

Johnston Annie Fellows

Mary Ware in Texas



Annie Johnston

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CHAPTER I

IN SAN ANTONIO

The musicians were tuning their instruments somewhere behind the palms in the hotel courtyard. It was one of the older hotels of San Antonio, much sought by Northern tourists on account of that same inner garden, around which the big building stretched itself. The rooms opening on to it had vine-covered balconies, and, looking down from them into the tropical growth of palms and banana trees and roses, one felt that it was summer time, no matter what the calendar said.

It was on one of the second floor balconies at the close of a November day that Mary Ware stood looking around her with eager eyes. Queen's wreath and moon-vines made such a thick screen that no one could see her, so she might lean over the railing as far as she pleased to watch the brilliantly lighted scene below. Electric bulbs were strung through the cacti and devil's ivy like elfin lamps. There was a shine of brass buttons as colored bell boys scudded across the open space with clinking ice-pitchers or jingling keys, and through the glass doors beyond came the gleam of silver and flowers where the waiters were arranging the tables for dinner.

There was to be a military banquet in one of the private dining-rooms, and already the guests were beginning to arrive for the reception which was to precede it. So much bunting was draped over the arch between the office corridors and this inner court, that the view was somewhat obscured, but, by leaning dangerously far over the railing, Mary could catch a glimpse of the legs of a uniform now and then, strolling along beside the trailing skirt of a dainty evening gown.

All this warmth and life and color was in sharp contrast to the dreary solitudes of the snow covered mining camp which she had just left. It had been winter for nearly a month up in the hills of Arizona, and Lone Rock in the winter was such a barren waste socially that her present surroundings seemed wildly exciting. In Lone Rock it was a matter of comment whenever a human being passed the house, and even a stray mule, stumbling along with a bell on its neck, was enough to call one to the windows.

The orchestra behind the palms having finished its tuning, swung into a gay two-step. At the sudden burst of music Mary drew a long breath and stood up straight, her pulses a-tingle. Something delightful was beginning to happen. Two girls, one in white and one in pale lemon-yellow, attended by a young lieutenant and a still younger man in civilian's evening dress, came out under the bunting-draped arch and strolled along past the banana trees to the garden seat just below her.

From her hiding place behind the moon-vines, Mary watched them as only a sociable little soul could watch, who for months had been hungering for such companionship. She clutched the railing with both hands, hoping fervently that they would stop.

They did pause for a few moments, just under the balcony, so near that for the little while they stood there she could almost feel herself to be one of the party. She could even smell the white violets that the girl in white wore on her corsage, and was close enough to see that an amber comb was slipping out of the soft auburn-bronze hair arranged so becomingly on the graceful little head. Each laugh and gesture sent it slipping lower and lower till involuntarily Mary's hand went out to stop it. Then she drew back in confusion. She had almost called attention to herself by speaking aloud.

"Let's go into the other court," insisted the girl in yellow. "I want to show you the alligators in the fountain, Mr. Wade, to convince you that you're really in the sunny South. Some people can't appreciate alligators – Bogey there, for instance."

Her disdainful glance indicated the lieutenant. "He jeers at me for liking them, but I think they are more interesting than half the people one meets."

"*Bogey!* What a nickname for such a dignified officer," thought Mary, peeping over the railing to see how such banter was received. Evidently the lieutenant was accustomed to it, for he smiled indulgently as one would at a spoiled child.

"'Birds of a feather,' you know," was his answer. "Go on, Roberta. *I* don't care to flock with alligators myself, but if you do we'll follow and see it done."

Roberta deigned no reply but a glance intended to be withering, which failed in its purpose because it was only counterfeit. Her eyes were as dark as a gypsy's and she had the curliest lashes Mary had ever seen. A boyish straightforwardness of manner contradicted their coquettish curliness, however. She had an air that comes only from being brought up in a houseful of teasing brothers. The man in civilian dress, whom she called Mr. Wade, watched her as if he had found a new species of girl, uncertain what she might say or do next. He was familiar with the coquettish kind and with the tom-boy kind, but this combination puzzled him.

Mary longed to follow as the four went slowly away together into the adjoining court, wholly unconscious that they had left an indelible memory behind them, or that they had revealed anything of themselves and their affairs to an unseen listener. But to Mary it was as if a new book had been opened before her and she had been allowed a glimpse of one page and the attractive picture that illustrated it. It was never necessary for her to begin at the first chapter of a book. Often, attracted by some paragraph in the middle, she would plunge into a story, only turning back for the beginning after she had pursued it eagerly through to the last word and found "how it all ended."

Now as the interesting group walked away she fervently hoped that fate would send them across her path sometime again during her sojourn in San Antonio, that she might piece together the rest of the story. All that she knew now was that the girl in white was a daughter of one of the majors at Fort Sam Houston, that the lieutenant had known Roberta ever since he was a cadet at the West Texas Military School, and that it was her brothers who had dubbed him *Bogey*. She had learned also that this was Mr. Wade's first visit to Texas, and that Roberta was trying to impress him with it by marvelous tales, so that he would decide to spend the winter in San Antonio instead of going on to Mexico.

But if the conversation revealed little, the picture they made as they stood against the tropical background of palms and banana trees held many suggestions. Mary felt that she knew all about lieutenants, having met two at a Kentucky house-party where she had gone to be flower-girl at a wedding when she was only fourteen. Fashions evidently had not changed in lieutenants, since these looked as if they might have been taken out of the same box that furnished the first soldiers of her acquaintance; but the girls – there had been many changes in girls since she last saw any of this kind. It was eight months since she had left school at the end of the Easter vacation, and none of the girls at Warwick Hall were doing their hair then as Roberta and the Major's daughter were doing theirs. Each had a very elaborate coiffure with a cluster of little short curls escaping to nestle against their white necks.

Her attention was especially called to this new style by Roberta's escort, whom Mary had classified in her mind as a "callow youth with a habit of making gallant little personal speeches."

When they first stepped into the court Roberta had thrown a white scarf about her, almost as light as thistledown, and glistening with crystal beads which spangled its soft meshes like dewdrops. As they turned to go it slipped from her shoulders, and Mr. Wade sprang forward to replace it. Drawing it around her shoulders he said with a melting glance at her dark hair, "What an adorable little curl!"

"'Ringle, O Ringle, she blushed a rosy red,
When Ringle, O Ringle, she clipped you from her head!'"

Mary, who knew her Tennyson like her multiplication table, recalled the next lines,

"Ringlet, O Ringlet, she gave you me and said,
'Come kiss it, love, and put it by,
If this can change, why, so can I.'"

Roberta only laughed, not in the least impressed by his manner nor embarrassed by the inference of his quotation. Mary knew that she could not copy the curls, but she decided to try the rest of the coiffure in the morning. Not a single twist or wave had escaped her sharp eyes. In the darkness of her retreat, after they had gone, she put her hands to her head, rehearsing in pantomime each move she would have to make to produce the result she admired.

Suddenly her hands dropped and one clutched the railing, as the window shutters of the next room were thrown open with a bang and some one stepped out on to the balcony adjoining hers. The intruder was a large and elderly woman in a rustling black dress. The light from the room streaming out behind her showed that she was portly and gray-haired, and the way she peered through the vines, changing quickly from one view-point to another, showed that she was impatient.

When she turned, Mary saw that her dress, which was made to fasten in the back, was open from collar to belt, and she readily guessed the trouble. Forgetting that her presence was unknown to the anxious watcher, she leaned forward through the dark, saying politely, "Can I help you, Madam?"

If a hand had reached out and grabbed her, the old lady could not have been more startled. With a stifled shriek she backed up against the wall to hide her open bodice, and stood there limp and panting.

"Merciful *fathers!* how you scared me!" she breathed as Mary's face appeared in the full light. When she saw only a little school-girl of seventeen or thereabouts her relief found vent in a hysterical giggle. It shook her plump shoulders until they both started to laughing so hard that she could barely find voice to explain, or Mary to apologize.

