he looked at the much swollen foot and ankle. "I shall have to take an X-ray of this to be sure no bones are broken, and then, young lady, you will have to be quiet for some days, how many I can't yet tell."

Never having been disabled in my life, I had no idea how irksome it could become. On no account to put your foot to the ground and to feel perfectly well is about as hard a job as could be given me, an active country girl. Father came up from Milton and heartily agreed with the surgeon in charge.

"I have set a carload of broken legs in my time and bandaged a wagonful of ankles, and I am sure I have had less trouble from the legs than the ankles. It is because, as a rule, a sprain is not treated seriously enough. Now, honey, you have got to sit still and take it."

I sat still all right, although it nearly killed me to do it. Not even crutches were allowed for a week for fear I might be tempted to bear my weight on the offending member.

The Tuckers, father and twins, were goodness itself to me. I was afraid to express a wish, because no matter how preposterous it was they would immediately rush off and try to get whatever silly thing I had in a careless moment expressed a desire for. For instance, one day Dum came in enthusiastic over a new drugstore drink she had discovered:

"Vanilla ice cream with fresh pineapple mixed up with it, orange syrup and lots of bubbly soda! The best mess you ever sucked through a straw!"

"Ummm-ummm! Sounds good to me! When I can trust this old limb of Satan I am going to make straight for that drugstore and drink three of them."

Mr. Tucker had just arrived from the newspaper office where he labored many hours a day. He must have been tired sometimes, but he never looked it and never complained of work. Eternal youth seemed to belong to him, and undying energy.

"Good? I think it sounds awful!" he exclaimed. "You girls must astonish your poor little insides with the impossible mixtures you put in 'em."

"I think it sounds fine, and I am surely going to have three of them just as soon as I can toddle."

Mr. Tucker laughed and left the room, and I wearily resumed a not very interesting book I was reading while Dum followed her father. I read on, hoping to come to something better. I fancy not more than ten minutes had elapsed when father and daughter burst into the room, Dum carrying two foaming soda-water glasses and Zebedee one. The dauntless pair had actually cranked up Henry

Ford, as they dubbed their little old automobile, and speeded down to the drugstore where they knew how to make that particular mixture, and brought them back to me.

"Your blood be on your own head if you drink them. They look pizen to me."

But drink them I did, all three, much to the wonderment of Zebedee, who declared that girls were fearfully and wonderfully made. I did feel slightly fizzy, but after my kind friends had brought them to me and even braved the danger of arrest and fine for speeding, trying to get the drinks to me with the foam on, I felt it was up to me to show my appreciation. The only way to show it was to drink the soda. What if I did burst in the effort?

The Tucker twins and I were almost seventeen, our birthdays coming quite near together, and their father, now Zebedee to all of us, was about thirty-seven, I think, almost thirty-eight. The Tuckers were so irresponsible in some ways that I often felt myself to be older than any of them, although I was certainly not very staid myself. Zebedee always declared he was just grown up enough to keep out of debt, but keep out of debt he would no matter what temptations he had to withstand. Tweedles regarded debt as the only lawful state, and hard they found it to keep within their allowance, but the one time when Zebedee was really severe was when they exceeded that allowance. Dum was worse about it than Dee, as her artistic temperament made it hard for her to keep up with money.

"It just goes, and I don't know where!" she would exclaim.

When we got back to Richmond after the fire, one day when Zebedee was in Norfolk attending a convention of newspaper men, to be gone several days, the sisters realized that a day of reckoning had arrived and they must take stock of their assets and liabilities. Each one had borrowed small sums from various friends at school, intending to pay back out of allowances forthcoming, and also expecting to realize large sums from old clothes that our washerwoman would sell on commission to the colored contingent in the village. Colored people for some unknown reason would much rather have clothes that have been worn by white people than new ones out of shops. Of course the fire had interrupted this traffic and Tweedles never expected to see the money owed them by our washerwoman's clients.

"I could have worn that corduroy skirt for months longer, but I thought I could get two dollars and a half for it at least and help get out of debt," wailed Dee.

"And I just loved my blue linen shirtwaist and the frayed cuffs hardly showed at all, and now the old washerwoman has got my shirt and the fifty cents, too – to say nothing of my old-rose dinner dress that I am scared to death about every night for fear Zebedee will ask me why I don't wear it. He always liked the color of it so much," and Dum looked ready to weep.

"Well, girls, count it all up and see where you stand; maybe I can lend you enough to get you out," I said.

"You sound like we were in jail," declared Dee ruefully. "I don't see how on earth you keep on top so yourself. You seem to do as many things as we do and always pay your share, and still you don't get in debt."

"I don't know how it is," I laughed, "unless I am like the Yankee who left his wife a large fortune, much to the astonishment of his neighbors, who did not know he had anything. When questioned as to the way her husband had made the money, the wife said: 'Wal, you see my husband was powerful fond of oysters, and whenever he went up to the city he just didn't get any.' You girls don't know how free you are with money. If you buy a paper that costs a penny you always say, 'Keep the change!' And then when a tip of ten cents is all that is necessary, you invariably give twenty-five."

"I know that's so," they contritely tweedled.

"Count up and see where you're at," and then they figured in silence for a few minutes.

"I owe five dollars and seventy-three cents," said Dee, getting hers added up first and emptying her purse; "I've got just thirty-seven cents and a street car ticket between me and the penitentiary."

"And I owe seven dollars and twenty-three cents and I haven't got anything but a green trading stamp and a transfer to Ginter Park that I did not use," and Dum searched in the corners of her purse for a possible penny that might have escaped her.

"I've three dollars and will have some more soon, as father is going to send me a check for a spring suit. You let me pay you both out of debt."

"We just can't. It only puts off the evil hour. We can't let you give us the money, and how will we ever pay it back?"

"Why don't you earn it?" I ventured.

"Earn it! Splendid! But how? Dum earned fifty cents once making paper dolls to sell at the Arts and Crafts, and Zebedee pays us both to dust the books and put them back in the right places, something the housemaids are incapable of doing; but this money we must earn without letting Zebedee get on to it. Where's the morning paper?"

But Dum had already got it and was poring over the want ads. Dee had to content herself with the news section, while Dum monopolized the "Help Wanted – Female" part.

"What's this?" demanded Dee, reading headlines: "'Ordinance to prohibit the drivers of jitney cars!' That is a sin and a shame. I can't see why they can't let the poor men make a little money without issuing ordinances. Oh, it is only under consideration! They may not pass it —

"By the great Jumping Jingo, I've got a scheme! I'm going to turn Henry Ford into a jitney bus. Zebedee'll be away for two more days, and by the time he comes back I bet I'll have enough to pay my debts and blow us all to the swellest supper at Rueger's."

