

Speed Nell

The Carter Girls



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CHAPTER I THE CARTERS

"I don't believe a word of it!"

"But, Helen, the doctor ought to know."

"Of course he ought to know, but does he know? If doctors agreed among themselves, I'd have more use for them. A poor patient has to submit to having everything the doctors are interested in for the time being. A specialist can always find you suffering with his specialty. Didn't old Dr. Davis treat Father for malaria because he himself, forsooth, happened to be born in the Dismal Swamp, got malaria into his system when he was a baby and never got it out? All his patients must have malaria, too, because Dr. Davis has it."

"Yes, Helen, that is so, but you see Father's symptoms *were* like malaria in a way," and Douglas Carter could not help laughing at her sister, although she well knew that the last doctor's diagnosis of her father's case was no laughing matter.

"Oh, yes, and then the next one, that bushy-whiskered one with his stomach pump and learned talk of an excess of hydrochlorics! Of course he found poor dear Daddy had a stomach, though he had never before been aware of it. All the Carters are such ostriches –"

"So we are if we blindly bury our heads in the sand and refuse to see that this last doctor is right, and –"

"I meant ostrich stomachs and not brains."

"Shhh! Here come the children! Let's don't talk about it before them yet. They'll have to know soon enough." And Douglas, the eldest of the five Carters, tried to smooth her troubled brow and look as though she and Helen had been discussing the weather.

"Know what? I'm going, too, if it's a movie," declared Lucy, a long-legged, thirteen-year-old girl who reminded one of nothing so much as a thorough-bred colt – a colt conscious of its legs but meaning to make use of those same legs to out-distance all competitors in the race to be run later on.

"I don't believe it's movies," said Nan, the fifteen-year-old sister, noting the serious expression of Douglas's usually calm countenance. "I believe something has happened. Is it Bobby?" That was the very small brother, the joy and torment of the whole family.

The Carters formed stair steps with a decided jump off at the bottom. Douglas was eighteen; Helen, seventeen; Nan, fifteen; Lucy, thirteen; and then came a gap of seven years and Bobby, who had crowded the experiences of a lifetime into his six short years, at least the life-long experiences of any ordinary mortal. He was always having hair-breadth escapes so nearly serious that his family lived in momentary terror of each being the last.

"No, it's not Bobby," said Douglas gravely. "It's Father!"

"But nothing serious! Not Daddy!" exclaimed the two younger girls and both of them looked ready for tears. "Can't the new doctor cure him?"

"Yes, he thinks he can, but it is going to be up to us to help," and Douglas drew Lucy and Nan down on the sofa beside her while Helen stopped polishing her pretty pink nails and planted herself on an ottoman at her feet. "All of you must have noticed how thin Father is getting and how depressed he is –"

"Yes, yes! Not a bit like himself!"

“Well, it wasn’t malaria, as Dr. Davis thought; and it wasn’t stomach trouble, as Dr. Drew thought; and the surgeon’s X-ray could not show chronic appendicitis, as Dr. Slaughter feared, – ”

“Feared, indeed!” sniffed Helen. “Hoped, you mean!”

“But this new nerve specialist that comes here from Washington, so highly recommended – ”

“If he was doing so well in Washington, why did he come to Richmond?” interrupted the scornful Helen, doubtful as usual of the whole medical fraternity.

“I don’t know why, honey, but if he can help Father, we should be glad he did come.”

“If, indeed! Another barrel of tonics and bushel of powders, I suppose!”

“Not at all! This new man, Dr. Wright, says ‘no medicine at all.’ Now this is where we come in.”

“Mind, Helen, Douglas says ‘come in,’ not ‘butt in,’” said Lucy pertly. “You interrupt so much that Nan and I don’t know yet what’s the matter with Daddy and how we are to help him.”

“Well, who’s interrupting now? I haven’t said a word for half an hour at least,” said Helen brazenly.

“Oh, oh, what’ll I do?” which was Carter talk for saying, “You are fibbing.”

“You’re another!”

“Girls, girls, this is not helping. It’s just being naughty,” from the eldest.

“Go on, Douglas, don’t mind them. Helen and Lucy would squabble over their crowns and harps in Heaven,” said the peace-loving Nan. And the joke of squabbling in Heaven restored order, and Douglas was able to go on with what she had to tell.

“Dr. Wright says it is a case of nervous prostration and that a complete change is what Father needs and absolute rest from business. He thinks a sea trip of two months, and a year in the country are absolutely essential.”

“And will that make him all the way well?” asked Helen. “If it does, I’ll take off my yachting cap to this Dr. Wright as having some sense, after all. I mean to have a lovely new yachting suit for the trip.”

Helen was by all odds the most stylish member of the family, and, some thought, the beauty; but others preferred the more serene charm of Douglas, who was a decided blonde with Titian hair and complexion to match. Helen’s hair was what she scornfully termed a plain American brown, neither one thing nor the other, but it was abundant and fine and you may be sure it was always coiffed in the latest twist.

Nan had soft dark curls and dreamy dark eyes and spoke with a drawl. She did not say much, but when she did speak it was usually to say something worth listening to.

Lucy was as yet too coltish to classify, but she had a way of carrying her bobbed head with its shock of chestnut hair and tilting her pretty little pointed chin which gave her sisters to understand that she intended to have her innings later on, but not so very much later on.

“A new yachting suit! Just listen to Helen! Always got to be dressing up!” declared Lucy, ever ready for battle with the second sister. “I should think you would blush,” and, indeed, Helen’s face was crimson.

“Oh, I did not mean to forget Father, but if I have to have a new suit, I just thought I would have it appropriate for the sea trip.”

“I’m going to learn how to climb like a sailor,” from Lucy.

“I’m going to take a chest full of poetry to read on the voyage,” from Nan.

“But, girls, girls! We are not to go, – just Father and Mother! The way we are to help is to stay at home and take care of ourselves and Bobby. How do you think Father could get any rest with all of us tagging on?”

“Not go! Douglas Carter, you are off your bean! How could we get along without Mother and Father and how under Heaven could they get along without us? What does Mother say?” asked Helen.

“She hasn’t said anything yet. The doctor is still with Father. Dr. Wright says Father must have quiet and no discussions going on around him. He says every one must be cheerful and arrangements must be made for the trip without saying a word to Father.”

“Is Mother to make them?” drawled Nan, and everybody laughed.

It was an excruciating joke to expect Mrs. Carter to make a move or take the initiative in anything. Her rôle was ever to follow the course of least resistance, and up to this time that course had led her only by pleasant places. Like some pretty little meadow stream she had meandered through life, gay and refreshing, if shallow withal, making glad the hearts of many just by her pleasant sweetness; but no one had expected any usefulness from her, so she had given none.

Twenty years ago, fresh from the laurels of a brilliant winter, her debutante year in New Orleans, the beautiful Miss Sevier had taken the White Sulphur by storm. Only one figure at one German had been enough to show Robert Carter that she was the only girl for him; and as he was the type that usually got what he started out to get, and also was by all odds the best looking young man at the White, besides being a very promising architect who had plenty of work waiting for him in Richmond, Annette Sevier naturally succumbed to his wooing, and in three weeks’ time their engagement was announced. She was an exquisite girl, a Creole beauty of a daintiness and charm that appealed to every fibre of Bob Carter’s being. She had been a beautiful girl and was still a beautiful woman; under forty, she looked more like the elder sister of her great girls than like their mother.

“I confess to Bobby,” she would say, “and maybe to Lucy, although her long legs make me a little doubtful of her being really mine – but you other girls, you must be changelings.”