"I just couldn't get my dress hooked up the back," she finally managed to say. "I rang half a dozen times for a chambermaid, but the ones on this floor all seem to be off duty this time of evening, and I won't ask a bell-boy as some of the ladies do. I don't think it's decent. So I just thought I'd look down into the court and see if I couldn't catch sight of James. He did it yesterday and I vowed I'd never ask him again. He's willing enough, but he kept me standing a solid half hour by the clock, and we were both tuckered out when he got through."

"Let me come and do it for you," said Mary with her usual alacrity for following up promising beginnings.

"Oh, if you only would!" was the grateful answer. "I'll go in and unlock the door – "

Before she could finish her sentence Mary had climbed lightly over the railing which divided their balconies, and was following her into her room through the long windows that opened to the floor.

"Do you know," confided the old lady while Mary deftly fastened the hooks, "I think a hotel is the loneliest place on the face of the globe for a woman. I come down here once a year or so with my husband, and he has a good time sitting around in the lobby smoking and making friends with stockmen like himself, but by the end of the second day I'm homesick for the ranch. Of course I enjoy the stores and the crowds on the street, and seeing all the finely dressed tourists at meal-times, but we've been down here three days now, and you're the first person I've spoken to besides the chambermaid and James. It's all right for strangers to keep themselves to themselves I suppose, but I must say it's a sort of strain when it comes to being the stranger yourself. I want somebody to neighbor with."

"So do I," responded Mary with such heartiness that the old lady instantly expanded into warm friendliness. Before she was fairly fastened into her rustling black and purple gown she had confided to Mary that it was her very best one, and that it just wouldn't wear out, because it was too fine for church and she had no occasion to put it on save when she made her rare visits to San Antonio. The sleeves had been changed so many times to keep it in fashion, that her dressmaker had refused to alter it another time, even if the lace on it did cost five dollars a yard. James said why didn't she wear it at home and get done with it. But she told him much comfort a body would take around home in the tight gear a dressmaker boned you up in. But she'd have to do something, for full skirts were clear out now, and she felt like a balloon when other people were going around as slim and lank as starved snakes.

"It doesn't take long to get out of date," she added, "when you're living up in the hills in the back-woods."

"Oh, I know that," agreed Mary. "I've been living in a lonesome little spot out in Arizona for so long that I've nearly forgotten what civilization is like."

"You don't look like it," was the frank comment as the still franker gaze of her listener travelled over her dress from top to bottom, noting every detail.

"Oh, this," answered Mary, as if the eyes had spoken. "This is a dress that I got in New York last Easter vacation. I was in school at Washington, but as I had to leave at the end of the term and go back home I've had no occasion to wear it since. That's why it looks so new."

"Now do sit down and tell me about it," urged her hostess hospitably. "I've always wanted to go to Washington."

She pushed forward a low rocker, and took the arm chair opposite with such a look of pleasurable anticipation on her kindly old face, that Mary obeyed. She knew how it felt to be fairly bursting with a sociability for which there was no outlet. She had experienced that same sensation a few minutes before when she watched Roberta and the Major's daughter go by with their friends. Besides, she felt a real liking for this companionable old lady who introduced herself as Mrs. Barnaby of Bauer, Texas. Mrs. James Barnaby.

"She's the real, comfortable, homey sort," thought Mary, who had been much given of late to classifying people. "She's like mission furniture – plain and simple and genuine. She'd be her simple unpretentious self no matter what gilt and veneer she found herself among."

Mary was proud of her insight afterward when she learned more about Mrs. Barnaby's family. They had come out from Ohio over fifty years before when she was so young that she could barely remember the great prairie schooner that brought them. They had suffered all the hardships of the early Texas settlers, gone through the horrors of the Indian uprisings, and fought their way through with sturdy pioneer fortitude to the place where they could fold their hands and enjoy the comforts of the civilization they had helped to establish.

She told Mary little of this now, however, but led her on with many questions to talk of herself. Mrs. Barnaby had a lively curiosity and always took the most straightforward means to gratify it.

"She's interested in people, no matter who they are, just as I am," thought Mary, instantly recognizing the spirit which prompted the questions, and for that reason was led on to tell more than she would have told to most strangers. She did not take the world at large into her confidence now as she had done in her chatterbox days. In just a few moments Mrs. Barnaby had a very fair snapshot picture of the Ware family in her mind. Mary had given it very simply.

"I had gone from school at Warwick Hall to New York, to spend the Easter vacation with my sister Joyce. She's an artist and has her studio there. And we got word that my oldest brother, Jack, had been dreadfully hurt in an accident at the mines where he was manager – that it had made him a cripple for life. We all just adore Jack, so of course I packed up and went straight back to Arizona. It wasn't possible for Joyce to leave just then, and my brother Holland is in the navy, and of course he couldn't get away. Except the trained nurse there was nobody with mamma at the time but my youngest brother Norman, and as he is only fourteen I felt that I had to go."

"I hope he got better right away," interrupted Mrs. Barnaby eagerly.

"Yes, he did for awhile. He even got so that he could wheel himself around in his chair and go down to the office awhile every morning. But as soon as the cold weather set in he began to have such dreadful rheumatism that the doctor said the only thing to do was to take him to a milder climate. So we got ready right away and brought him down here."

"It must have been a hard trip for him," commented Mrs. Barnaby with a sympathetic shake of the head. "Arizona always did seem to me like the jumping-off place. I don't see how you managed it, him in a wheeled chair and so helpless."

"Oh, we came in a private car," Mary made haste to explain, "and Jack really enjoyed the trip. Waffles, the old colored cook on the car, you know, just laid himself out to please him, and the porter was so strong and helpful."

"H'm!" exclaimed her interested listener. "I've always thought I'd like to travel in a private car. It must be such a nice way to get over the country. But it isn't everybody that can afford it."

It was on the tip of Mary's honest little tongue to explain that it was not their car. They had come as guests of Mr. Robeson, one of the mine owners. But Mrs. Barnaby interrupted her with a question.

"Didn't you all go out in a big red automobile this afternoon? I've been trying to think ever since you came in here where it was I'd seen you before, and I believe it was with that party. There was a little lady in black and a boy and a rather heavy-set man with iron gray whiskers. I heard him giving orders to the chauffeur to go out to the missions."

"Yes," agreed Mary, "that was Mr. Robeson, one of the owners of the mine. He's so fond of Jack and has been so lovely to all of us on his account. His valet stayed with Jack while we went out to see the town. He's going on to Mexico this afternoon."

Again she was on the point of saying that it was as Mr. Robeson's guests they had enjoyed the outing in the expensive car, but another question switched her off to another subject and left Mrs. Barnaby with the impression that the Wares were wealthy beyond computation. Mary had the manner of one always accustomed to luxury, and her easy way of referring to the studio in New York and the private car and the valet made one think she was born to purple and fine linen.

The impression was deepened later, when the Barnabys found themselves at the same table with Mary and Norman in the dining-room. "Mrs. Ware was having dinner in her rooms with Jack," Mary explained. He was sensitive about being wheeled into a public dining-room, so she and her mother would take turns staying with him.

With a brief glance at the menu card Mary ordered dinner for herself and brother before Mr. Barnaby had adjusted his glasses on his long nose and stumbled half-way through the menu. He always read the bill of fare aloud to his wife, pronouncing the French words exactly as they were spelled, and they paused to discuss the nature of each unfamiliar dish with the amused waiter before ordering.

The ease with which Mary ordered gave further evidence to Mrs. Barnaby that the Wares had always been accustomed to sumptuous living, and to being "waited on, hand and foot." And it was proof to Mary that "James" was as genuine and primitive as his wife when he made no attempt to cover his ignorance of French menus. Looking up with a twinkle in his eyes he said to the waiter, "Just bring me the same as my wife ordered." Then he added with an odd one-sided smile that gave an irresistible expression of humor to his face, "I always take the blazed trail when there is one. It's a heap sight safer than striking out for yourself when you're in tall timber."

Evidently Mrs. Barnaby had told him all that she had learned of the Ware family, for he at once began making minute inquiries about Arizona and the mines, with the interest of a shrewd, genial old man who kept pace with the times and liked the companionship of young people. They were warm friends before the meal was over, and Mary hurried up-stairs afterward, to report all she could remember to Jack. She had fallen into the habit of making the most of everything she saw and heard, for his entertainment.