Jitneys had just reached Richmond that spring, and every man or boy out of work who could beg, borrow or steal an old tumbled-down car had gone into the business of running a jitney. The streets were swarming with them, and the public, pleased with the novelty, patronized them to the neglect and chagrin of the trolleys. Of course there were some drivers who would hardly have been trusted with coal carts, and there were many accidents by reason of this. We adored the jitneys. Of course, I had not been able to ride in them because of my ankle keeping me house-bound, but I loved to see them swing around the corner, and always had my chair or sofa in the bay window where I could get a good view of them. There seemed to be such a happy, good-natured crowd of passengers; and certainly many a shopgirl and workingman got to ride in a jitney who had despaired before of ever being fortunate enough to get into an automobile. The Tuckers were strong upholders of the poor man's rights and patronized the jitneys whenever their own Henry Ford was out of commission or in use by some other member of the family.

"But what will your father say?"

"More than likely he will say something that won't bear repetition, but by that time I will have paid my debts."

"But will they let girls run one?"

"How are they going to help it? The ones who are running them are liable to be stopped any day, but so far there are no laws one way or the other about it, and I am going to get in my licks before they have time to make any. Besides, I am not going to look very feminine."

"That's what I get for being a pig and snatching up the want column before you could get it. Now if I had let you have it like a lady I could have got the jitney scheme first," grumbled Dum.

"What difference does that make? You can go in on it, you goose!"

"But I'm not going in. I think I ought to earn something my own way. That was your scheme, and I am not going to butt in on it."

"Well, you know you are welcome; but suit yourself."

"But, Dee, you say you are not going to look very feminine. Surely you are not going to wear pants?" I asked, aghast at what these Heavenly Twins would do next.

"Oh, no! I have no intention of landing in the pen. I'm just going to make up the upper half to look mannish. I'll wear Zebedee's big coat, which I tried to make him take to Norfolk with him and he wouldn't, just to be stubborn. Now ain't I glad?" and she put it on to show how well it fitted. "If it is a nice cool day I can keep the collar turned up so! Now there is no law about a lady's hat, and I am going to wear Zebedee's chauffeur's cap." She accordingly put it on, pulling it well down over

her ears. "Now all I need is a dirty face. I've never yet seen a jitney driver who did not have a shady face. I wonder if I had not better just acquire it by the natural method of gradual accumulation, or if I could smudge it on tomorrow morning."

By this time Dum and I were reduced to a pulp with the giggles. Dum had for the time being abandoned her search for a lucrative job and had entered with zest into her sister's plans.

"Your hair is too lumpy-looking under your cap and it rides up too high on your head."

"Well, it shall have to be cut off then. It will grow out again."

"Dee! No! You mustn't! That would make your father really angry. Plait it in a tight rope and put it down your neck, inside your collar."

No sooner said than done, and now the cap came down to meet the upturned collar.

"You must wear Zebedee's gloves and take off your ring. Your hands look mighty sissy. You'll do fine if Henry Ford will just behave and you don't have to get out to crank him. It's too bad about the pants. You would be perfect if you could just wear pants. If you should have to get out, it would sho' be a joke if you got arrested for wearing skirts. You look terribly like a bad boy," and so she did. "And now I must get back to the task of finding a job for myself," and Dum returned wearily to the want column. Dee's delightful get-rich-quick scheme made everything else seem very colorless.

"'Wanted – A mother's helper to mind four children and wash dishes.' What do you reckon the lazy thing would be doing while I was doing all that for her? 'Wanted – Woman to wash only by the day.' Does the idiot think I could keep it up all night? Here we are! 'Wanted – Twenty able-bodied young women to apply between the hours of three and five p. m. to make house-to-house canvass, selling a number of household novelties.'" Dum grabbed her hat and began to draw on her gloves. "Here, Page, cut this out for me. It is ten minutes to three now and I can just get there!"

Dum was out of the house before we could say Jack Robinson, the clipping from the want column grasped tightly in her hand and her chin set in its determined, square, do-or-die lines.

"When Dum looks like that she always gets what she goes after," said Dee, looking admiringly after her twin as she jumped in Henry Ford, who spent a large part of his waking life parked in front of the apartment house or newspaper office. "Maybe going in a car, even a bum one like Henry, will queer her game. If she will only have sense enough to stop a little to one side of the place!"

We waited in almost breathless silence for Dum's return, Dee experimenting with her hair for the morrow's fray and I gazing out of the window at the whirling jitneys skidding around the corner, making hair-breadth escapes.

"There she is!" and Henry Ford sure enough threaded his way jauntily through the crowded street, turned himself about like a graceful skater and parked himself in good order just one inch from the curb. The Tuckers were all born chauffeurs, and, like most born chauffeurs or riders or drivers, they showed their skill by going faster than the law allows. They prided themselves on being able to go very close to things without touching them, and indeed I have seen Henry Ford almost take the buttons off the fat traffic cop at Seventh and Broad. That time Zebedee was driving, and as he skimmed by the grinning policeman he called out:

"If it had been after dinner I would have hit you," and the delighted officer shook his fat sides and patted his bay window with its row of gleaming buttons, showing he understood Mr. Tucker's joke. "There are two classes of persons I always keep in with – policemen and cooks. You can get into no very serious trouble when you have them on your side," Zebedee had laughed gaily.

"I've got a job! I've got a job!" cried Dum, almost breathless with haste and excitement as she rushed into the room where Dee and I waited.

"What is it?"

"Selling household novelties, of course. I'm to report at eight in the morning. I was the third girl to get in to see the boss. You never saw such a pompadoured, gum-chewing crowd in your life. I felt so ladylike I hardly knew myself. The boss was sure some household novelty himself. He is fat and

soft, looks powerful like a dough ball, wears button shoes and an embroidered vest, curly black hair done up in a roach and stewed prune eyes and a full set, upstairs and down, of false teeth that look like

"Thirty white horses on a red hill,
Now they dance, now they prance,
Now they stand still."

"But, Dum, what on earth are household novelties?" I gasped.

"And how much are you to get?" demanded Dee.

"One at a time! There is a whole bunch of novelties: one is a little plug to keep windows from rattling; another a needle-threader; another a silver polish; another a spot-knocker; a patent batty-cake turner that makes the batty-cake do the flipflap by pressing a button – either for cakes or omelettes; then there's Mrs. Rand – "

"No, not really!"

Mrs. Rand was a miscellaneous implement we had taken to boarding-school that had been purchased from a street fakir and we had named for the landlady at Willoughby Beach, who had been very irate over the Tuckers having lost the one she had in the cottage they rented from her. It was a combination apple-corer, can-opener, cheese-grater, potato-parer, and what not. It was the kind of thing you could use for everything but the things it was intended for. It was a great screw-driver and tack hammer and invaluable to gouge things out of deep cracks.

"I'll buy a Mrs. Rand with pleasure," I promised. "I have never ceased to regret that I did not save ours in the fire and let the pincushion Cousin Park Garnett gave me perish in the flames."

"Well, that's one sale already! That means five cents. I get five cents on every sale I make."

"I'll take a batty-cake turner just to see it do the flipflap, if it takes a whole trip of fares to pay for it."

"Good for you, Dee! I'll ride in your jitney if my work takes me in the West End."

CHAPTER II

EARNING A LIVING

We were up bright and early the next morning. I was dressed and tenderly cared for, with my easy chair dragged into the bay window, where I could command a view of the street east and west as far as the eye could reach. A housemaid, whose duty it was in the morning to do up the Tuckers' apartment, was cautioned to look in on me every half-hour to see that I wanted for nothing.