Robert Carter had worked hard to keep his dainty love in all the comforts that she needed. I will not say expected or demanded, – she did neither of those disagreeable or ungraceful things. Comfort and elegance were just necessary to her environment and one could no more accuse her of selfishness than tax a queen for receiving homage.

If a dainty, elegant wife with no idea that money was more than something to spend takes hard work to keep, surely four growing girls with the extravagant ideas of the young persons of the day meant redoubled and tripled labour. Then there was Bobby! It took still more money to furnish him with all the little white linen sailor suits that his doting mother considered necessary for him. She thought nothing of having two dozen made up at one time, and those of the purest and finest linen. Bob, Sr., looking over the bill for those same two dozen suits, did have a whimsical thought that with all that equipment it would be gratifying if just once he could see Bob, Jr., clean; but the only way to see Bobby clean was to lie in wait for him on the way from the bath; then and then only was he clean.

As a rule, however, Robert Carter accepted the bills as part of the day’s work. If they were larger than usual, then he would just work a little harder and get more money. An inborn horror of debt kept him out of it. He had all the orders he could fill and was singularly successful in competitive designs. His health had always been perfect and his energy so great that action was his normal state.

And now what was this thing that had come upon him? A strange lassitude that made it almost impossible for him to get up in the morning, a heaviness of limbs and an irascibility that was as foreign to him as weakness. It had been going on for several weeks and he had run the gamut of doctors, impatient of their failures. They agreed on only one thing and that was that he must rest. How could he rest? Weren’t there five pairs of legs demanding silk stockings (even Lucy insisted that her lean shanks be clothed in the best)? Suits and hats must be bought with each change of season for the whole family, shirtwaists and shoes, lingerie of the finest. It took four servants besides the chauffeur to run their establishment. Their butcher’s bills were only equalled by the dairy bills, their grocery bills by their gasoline. “Rest, indeed! They might as well tell Uncle Sam to rest,” said the sick man to himself. “Who is going to pay for the silk stockings if I rest?”

The doctor had come, the last one on his list of doctors, a young man from Washington, a nerve specialist. He had asked him quite seriously if he had had any hallucinations, seen things he could

not quite account for, and Carter had answered somewhat grimly: "Silk stockings and French chops!" And the doctor, being a very knowing young man, had understood.

"You see, Mr. Carter, any one in your run-down nervous condition is apt to brood over fancied troubles until it is not uncommon for him to be in a measure delirious. Now I am going to be quite frank with you, which is a course not usually pursued by nerve specialists but one I feel to be wisest. You have presumed on your strength and endurance for many years. Physically you have stood the test, but your nerves, which are in a way the mind or soul of the muscles and organs, have at last rebelled, and now you are going to have to submit to inactivity for at least a year – "

"A year! My God, man, you are crazy!"

"Yes, a year. Would not that be better than going to pieces completely and living on, a useless hulk? There, I thought that would make you sit up. Why should you not rest? What is eating you?"

Dr. Wright had a very brusque manner which was, indeed, in keeping with his appearance. He was a stalwart, broad-shouldered man, considerably under thirty. His face, rough-hewn but not heavy, was redeemed from plainness by the bluest blue eyes that were ever seen, with exceedingly long black lashes. His teeth were good but his rather long upper lip did not disclose the fact except on the rare occasions when he laughed. He had more control over his mouth than his eyes, as his eyes laughed continually whether he would or no. His brows were heavy and shaggy and he had a trick of pulling them down over his eyes as though he wanted to have his little laugh to himself, since those eyes would laugh. There was no laugh in his eyes now, but rather a stern kindness as he slangily invited the confidence of the older man, his patient.

"Eating me? Why, money, of course. I have absolutely nothing but what I earn, – and look at my family! They have always had everything I could give them and – "

"And now they must wake up and pay for their beds of ease," said the physician grimly. "Have you no property?"

"Well, I own the house we live in; at least I almost own it. If a shoemaker's children do go barefoot, an architect does build and own the house he lives in," and the sick man managed to smile.

"That's good! Any other property?"

"I've a side of a mountain in Albemarle County. I took it for a bad debt from a country store-keeper – a kind of miser – but I believe I'd rather have the debt, as at least I had no taxes to pay on the debt."

Mr. Carter and Dr. Wright were alone during this conversation as Mrs. Carter had left the room to endeavor to compose herself. The little meadow brook had struck a rocky bed at last and its shallow waters were troubled. What was to become of her? Her Bob ill! Too ill to be worried about anything! And this beetle browed young doctor scared her with his intent gaze; there was no admiration or homage in it, only a scarcely veiled disapproval. She felt like a poor little canary with a great Tom-cat peering at her, scorning her as too insignificant even for a mouth-full. And how was it her fault that she was so useless? Was it the canary's fault that he had been born in a cage and some one took care of him and he had never had to do like other birds and grub for his living? She was just about as capable of doing what this Dr. Wright expected of her as the canary would have been had he told the bird to come out of his cage and begin not only to grub worms for himself but for the kind person who had always fed him and maybe for the family as well.

"Mrs. Carter," said Dr. Wright, trying evidently not to be too stern as the little woman fluttered back into the room, a redness about her eye-lids and a fresh sprinkling of powder on her pretty nose, "I want your husband to give you power of attorney so you can transact any business for him that is necessary – "

"Me? Oh, Dr. Wright, not me! I can't write a check and don't know how to do sums at all. Couldn't you do it?"

"Douglas will do," feebly muttered the invalid.

"Is Douglas your son?"

“Oh, no! She is our eldest daughter.”

“It is strange how you Virginians, with the most womanly women I know of anywhere, are constantly giving them masculine names. Shall I ask Miss Douglas to come to you?” Dr. Wright was evidently for early action and meant to push his point without more ado.

“Oh, Doctor, couldn’t you see her first and tell her what it is you want? I don’t quite understand.”

“Yes, Mrs. Carter, if you wish it. And now I must ask you to keep your husband very quiet, no talking, no discussions, sleep, if he can get it, and very nourishing food. I will write out what I want him to eat and will ask you to see that he gets it and gets it on schedule time.”

Poor little canary! The time has come for you to begin to grub!

CHAPTER II

POWER OF ATTORNEY

When Dr. Wright entered the library where the four girls were holding their consultation, he thought that without doubt they made a very charming group. But his soul was wroth within him at womenkind who could let a man like the one he had just left upstairs slave himself almost into insensibility that they might be gorgeously clothed and delicately fed. Silk stockings and lamb chops! Both very expensive luxuries! Well, they would learn their lesson young, which was a blessing. Rump steaks and bare feet or maybe cotton stockings and sandals would not be so hard on them as on the poor little weakling upstairs with her pretty eyes already reddened at the first breath of disaster.

The library at the Carters' home was a beautiful room with not one jarring note. Low bookshelves built into the walls were filled with books in rich bindings. Costly rugs covered the floors. The walls were hung with signed etchings and rare prints. Ordinarily George Wright would have taken great pleasure in such a room, but now he only looked upon it as just so much more evidence of the selfishness of the females of the Carter family and the unremitting toil of the male.

He had not yet met any of the girls, but without hesitation he came forward, his step singularly light for one of his build. He spoke before Helen, whose back was towards the door, had even become aware of his presence. She gave a little gasp, sprang from the low ottoman, and faced the young physician, a spirit of antagonism showing from the first in her flashing eyes and sensitive nostrils. Helen had what Nan called "a speaking nose," and every emotion was shown as clearly by her nose as by some persons' eyes and others' mouths.

"I want to speak to Miss Douglas Carter; but since all of you are here, perhaps it might be just as well for me to speak to all of you." The last part of his speech was made to Helen, whose attitude of defiance was unmistakable.