She found him in his chair, out on the balcony with her mother, looking down on the same scene she had watched earlier in the evening. Mrs. Ware had just tucked a lap-robe around him and drawn a wrap over her own shoulders when Mary opened the door of the room behind them, and started across the floor to join them.

Some letters had been sent up while she was at dinner and seeing one on the table addressed to herself, she paused to read it before joining them. It was just a note from one of the girls at Warwick Hall, who, knowing Mary's fondness for the beautiful old garden there, always enclosed some leaf or flower from it every time she wrote. This time several violets fell out, withered but still sweet. As Mary stooped to pick them up she heard Jack say in a voice so full of hearty enjoyment that she scarcely recognized it for his: "This certainly is great! What a world of things we've been missing all these years, little mother! I never realized just how much we have missed till I went East last year. Then afterwards the days were so full of work and the new responsibilities that I didn't have time to think about it much. But I can see now what a dull gray existence *you've* had, for as far back as I can remember there's only been three backgrounds for you: a little Kansas village, a tent on the edge of the Arizona desert, and a lonely mining camp. How long has it been since you've seen a sight like this?"

The scattered violets were all picked up now, but Mary still stood by the table, waiting for her mother's reply.

"It's so long ago I'll have to stop and count up. Let me see. You're twenty-two and Joyce twenty-three – really it's almost a quarter of a century since I've been in a large city, and seen anything like this in the way of illuminations, with music and crowds. Your father took me to New York the winter after we were married. Before that I'd always had my full share. I'd visited a great deal and travelled with Cousin Kate and her father. And I'm sure that no one could want anything brighter and sweeter and more complete than life as I found it as a girl, in 'my old Kentucky home.' As I had so much more than most people the first part of my life I couldn't complain when I had less afterwards. But I certainly do enjoy this," she added earnestly, as the orchestra began the haunting air of the Mexican "Swallow Song," *La Golondrina*, and the odor of roses stole up from below. The court was filled now with gay little groups of people who had the air of finding life one continual holiday.

The cheeriness of the reply almost brought tears to Mary's eyes, as she realized for the first time how much more than any of them her mother must have suffered from the hardships of their early poverty, because it was in such sharp contrast to what she had known before. To hide the little quiver that wanted to creep into her voice Mary laughed as she joined them, dragging a chair through the French window after her.

"Here you sit like two comfortable cats in the lap of luxury," she said. "You'll begin to purr soon."

"That's exactly what we're doing now," answered Jack. "We're congratulating ourselves on being in this land of summer with every comfort at hand and a free show to entertain us. This is as good as being in a box-party at the opera."

Mary settled herself with her chair tipped back on its rockers, and looked down on the court below. "I wish we could stay at this hotel all winter," she exclaimed. "I wish we could be as rich all the time as I feel to-night. Ever since we started South in Mr. Robeson's car I've felt as opulent and as elegant as if we owned the earth, and I've noticed that you and mamma take to luxury quite as readily as I do – like ducks to water. Norman is learning fast, too, for one of his opportunities. He's having the time of his life now, down in the lobby, just 'seein' things at night.' He asked me for a quarter when I left him, to get some postcards of the Alamo and the plaza to send home."

"Well?" queried Jack as she paused. Mary had had the family finances in hand since his illness, and her economical clutch had earned her the title of "Watch-dog of the Treasury."

"Oh, I gave it to him," she answered. "Gave it with a lordly sweep of the hand, as if bestowing millions were a daily habit of mine. But to-morrow it will be a different story. To-morrow a copper

cent may be too great a boon for my family to ask me to part with. To-morrow we go house-hunting, with the sad realization that we're all as poor as Job's old blue turkey hen."

"What's the odds so long as you're happy," quoted Jack. There was a long pause in which they listened to the music, each enjoying to the fullest the novelty of being in such a place. Then Jack asked, "Didn't you have any adventures down in the dining-room? We rather expected that you'd have a series of them to report."

"Mercy, yes! I've had half a dozen since I saw you last, very mild ones though. I've seen some most interesting people, a major's daughter and a lieutenant from the Post, called Bogey, and I overheard the beginning of a romance, a most sentimental request for an 'adorable little curl,' and I've hooked Mrs. James Barnaby of Bauer, Texas, up in her best black and purple gown, and James himself has invited me to take 'pot luck' with them up at the Barnaby ranch any time I choose to go. He's a dear and so is she, and if you'd only – "

Her chatter was stopped by a sudden exclamation from Jack, and following his gaze into the court below she saw two of the group in which she had been so interested earlier in the evening.

"That's the lieutenant I told you about!" she exclaimed excitedly. "That's Bogey, and the other is the major's daughter. I don't wonder that you're stunned at the sight of a pretty girl like that when it's been such ages since you have seen one."

"I'm stunned because it happens to be a girl I know," exclaimed Jack in a tone almost as excited as her own. "That's Gay Melville, and I met her at The Locusts the night I stopped in Lloydsboro Valley with the Shermans."

"Are you sure?" gasped Mary.

"Dead sure! She played the violin that evening, and you can't take your eyes off her face when she plays, it's so sweet, and you could never forget it after you'd watched her through one performance. Then her hair – there's no mistaking *that*, and that little trick of lifting her chin. Besides, it's no surprising matter to see her. She lives here and she's a popular girl."

"Oh, I know it!" exclaimed Mary, "and I've known all the time that her home is in San Antonio. Haven't I heard the Warwick Hall seniors talk of her by the hour? But somehow I never put two and two together and got it through my head that we're in the same town. Really I'd forgotten her in the excitement of our sudden coming. But now it just takes me off my feet to know that we're under the same roof, and to remember that she lived a whole summer in Lloydsboro Valley and is such a dear friend of the Little Colonel and Betty. Why, we're *bound* to meet her some time this winter. Oh, I know we're going to have a good time here, and I think that San Antonio is just the dearest, most charming old place in the world."

"It is certainly a good place to be to-night," answered Jack, following with intent gaze the vanishing figure of the major's pretty daughter. "And to-morrow – "

He did not finish the sentence, for the violins were throbbing through that last refrain of *La Golondrina* so softly and sweetly that he did not want to lose a note. When it was done Mary took up his last word, quoting with a dramatic sweep of the hand, "To-morrow do thy worst, for I have lived to-day!"

CHAPTER II

IN SEARCH OF A HOME

It was with the vision of a charming little bungalow in her mind that Mary started on her search for a house next morning; a little white bungalow half hidden in vines, and set among heuisach and mesquite trees, or maybe in the shelter of one giant pecan. As they had whirled around the city in the touring car the day before, she had seen several of that kind which she thought would suit both their taste and their purse.

She had not yet reached the point of picturing to herself the inside furnishings. They would have to be of the simplest sort, of course. But one picture seemed to rise up of its own accord whenever she thought of the new home. She saw a big living-room, the centre of a cheery hospitality, where girls fluttered in and out at all hours of the day. Bright, fun-loving, interesting girls like Gay Melville and Roberta. Her wistful little face grew very sweet and eager at the mere thought of such companionship, and there was such a dancing light in her gray eyes and such a happy glow of expectancy on her cheeks that more than one passer-by took a second glance and felt the morning brighter because of it.

Mrs. Ware had expected to accompany her, leaving Jack to Norman's care for the morning, but a neuralgic headache, an old enemy of hers, seized her on awakening, and she was obliged to shift the responsibility to Mary's willing shoulders. Although it doubled the car-fare, Mary took Norman with her for company. Armed with a map of the city and a list of houses, clipped from the morning paper, they started gaily out on their quest. It was good just to be alive on such a morning, and out in the brilliant sunshine, with the air so fresh and sweet, and the plaza as green and flowery as if it were mid-summer instead of the week before Thanksgiving.

They walked at first, wanting a closer view than the cars afforded of the fascinating old curio shops. Mexicans were no novelty to them as they were to Northern tourists. They had seen too many in Phoenix and at the mining camp to care for a second look at the tall, peaked hats of the men or the rebosa-draped heads of the women. But the narrow streets of the Mexican quarter with their chili and tamale stands interested them. It was some kind of a fête day, and flags were flying and a festive spirit was in the air; a spirit that seems to belong peculiarly to this alluring old Spanish city, where fête days come often and one soon learns to say "mañana" with the rest.