"Zebedee would kill us for leaving you this way," declared Dum as she embraced me good-by. "Nothing but the exigencies of the case excuse us."

"My poverty and not my will consents," quoted Dee. "We'll be in for lunch. We've got to eat, and it might just as well be here." The maid was instructed to bring a generous supply of lunch up to the apartment at one o'clock. "If we have it up here I won't have to wash my face. I have worked so hard to make the dirt on it look casual that I can't contemplate going all over it again."

Of course my meals had to be brought up to me from the café because of my old ankle, and the girls often had theirs brought up, too, although they preferred going down as a rule. They insisted they missed too many tricks by having them sent up. "No second and third helps to pie, and the one help you get too dainty for us."

"Look out the window for me every ten minutes or so and pray that Henry won't get cranky and have to be cranked and have me expose my skirts to the rude gaze of the public," begged Dee as she hugged me good-by. She had to forego the kiss as she was afraid of rubbing off her dirty make-up, and I was quite willing to have it thus. Brindle, her beloved bulldog, was not so squeamish as I, however, and gave her an affectionate and disastrous lick. "Brindle can keep you company, honey. Good-by, darling," to the dog. "I'm going to take you down to your household necessity, Dum, and I am going to do it for nothing, too. I am loaded to the guards with gas. I reckon I won't put out my sign until I get downtown. I'll start my trade from down there."

Dum had lettered the jitney sign for her the evening before. It was most artistic, done in large blue letters on white cardboard:

MONUMENT

AVENUE

5c JITNEY 5c

Dee was not a day too soon in her venture, for already the authorities were taking the matter of the jitney business in hand, and the privilege of running a jitney without special license and a \$5,000 bond was on the verge of being withdrawn from the legion of owners of broken-down Fords.

My morning was far from dull. The attentive maid came popping in every few minutes, I had a pile of new magazines and papers, and there was the never-dying excitement of watching for Dee and her blue-and-white sign.

On her return trip, after taking Dum to the household necessities, she had a lone passenger – certainly not enough money in that to pay for the gas; but on the downtown trip she caught many an early worm, and her car was actually running over. At that time there were no rules about standing on the steps and overcrowding, and Dee had taken in every one who had raised a finger. I counted

thirty-five cents, which was going some for a five-passenger car. Dee had a small plaid shawl which she had wrapped around her legs to conceal her skirt. She looked as much like a boy as Zebedee himself must have at her age. She never forgot to look up at my window, and, on seeing me, would touch her cap in a most gentlemanly way, a grin on her funny, dirty face.

Up to nine-thirty her downtown trips were all crowded, while her outgoing ones were but sparsely patronized. Then there was a lull in her traffic until about eleven, when the shoppers began to pour downtown. Women and babies! women and babies! Sometimes women and dogs! Brindle, who never left the window, and seemed to be watching for Dee and Henry Ford as eagerly as I was, resented the dogs very much. He felt that his rightful place was in that car, and any dog who dared get in it was to be disciplined through the window glass if he could not reach him in any other way.

Every time Dee raised her dirty face and grinned at us Brindle would tremble all over with excitement and joy. I trembled, too, for fear that he would break the great pane of glass, he scratched on it with such vigor.

Before the hordes of shoppers were disposed of the men and business women began to jitney their way back to their homes for luncheon. It was actually almost one o'clock. I could hardly believe it. The morning had been fraught with excitement to me as I had kept account of Dee's earnings, and in watching for her and keeping up with her gains I had had little time for literature.

At one o'clock sharp, Henry Ford, shorn of his gorgeous blue-and-white placard, parked in front of the apartment house, and in a moment a breathless and excited Dee was hugging first Brindle and then me, quite careless of her make-up.

"Gee, but I am tired and hungry! It is a sin to be wasting all those fares. Just see how crowded the jitneys are! But I am so hungry I'm fittin' to bust. Where's Dum? Here, count my earnings while I scrape off enough dirt to eat." She poured into my lap a pile of silver and nickels.

"Four dollars and fifteen cents!" I called to her in the bathroom, where she was punishing her begrimed face. "I counted more than that; I kept watching and saw you every time you passed."

"Oh, yes, I took a load of old soldiers out to the Soldiers' Home for nothing. I gave them the time of their lives. They were so tickled, I took them down and back again. That made sixty cents short."

That was so like Dee and explained the many old men I had seen in the car.

Dum came bursting in just as the maid brought a tray laden with food. "Lord love us, but I'm tired! I have had a rip-roaring time, though. I can get off a spiel that would sell household novelties to Fiji Islanders. Mrs. Rand has taken like hot cakes, and the batty-cake turner went with it to turn those cakes." She had with her a disreputable-looking canvas telescope that contained her samples. Her job was to go from house to house and take orders, to be delivered later. Her pocket was bursting with signed agreements to pay for said wares on delivery. "Here, Page, please count 'em up and see how rich I am. What did you make, Dee? I am dying to hear all about your morning! You tell first and then I'll tell."

"I made four dollars and fifteen cents. I can't tell you about my morning now because I've got to eat with my mouth. I'm missing fares until it makes me sick," and Dee jumped into her lunch with such vim that Dum and I deemed it wiser to eat, too, for fear there would be nothing left from the voracious jitneur.

"Henry did not have to be cranked but once, and that was when we were at the end of the line up at Robinson Street and there were no passengers in. I bumped over a high car track, and you know how indignant that makes old Henry. I was awfully glad I had just dumped my last fare. Not a soul saw my skirts." This was mumbled with a full mouth as Dee steadily stoked up, accomplishing in about ten minutes one of the largest meals I ever saw.

"Dee, I am afraid you will have apoplexy or something," Dum remonstrated.

But Dee declared that a workingman must eat a lot. She could easily digest anything she could accommodate, and she was not quite full yet. Finding I had not tasted my consommé, for being shut

up as I was my appetite was nothing to boast of, Dee drank it down on top of cocoanut pie and currant jelly, the dessert she had just finished.

"To fill up the cracks!" she exclaimed, and with a whirl she was out of the apartment and back in her jitney once more, alert for fares.

"Isn't she a great girl, though?" said Dum, a little wistfully. "Four-fifteen was a good haul. Have you counted up my pledges yet?"

"Yes, you have twenty-seven. At five cents apiece that makes one dollar thirty-five cents. That's not a bad morning's work."

"No, that's not so bad, and maybe I can do better this afternoon. I am going to kick for another part of town tomorrow. They gave me the swellest part of Franklin Street, and so many of the houses were where our friends live that it was hard to be businesslike. I put it up to them as a perfectly businesslike proposition, however, and would not let them sign up unless they wanted my wares for their own sake, not mine. I had an awful time with your cousin, Park Garnett. She made out she did not know me, and I did not force my acquaintance on her, but I just talked and talked and made her look at everything I had – Mrs. Rand, batty-cake flapper, and all the needle-threaders, spot-knockers, and silver polish – and, what's more, I did not leave her ugly, ponderous old house until I had made her sign up for fifteen cents' worth of household necessities – I mean fifteen cents for me. I expatiated on Mrs. Rand until there was nothing for her to do but own one, and I played battledore and shuttlecock with her ball of gray yarn (of course she was knitting another shawl with purple scallops) and the batty-cake turner until she was dizzy and would have signed up to get me out of the house, I think. She bought some silver polish, too, because I took her fat old pug up in my lap and showed her how much his collar needed rubbing. Jeremiah, the blue-gummed butler, was fascinated by my wares, and kept tiptoeing back into the room to fix the fire or pretend he heard the bell or something. That put it into my head to make the rest of the rounds in the backs of the houses, where the servants can see my novelties, and I had fine luck. I am going to stick to the alleys and back doors all afternoon."