"I am Douglas," said the elder girl, rising and giving her hand graciously to the young man whose blue eyes showed no gleam of humour now and whose long upper lip was pulled down so far and so grimly that his perfect teeth could not do their part towards taking from the rugged homeliness of his face. "This is Helen, this Nan, and this Lucy."

The girls shook hands with him, all but Helen. She bowed, but as she bowed backwards, as it were, that is, jerked her chin up rather than down, it did not pass for courtesy.

"Won't you sit down?" asked Douglas.

"Well, yes, – I've got to talk to you girls like a Dutch uncle and I might just as well get down to it."

"I have an engagement," said Helen icily, consulting her tiny wrist watch, "so I will be excused."

"What time is your engagement?"

"Whenever I choose to keep it."

"Well, then I think you will choose to keep it a little later. I have one, too, but am going to spare a few minutes to talk about your father, and I think it best for all of you to be present."

Douglas drew Helen down beside her. The girl was trembling just like a young horse who has felt the first spur. Robert Carter had always said that Helen was the best child in the world just so long as she had her own way. Fortunately her own way was not a very wrong way as a rule, but if there were a clash of wills, good-bye to the will that was not hers.

Who was this bushy-eyebrowed young Caliban who came there ordering her about? She would show him! But in the meantime Douglas had an arm around her and Caliban was talking.

"Your father is a very ill man and as his physician I feel compelled to have a very serious conversation with the family."

"Will he die?" whispered Lucy, all pertness gone from her young face.

“No, my dear, he will not die; but he may do worse than die unless he can be allowed to take the rest that he should have been taking for years.”

“What could be worse than death?” sobbed Nan.

“Uselessness! Chronic nervous prostration! His nerves have lost their elasticity and nothing will cure him but a long rest, absolutely free from care. Worries of all kinds, business, financial, family, every kind, must be kept from him. As I told your mother yesterday, a sea voyage would be the best thing for him, a long, lazy trip. When one gets on the water out of sight of land he kind of loses his identity in the immensity of Creation. That is what I want your father to do – lose his identity. Your mother must go with him to nurse him – he won’t need much nursing, fortunately. And now you girls have got to decide among yourselves what is best to do. I know your financial affairs are none of my business – ”

“Ahem – ” from Helen.

“But I have to make your business my business for the time being on account of my patient. Your father tells me he has absolutely no income except what he gets from his profession. You know that, I suppose?”

“Why no – that is – we – ” hesitated Douglas. “Father never talked business with us.”

“Um hum! I see! Just gave you ample allowances and let you spend ’em?”

“We have never had allowances,” spoke Nan with her funny drawl. “Just made bills instead.”

Dr. Wright flashed an amused look at the girl and for the first time they became aware of the fact that he had a very handsome set of teeth.

“Well, now, for a year I see nothing but for you to manage with very little and maybe not that. You own this house.”

“Of course!” from the scornful Helen. “We can easily keep house here while our parents are away.”

“But, Helen, keep house on what?” asked Douglas.

“Why, just keep house! Just go on living here.”

“But when Father stops working, there is no more money. Can’t you see?”

“Well, then, we will have to charge.”

“Yes, charge on, and when your father gets well, if he does get well, he will have an accumulation of bills to meet which will be so good for his health, won’t it?” The young man looked the scorn which he felt for Helen and addressed all of his remarks after that to Douglas, who listened attentively and gratefully. She well knew it was no pleasant task for him to plunge into their financial affairs, but he explained to her that it was important for his patient to leave town immediately if the change was to come in time, and that left no opportunity for them to consult the friends and relatives who would be the natural ones to go to in this predicament.

“Your mother wishes you to act in her stead and your father is to give you power of attorney so you can attend to any business for him. Can I trust you to get them ready, without bustle and confusion, by to-night? They can take the train to New York leaving here at eight. They can take a boat to the Bermudas and Panama which sails to-morrow. I will go to New York with them and see that they get off safely.”

“Oh, you are very kind,” murmured Douglas.

“Not at all! I have business in New York, anyhow, and I know the surgeon on that particular boat, an old classmate of mine, and I want to put him on to your father’s case. But now we come to the part you girls are to play. It is going to be pretty hard on you, but you are not to see your father before he goes. It would be exciting for him and I want him to avoid all excitement. Arrangements must be made and we must get him off quietly, without bustle. If he sees you, he will begin to question you about what you are going to do while he is away, and as you don’t know yourselves, the old habit that is as much a part of the whole family as fingers and toes will assert itself, and the burden will fall on him, as usual, and I can assure you I will not answer for the consequences if one more ounce of worry

is put on that tired brain. I am going to bring a notary public so he can give you, Miss Douglas, power of attorney to transact any business for him. I am loath to bring even this matter to him, but that is necessary. As for what you are to do with yourselves after your parents leave, that is, of course, for you and your friends to decide. My province as a nerve specialist ends when I get my patient away, but begins again on his return, and if he comes back and finds debts waiting for him, I am pretty sure all the good of the voyage will be done away with. I think his mania is to keep out of debt. How he has managed to do it I can't see, but he tells me the bills are paid up to date. I am awfully sorry for all of you, but I am much sorrier for that fine, unselfish nature upstairs who has borne the heat of the burden absolutely unassisted until he has fallen under it."

"Oh, Dr. Wright! Don't! Don't!" wailed Douglas.

"Brute!" hissed Helen, but whether she meant the young doctor or Helen Carter she wasn't herself quite certain.

"Your mother – " he continued.

"Don't you dare to criticise our mother!" interrupted Helen.

"My dear young lady, I was merely going to remark that your mother seems to be absolutely necessary to the peace and happiness of your father, otherwise I would insist upon his going away alone. Often in these cases it is best for the patient to get entirely away from all members of his family, but I think she has a good effect on him. I must go now and get the notary public so you can enter into your office of vice regent. I'll also make arrangements for the railroad trip and long-distance my friend, the surgeon on the steamer. I'll be back in a jiffy," and Dr. Wright smiled very kindly at Douglas, whose young countenance seemed to have aged years in the last few minutes. "I am trusting you to keep the house quiet and get things in readiness without once appealing to your father."

"I'll do my best."

"That's all any one can do," and George Wright was grateful that there was one person in the house he could look to for sense and calmness. He noted with added confidence that Douglas was very like her father in coloring and that the general shape of their features was similar. "I hope they won't manage to break her in two as they have him," he said to himself.

"We are going to help Douglas all we can," drawled Nan.

"Indeed we are!" exclaimed Lucy. Helen said nothing and did not acknowledge the bow that included her as the young doctor made his exit from the room.

Piercing shrieks came from the rear before the front door was reached!

"Give it to me! Give it to me! I ain't done makin' my puddin' an' it'll be ruind if you don't give it to me! Marmer! Marmer! Make 'em give it to me!"

A door noisily opened above and a rather sharp call descended from the court of appeals.

"What does he want? Whatever it is, give it to him!"

"But, Mis' Carter, he done been in de silber draw' and 'stracted de tea strainer an' dat new fangled sparrowgrass flapper an' done took de bes' fluted bum bum dish fer tow mold his mud pies. I done tol' him not tow meddle in de mud no mo' fo' to-morrow as he is been washed an' dressed in his las' clean suit till de wash comes in. Jes' look at him! An' jes' listen tow him."

The irate old butler, Oscar, held by the hand the screaming, squirming Bobby. One could hardly help listening to him and it was equally hard to help looking at him. His beauty was almost unearthly: a slender little fellow of six, with dark brown hair that curled in spite of the barber's shears, the mouth of a cherub and eyes that were the envy of all his sisters – great dark eyes that when once you looked in them you were forced to give up any anger you might feel for him and just tumble head over heels in love with him. That is what Dr. Wright did. He just fell in love with him. Enraged for a moment by the noise that he was trying so hard to make the household feel must be kept from his patient, he started angrily down the hall toward the angelic culprit with a stern:

"Shhh! Your father is ill! You must stop that racket!" But one look in those eyes, and he changed his tactics. Taking the naughty child by his dirty little hand, he said: "Say, Bob, how would you like

to come out with me in my car and help me? I've a lot of work to do and need some one to blow my horn for me and stick out an arm when we turn the corners."