Norman, who picked up bits of information here and there as a magnet draws needles and nails, imparted some of it to Mary as he trudged along beside her. Everything was making a deep impression on his mind because this was his first journey of any consequence.

"This is the third oldest city in the United States, the guide book says," he began, then paused before a shop window, attracted by the sign, "Dressed Fleas, 35 cents," to exclaim, scornfully, "Who'd be fool enough to want one of *those* things, dead or alive!" With a skip or two to catch up with Mary, he continued, "And there's thirteen miles of river twisting in and out among the streets, with seventeen bridges over it."

"It surely is the twistiest, crookedest river that I ever saw on a map," answered Mary, "but that's what makes the town so lovely – all those graceful bends with the green banks and tropical foliage and the little boats tied up here and there to the landings. I wish we could find the kind of a place we want somewhere along the river. Maybe we could manage to get a boat. Anyhow, if we couldn't do any better we could make a raft. I'd love to pole one, and it would be just like doing it in our own back yard if the river ran right behind our place."

"Say! Let's!" exclaimed Norman, explosively. "Mary Ware, you've got a head on you that's worth something! And I'll tell you something else I wish we could manage to do, – that's to get a house out near Brackenridge park. They've got antelope and buffalo and elk, and all sorts of wild animals out there. I'd like to see them often."

"We'd better get down to business, then," said Mary, "instead of loitering along this way. We can look at the shops after we've found a house."

"Stop just a minute at the Alamo," begged Norman. "I want to see the place where Travis and Davy Crockett and Bowie put up such a desperate fight against Santa Anna. This is just as interesting a place to me as Bunker Hill or Plymouth Rock would be, and I want to write home to Billy Downs about it."

"But it isn't the *exact* spot," objected Mary, who wanted to lose no more time and was sometimes provokingly literal. "This is only the little chapel, and the real fight took place in a court that was away over yonder, and the walls were pulled down long ago."

Norman planted himself at the entrance and proceeded to argue the matter. "But the chapel was part of it, and it stands for the whole thing now – a sort of monument, you know, and there's relics inside and –"

"Oh, well, come on, then," said Mary, "if you're *that* anxious, but just for a minute. You can come here some other time by yourself and prowl around all day."

She followed him into the dim interior, still insisting at every step that they must hurry. It was so early no one but the care-taker was in sight. She knew how Norman liked history, and what enthusiastic admiration he had for the heroes of frontier times, but she was surprised to see how deeply he was impressed by the venerable building. He took off his hat as they entered and walked around as reverently as if they were in a church. As they gazed up at the narrow, iron-barred windows which had witnessed such a desperate struggle for liberty, he said, in an awed tone, which made even Mary feel solemn:

"Here, for ten days, took place the most memorable, thrilling, tragic, and bloody siege in American history. One hundred and seventy-nine indomitable American frontier riflemen against an army of six thousand brave and disciplined troops led by veteran officers!"

"Where did you get all that?" demanded Mary, in surprise.

"I saw it in a little pamphlet, in the reading-room last night, and it told about the Comanche Indians that came here about seventy years ago. The fiercest fighting you ever heard of – thirty-two Indian warriors killed right out there in the street that we came across just now, and seven Texans."

"Goodness, Norman!" she answered, with a shrug. "What do you want to resurrect all those old horrors for? It doesn't make the place any more attractive to me to know that its streets once ran red with blood. I'd rather think of them as they will be in the Spring on San Jacinto Day, red with roses after the Battle of Flowers. Think of our being here to see that!" she added, exultingly.

As they emerged from the dimly-lighted chapel into the blinding sunshine of the street, Norman remarked thoughtfully, "Of course I'm sorry that Jack had the rheumatism so badly that he had to get out of Lone Rock, but as long as we did have to leave home, I'm jolly glad it brought us to San Antonio. Think of the times we'll have going out to Fort Sam Houston to guard-mounts and parade. It's something just to be within walking distance of the largest army post of the United States."

"I'm thinking of the public library," was her rejoinder. "Jack can have all the books he wants to read this winter; and I'm thinking of the friends we'll have; the real, satisfying kind, that do things, and go places, and think, and keep you from sinking to the level of a cabbage. I've always wanted to live in the thick of things, and here we are at last!"

They paused on the curb to wait for a long string of vehicles to pass. An army ambulance came first, drawn by sleek mules, driven by a soldier in khaki and carrying several ladies and children from the Post. Close behind it came a riding party, clattering in on horseback from a breakfast at the Country Club. Then followed close on each other's heels, a dilapidated prairie schooner, three boys on a burro, a huckster's wagon, and a carriage with liveried coachman and prancing, thoroughbred horses. The clang of a long line of electric cars whizzing past, the honk of many automobiles, and the warning sound of bicycle bells, as their owners wheeled in and out through the bewildering maze of

vehicles and pedestrians, made Norman exclaim, joyfully, "Gee! I'm glad we're out of Lone Rock! There's something to see here every single minute."

Mary signalled a passing car, and as soon as they were seated, drew out her newspaper clippings. "Mrs. Barnaby said for us to go to Laurel Heights first," she remarked, "so I believe we'll find it best to try this one. It sounds all right."

She read the advertisement aloud: "A five-room bungalow, never been occupied, all modern conveniences, one block from car-line, rent reasonable, inquire next door."

Then she unfolded the map and studied it as they whirled along, now and then repeating the name of a street as she came across one which sounded particularly pleasing and story-bookish, as she called it, to Norman: "King William Street, Mistletoe Avenue, Dolorosa and San Pedro."

When a little later they alighted from the car and found the place described in the advertisement, it was almost the bungalow of Mary's dreams. The vines were lacking and the lawn was still strewn with the débris of building, but that could soon be remedied.

"What good, wide porches to hang a hammock on!" exclaimed Norman, as they mounted the steps and walked around, peering through the windows.

"You'll have to say gallery," corrected Mary. "Everybody down here calls a porch a gallery. They won't know what you mean."

They walked all around the house, exclaiming over each attractive feature, as each window revealed a new one. The electric lights, the convenient little bathroom, the open fire-place in the living-room, the built-in china closet. Norman's only complaint was that the house was nowhere near the river. That was a drawback in Mary's eyes also, for ever since they had thought of a boat it had begun to take its place in that mental picture in which those alluring girls were always fluttering in and out.

"Of course we'll look farther," she said. "It wouldn't do to take the first one we came to when there are so many to choose from. I'll just run in next door and inquire the price, and tell them we'll make up our minds later."

But when she had made her inquiries her decision followed immediately. What might seem reasonable rent to the owner and to the people of that neighborhood was entirely out of the reach of the Ware pocket-book. "You won't find anything cheaper in this part of town," the woman assured her, and after several more experiences of the same kind, Mary believed her.

They passed all sorts of beautiful homes in their wanderings; stately Colonial mansions, comfortable wide-spreading houses with broad galleries and hospitable doors, picturesque bungalows in the mission style, little white-winged cottages over-run with tangles of Maréchal Niel roses, their fragrant buds swinging from the very eaves. The farther they searched the more Mary longed to find a home among them, and it was with a feeling of deep disappointment that she turned back to the hotel for lunch.

Mrs. Ware had spent part of the morning telephoning to different real estate offices recommended by Mr. Barnaby, and had a small list of houses sifted down from those offered her.

"They tell me we are too late to get much of a choice," she reported. "People have been pouring into the city for a month, and the freight stations and ware-houses are piled up with household goods. It is this way every fall, they say. No matter how many homes they build there are always more families clamoring to occupy them than can be accommodated. It would be easier for us to find one if we could afford to pay more, but I had to cut out all the high-priced ones from the lists that they gave me."

Mary took the slip of paper from her mother, saying, "So far the ones we have seen have been too big or too expensive, or else far too small. I wonder what will be the matter with these?"