Dum was, as usual, perfectly open and straightforward, with absolutely no idea of concealing her identity. I had not dreamed that she was contemplating going into the homes of her friends and acquaintances with her peddling job. I couldn't help wondering what Mr. Tucker would say to it. He was accustomed to the scrapes of his progeny and used to say just so long as they told the truth and kept out of jail, he could stand it; but these new escapades did seem to be a little more serious than any they had heretofore plunged into. They were certainly not doing anything wrong from a moral standpoint, but they were giving Mrs. Grundy a chance to do a lot of gabbling. I could not help laughing over Cousin Park, although I secretly wished that Dum could have started her back-door canvassing before she reached that ponderous edifice belonging to my relative. It merely meant that Mrs. Garnett would have some tangible grievance against my friends, for whom she held a prejudice that no politeness on their part seemed to do away with. Certainly Zebedee had been very kind and pleasant to her on several occasions, and he had been quite attentive to her on that memorable picnic the summer before. He had also done all that was required of him toward entertaining her guest, Mabel Binks, in the early part of the winter. In fact, Tweedles and I felt that he had done more than common politeness required toward the amusement of that flashy young woman.

"Did you tell Cousin Park I was in town?" I asked.

"No, indeed; I never claimed acquaintance with her, I tell you! She made out that she had never seen me before and I fell in with her mood and just be'ed an agent, only that and nothing more. Sometimes I think maybe she really did not know me. You know she won't wear glasses all the time and I believe her eye-sight is bad."

I devoutly hoped this to be the case. I had not informed Cousin Park of my presence in Richmond and had father's consent to this concealment, as we both of us knew that she would be tearing around and drag me out of the Tuckers' apartment and incarcerate me in her prison-like mansion, whether I would or no. Father and I felt the same way about her house. Father always said

he was afraid the butler, Jeremiah, would bite him, and every one brought up by a mammy knew that "to be bit by a blue-gummed nigger was certain death." Jeremiah was really a very nice old man in spite of his lugubrious air of officiating at your funeral while he was actually serving the very heavy viands with which Mrs. Garnett's oiled walnut table was laden.

"Maybe she didn't know you, after all," I ventured cheerfully.

"Well, if she didn't or did, it is all one to me. I don't have to deliver the novelties, as that is done by some trustworthy person employed steadily by the boss, and in the meantime I have earned fifteen cents at the funereal mansion. I must tear myself away now and begin a systematic visiting of the back doors of the homes fronting Monroe Park. Good-by, honey," and Dum, too, was gone.

Brindle and I were left to watch for the meteoric appearances of Dee and to get through the afternoon as best we might.

Dee did a thriving business. As the afternoon went on she never passed without a car full and sometimes running over. Her face was tense and as often as not she forgot to look up and salute Brindle and me.

"She will be a tired little girl when the day is over," I said to Brindle, and he wagged his tail and snuffled his appreciation of my noticing him. Dee had just passed, the back seat of Henry two-deep with passengers and on the front seat a very dressy looking young woman who seemed to be sitting very close to the stern young jitneur. That was one of the times Dee had forgotten to look up and poor Brindle was in deep distress.

CHAPTER III

A TEMPEST IN A TEAPOT

It was almost dark and still the twins had not returned. The maid came in and turned on the electric light and brought me the menu from the café. I ordered a substantial dinner for the three of us and with the assistance of the good-natured girl got myself into another dress and smoothed myself up a bit.

A quick step sounded in the hall just as I settled in my chair and the maid went down to order dinner. Tweedles at last – one of them, anyhow! It turned out to be Mr. Tucker, and I was covered with confusion! What on earth was I to say to him? What business did he have coming home before he was expected?

"Hello, little friend! Where are those girls? You don't mean that both of them have had the heartlessness to go out at one time and leave you all by yourself? I wouldn't have thought it of them!"

"Oh, they – they – I reckon they'll be in soon. I haven't been lonesome at all. Brindle and I have been looking out of the window at the jitneys – " dangerous ground! If the girls wanted to tell their father of their escapades they were to be allowed to do so, but it was not my business. Why didn't they come on in? I knew they would sooner or later divulge to their beloved Zebedee, but they had certainly meant to get all over with their schemes while he was away.

"We weren't looking for you until day after tomorrow," I stammered.

"Well, is that any reason why you shouldn't be glad to see me now?"

"Oh, no! We are glad to see you – that is, I am."

"That is to say, Tweedles will not be?" he questioned.

"Of course they will be." Why, oh, why didn't they come on?

Weary footsteps dragging along the hall and Dum appeared. Her hat was on one side, not at a jaunty angle but just at that hopelessly out-of-plumb slant. Her face was dirty enough to suit Dee's idea of a jitney driver. Her hair was dishevelled and her shoes very dusty.

"Oh, Page, only fifteen orders in all the afternoon and I am nearly dead! I'll never be able to make a living peddling household no – What, – you!" and her mouth formed itself into a round O as she spied her wonderful parent.

"Yes, I!"

"You!"

"Yes, me! If you understand that better."

"Oh!"

"Is that all you can say when I chased back from the meeting in Norfolk expecting to find three lone ladies so glad to see me? Page greets me with an icy mitt, and now all you can say is 'You!' and 'Oh!' Where is Dee? Maybe she will at least ask me how I am."

More tired footsteps dragging along the hall, and in came Dee.

"I am rolling in wealth but I am so tired that nobody had better say 'boo' to me or I'll weep."

"'Boo!'" said Zebedee.

"Oh, you?" and Dee proceeded to burst into tears which certainly did not improve her begrimed countenance.

"Great heavens! What is the matter?" he cried, turning fiercely on Dum.

Dum did the most natural thing in the world for a poor little half-orphan who had been trying to pay her debts by honest toil, selling household novelties at back doors and tramping up and down cobble-stoned alleys until she had worn a blister on her heel – she just burst out crying, too.

Zebedee looked hopelessly at me, evidently expecting me to be dissolved in tears, too, but the ludicrous side of things had struck my risibles and, willy-nilly, I succumbed to laughter. Brindle,

however, was sympathetic with his beloved mistress, and set up such a howling as never was heard before.

"By the great Jumping Jingo! What is the matter? Have I done something? Is anybody dead? What do you mean, Dee, by having on my coat and cap? What do you mean, Dum, by fifteen orders? Page, you can speak; tell me what's up."

"I – I – "

"Go on and tell him, Page!" tweedled the twins, trying to control their emotions.