"Bully! How much wages does you give?"

"A milk shake if you are good, and another kind if you are bad! Is it a go?"

"Sure!" And once more quiet reigned in the house. The upstairs door closed much more softly than it had opened, and Oscar cheerfully cleaned the silver that Bobby had left in such a mess.

CHAPTER III

SILK STOCKINGS AND LAMB CHOPS

“Well! What are we to do about it?” queried Nan as the front door closed on the doctor and their precious torment.

“Do? Do what has come to us to do as quickly as we can. I am going to see that mother’s clothes are packed and father’s, too. It does seem strange to be looking after his things. Oh, girls, just think how we have always let him do it himself! I can’t remember even having darned a sock for him in all my life,” and Douglas gave a little sob. “This is no time for bawling, though, I am going to let Dr. Wright see that I am not just a doll baby.”

“Dr. Wright, indeed!” sniffed Helen. “Hateful, rude thing!”

“Why, Helen, I don’t see why you need have it in for him. I think he was just splendid! But I can’t wait to tell you what I think about him; I must get busy.” Douglas picked up her burden with very much her father’s look and hastened off to do her young and inexperienced best.

“As for saying we can’t see Father before he goes, it is nothing but his arbitrariness that dictates such nonsense,” stormed Helen to the two younger girls. “He is just constituting himself boss of the whole Carter family. I intend to see Father and let him know how much I love him. I’d like to know how it would help any to have poor dear Daddy go off without once seeing his girls. Hasn’t he always been seeing us and haven’t we always taken all our troubles to him? How would we like it if he’d let us go on a trip and not come near to wish us *bon voyage*? You silly youngsters can be hoodwinked by this bumptious young doctor if you like, but I just bet you he can’t control me! I’ve a great mind to go up to Father’s room right this minute.”

“If you go, I’m going, too,” from Lucy.

“Neither one of you is going,” said Nan quietly. “Helen, you are acting this way just because you are ashamed of yourself. You ought to be ashamed. I know I am so mortified I can hardly hold up my head. We have been actually criminal in our selfishness. I don’t intend ever as long as I live to get a new dress or a new hat or a new anything, and when I do, I’m going to shop on the wrong side of Broad and get the very cheapest and plainest I can find.”

“Nonsense! What does this ugly young man know of our affairs and what money Daddy has in the bank? I don’t see that he is called on to tell us when we shall and shan’t make bills. He is pretending that our own Father is crazy or something. Won’t answer for the consequences! I reckon he won’t. Why should he be right in his diagnosis any more than Dr. Davis or Dr. Drew or Dr. Slaughter or any of the rest of them? Nervous prostration! Why, that is a woman’s disease. I bet Daddy will be good and mad when he finds out what this young idiot is giving him. How we will tease him!”

“But Dr. Wright is not an idiot and is not ugly and is doing the very best he can do. Do you think he liked giving it to us so? Of course he didn’t. I could see he just hated it. He would have let us alone except he sees we haven’t a ray of sense among us, except maybe Douglas. She showed almost human intelligence.”

“Speak for yourself, Miss Nan. Maybe you haven’t any sense, but, thank you, I’ve got just as much as Douglas or that nasty old Dr. Wright or anybody else, in fact.”

“Well, take in your sign then! You certainly are behaving like a nut now.”

“And you? You think it shows sense to say that man is not ugly? Why, I could have done a better job on a face with a hatchet. He’s got a mug like Stony Man, that big mountain up at Luray that looks like a man.”

“That’s just what I thought,” said Nan, “and that is what I liked about him. He looked kind of like a rocky cliff and his eyes were like blue flowers, growing kind of high up, out of reach, but once he

smiled at me and I knew they were not out of reach, really. When he smiled sure enough and showed his beautiful white teeth, it made me think of the sun coming out suddenly on the mountain cliff.”

“Well, Nan, if you can get some poetry out of this extremely commonplace young man you are a wonder. I am going down to see about my new hat, so I’ll bid you good-bye.”

“If you are getting another new hat, I intend to have one, too!” clamored Lucy.

“Helen,” said Douglas, coming back into the library. “Of course you are going to countermand the order for the hat that, after all, you do not really need.”

“Countermand it! Why, please?”

“You heard what Dr. Wright said, surely. You must have taken in the seriousness of this business.”

“Seriousness much! I heard a very bumptious young doctor holding forth on what is no doubt his first case, laying down the law to us as though he were kin to us about what we shall eat and wear!”

“Helen, you astonish me! I thought you thought that you loved Father more than any of us.”

“So I do! None of you could love him as much as I do. I love him so much that I do not intend to stand for this nonsense about his going off for months on a dirty old boat without ever even being allowed to hug his girls. I bet he won’t let this creature boss him any more than I will. Daddy said I could have another hat just so I get a blue one. He doesn’t think the one I got is becoming, either,” and Helen flounced off up to her room.

“Douglas, what do you think is the matter with her? I have never seen Helen act like this before,” said Nan anxiously.

“I think she is trying to shut her eyes to Father’s condition. Helen never could stand anything being the matter with Father. You know she always did hate and despise doctors, too. Has ever since she was a little girl when they took out her tonsils. She seemed to think it was their fault. She will come to herself soon,” and Douglas wiped off another one of the tears that would keep coming no matter how hard she tried to hold them back.

Indeed, Helen was a puzzle to her sisters, and had they met her for the first time as you, my readers have, no doubt they would have formed the same opinion of her as you must have: a selfish, heartless, headstrong girl. Now Helen was in reality none of these terrible things, except headstrong. Thoughtless she was and spoiled, but generous to a fault, with a warm and loving heart. Her love for her father was intense and she simply would not see that he was ill. As Douglas said, she disliked and mistrusted all doctors. If the first and second and third were wrong in their diagnoses, why not the fourth? As for this absurd talk about money – what business was it of this young stranger to put his finger in their financial pie?

She shut her mind up tight and refused to understand what Dr. Wright had endeavored to explain to them, that there was no time to call in consultation their old friends and relatives. Besides, he wanted no excitement for the sick man, no adieux from friends, no bustle or confusion. He just wanted to spirit his patient away and get him out of sight of land as fast as possible.

How could a perfect stranger understand her dear father better than she, his own daughter, did? Nervous prostration, indeed! Why, her father had nerves of steel. You could fire a pistol off right by his ear and he would not bat an eyelash! She worked herself up even to thinking that they were doing a foolish thing to allow this beetle-browed young man to carry off their mother and father, sending them to sea in a leaky boat, no doubt, with some plot for their destruction all hatched up with this ship’s surgeon, this one time classmate.

“To be sure, he was nice to Bobby,” she said to herself as she sat in her room, undecided whether to go get the new hat in spite of Douglas or perhaps twist the other one around so it would be more becoming. “That may be part of his deep laid scheme – to get the confidence of the child and maybe kidnap him.

“I’ll give in about the hat, but I’ll not give in about seeing Daddy before he goes – I’m going to see him right this minute and find out for myself just how sick he is, and if he, too, is hypnotized

into thinking this doctor man is any good. He shan't go away if he doesn't want to. Poor little Mumsy is too easy and confiding."