She began to find out almost as soon as she and Norman resumed their search again after lunch. The lists they had led them into older parts of the town, where the rented houses had seen several generations of transitory occupants. Some of the places they visited made her shrink back in dismay. A long procession of careless tenants had passed through, each leaving some contribution

to the evidences of their slack housekeeping. Nearly every family had had its share of disease and death, and Mary hurried away with a wry face and the single exclamation, "germs!" Mrs. Barnaby had spoken of that class of houses. "You want to be careful," she told her. "Even the nicest looking may have had dreadfully sick tenants in them, and although there is a law requiring landlords to fumigate, and all that sort of thing, you can't be sure that it has been done as thoroughly as it should."

"This is getting monotonous," Mary exclaimed, wearily, when they had walked block after block to no purpose, and the end of the day found them with nothing accomplished. The morning freshness of the atmosphere had given place to such enervating heat that she had been carrying her coat on her arm for several hours. The sky was overcast with clouds, when fagged and inwardly cross she climbed on the car that was to take them back to the hotel, vowing that she couldn't drag herself another step.

At the next corner half a dozen people hurried down the street, waving frantically for the car to wait. As they crowded into the aisle, laughing and out of breath, Mary heard a lady exclaim, "We certainly were lucky to catch this car. If we'd had to wait for the next one the 'Nortner' surely would have caught us, and this is going to be a nasty, wet one, too."

Even as she spoke there was a sense of sudden chill in the air. A cold gale swept down the street, setting flags and awnings to flapping, and blinding pedestrians with whirling clouds of dust. The conductor hurried to close the car windows, and the passengers began struggling into their wraps.

The sudden freshening of the air had such a bracing effect that Mary straightened up, feeling that after all she might be able to walk the half block from the car to the hotel. When the time came, she found that she could even run the distance, for the few big drops of rain that splashed in her face were the fore-runner of a downpour, and they had no umbrella. Just as they reached the entrance such a mighty deluge began that Mary's disappointment in house-hunting was somewhat softened by the fact that her beloved hat had escaped a wetting which must have ruined it.

"Never mind, little Vicar," said Jack, consolingly, when she had made her report to the assembled family. "The proverbial turn in our fortune is bound to come. It's never failed us yet, you know."

"But we've simply got to get out of this expensive hotel," she answered, desperately. "Do you realize that we could keep house for a week on what it costs the four of us to stay here just one day?"

Mrs. Ware broke the long silence that followed, by suggesting, "Maybe for the present we'd better try to get a few rooms somewhere, just for light housekeeping. It's a last resort, I know, but Mary is right. Every day we spend here is taking a big mouthful out of our little capital."

Nobody liked the suggestion, for whatever else they had lacked in their Arizona homes there had been no lack of space, but they all saw the wisdom of Mrs. Ware's suggestion, and agreed to try it until they could look around and do better.

"How lovely it must be to have an ancestral roof-tree," thought Mary that night, as she tossed, restlessly, kept awake by the noises of the big hotel. "I can't think of anything more heavenly than to always live in the house where you were born, and your fathers and grandfathers before you, as the Lloyds do at The Locusts. It must be so delightful to feel that you've got an attic full of heirlooms and that everything about the place is connected with some old family tradition, and to know that you can take root there, and not have to go wandering around from pillar to post as we Wares have always had to do. I wonder if Lloyd Sherman knows how much she has to be thankful for!"

Next day in her shortest skirt and rain-coat, and under a dripping umbrella, Mary started to look for rooms. She was alone this time. Company was too expensive a luxury to afford more than one day, since it meant extra car-fare. She paddled blithely off, however, never minding the weather. This rain made the little home she was seeking seem all the more desirable. Whenever a window showed her a cozy interior with the light of an open fire shining cheerily over it, she thought it would not be long till she would be making afternoon tea over just such a fire, or popping corn or toasting

marsh-mallows. She could think of a dozen ways to make it attractive for the girls when they dropped in of rainy afternoons.

Occupied with such plans she tramped along through the mud and slush as happily as she had gone through the sunshine the day before. But by the end of the morning repeated failures began to bring a worried line between her eyes and a sharp note of anxiety into her voice when she made her inquiries. Once, finding herself in the neighborhood of a house which she had refused the day before because it did not quite measure up to the standards she had set, she went to look at it again, thinking, after all, they might manage to be more comfortable in it than in a few rooms. To her disappointment she found a family already moving in. It had been rented almost immediately after her refusal to take it.

In her search for rooms a new difficulty faced her. Invariably one of the first questions asked her was, "Anyone sick in your family?"

"Yes, my brother," she would say. "He has rheumatism. That is why we are particular about getting a sunny south room for him."

"Well, we can't take sick people," would be the positive answer, and she would turn away with an ache in her throat and a dull wonder why Jack's rheumatism could make him objectionable in the slightest degree as a tenant. The morning was nearly gone before she found the reason. She was shown into a dingy parlor by a child of the family, and asked to wait a few moments. Its mother had gone around the corner to the bakery, but would be right back.

There were two others already waiting when Mary entered the room, a stout, middle-aged woman and a delicate-looking girl. The woman looked up with a nod as Mary took a chair near the stove and spread out her damp skirts to dry.

"I reckon you're on the same errand as us," said the woman, "but it's first come, first served, and we're ahead of you."

"Yes," answered Mary, distantly polite, and wondering at the aggressive tone. When the child left the room the woman rose and shut the door behind it, and then came back to Mary, lowering her voice confidentially.

"It's just this way. We're getting desperate. We came down here for my daughter's health – the doctor sent us, and we've gone all over town trying to get some kind of roof over our heads. We can't get in anywhere because Maudie has lung trouble. People have been coming down here for forty years to get cured of it, and folks were glad enough to rent 'em rooms and take their money, till all this talk was stirred up in the papers about lung trouble being a great white plague, and catching, and all that. Now you can't get in anywhere at a price that poor folks can pay. I've come to the end of my rope. The landlady at the boarding-house where we've been stopping, told me this morning that she couldn't keep us another day, because the boarders complained when they found what ailed Maudie. I was a fool to tell 'em, for she doesn't cough much. It's only in the first stages. After this I'm just going to say that I came down here to look for work, and goodness knows, *that's* the truth! What I want to ask of you is that you won't stand in the way of our getting in here by offering more rent or anything like that."

"Certainly not," Mary answered, drawing back a little, almost intimidated by the fierceness which desperation gave to the other's manner.

The landlady bustled in at that moment, and as she threw the rooms open for inspection, she asked the question that Mary had heard so often that morning, – "Any sick in your family?"

"No," answered the woman, glibly. "I'm down in the city looking for work. I do plain sewing, and if you know of any likely customers I'd be glad if you'd mention me."

The landlady glanced shrewdly at Maudie, who kept in the background.

"She does embroidery," explained her mother. "Needle-work makes her a little pale and peaked, sitting over it so long. I ain't going to let her do so much after I once get a good start."

"Well, a person in my place can't be too careful," complained the landlady. "We get taken in so often letting our rooms to strangers. They have all sorts of names for lung trouble nowadays, malaria and a weak heart and such things. The couple I had in here last said it was just indigestion and shortness of breath, but she died all the same six weeks later, in this very room, and he had to acknowledge it was her lungs all the time, and he knew it."

Mary looked around the room with a shiver. Its old wallpaper, dingy paint and worn carpet proclaimed too plainly that its renovation since the last lodgers' departure had been only a superficial one, barely what the law demanded.

"No, thank you," she replied to the landlady, who had turned to her with the hope of finding a more desirable tenant. "I couldn't consider these rooms at all. There are only two, and we need three at least."

Out on the street again a tear or two splashed down and mingled with the rain on her face as she walked away. She was growing desperate herself. If two rooms had been all they needed, she could have found them a number of times over. Or, if they could have afforded some of the flats or the sunny suites she discovered on pleasant streets, her search would have been soon over. But it was the same old circle she kept coming back to. When the rooms were large enough and within their means, either they were unsanitary or the owners objected to invalids. In vain she explained that Jack's helplessness was due to an accident, and that rheumatism is not contagious. Too many people like Maudie's mother had been ahead of her and bred suspicion of all strangers in quest of rooms for light housekeeping.