"Well, Tweedles got a little behind with their finances and the fire came along at Gresham at a rather inopportune moment as they were expecting to save up on allowances – "

"And the old clothes! Don't forget the old clothes!" from a very crumpled-up Dee.

"They also were negotiating some sales with the laundress, of cast-off clothing." Zebedee was looking me through and through with his ice-blue eyes. I had never had the least fear of him from the moment I had met him, but now I felt, to say the least, quite confused. He looked stern, and his eyes, which had been only the color of blue, blue ice, but always seemed warm, were now as cold as ice, too.

"Well, go on!"

"The fire broke out and now the old laundress has the clothes and the money, too. So Tweedles were all broken up over owing so much money and I suggested that they turn in and earn some."

"You suggested it?" still very coldly.

"Yes, I suggested it, and I would do the same thing again. I think it is a great deal better for people to get to work and pay off their debts at any honest labor than to keep on owing them – "

I gulped and got red. I was tired of having Mr. Tucker look at me with his cold expression of a criminal judge. I had done nothing wrong, and neither had the girls, for that matter. I felt a great wave of anger rising in me, and I stood up on my bad ankle, forgetting all about having one, and faced my host, ready for battle. He looked rather startled, and the twins stopped sobbing and began to dry their eyes on two very grimy handkerchiefs. I do not often get very angry, but there was something about being looked at as Zebedee looked at me, that made me lose all control of myself. He made me feel that I was a bad little girl while he considered himself a superior old gentleman. Now up to this time the father of my two best friends had always treated me like a grown-up young lady, and had never made me feel that there was any difference to speak of between his age and mine, and he had no right with one wave of his hand to put me back in the kindergarten class.

"Why, Page – "

"Don't 'Why, Page' me! You came back before we expected you and startled us somewhat, as Tweedles hoped to get the money earned before you returned. The girls are dead tired and need their dinner and kind sympathy instead of being bullyragged – "

"Page! Please! I only wanted to know how Tweedles went to work to make all the money you say they owe. I am not a bit angry, not the least little bit. I think you are very unkind to me."

"Well, you looked at me so coldly and sneered so."

"No! You are mistaken!"

"Yes, you did, when I said I suggested it."

"I am awfully sorry, little friend," and now his ice-blue eyes melted, literally melted, as he, too, began to leak, as the Tuckers call their free giving way to tears. You remember, it was a trait of the family. They thought no more of weeping than of laughing or sneezing. They wept when they felt weepy just as they laughed when anything amused them or sneezed when they felt sneezy.

"I tell you what you do, girls: you go on and wash up and change your dresses, and then we'll have dinner, and after dinner we'll talk it all over like sensible people without getting angry or huffy or anything that we might get." Zebedee wiped his eyes and gave his girls a hug and kiss in spite of their grimy, soiled countenances, and then he turned to me as they flew to the bathroom to do his bidding. I had become conscious of my ankle as I stood there disobeying the doctor's commands, and now that it was all over I flopped back in my chair, feeling very grateful for its support.

"Now you have gone and put your weight on your foot and it is all my fault."

"Oh, no! Not at all!"

"It is just as much my fault as that Tweedles came in worn out with making a living and had dirty faces and were hungry – "

"Nobody said that was your fault!"

"Well, what was my fault, then?"

"It was your fault for looking at me so disapprovingly. You were what Tweedles call Mr. Tuckerish. You were so cold and grown-up and made me feel so young and naughty, and as I had not done a thing on earth but just suggest to the girls that they try to earn some money, not specifying how they should go about it, it did seem hard that you should be so hard on me. It hurt my feelings."

"Well, on the other hand, little girl, how about my feelings? Here I had come tearing home from Norfolk expecting to find three charming girls, all of them overjoyed to see me, and what do I find? Nothing but 'What, yous!' from first one and then the other – stammered greetings, and then tears and flashing eyes and false accusations."

At that I burst out laughing, and Zebedee did the same. It was such a tempest in a teapot! I was ahead of him, however, and by my sudden anger over nothing or almost nothing I had unwittingly turned his attention from Tweedles and their misdemeanors, and now I was sure he would be only amused over their escapade.

"We are all of us mighty glad to have you back. I don't see what made you think we weren't."

"Foolish of me, wasn't it? I realize now that it was excess of emotion and delight that made all of you behave as you did."

CHAPTER IV

WHAT ZEBEDEE SAID

We ate dinner very quietly. The twins began to perk up a bit in the salad course, and by the time we got to Brown Betty and the Roman punch they were quite themselves, except for a languor that might have come from overeating as much as from overexertion.

Zebedee avoided the subject of money-making with great tact. He had much to tell us of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Gordon and their little home in Norfolk and their happiness and hospitality. Mrs. Gordon was or had been our beloved Miss Cox, a teacher at Gresham. She had married Mr. Gordon at Willoughby Beach the summer before while she was chaperoning us, and all of us felt that we had been instrumental in making the match and were in a measure responsible for the great happiness of the couple.

The maid had removed all traces of dinner and we were seated snugly around the drop light on the library table, a table that had been converted into a dinner table when the Tuckers decided to dine in their apartment, which boasted no housekeeping arrangements. There was a deep silence broken only by a smothered yawn from Dee. Running a jitney for almost eleven hours is some sleep-provoker.

"Well, girls, aren't you going to take your poor old father in out of the cold?" and Zebedee looked appealingly at his daughters.

"Well, it was this way – " they started in the same breath.

"One at a time, please! Dum, you begin."

"Well, you see I owe seven dollars and twenty-three cents to different girls at Gresham and I didn't have a red cent and no telling how long before allowances are due, so I just thought I'd try to earn something. I found an ad for twenty young women to sell household novelties and so I applied for the job."

"That was rather ambitious as a starter. Were you going to be all twenty right from the first?"

"Silly and flippant! I got the job, at least one twentieth of it, and started out this morning at eight o'clock. I am to get five cents on every sale. I went up and down Franklin and Grace streets all morning, going in the front doors, but this afternoon I tried the back doors because naturally the servants are more interested in these labor-saving devices than the mistresses; besides, I saw so many people we know when I went in the front way that I was afraid if they bought from me they would do it from pity or something, and I wanted to be very businesslike and create a burning desire for the really excellent articles I am selling. I didn't want to hold up anyone."

"That's right!" I was trembling for what Zebedee would say about Dum's meeting all the friends on her canvassing jaunt, but I realized that I did not really know that gentleman as well as I thought I did. He did not seem to mind in the least if perhaps everyone in Richmond knew that one of his girls had been out going from house to house in the most fashionable residential districts selling batty-cake flappers and spot-knockers.

"I have made in all on commissions two dollars and ten cents, I think. I have completely worn out my shoes on the cobblestones in the alleys and have got a blister on my heel as big as all my commissions put together."

"Have you collected your money yet?"

"No! I don't get it until the goods are delivered and my customers pay up."

"How long does your job last?"

"Oh, until the whole town is combed with a fine tooth comb. Our boss wants every lady in Richmond to have the advantage of these household novelties." Dum unconsciously took on the tone usual with the house-to-house canvasser.