So Helen settled this matter to her own satisfaction, convincing herself that it was really her duty to go see her father and unearth the machinations of this scheming Dr. Wright, who was so disapproving of her. That really was where the shoe pinched with poor Helen: his disapproval. She was an extremely attractive girl and was accustomed to admiration and approval. Her youngest sister, Lucy, was about the only person of her acquaintance who found any real fault with her. Why, that young man seemed actually to scorn her! What reason had he to come pussy-footing into the library where she and her sisters were holding an intimate conversation, and all unannounced speak to them with his raucous voice so that she nearly jumped out of her skin? Come to think of it, though, his voice was not really raucous, but rather pleasant and deep. Anyhow, he took her at a disadvantage from the beginning and sneered at her and bossed her, and she hated him and did not trust him one inch.

"Daddy, may I come in?"

Without knocking, Helen opened her father's door and ran into his room. He was lying on the sofa, covered with a heavy rug, although it was a very warm day in May. His eyes were closed and his countenance composed and for a moment the girl's heart stopped beating – could he be dead? He looked so worn and gaunt. Strange she had not noticed it before. She had only thought he was getting a little thin, but she hated fat men, anyhow, and gloried in her father's athletic leanness, as she put it. Most men of his age, forty-three, had a way of getting wide in the girth, but not her father. Forty-three! Why, this man lying there looked sixty-three! His face was so gray, his mouth so drawn.

Robert Carter opened his eyes and sighed wearily.

"Who is that?" rather querulously. "Oh, Helen! I must have been asleep. I dreamed I was out far away on the water. Just your mother and I, far, far away! It was rather jolly. Funny I was trying to add up about silk stockings and I made such a ridiculous mistake. You see there are five of you who wear silk stockings, not counting Bobby and me. I wasn't counting in socks. Five persons having two legs apiece makes ten legs – silk stockings cost one dollar apiece, no, a pair – fifty cents apiece – that makes five dollars for ten legs. Everybody has to put on a new pair every day, so that makes three hundred and sixty-five pairs a year, three hundred and sixty-six in leap year, seven hundred and thirty stockings – that makes one thousand, eight hundred and twenty-five dollars – thirty, in leap year – just for stockings. Seems preposterous, doesn't it? But here was my mistake, right here – people don't have to put on a new pair every day but just a clean pair, so I have to do my calculating all over. You can help me, honey. How many pairs of silk stockings does it take to run one of you? You just say one, and I can compute the rest."

"Oh, Daddy, I don't know," and Helen burst out crying.

"Well, don't cry about it. It seems funny for stockings to make any one cry. Do you know, I've been crying about them, too? It is so confusing for people to have two legs and for leap year to have one more day, so some years people have to have more – maybe not have more, but change them oftener. I cry out of one eye about stockings, and the other sheds tears about French chops. I feel very much worried about French chops. It seems they sell them by the piece and not by the pound as they do loin chops – ten cents apiece, so the bills say. We usually get a dozen and a half for a meal – eighteen – that's a dozen and a half. Now there are seven of us and the four servants, that makes eleven, not quite a dozen. What I am worried about is that some of you don't get two chops apiece. I am wondering all the time which ones don't eat enough. There is nothing at all on one little French chop, although I'm blessed if I could make one go down me now. But, honey, promise me if your mother and I do take this trip that this young man, whose name has escaped me, is going to arrange for us, that you will find out who it is among you who eats only one chop and make 'em eat more. I am afraid it is Nan and Bobby. They are more like your mother, and of course fairies don't really eat anything to speak of – but it must be of the best – always of the best. She has never known anything but luxury, and luxury she must have. What difference does it make to me? I love to work – but the

days are too short. Take some off of the night then – six hours in bed is enough for any man. Edison says even that is too much. What's that young man's name? Well, whatever it is, I like him. He should have been an architect – I bet his foundations would have gone deep enough and the authorities would never have condemned one of his walls as unsafe. That's what they did to me, but it wasn't my fault – Shockoe Creek was the trouble – creeping up like a thief in the night and undermining my work."

As Robert Carter rambled on in this weird, disconnected way, the tears were streaming down his face and Helen, crouched on the floor by his side, was sobbing her heart out. Could this be her Daddy? This broken, garrulous man with the gray face and tears, womanish tears, flowing shamelessly from his tired eyes? Dr. Wright was right! Their father was a very ill man and one more ounce of care would be too much for his tired brain. Had she done him harm? Maybe her coming in had upset his reason, but she had not talked, only let him ramble on.

A car stopping at the door! The doctor and Bobby returning with the notary public! What must she do? Here she was in her father's room, disobeying the stern commands of the physician who could see with half his professional eye that she had harmed his patient. She had time to get out before the doctor could get upstairs – but no! not sneak!

"I may be a murderess and am a selfish, headstrong, bad, foolish, vain, extravagant wretch, but I am not a sneak and I will stay right here and take the ragging that I deserve – and no doubt will get," remembering the lash that Dr. Wright had not spared.

The doctor entered the room very quietly, "Pussy-footing still," said Helen to herself. He gave her only a casual glance, seeming to feel no surprise at her presence, but went immediately to his patient, who smiled through his tears at this young man in whom he was putting his faith.

"I've been asleep, doctor, and thought I was out on the water. When Helen came in I awoke, but I was very glad for her to come in so she could promise me to look into a little matter of French chops that was worrying me. She and I have been having a little crying party about silk stockings. They seem to make her cry, too. Funny for me to cry. I have never cried in my life that I can remember, even when I got a licking as a boy."

"Crying is not so bad for some one who never has cried or had anything to cry for." Helen had a feeling maybe he meant it for her but he never looked at her. "And now, Mr. Carter, I have a notary public downstairs and I am going to ask you to sign a paper giving to your daughter, Douglas, power of attorney in your absence. You get off to New York this evening and sail to-morrow."

"But, Dr. Whatsyourname, I can't leave until I attend to tickets and things," feebly protested the nervous man.

"Tickets bought; passage on steamer to Bermuda and Panama engaged; slow going steamer where you can lie on deck and loaf and loaf!"

"Tickets bought? I have never been anywhere in my life where I have not had to attend to everything myself. It sounds like my own funeral. I reckon kind friends will step in then and attend to the arrangements."

"Well, let's call this a wedding trip instead of a funeral. I will be your best man and you and your bride can spend your honeymoon on this vessel. The best man sometimes does attend to the tickets and in this case even decided where the honeymoon should be spent. I chose a Southern trip because I want you to be warm. Very few persons go to Bermuda in May, but I feel sure you will be able to rest more if you don't have to move around to keep warm."

"Yes, that's fine, and Annette is from the extreme South and delights in warmth and sunlight. I feel sure you have done right and am just lying down like a baby and leaving everything to you," and Robert Carter closed his eyes, smiling feebly.

At a summons from the doctor, Douglas and the notary public entered the room. Helen, who had stayed to get the blowing up that she had expected from Dr. Wright, not having got it, still stayed just because she did not know how to leave. No one noticed her or paid the least attention to her except the notary, who bowed perfunctorily.

“This is the paper. You had better read it to see if it is right. It gives your daughter full power to act in your absence.” Dr. Wright spoke slowly and gently and his voice never seemed to startle the sick man.

“Is Miss Carter of age?” asked the notary. “Otherwise she would have some trouble in any legal matter that might arise.”

“Of age! No! I am only eighteen.”

“I never thought of that,” said Mr. Carter.

“Nor I, fool that I am,” muttered the young physician.

“Oh, well, let me make you her guardian, or better still, give you power of attorney,” suggested Mr. Carter.

“Me, oh, I never bargained for that!” The patient feebly began to weep at this obstacle. You never can tell what is going to upset a nervous prostrate. “Well, all right. I can do it if it is up to me,” the doctor muttered. “Put my name in where we have Miss Carter’s,” he said to the notary. “George Wright is my name.”