Mary had told her mother not to expect her back for lunch. She would go into some tea-room or restaurant wherever she happened to be. But one o'clock found her in a part of the town where nothing of the kind was in sight. She bought an apple and some crackers at a grocery, and ate them under cover of her umbrella while she stood on a corner, waiting for a car to take her to another part of the city.

What a different place it seemed to be from the one they had seen the day of their arrival! Then it was a world of hospitable homes and sunshine and kindly faces. The very shop windows looked friendly and inviting. Now, plodding along in the wet, to the tired, homesick girl it seemed only a great, desolate place full of lonely, discouraged strangers and sick people and dingy boarding-houses, whose doors shut coldly in anxious faces.

All afternoon she kept up the search. The electric lights were beginning to gleam through the rain, throwing long, quivering reflections in the puddles when she finally turned back to the hotel, bedraggled and utterly discouraged.

"I *won't* cry!" she said, fiercely, to herself. "I can't! For Jack would see that I had been at it, and he is getting so sensitive lately. It would hurt him dreadfully to know that we are barred out of all the desirable places because he is an invalid."

The habit of years is strong. Mary had persisted so long in applying the good Vicar of Wakefield's motto to her childish difficulties and disappointments, that it had taught her remarkable self-control. Instead of bursting impulsively into the room as so many girls of her age would have done, and giving vent to her over-taxed nerves and discouragement in a tearful report of the day's adventures, she walked slowly from the elevator to her room, trying to think of some careless way in which to announce her failure. She paused with her hand on the knob, thinking, "I'll just tell them that I've come back like Noah's dove did the first time it was sent out from the ark, because I could find no rest for the sole of my foot; at least a rest which fitted both our ideas and our income."

To her relief, the room was empty when she entered. The only light streamed through the transom and keyhole from Jack's room, where a low murmur told that her mother was reading aloud. Opening the door just a crack so that her face was not visible, she called, gaily, "I'm back, mamma, but you can just go on with your reading; I'll not tell a single thing till I'm all dried and dressed. I'm as wet as a frog."

"Oh, I was afraid you'd be," came the anxious answer. "I'll come and get – "

"No," interrupted Mary, decidedly. "I don't want anything but time." Closing the door between the rooms, she switched on the light and began slipping out of her wet clothes into dry ones. In a moment or two she was in her soft, warm kimona and Turkish slippers, standing on the threshold of the bathroom, intending to plunge her face into a basin of hot water. It was the best thing she could think of to remove the traces of tears, and she was so tired that now she was safe in the harbor of her own room the tears *would* come, no matter how hard she tried to keep them back.

But before she could turn the faucet, a tap at the hall door made her dab her handkerchief hastily across her eyes, for Mrs. Barnaby's voice followed the tap.

"I surely hate to trouble you," she began, apologetically, as soon as Mary had admitted her, "but if you could only hook me up this one more time – I've been waiting for James with this shawl over my shoulders for nearly half an hour. Then I heard you come in and I thought maybe you wouldn't mind doing it once more. We're going home in the morning."

Then with a keen look into Mary's face, she added, kindly, "Why, you poor child, what's the matter? Your brother isn't worse, I hope!"

There was such a note of real concern in the sympathetic voice that Mary's lip trembled and her eyes brimmed over again. When the next moment she found herself drawn into Mrs. Barnaby's capacious embrace with a plump hand patting her soothingly on the back, the story of her discouragement seemed to sob itself out of its own accord. The performance left Mary's eyes very red and tear-swollen, but the outburst brought such relief that she could laugh the moment it was over. It was Mrs. Barnaby's surprise which brought the laugh.

"I can't get over it!" she kept exclaiming. "To think that all this time I supposed that you were enormously wealthy – actually rolling in riches! Well, well!"

"I didn't know that my 'short and simple annals of the poor' would be so upsetting," giggled Mary, hysterically. "You were so sweet and sympathetic I couldn't help telling you. But don't take it to heart, please. We Wares never stay discouraged long. I'll be all right now after I get my face washed. As soon as I fasten your dress I'll run in and turn on the hot water."

The hooking proceeded in silence, Mrs. Barnaby so absorbed in thought that she forgot her usual sigh of relief and expression of thanks at the end. Instead she said, abruptly, "You come and go up on the train with us in the morning to Bauer. It's only thirty miles from here and it's up in the hills, high and dry, and there's the Metz cottage I'm sure you can get, all freshly scrubbed and ready to move into. Mrs. Metz is the cleanest little German woman you ever saw, – scrubs even the under sides of her tables as white as the tops. It wasn't rented when we came down here last Saturday. Let me talk to your mother about it. I'm sure it is just the place for you."

"Oh, no," began Mary. "We couldn't possibly go there! We've counted so much on living here in San Antonio this winter and meeting some of our friends' friends – "

Then she stopped with a little gasp, and after an instant's pause said, apologetically, "I didn't mean to refuse so abruptly, and now I take it all back. Changing plans so suddenly is somewhat of a shock to one's system, isn't it! After all, I'm like a drowning man catching at straws, and I'd be very glad, indeed, if you would talk to mamma about it. You can go right in now while I finish dressing, if you like."

It was not the first time Mrs. Barnaby had been ushered into Jack's room. Their acquaintance had begun over the railing of their adjoining balconies the first day of Mary's house-hunting, and had rapidly deepened into a mutual liking. So strongly had Mrs. Barnaby been attracted to the young fellow who bore his crippled condition so lightly that he made others forget it, that she induced James to go in and make his acquaintance also. The two men had spent several hours of the long, rainy morning together, each greatly interested in the other's conversation.

Mary, who had been gone all day, did not know of this, but she knew that her mother had met and liked Mrs. Barnaby, and that the story of the day's unsuccessful search would not sound half so

serious if that cheerful old lady told it, especially if it were followed immediately by her offer to find them a home in Bauer.

Bauer was an uncharted country on Mary's map, but if Mrs. Barnaby thought of it as their desired haven, she could trust her capable hands to take them safely into it. So it was with a sigh of relief that she opened the door between the rooms, saying, "Here's Mrs. Barnaby, mamma," and left her to make explanations while she finished dressing.

CHAPTER III

THE LITTLE TOWN OF BAUER

Mary was the only one to whom the change of plans made a vital difference. She had built such lovely dream-castles of their winter in San Antonio that it was hard to see them destroyed at one breath.

"Of course it's the only thing to do," she said, in a mournful aside to Norman, "but did you ever dream that there was a dish of rare, delicious fruit set down in front of you, so tempting that you could hardly wait to taste it, and just as you put out your hand it was suddenly snatched away? That's the way I feel about leaving here. And I've dreamed of getting letters, too; big, fat letters, that were somehow going to change my whole life for the better, and then just as I started to read them I always woke up, and so never found out the secret that would make such a change in my fortunes."

"Maybe it won't be so bad after all," encouraged Norman. "Maybe we can have a boat. There's a creek running through the town and the Barnaby ranch is only seven miles out in the country. We'll see them often."

Mary wanted to wail out, "Oh, it isn't boats, and ranches, and old people I want! It's girls, and boys, and something doing! Being in the heart of things, as we would be if we could only stay here in this beautiful old city!"

The wail found no voice, however, for even in the midst of her disappointment Mary remembered Jack, and could not let him feel that this change in their plans meant any sacrifice for her. Besides, she had to acknowledge that the creek and the ranch *did* hold out some compensations, and she was deeply grateful to these two kind old people who had come to their rescue in such cordial, neighborly fashion. Mr. Barnaby had been called into the family council also, and had spent the evening with them discussing prices and prospects.

Even Norman was impressed by their offers of assistance, and spoke of it as he sat slowly unlacing his shoes after they had gone. Mary was in the next room, repacking her trunk, for it had been decided that she and Norman were to go to Bauer on the early accommodation train when the Barnabys left for home. The door between the rooms was still open, and she heard him say, thoughtfully:

"What do you suppose makes them so rattling good to us when we're just strangers?"

Jack laughed and quoted, teasingly:

"'What makes the lamb love Mary so?'

The eager children cry.

'Oh, Mary loves the lamb, you know,'

The teacher did reply."

"Aw, talk sense!" was Norman's disgusted answer. "I don't know what you mean by that."

An understanding smile flashed between Jack and his mother, who had stayed to help him prepare for the night, and she answered for him.