Zebedee gave a smile but there was no divining what his real thoughts were any more than if he had been the Sphinx herself. He looked to me rather like a man who was seeing a real good show and was deeply interested but reserving his final opinion of the merits of the actors and the playwright until the curtain.

"Now, Dee, let's hear from you!"

"Well, – while Dum was looking at the want column, I saw on the front page that the poor men who run jitneys were in a fair way to be crowded out of their business by all kinds of ordinances and things that were likely to be put on them."

"Yes, they won't have long to run without giving bonds, etc."

"I just knew how much you felt for the poor men and approved of their venture, and so I just decided I'd run a jitney myself for a day or so and get myself out of debt. I owe five dollars and seventy-three cents to schoolmates and did not have but thirty-seven cents and a street car ticket. I wanted to let Dum in on my scheme but she said she would get out and earn her own money. I did not dream I could make so much, and indeed I couldn't have, if I had not speeded like fun. The cops knew Henry in spite of his sign, and I believe they knew me through the dirt and make-up, and they never once stopped me.

"Of course I had to run in high a lot and it took gas, but I am going to pay for that out of my earnings. I made four dollars and fifteen cents this morning and I have not counted yet what I took in this afternoon." She turned the pockets of her father's greatcoat inside out into my lap and the bills and coin made such a showing that I thought it no wonder she had announced she was rolling in wealth. I counted six dollars and thirty-five cents. That made ten dollars and fifty cents for the day's work.

"I think being a jitneur is mighty hard work. There is a nerve-racking something about it that sho' does you up. In the first place there are always some idiots on board, the kind that rock the boat, and they will sit on the doors and are liable at any time to go spinning into the street. Then there are some old ladies who always drop their nickels and then you stand chugging away, scared to death for fear Henry will give up the ghost, and that means getting out to crank up when you have got on skirts and don't want to flaunt them."

"I have been wondering what you did about your skirts."

"Did nothing! Just ignored them! I didn't have to crank up but once this morning, and that was when I hit a hole out on Robinson Street and Henry blinked out; but I had just got rid of my last fare and no one saw my disgrace. This afternoon I had awful bad luck. There were three funerals and every single one of them crossed my route and I had to wait for them to pass. You know how Henry gets mad and stops playing when he has to stand still too long – well, every one of those funerals got me in bad. One of them I was glad to see, as I was having an awful time. A girl dressed up to beat the band had got on the front seat with me and she was lollapalusing all over me, and I had no room to drive. She would talk to me, although I never encouraged her with anything sweeter than a grunt. I had made an awful mash and was up against it. She got me so hacked I let a fare get away from me, – man just got out and walked off without paying. I felt like Rosalind must have felt when Phebe pursued her or like Viola when Olivia got soft, but this girl was more of the Phebe type. I was afraid she was going to spend the afternoon with Henry and me. She had just intimated that she would go on downtown with us again and make a round trip when we struck the funeral. Henry chugged away and then stopped off short. I dropped the plaid shawl I had my skirts wrapped up in and climbed over the foolish virgin, and I tell you I blessed the day I was born a girl then. I wish you could have seen the minx. I cranked up and climbed back, and there was no more lollapalusing from her. She scrouged herself over into her own corner and laughed a scornful laugh. The people on the back seat had been amused by her goings-on before, but when they found out I was a girl, they roared with laughter and my mash got out on the next corner. She gave me a dime and told me I could keep the change, so I did not lose anything after all from the man who sneaked off."

"You didn't really keep it?" exclaimed Dum.

"Keep it! O course I did! It would have been very melodramatic to hurl it after her. I was not driving a jitney for my health. I was out for money – rocks – spondulix – tin – the coin – and that idiot's dime was just as good as any man's. Besides, she had taken up more than her share of room and owed me something for letting the sneak get off.

"That dollar bill! I bet you can't guess who paid me that, – Mrs. Barton Alston. She got in and handed me the dollar and said: 'Here, boy! Just ride me until that is used up!' It was ten round trips so she was with me a good part of the afternoon. She said she never did get out in automobiles much these days, that her friends sometimes come and drive her out to the cemetery, but she is tired of graveyards and wants to cheer up some. She told me all this when we were having a little spin alone, but I heard her telling some of the fares the same thing. She was real nice and jolly and took people on her lap and did the honors of the jitneys with as much graciousness as she used to entertain before they lost their money. I was sorry she was so broad-beamed, as it was difficult to get three on the seat while she stayed with me, and of course when you are running a jitney every inch counts. When her ten round trips were up, I hated to tell her and took her another for luck. Some day let's go get her, Zebedee, and take her out to the Country Club or something and give her a good time. She is mighty tired of being supposed to be in retirement, mourning for Mr. Alston. She never did recognize me, although I talked to her quite freely. She called me 'Boy' all the time. Gee whilikins, but she can talk!"

"There are others!" put in Dum. "Do you know you have not stopped once for half-an-hour?"

"Well, I'm not out of gas yet."

"No, I reckon not! You are some self-starter, too. Nobody has to get out and crank you up and persuade you to get going. Funerals don't stop you. You go in high all the time, go so fast a traffic cop can't see your number."

"Well, I'm afraid I have monopolized the conversation some but it has been a very exciting day. I'm going to divide up with you, Dum. I believe between us we can get all of those debts paid."

"Oh, Dee, that would be too good of you!"

"Nonsense! You worked just as hard as I did. I believe in an equal distribution of wealth. Count up, Page, and see where we stand."

"Let's see! You made ten dollars and fifty cents; Dum made two dollars and ten cents – that makes twelve dollars and sixty cents. You owe five dollars and seventy-three cents – Dum owes seven dollars and twenty-three cents. That makes twelve dollars and ninety-six cents. You are thirty-six cents short."

"Oh, but I've got thirty-seven cents and a street car ticket. That leaves a penny over, to say nothing of the ticket. Hurrah! Hurrah!" and those irresponsible Tuckers, all three of them, got up and danced the lobster quadrille with me in the middle. When they stopped, completely out of breath, Dee exclaimed:

"Oh, Zebedee! I am awfully sorry, but I am afraid you will have to pay for the gas after all. I charged it."

And all Zebedee said was: "I'll be – " and just as Dee said would be the case, what he said does not bear repetition and certainly is not to be printed.

Mrs. Barton Alston had many a treat from the Tuckers. Dum did not collect her two dollars and ten cents until she had made many trips to the boss. He tried to persuade her to accept a steady job with him as an agent for household novelties, and while she naturally could not do it, she declared it gave her a very comfortable feeling that if she should have to earn her living there was at least one avenue open to her.

The day after Dee's success as a jitneur the paper came out with headlines that the jitneys were no longer within the law. Bonds must be furnished, licenses must be paid, etc. Dee had been not a day too soon in her venture.

Zebedee never said one word of reproach to Tweedles. When he gave voice to the unprintable remark above he was through.

"I know I ought to do something about it," he moaned to me several days after when he caught me alone. "It was a very risky thing for both of my girls – they might have got in no end of scrapes – but what am I to do? If I row with them and get Mr. Tuckerish even you get out with me, and somehow I feel as long as the girls tell me everything, that they can't get into very serious mischief. I know I have not done my part by them. If I had been the right kind of unselfish father I would have married long ago when they were tiny little tots and have had some good, sensible woman bring them up."