“I’m so glad to know your name; that is one of the things that has been worrying me,” said the patient, as he signed his name and the notary affixed his seal after the oaths were duly taken.

CHAPTER IV

GONE!

"I am waiting, Dr. Wright," said Helen, after the notary public had taken his departure and Douglas had gone to put finishing touches to the very rapid packing of steamer trunks, Mrs. Carter helping in her pathetically inefficient way. Helen stood at the top of the stairs to intercept the doctor as he left the patient's room.

"Waiting for what?"

"For you to tell me you were astonished to find me in my father's room when you had given express orders that none of us were to see him."

"But I was not astonished."

"Oh, you expected to find me?"

"I did not know whether I should find you, but I knew very well you would go there."

"So you thought I would sneak in and sneak out?"

"I did not call it sneaking but I was pretty sure you had no confidence in me and would do your own sweet will. I hope you are satisfied now that it was best not to excite your father."

"But I did not excite him. He just talked in that terrible way himself. You are cruel to say I made him worse!"

"But I did not say so. Certainly, however, you made him no better. He said himself he waked when you came in and you did not deny it. Of course, sleep is always 'kind Nature's sweet restorer.' If you will let me pass, I will now go to see Miss Douglas about ordering your car for the train this evening. We have only about an hour's time and there is still a great deal to do. There is the expressman now for the trunks."

"Can't even trust me to order the chauffeur to have the car at the door," cried Helen bitterly to herself as the doctor went past her. "I am of no use to any one in the whole world and I wish I were dead."

The look of agony in the girl's face made an impression on the young man in spite of the strong resentment he felt toward her. He was somewhat like Helen in that he was not accustomed to disapproval, and being flouted by this schoolgirl was not a pleasant morsel to swallow. He felt sure of his diagnosis of Mr. Carter's case, for, having served for several years as head assistant in a large sanitarium in New York, he was well acquainted with the symptoms of nervous prostration. Of course, his sending the patient on a sea voyage instead of placing him in a sanitarium was somewhat of a risk, but he felt it was the best thing to do, reading the man's character as he had.

Helen's scorn and doubt of him and her seeming selfishness had certainly done little to recommend her in his eyes, but gentleness and sympathy were the strongest points in George Wright's make-up, and as he went by the girl he could read in her face agony, extreme agony and desperation. He went up the steps again, two at a time, and said gently:

"Miss Helen, would you be so kind as to see about the car for me? Order it for 7.45. I am going to put them on at the downtown station and get them all installed in the drawing-room with the door shut so they need not see all the Richmond people who are sure to be taking this night train to New York and getting on at Elba, the uptown stop."

"Yes – and thank you."

"By Jove," thought the young man, "that girl is some looker! If she had the sense of her sister Douglas, I believe she would be pretty nice, too."

Helen's whole countenance had changed. From the proud, scornful girl, she had turned again into her own self, the Helen her sisters knew and loved.

"You might see that Bobby is kept kind of quiet, too. Tell him I will take him out with me again soon and let him blow my horn and poke out his arm when we turn the corners, if he will be quiet for an hour."

"All right," said Helen meekly, wondering at her own docility in so calmly being bossed by this person whom she still meant to despise. She interviewed the chauffeur, ordering the car at the proposed time, and then captured Bobby, who was making his way to his father's room. She inveigled him into the back yard where she kept him in a state of bliss, having her supper out there with him and playing tea party to his heart's content, even pretending to eat his wonderful mud "pies an' puddin's."

It was almost time for the dread departure and still she kept watch over Bobby. The mother came out in the back yard to kiss her children good-by. Poor little mother! The meadow brook has surely come on rocky places now. What effect is it to have? Perhaps the channel will be broadened and deepened when the shoals are past. Who knows?

Gone, at last! No one even to wave farewell, so implicitly did the Carter household obey the stern mandates of the doctor. Even the negro servants kept in the background while their beloved master and mistress were borne away by the smoothly rolling car.

"Seems mos' lak a funeral," sobbed Oscar, "lak a funeral in yellow feber times down in Mobile, whar I libed onct. Nobody went to them funerals fer fear er ketching sompen from de corpse. Saddes' funerals ebber I seed."

The girls were sure those funerals could not have been any sadder than this going away of their parents. Once more they gathered in the library, as forlorn a family as one could find in the whole world, they were sure. Their eyes were red and their noses redder. Douglas had had the brunt of the labor in getting the packing done and had held out wonderfully until it was all over, and now she had fallen in a little heap on the sofa and was sobbing her soul out.

Nan was doing her best to comfort her while Lucy was bawling like a baby on Helen's shoulder, truce between the two declared for the time being.

"I feel just like the British would if the Rock of Gibraltar had turned into brown sugar and melted into the sea," declared Helen, when the storm had blown itself out and a calmness of despair had settled down on all of them.

"That's just it," agreed Nan. "Father has always been just like Gibraltar to us. His picture would have done just as well for the Prudential Life Insurance ad as Gibraltar did."

"If you could just have heard him talk as he did to me. Oh, girls, I feel as though I had killed him!" and Helen gave a dry sob that made Lucy put an arm around her. "I have sworn a solemn swear to myself: I am not going to wear a single silk stocking nor yet a pair of them until Father comes home, and not then unless he is well. I have some old cotton ones that I got for the Camp-Fire Girls' hike, the only ones I ever had since I can remember, and I am going to wear those until I can get some more. I hate 'em, too! They make my toes feel like old rusty potatoes in a bag."

This made the girls laugh. A laugh made them feel better. Maybe behind the clouds the sun was, after all, still shining and they would not have to wear rubbers and raincoats forever.

"You remind me of the old man we saw up at Wytheville who had such very long whiskers, having sworn never to cut them off or trim them until the Democrats elected a President," drawled Nan. "Those whiskers did some growing between Cleveland's and Wilson's Administrations. You remember when Wilson was elected and he shaved them off, his wife made a big sofa cushion out of them; and the old man had become so used to the great weight on his chin, that now he was freed from it, his chin just naturally flew up in the air and made him look like his check rein was too tight."

"Yes, I remember," declared Lucy; "and his wife said she was going to strap the cushion back on where his whiskers used to be if he didn't stop holding his head so haughty." Another laugh and the sun came out in their hearts.

Dr. Wright had assured them that their father would be well. He had had many patients who had been in much worse condition who were now perfectly well. Mr. Carter's case had been taken

hold of in time and the doctor was trusting to his splendid constitution and the quiet of the ocean to work wonders in him. In the meantime, it was necessary for the girls to begin to think about what they were to do.

“I think we had better not try to come to any conclusion to-night,” said Douglas, “we are all of us so worn out, at least I am. We will sleep on it and then to-morrow get together and all try to bring some plan and idea. There was almost no money left in the bank after the tickets for the voyage were bought and money put in Mother’s bag for incidentals.”

“Poor little Muddy, just think of her having to be the purse bearer! I don’t believe she knows fifty cents from a quarter,” sighed Nan.

“Well, Mother will have to go to school just like the rest of us. I fancy we only know the difference in size and not much about the value of either. Dr. Wright wrote a check for the amount in bank, showing from Father’s check book, and after he had paid for the tickets, he left the rest for me to put to my account. I am awfully mortified, but I don’t know how to deposit money – and as for writing a check – I’d sooner write a thesis on French history. I know I could do it better.”