"Jack only means that we get just what we give in this world, dear. From the days of Solomon it's been a proverb that the man who would have friends 'must show himself friendly.' And that's what you and Mary did the first night you met the Barnabys. You made them feel that you found them genuinely interesting, and that awakened a liking for you."

"But anybody'd find that old man interesting," Norman explained, gravely. "You never heard such Indian stories as he can tell, – true ones that he's been in himself, – and hunting – Gee! you ought to hear him! I bid to sit next to him going up on the train."

"You're welcome to him!" called Mary. "I'll take Mrs. B." Then she came to the doorway, a pile of folded garments in her hands. "I declare, she's just an old dear! She's thought of so many ways to save us expense since she found out that we have to economize. She even offered to have our two extra trunks checked on their tickets. They only brought suit-cases. So we'll have no extra baggage to pay for."

The sun was shining next morning, and although the chill of the Norther was still in the air, the rain-washed plazas were greener than ever, and new roses were opening to take the places of the old ones that the storm had beaten off the day before. Mary's spirits seemed to have passed through the same freshening process, for there was no trace of tears or regrets on the bright face that greeted her travelling companions.

The only morning train was an accommodation, which carried much freight and took its own time for the journey. This happened to be a day when it was four hours on the road, but none of the little party felt that time dragged. Ordinarily, Mary would have enjoyed keeping close to the old ranchman, as Norman did, hopping off the car every time they stopped on a side-track, to investigate everything along the way, – the lime works, the rock quarry, the station where the mail was put off for the soldiers who were camped at the Government reservation for target practise. Even the little oil-burning engine would have been of as much interest to her as it was to Norman, had she not been so busily occupied otherwise.

As they wound higher and higher into the hills she looked out now and then with a quick exclamation of pleasure at the view, but for the most part she was "visiting" with Mrs. Barnaby, as that good soul expressed it. Their acquaintance took long strides forward that morning. Part of the time Mary chattered along just as if her listener had been one of the Warwick Hall girls, and part of the time she listened to elderly views and confidences with the seeming sympathy of middle age. A bit of personal history from one called out a corresponding scrap from the other, and they had exchanged views on many subjects, ranging from young turkeys to unhappy marriages, when the porter passed through the train calling, "Bauer! All out for Bauer!"

Mrs. Barnaby glanced out the window, saying in surprise, "I had no idea we were so near home!" Then she gave Mary's sleeve an affectionate little pat with her plump hand, exclaiming cordially, "I declare, it's been a real treat to have you along." And Mary, as she helped Mrs. Barnaby struggle into her coat, responded, "Well, I've enjoyed every inch of the way. Somehow you make me feel that you're just my age or I'm just yours, – I don't know which. You can't imagine how 'little and lorn' I feel at the thought of leaving you."

"Oh, but I'm not going to leave you until you're safely settled," was the comforting assurance. "James has some business at the court-house that will keep him in town for an hour or so. As soon as we drop him there I'll drive around with you to make arrangements about the cottage. There's Pedro now."

They were on the platform by this time, and she indicated by a nod the slim young Mexican who had driven the carriage from the ranch to meet them. It was a roomy, old-fashioned carriage drawn by two big gray mules, with much shining nickel-plating on their stout black harness. The station was half a mile away from the village, and as they swung down the sunny white road towards it, at a rapid gait, both Norman and Mary looked out eagerly at the place that was to be their home for a whole long winter, and maybe more.

From a distance it looked almost like a toy village, with its red roofs, blue barns and flashing windmills nestled against the background of misty hills. Low mountain peaks rose here and there on the far horizon beyond.

"This is distinctly a German village, you know," explained Mrs. Barnaby, as they passed a group of little flaxen-haired Teutons on the roadside, who were calling to each other and their dog in a tongue which Mary could not understand.

"Bauer was settled by an old German count and a baron or two, who came over here with their families and followers. They made it as much like a corner of the Fatherland as they could, and their descendants still cling to their language and customs. They don't want any disturbing, aggressive Americans in their midst, so they never call on new-comers, and never return their visits if any of them try to make the advances. They will welcome you to their shops, but not to their homes. Even the English and Scotch people who have owned the out-lying ranches as long as they have owned the town are looked upon as aliens and strangers, in a way."

Mary gave an exclamation of dismay. "Texas certainly is full of surprises," she said, in a disappointed tone. "One thinks of it as being young and crude, and with the proverbial hospitality of a new country. I've always thought of it as having the latch-string out for everybody."

"Oh, *Texas* has," Mrs. Barnaby hastened to assure her. "Its doors are wide open, and its welcome corresponds to its size, the biggest in the Union. But Bauer is different. It has a few families who will not look on you with suspicion. The old couple who own the cottage which I hope to get for you will be good neighbors, and if you were to live here a long time there are others who would be friendly. Then there are several American families who have found a foothold in the town, and as I said, English-speaking people on the ranches hereabout. They are cultured, refined people, interesting to know, but strangers coming here rarely make their acquaintance. You see we have so many transients coming for their health, staying just a few weeks or months and going on again – it's hardly to be expected we'd – "

Her sentence was interrupted by a dashing girl in khaki and a cowboy hat, astride a fiery little mustang. She rode past the carriage, calling out a greeting as she passed. Norman turned around exclaiming, "Did you see that? A cartridge belt around her waist and a six-shooter in her holster! That's the wild West for you."

"That's the sheriff's daughter," explained Mrs. Barnaby. "She's his deputy, and meets the trains when it's necessary and he's out of town."

"I'd like to know her," said Mary. "I'm glad that there's something to give one the kind of a thrill you naturally expect to have out here. I was beginning to have such a foreign, far-away feeling, seeing all these picturesque little German gardens with old women weeding in them. We can imagine we are abroad this winter in Cologne or Potsdam or Bingen on the Rhine. Oh, *oh!* How quaint and dear!"

The exclamation escaped her as the gray mules stopped at the gate of an old garden, over whose stone walls arched a row of great pecan trees. A straight path ran from the gate to the kitchen door, stiffly bordered by coxcombs and princes' feather, while on each side chrysanthemums and roses and a host of old-fashioned autumn flowers made the little plot a tangle of colors and sweet smells. There were some bee-hives under the bare peach trees, and at one side beyond them, a small vineyard where the mockingbirds still sang noisily although the grapes had all been gathered and pressed into wine. An old man with a flowing white beard and a high black hat sat on a bench by the kitchen door placidly smoking a long pipe.

"That's Mr. Metz," said Mrs. Barnaby, preparing to alight. "Come in with me."

"It's all just like one of the pictures in Joyce's studio," commented Mary, as they followed the straight walk to the door, "and this is just like one of those lovely old-master, Dutch interiors," she added, in a whisper, as Mr. Metz ushered them into the big, clean kitchen, where his wife sat knitting.

On the deep window-sill a cat lay asleep in the sun beside a pot of glowing red geraniums, and there was such an air of cleanliness and thrift and repose about the room that Mary could not help exclaiming aloud over it. As she glanced around with admiring glances her bright face showed its appreciation also, and Mrs. Metz watched it shrewdly while she talked with Mrs. Barnaby, in English so broken as to be almost unintelligible.

What the old woman saw must have satisfied her, for she accepted Mrs. Barnaby's offer after a very short parley with her husband in German, and when they rose to go she bade them wait while she made a stiff little nosegay for each of them, culled from her garden borders and edged with strong-

smelling mint. In the center of Mary's was one of her handsomest coxcombs. Mrs. Barnaby smiled meaningly when she saw it, and when they had climbed back into the carriage, said in a pleased tone, "That shows that she has weighed you in the balance and is satisfied with the result. You'll get along famously with her, I'm sure, and we'll soon have you settled now, in fine shape."

An hour later Mary stood on the threshold of the cottage she had rented, with the keys of possession in her hand. Thanks to Mrs. Barnaby and the rapid gait of the gray mules, much had been accomplished in that time. The groceries they had ordered were already piled on the table in the kitchen. A load of wood was on its way. The new mattresses they had bought at the furniture shop (kept by the undertaker of the village) were promised for delivery early in the afternoon, and they had been introduced at each place as friends of the Barnabys, who were to be charged home prices, and not the ones usually asked of strangers. Mrs. Barnaby was what she called plain-spoken, and although she made a jest of her demands they carried weight.