"They don't look at it that way."

"Well, you could hardly expect them to 'kiss the rod'."

I laughed aloud at that.

"What's the matter?"

"I am wondering what the 'good, sensible woman' would think at being called a rod. I wonder if there is any woman good enough to undertake the job of rod."

"Perhaps not," he said ruefully. "You see when my little Virginia died, all my friends and hers got busy and found a roomful of worthy ladies that they considered the proper persons to marry me and bring up the twins, but all of them were rather rod-like in a way, and somehow I never could make up my mind to kiss 'em either. The trouble about me is I can't grow up, and anyone whom my friends consider a suitable age for me now, I look upon as a kind of mother to me."

"I think Tweedles are getting on pretty well without a stepmother," I managed to say. I felt about as bad as the twins themselves would have at the thought of Zebedee's marrying again. "They never do anything too bad to tell you, but they do lots of things I fancy they would not tell a stepmother."

"Well, little friend, if you think that, I reckon I'll worry along 'in single blessedness' for a while yet."

The Tucker Twins had been living in dread of a stepmother ever since they had been conscious of living at all. It was a theme with all of their relations and friends and one that was aired on every occasion. "Jeffry Tucker should marry again!" was the cry and sometimes the battle cry of every chaperone in Richmond. As Mr. Tucker said, it was always some good, settled lady who needed a home and was willing to put up with the twins who was selected as his mate.

"I don't want to run an old ladies' home. If I ever marry I shall do it for some reason besides furnishing a stepmother to my family and giving a haven of refuge to some deserving lady."

"I don't want to seem disloyal to Dum and Dee, but I think it might be rather salutary if you talk to them just as you have to me, I mean about stepmothers and things. It might make them a little more circumspect."

"All right, I'll try; but I am afraid I have cried 'Wolf!' too often and they would just laugh at me."

Tweedles did listen to him quite seriously when he broached the subject of his duty to marry again and give them the proper chaperonage.

"Oh, Zebedee, please don't talk about such terrible things. We'll be good and learn how to sew," wailed Dum. "I'm going to make some shirts the very first thing."

"Oh please, please spare me! I couldn't bear for you to get so good that I'd have to wear home-made shirts!" And so the threat of a stepmother was withdrawn for the time being.

CHAPTER V

A TRIP TO CHARLESTON

My ankle improved rapidly and in another week I was able to walk and still another to dance. I had been patience itself, so my friends declared, and I am glad they thought so. I had really been impatience itself but had kept it to myself.

"Girls, I've got a scheme!" exclaimed Zebedee one evening after dinner. "I want to send a special correspondent to South Carolina to write up the political situation and I am thinking about sending myself. If I do, I am going to take all of you. I have written your father, Page, and an answer came from him today. He says you may go, as he knows it would do you good. I haven't said anything about it to you girls until I was sure I could work it."

"Oh goody, goody, goody! Where will we go first?"

"Charleston first! I may leave you there awhile, as I have to do some knocking around, but it will not be for very long, not more than a day at a time."

We plunged into shopping the very next day. Father had sent me a check for necessary clothes, and the all-important matter had to be attended to speedily.

"Let's get all of our things exactly alike and pass for triplets! It would be such a scream on Zebedee," suggested Dee.

"Triplets, much! We'd just look like a blooming orphan asylum and get in a book. It seems to me that every book I pick up lately is about orphan asylums. Chauffeurs and orphans and aviators form the theme for every book or magazine story I read. No, indeed! Let's get our clothes just as different as possible," said Dum, rapidly turning the pages in *Vogue*.

"All right. Then we can wear each other's. I'm going to get brown."

"I'm crazy for dark green, if you don't think it will make my freckles show on my nose too much. My nose and its freckles are a great trial to me."

"Nonsense! You've got the cutest nose in Virginia and Zebedee says he likes freckles," said Dee, always tactful.

"Well, he can have them, I'm sure I don't want them. What color are you going to get, Dum?"

"Anything but blue. There is a refinement about blue that I can't stand right now. I want something dashing and indicative of my sentiments of its being my bounden duty to have a good time."

"Red?"

"No, red's too obvious! I think I'll get lavender or mauve. Then I can wear violets (when I can get them). I think lavender suits my mood all right. It is kind of widowish and widows when they get into lavender are always out for a good time. I tell you when widows get to widding they are mighty attractive. I don't see why they don't stay in their pretty white crêpe linings, though. They are so terribly becoming. I mean to make a stunning widow some day."

"First catch your flea before you kill him," taunted Dee.

"Well, I can't see the use in having your hair grow in a widow's peak on your forehead if you can't ever be a widow. It seems such a waste."

"There's time yet! You are only seventeen," I laughed.

"Seventeen is old enough to know what style suits me best. Weeds are my proper environment."

In spite of Dum's conviction about weeds she purchased a most becoming and suitably youthful suit in a soft mauve. Dee got exactly the same style in brown and I in green. We deviated in hats, however, and each girl thought her own was the prettiest, which is a great test of hats. Hats are like treats at soda fountains: you usually wish you had ordered something you didn't order and something your neighbor did.

Spring was late in making its appearance in Virginia that year, but since we were going to South Carolina we bravely donned our new suits and hats. Zebedee declared he was proud of us, we were so stylish.

"I have a great mind to grow some whiskers so people won't think I am your little nephew," he said as he settled us in our section. The three of us girls were to occupy one section, two below and one above, lots to be cast how we were to dispose ourselves.

"Nephew, much! You've got three gray hairs in your part now," declared Dee.

"Each of you is responsible for one of them." Mr. Tucker often classed me with his own girls and really when I was with them I seemed to be a member of the family. He treated me with a little more deference than he did Tweedles because he said I seemed to be older. I was really a few days younger.

Dee got the upper berth in the casting of lots and Dum and I slept in the lower, at least, Dum slept. I was conscious of much jerking and bumping of the train, and Dum seemed to be demonstrating the batty-cake flipflapper all night.

We had left Richmond with a belated sprinkling of snow, but as we were nearing Charleston at about five-thirty in the morning we ran through a fine big thunder storm, and then torrents of rain descended, beating against the windows. Of course some bromide who got off the train with us, said something about "the back-bone of winter."

What a rain! It seemed to be coming down in sheets, and such a thing as keeping dry was out of the question. Tweedles and I regretted our new spring suits and straw hats, but since we had been so foolhardy as to travel in them we had to make the best of it and trust to luck that they would not spot.

The train had reached Charleston at six and by rights it should have been dawn, but it was as dark as pitch owing to the thunder clouds that hung low over the city.

Zebedee hustled us into a creaking, swaying bus that reminded us somewhat of the one at Gresham. Other travelers were there ahead of us and as everyone was rather damp the odor of the closed vehicle was somewhat wet-doggish.

We rattled over the cobblestones through narrow streets, every now and then glimpsing some picturesque bit of wall when we came to one of the few and far between lamp posts. But it was generally very dim and would have been dreary had we not been in a frame of mind to enjoy everything we saw and to look at life with what Dee called "Behind-the-clouds-the-sun's-still-shining" spirit.