Douglas smothered a little sigh. This was no time to think of self or to repine about her private ambitions, but somehow the thought would creep in that this meant good-by to college for her. She had planned to take examinations for Bryn Mawr early in June and was confident of passing. She had her father’s ability to stick to a thing until it was accomplished, and no matter how distasteful a subject was to her, she mastered it. This was her graduating year at school. Now all joy of the approaching commencement was gone. She was sorry that her dress was already bought, and in looking over the check book, she had found it was paid for, too. Forty dollars for one dress and that of material that had at the best but little wearing quality! Beautiful, of course, but when a family had been spending money as freely as this family had always done, what business had one of them with a forty dollar white dress with no wear to it when the balance in the bank showed only eighty-three dollars and fifty-nine cents?

A sharp ringing of the front door bell interrupted Douglas’s musings and made all of the sisters conscious of their red eyes and noses.

“Who under Heaven? It is nine o’clock!”

“Cousin Lizzie Somerville, of course. She always rings like the house was on fire.”

It was Miss Elizabeth Somerville, a second cousin of their father. She came into the library in rather unseemly haste for one of her usual dignity.

“Where is your father?” she demanded, without the ceremony of greeting the girls. “I must see him immediately. Your mother, too, of course, if she wants to come down, but I must see your father.”

“But he is gone!”

“Gone where? When will he return?”

“In about two months,” said Helen coolly. Helen was especially gifted in tackling Cousin Lizzie, who was of an overbearing nature that needed handling. “He and Mother have gone to Bermuda.”

“Bermuda in the summer! Nonsense! Tell me when I can see him, as it is of the greatest importance. I should think you could see that I am in trouble and not stand there teasing me,” and since it was to be a day of tears, Cousin Lizzie burst out crying, too.

“Oh, Cousin Lizzie, I am so sorry! I did not mean to tease. I am not teasing. Father is ill, you must have noticed how knocked up he has been looking lately, and the doctor has taken him with Mother to New York. They have just gone, and they are to sail on a slow steamer to Bermuda and Panama in the morning. Please let us help you if we can.”

“You help! A lot of silly girls! It is about my nephew Lewis!” and the poor lady wept anew.

CHAPTER V

LEWIS SOMERVILLE

“Lewis! What on earth can be the matter with him?” chorused the girls.

“Matter enough! He has been shipped!”

“Shipped? Oh, Cousin Lizzie, you can’t mean it!” exclaimed Douglas, drying her eyes as she began to realize that she was not the only miserable person in the world whose ambitions had gone awry.

“I am sure if he has been fired, it is from no fault of his own,” declared Nan, who was a loyal soul and always insisted that her friends and relatives were in the right until absolute proof to the contrary was established.

“Well, whether it was his fault or not, I am not prepared to say. ‘Where there is so much smoke there must be some fire.’”

The girls had to smile at this, as there was never a time when Cousin Lizzie did not have a proverb ready to suit the occasion.

“Yes, but the fire might not have been of his kindling,” insisted Nan.

“Please tell us what the trouble is, Cousin Lizzie, if you don’t mind talking about it,” begged Douglas. “Has Lewis really left West Point for good? I can’t believe it.”

“The trouble is: ‘Evil communications corrupt good manners.’ If Lewis had not been with the companions that he has chosen, he would not have gotten into this trouble. Surely Solomon was wise indeed when he said: ‘Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son, but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father.’ I am glad my poor brother is dead and not here to witness his son’s disgrace.”

“Cousin Lizzie, I do not believe that Lewis has done anything disgraceful,” insisted Nan, speaking almost quickly for once.

“Well, it is a disgrace in my mind for the son and grandson of Confederate soldiers to be dismissed from a Yankee institution, whether he was in fault or not. ‘As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place.’ A Somerville’s place is in the South and it was always against my wishes that Lewis went to West Point.”

“Please tell us what the trouble is, what Lewis did or didn’t do at West Point,” said Helen in the determined voice that usually made Cousin Lizzie stop her proverbs long enough to give the information required.

“‘Hazing a plebe,’ is what he said. What a plebe is or what hazing is I do not know, but whatever it is, Lewis says he was not mixed up in it, but he, with eight other second classmen, were let out. The words are his, not mine. All I know is that he was discharged and is at my house now in a state of dejection bordering on insanity.”

“Poor boy! We are so sorry for him. What is he going to do now?” asked Douglas.

Here was another disappointment for Douglas. Her cousin, Lewis Somerville, was one of the dearest friends she had in the world. He was two years her senior and had made it his business since they were tiny tots to protect her and look after her on all occasions. They had had a plan for the following year that now, of course, had fallen through. She was to have come to West Point from Bryn Mawr to the finals. He would then have been a third classman and able to make her have a rip-roaring time, as he had expressed it.

Lewis in a state of dejection bordering on insanity! That was unbelievable. If there ever was a gayer, happier person than Lewis, she had never seen him.

“Do? Goodness knows!”

“Well, all I can say,” put in Nan, “is that Uncle Sam is a fool not to know that Lewis is a born soldier, and if he wants to prepare himself to defend his country, he should be allowed to do so. Oh, I don’t care what he has done – I just know he hasn’t done it!”

“I’m going to ’phone him this minute and tell him to come around here!” and Helen jumped up from her seat, thereby waking Lucy, who had dropped asleep on her shoulder, worn out with the stress of emotion.

“If you are, so am I – whatever it is,” declared Lucy, rubbing her eyes, as determined as ever to keep up with Helen or die in the attempt.

“Hello! is this you, Lewis?” as the connection was quickly made.

“Well,” in a tired, dreary voice. “What is it?”

“This is me, Lewis, Helen Carter! We are all sitting up here dressed in our best waiting for you to come to see us. Douglas says if you don’t hurry she, for one, is going to bed.”

“What’s that?” in a little brisker tone.

“Say, Lewis, we are in an awful lot of trouble. You know Father is ill and has had to go away and we don’t know what is to become of us. We need your advice terribly – ”

“Be ’round in a jiffy,” and so he was.

“That was very tactful of you, Helen,” said Cousin Lizzie lugubriously. “You know ‘Misery loves company.’” But a peal from the front door bell interrupted further quotations and Lewis Somerville came tearing into the house in answer to Helen’s S. O. S.

He did look as dejected as one of his make-up could. It is hard to be dejected very long when one is just twenty, in perfect health, with naturally high spirits and the strength to remove mountains tingling in the veins. A jury of women could not have shipped the young would-be soldier, and it must have taken very hard-hearted men, very determined on maintaining discipline, deliberately to have cut this young fellow’s career in two. Our army must be full of very fine young men if they can so lightly give up such a specimen as this Lewis Somerville. Imagine a young giant of noble proportions, as erect as an ash sapling that has had all the needed room in which to grow, a head like Antinous and frank blue eyes that could no more have harbored a lie than that well-cut, honest mouth could have spoken one.

“I didn’t do it and just to let me know that you don’t believe I did, you have got to kiss me all around.”

“Nonsense, Lewis! Helen and I are too old to kiss you even if you are a cousin,” and Douglas got behind Cousin Lizzie.

“Quite right, Douglas, ‘The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge.’ Lewis is not such very close kin, besides.”

“Why, Aunt Lizzie, I did not expect you to desert me.”

“It is not good to eat much honey, so for men to search their own glory is not glory.”

“Well, Nan and Lucy will kiss me, anyhow. They believe I did not do it.”

“We are sure you are telling the truth,” said Douglas gravely. “We do not know yet what they say you did.”

“They say I helped a lot of fellows tie a plebe to a tree and drop ice down his back, making out it was red hot pennies, until the fellow fainted from his fancied injuries. I never did it, but if I had, it wouldn’t have been a patching on the things the second classmen did to me last year when I was a plebe, and wild horses would not have dragged a complaint from me. It was done by some men who are my chums, but I declare I was not with the crowd.”

“We know it! we know it!” from all the girls.