The bus turned into better lighted streets with smoother paving.

"Meeting Street," read Dum from a sign. "Doesn't that sound romantic? Do you reckon it means lovers meet here?"

"It may, but I am very much afraid it just means the many churches that abound on this street," laughed Zebedee.

I wondered who the people were in the bus with us, but they seemed to take no interest at all in us. There were two pale old ladies in black crêpe veils drawn partly over their faces; a dignified old gentleman in a low-cut vest and a very high collar with turned-down flaps that seemed especially designed to ease his double chin; and a young girl about sixteen or seventeen who had evidently been in a day coach all night and was much rumpled and tousled therefrom. She seemed to belong to the pompous old gentleman, at least I gathered as much, as I had seen him meet her at the station and noticed he gave her a fatherly peck of greeting. Not a word did they utter however on that bumpy bus ride, and although the two pale old ladies in crêpe veils had stiffly inclined their shrouded heads as father and daughter entered the vehicle and they in turn had acknowledged the bow, not one word passed their lips. Evidently a public conveyance was not the proper place for Charlestonians to converse. The girl, who was very pretty in spite of being so tired and dishevelled, smiled a sympathetic smile when Dum enthused over Meeting Street. I had a feeling if we could get her by herself she would chatter away like any other girl.

Perhaps the old man won't be so stiff when he gets his breakfast. It is hard to be limber on a wet morning and an empty stomach. When one has so much stomach it must be especially hard to have it empty, I thought.

It seemed very impertinent of the omnibus to bump this dignified old gentleman so unmercifully. He held on to his stomach with both hands, an expression of indignation on his pompous countenance, while his double chin wobbled in a manner that must have been very trying to his dignity.

The pale old ladies in crêpe veils took their bumping with great elegance and composure. When the sudden turning of a corner hurled one of them from her seat plump into Zebedee's arms, if she was the least disconcerted she did not show it. A crisp "I beg your pardon!" was all she said as she resumed her seat. She did pull the crêpe veil entirely over her face, however, as though to conceal from the vulgar gaze any emotion that she might have felt. Of course we giggled. We always giggled at any excuse, fancied or real. The pretty girl giggled, too, but turned it into a cough as her father pivoted his fat little person around and looked at her in evident astonishment.

The bus backed up to our hotel where a grinning porter was in readiness to capture our bags. Our fellow travelers were evidently relieved at our departure. I saw through the window that both ladies put back their stuffy veils and that the old gentleman relaxed his dignified bearing somewhat and entered into conversation with them. The young girl, however, peered rather wistfully through the drenched pane at us as we gaily took possession of the hotel lobby.

"Wasn't she sweet! Maybe we will see her again sometime," said Dee.

"I couldn't see her at all from where I sat," declared Zebedee. "Her old father's embonpoint obstructed my view."

The hotel where Zebedee had decided to take us was not the newest and most fashionable in Charleston, but he had heard it was the most typical and that the cooking was quite good. It had been built years before the famous earthquake, and had still marks of that calamity. The floors, many of them, had a down-hill tendency, and there were cracks under the doors and I believe not one right angle in a single wall of the house.

The room we girls were to occupy was a great square chamber with a large window looking out on a cobbled street. There were picturesque doors, and walls with mysterious shuttered windows, where one could occasionally see eyes peering forth. It is against the Charleston code of manners to open shutters or raise the blinds of windows that look out on the street.

The floor of our room was on a decided slant and this caused a very amusing accident. There was a large armchair with broad substantial rockers into which Dum sank to rest her weary bones until breakfast. The chair was pointed down-hill and over Dum went backwards, and nothing in the world but her fine new spring hat saved her from getting a terrible bump on her head.

"It's like living in the Tower of Pisa!" she exclaimed as we pulled her up.

"You had better remember to rock up-hill next time," admonished Dee. "I bet you, we will all develop a mountain leg living on such a slant. But isn't it fascinating? As soon as breakfast is over, let's go out and explore. I want to peep in the shutters all along the way and see what everybody is having for breakfast and going to have for dinner."

"That's just the way I feel! If anything is shut, I want to peep in. If it is locked, I want to get in."

Our hotel was run on the American plan and our grinning waiter insisted upon bringing us everything on the bill of fare. I think he saw in Zebedee the possibilities of a liberal tip. In South Carolina there is a law against tipping. In all of the rooms of hotels the guests are reminded of this by large printed placards, but like most laws of the kind it seems made only to be broken.

"The tight-wads who kicked against tipping the poor colored servants now have the law on their side and can get out of it gracefully, but the people who tip because they feel that the servants have earned some little acknowledgment of their faithful services, go on tipping just as though no law had been made," said Zebedee, as he slipped some silver under the side of his plate in view of the watching darky, who pounced upon it with a practiced hand, while making a feint of removing finger bowls.

"I am going to turn you girls loose now to find your way around and seek out the wonders of Charleston. I have work to do and politicians to see."

"All right! Don't worry about us!" tweedled the twins.

"I want to get a map of the city first," said Dee, "so we can get our bearings," but Dum and I cried down this project.

"Let's find out things for ourselves and then get a map and guide book to verify us. It's lots more fun to go at it that way."

"Well, all I know is that this hotel is on Meeting Street, and on our right is Church Street and on our left King. The street under your window is Queen, and if you walk south down Meeting you come to the Battery. You can't get lost and can't get in any trouble unless you try to climb the spiked fences or get over the walls covered with broken bottles. I'll meet you at luncheon at one," and Zebedee took himself off to find out things from some of the political lights of the city.

We were left to our own devices. The sun had come out and if we had not been in the rain we would not have believed it could have come down in such torrents only a short while ago. Our dresses did not spot.

"Let's not go in any place this morning but just walk around and see from the outside. It would be low of us to do the graveyards and things without Zebedee. He loves those things and will want to see them," said Dee.

It was a strange taste for one so cheerful, but it was the truth that Mr. Tucker was especially fond of poking around musty old churches and reading epitaphs on tombstones.

We walked to St. Michael's, looking longingly through the iron gates at the quaint old tombstones, but refrained from going in for Zebedee's sake. We passed many beautiful old houses, some of them in perfect repair, brave in fresh paint, with trimmed hedges and gravel walks in their lovely old gardens that we could see by peering through the wrought-iron gates. Some of the houses, though, looked as though they had not been painted since the Revolution, and their gardens were grown up with weeds, with ragged, untrimmed hedges and neglected paths.

Almost every house, big or little, boasts a southern gallery or porch. The houses are built right on the street, but the large door opens from the street to the porch and not to the house. The gardens are to the side and back, and, as a rule, are surrounded by great brick walls with either iron spikes across the top or ferocious broken bottles cemented to the bricks. The windows, opening on the street, are kept shuttered closely, and iron bars give you to understand that there is no breaking into Charleston society by night or day. The corners of the houses, where the porches are, also are protected from possible interlopers by great iron spikes, a foot long and sharp enough to pierce the hide of a rhinoceros. The porches are also shuttered, partly to protect the inmates from the rude gaze of the passer-by and partly to protect them from the ruder gaze of the southern sun.

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