“But I don’t want to talk about myself – I am so anxious to hear what is the matter with Cousin Robert. Let’s let up on me and talk about your trouble, and if I can help, please command me.”

“Father is very ill,” said Douglas soberly. “He has been working too hard for a long time and now his nerves have just given way and he has had to stop and go on a trip. Dr. Wright assures us

that he has stopped in time and a sea trip and a year's rest will completely restore him. It has come on us so suddenly that we have not had time to catch our breath even."

"And who is this Dr. Wright?" asked Cousin Lizzie. "I thought Dr. Davis was your family physician. Some Yankee, I'll be bound, with all kinds of new notions."

"He is from Washington recently, but I believe he came originally from New York State."

"Do you mean that you let a perfect stranger pick up your parents and send them off on a journey without consulting a soul?"

"But it was important to avoid all confusion and discussion. Dr. Wright has been lovely about it all. He even got a notary public so I could be given power of attorney to attend to any business that might come up. It so happened, though, that my being under age was a drawback and Father gave him power of attorney instead."

"Douglas Carter! Do you mean to say that a strange young Yankee doctor that has only been living in Richmond a little while has the full power to sell your father out and do anything he chooses with his estate? Preposterous!"

"But there isn't any estate," objected Douglas, and Helen could not help a little gleam of satisfaction creeping into her eyes. She was not the only person who felt that Dr. Wright had been, to say the least, presumptuous.

"No estate! Why I thought Robert Carter was very well off. What has he done with his money, please?"

"We have just lived on it. We didn't know," sadly from Douglas.

"I never heard of such extravagance. 'A fool and his money are soon parted.'"

"We have got just exactly eighty-three dollars and fifty-nine cents in the bank. Father owns this house and a side of a mountain in Albemarle, and that is all."

"Mercy, child! I can't believe it."

"We have got to live somehow, and I believe we all feel that it would be very bad for Father to come back and find debts to be paid off. He has such a horror of debt that he has always paid the bills each month. What do you think we could do – something to make money, I mean? Father was in such a nervous state we could not consult him, and Mother, poor little Mother, of course she does not understand business at all."

"Humph! I should say not! And what do you chits of girls know about it, either? Are you meaning to stay alone, all un-chaperoned, until this Yankee doctor thinks it is time to let your parents return? Just as like as not there is nothing the matter with your father but a touch of malaria."

"We had not thought of a chaperone, as we have been so miserable about Father we could not think of ourselves. If we are going to make a living, we won't need chaperones, anyhow."

"Make a living, indeed! You are to stay right here in your home and I will come stay with you, and you can curtail your expenses somewhat by dismissing one servant and giving up your car. Robert Carter is not the kind of man who would want his eighteen-year-old daughter and others even younger to go out into the world to make a living. He would rather die than have such a thing happen."

"But we are not going to have him die," broke in Helen. "I thought just as you do, Cousin Lizzie, until I saw him this afternoon and realized how worried he has been. We are going to do something and there are to be no debts awaiting him, either. What do you think of boarders? Do you think we could get any?"

"Who on earth would board with us, here in Richmond? Everybody knows what a trifling lot we are. If we have boarders, it will have to be on the side of the mountain in Albemarle," said Nan, and as usual every one stopped to hear what she had to say. "Besides, a boarding house in summer shuts up shop in cities. Country board is the thing. Let's rent our house furnished for a year and go to the mountains."

“But there are nothing but trees and rocks on the side of the mountain in Albemarle,” objected Douglas; “not a piece of a house except a log cabin near the top built by the sick Englishman who used to live there.”

“No room for boarders in that, I know, as Father pointed it out to me once from the train when we were on our way to Wytheville. It had one room and maybe two. It must command a wonderful view. You could see it for miles and miles and when you get up there, there is no telling what you can see. It would make a great camp – Girls! Girls! Cousin Lizzie! Lewis! All of you! I’ve got a scheme! It just came to me!” and Helen jumped up and ran around and hugged everybody, even the cousin she and Douglas had grown too big to kiss.

“Well, cough it up! We are just as anxious as can be to share your idea, or is it so big it got stuck on the way,” laughed Lewis, accepting the caress as it was meant.

“Let’s have a boarding camp, with Cousin Lizzie to chaperone us! I know just lots of girls who would simply die to go, and Albemarle is close enough for week-enders to pour in on us.”

“Hurrah! Hurrah! And I bid to be man-of-all work! I know rafts of fellows who would want to come.”

“Yes, and let’s call it Week End Camp,” said Nan. “Week to be spelled W-E-A-K. What do you think of the plan, Cousin Lizzie? If you are to be chaperone, it seems to me you should be consulted the first thing.”

“Don’t ask me, child. Things are moving too rapidly for me. We must go a little more slowly,” and truly the old lady did look dazed indeed. “‘More haste, less speed,’ is a very good adage.”

“Well, Cousin Lizzie, it does sound crazy in a way, but do you know, I believe we could really do it and do it very well,” said Douglas. “I consider Helen a genius to have thought of such a thing. I don’t think the outlay need be very great, and surely the living would be cheap when once we get there.”

“But, my dear, at my age I could not begin to eat out of doors. I have not done such a thing since I can remember but once, and then I went with the United Daughters of the Confederacy on a picnic. The undertaker went ahead with chairs and tables so everything was done in decency and order.”

Nan’s “Funeral baked meats!” made them all laugh, even Cousin Lizzie.

“I am going to have a short khaki suit with leggings coming way up,” declared Helen, who could not contemplate anything without seeing herself dressed to suit the occasion.

“Me, too,” sleepily from Lucy, who was trying to keep awake long enough to find out what it all meant.

“Aunt Lizzie, I wish you would consent. It all depends on you. You could eat in the cabin and sleep in the cabin and not camp out at all. I could go up right away and build the camp. I’d just love to have something to do. Bill Tinsley, from Charlottesville, got shipped with me and I’m pretty sure he’d join me. You’d like Bill, he’s so quaint. We are both of us great carpenters and could make a peach of a job of it. Do, please, Aunt Lizzie!”

Could this be the young man who, only ten minutes ago, she had described as being in a state of dejection bordering on insanity? This enthusiastic boy with his eyes dancing in joyful anticipation of manual labor to be plunged into? If she consented to go to the mountains, thereby no doubt making herself very uncomfortable, she might save her beloved nephew from doing the thing that she was dreading more than all others, dreading it so much that she had been afraid to give voice to it: going to France to fight with the Allies.

“Well, Lewis, if this plan means that you will find occupation and happiness, I will consent. I can’t bear to think of your being idle. ‘Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.’”

“Oh, Cousin Lizzie, I think you are just splendid!” exclaimed Helen.

And, indeed, Miss Elizabeth Somerville was splendid in her way. She was offering herself on the altar of aunthood. It was a real sacrifice for her to consent to this wild plan of going to the mountains. She hated snakes, and while she did not confess that she hated Nature, she certainly had no love for her. Her summer outings had meant, heretofore, comfortable hotels at the springs or

seashore, where bridge was the rule and Nature the exception. The promise of being allowed to sleep in the cabin and even eat in it was not any great inducement. A log cabin, built and lived in and finally, no doubt, died in, by a sick Englishman was not very pleasant to contemplate. Miss Lizzie was very old-fashioned in all her ideas with the exception of germs, and she was very up-to-date as to them. No modern scientist knew more about them or believed in them more implicitly. Oh, well! She could take along plenty of C. N. and sulphur candles and crude carbolic. That would kill the germs. She would find out the latest cure for snake bite, and with a pack of cards for solitaire perhaps she could drag out an existence until Robert Carter and Annette got home from this mad trip. All she hoped was that nobody would wake her up to see the sun rise and that she would not be called on to admire the moon every time there was a moon.

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