Their trunks, three of which contained bedclothes and dishes, stood on the front gallery waiting to be unpacked. Inside, the house looked as clean as soapsuds and fresh paint could make it. Mrs. Metz herself had attended to the scrubbing after the last tenant left. But Mary decided that she would feel more comfortable, moving in after strangers, if she should give the furniture a personal washing before they began to use it. While Norman built a fire in the kitchen stove, she unlocked one of the trunks and changed her travelling suit for a gingham dress and apron.

"Let's eat picnic fashion," called Norman, "and unpack afterward. It's nearly one o'clock, and I'm too hungry to wait. I've found a cup I can boil some eggs in, and if we don't use any dishes we won't have any to wash afterwards."

"That's a bright suggestion," Mary called back. "We haven't any time to lose if we are to get everything ready for mamma and Jack by to-morrow afternoon."

When she came dancing out into the kitchen a few minutes later Norman had already begun his luncheon, and was walking around with a cheese sandwich in one hand and a pickle in the other, investigating the premises while he ate. Mary followed his example, and wandered from the open doorway to the open windows, looking at the view from each, and exclaiming over each new discovery. The house was on a slight knoll with a wide cotton-field stretching down between it and the little village. From this distance it looked more than ever like a toy village, against the background of low hills.

"You ought to see it from the top of the windmill," said Norman. "I climbed up while you and Mrs. Barnaby were talking so long at the gate. I'm glad we've got a windmill. It'll save me a lot of pumping, and it makes such a fine watch-tower. You ought to see how far you can look across the country. You can see the creek. It's just a little way back of our place."

"I'm going up this minute!" answered Mary. Slipping her unfinished sandwiches into her apron pocket, she ran out to the windmill and began to swing herself from one cross-piece of the tower to another, as lightly as Norman had done.

"It's perfectly lovely!" she called back from the top. "I'd like to perch up here all afternoon if there wasn't so much to do. I'm going to come up here often. It gives you such a high-up-above-all-your-earthly-ills feeling! There's St. Peter's," she called, "over at the south end of town. I recognize the little stone belfry. What do you suppose that square tower is at the other end of town?"

Norman came out and climbed half-way up the windmill, swinging there below her by one arm, as he slowly munched a ginger-snap.

"Oh, that," he said, as he looked in the direction which she pointed. "That's the Sisters' school. I asked Pedro this morning. It's the Academy of the Holy Angels."

Mary's face glowed as she shook back the hair which the wind kept blowing into her eyes. "That's perfectly fascinating!" she declared. "There's something beautiful to me in the thought that the little town we've come to lies between two such guardians. It's a good omen, and I'm not sorry now that we had to come."

She stayed perched on the windmill, enjoying the view and eating her sandwiches until Norman called her that the wash-water was boiling over on the stove. Then she climbed nimbly down and started towards the kitchen door. The kitchen was in an ell of the house, and from its front window she could see the road which ran in front of the house. Just across it, half hidden by a row of bushy umbrella trees, stood two little blue cottages. They were within easy calling distance, and the voices of half a dozen children at play came cheerfully across to her. Although they spoke in a foreign tongue the chatter gave her a sense of companionship.

"Norman," she suddenly suggested, "let's stay here to-night, instead of going to the boarding-house as mamma and Mrs. Barnaby arranged. I'm not afraid with neighbors so near, and I'm sure mamma wouldn't care if she could see how quiet and peaceful it is here. We'd be saving considerable – a night's lodging for two, and we can make this real comfortable and homey by bedtime."

With the promise of hot biscuit and honey for supper Norman agreed to her plan. He was to call at the boarding-house and cancel the arrangements Mrs. Barnaby had made for them, when he went for the milk which Mr. Metz had promised to sell them. It was from the Metz bee-hives they were to have the honey, too. She had engaged it as a special treat for Jack.

Under her direction Norman fell to work making a kitchen cabinet out of two old boxes, while she scrubbed away at the chairs and tables.

"Isn't it funny the way history repeats itself?" she remarked. "This makes me think of the time that Joyce and Jack had getting settled in the Wigwam. I felt so defrauded then because I couldn't have a hand in it, and this seems a sort of compensation for what I missed then."

The exercise seemed to loosen her tongue, for as she worked she went on, "I'm truly glad that I can enjoy both the top and bottom crusts of things. Nobody, I am sure, could have squeezed more pleasure out of this last week than I did. I fairly revelled in all the luxuries we had as Mr. Robeson's guests. It comes so easy to be waited on and to be the fine lady. And on the other hand, it is a real joy to be working this way, blacking stoves and filling lamps and making things look spick and span. I can spend like a lord and I can skimp like a scrubwoman, and I really don't know which I enjoy most."

She did not attempt to put any finishing touches to the house that day, but left such things as the hanging of curtains and the few pictures they had brought until next morning. But before she stopped everything was shining, her room was ready for the night, and a cot was made up for Norman in the room which he was to share with Jack. Later, while she waited for the biscuits to bake and for him to come home with the milk and honey, she wrote a letter to Joyce. She did not take time to go to the bottom of her trunk for writing material, but emptying the sugar from a large paper sack, cut it into several square sheets. With a big tin pan turned bottom upwards in her lap for a desk, she hastily scribbled the events of the day with a lead-pencil, which she sharpened with the carving-knife.

Joyce has that letter yet. It was scribbled in the most careless, commonplace way, just as Mary would have told it had they been together; but Joyce, who could read her little sister like a book, read between the lines and divined the disappointments she had conquered, and saw the courage it took to make the most of every amusing incident in such a cheery way, while she touched only lightly on the serious ones.

"We had a visitor a little while ago," wrote Mary, in closing. "The Reverend Paul Rochester came to call, and where, of all awkward impossible places, do you suppose he found me? Up on the windmill tower. I had gone up again to watch the sunset, – for just a minute. The glow on the roofs of the town and the hills beyond was so lovely! If Norman had had any sense he would have ignored my high perch. He was splitting kindling by the back door, making such a noise that we could not hear Mr. Rochester's knock at the front door, so he came around."

"Mrs. Barnaby had stopped at the rectory on her way home to tell them about our coming to town, and Mrs. Rochester thought that we were all here, and that we would be so busy getting settled that we wouldn't have much time to cook things for an invalid, and she had sent the most tempting basketful of good things you ever saw. There was orange gelatine and charlotte russe, and

some delicious nut sandwiches. The rector had walked all the way up here and carried the basket himself. You know I've always stood in awe of clergymen. At first this one seemed fully as dignified and reverend as all the others, and I nearly fell off my perch with embarrassment when he looked up and saw me hanging there like a monkey on a stick. But the next moment we both laughed, and he seemed almost as young and boyish as Jack.

"I scuttled down in a hurry, I assure you. He only stayed a minute, just long enough to deliver the basket and his wife's message, but you've no idea how that little incident changed the whole atmosphere. I'd been looking down the white road that leads from our place into the town, thinking how lonely and foreign everything was, and how hard it would be to live all winter in a place where nobody wanted to be neighborly, and where the only people we knew were slightly old like the Barnabys or awfully old like the Metzses, and then Mr. Rochester appeared, young and so nice-looking and with a jolly twinkle in his eyes that makes you forget the clerical cut of his clothes.

"His wife must be young, too, or she couldn't be married to him, and she must be dear or she wouldn't have sent such a dainty, altogether charming basket with her message of greeting. You've no idea how their cordial welcome changed everything. Now as I look through the open door at the same road leading to the town, it doesn't look lonely and foreign any more. It makes me think of a verse that dear old Grandmother Ware taught me once. You remember how she used to take us up in her lap and make us spell the words out to her from her big Bible with the terrible pictures. '*The crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth!*'

"Well, grandmother's verse is coming true. It was all so crooked and uncertain and rough yesterday. But now everything is being smoothed out for us so beautifully. I have just looked out to see if Norman is coming. I can hear him whistling away down the road.

"I wish you, with your artist's eye for effect, could see the little town now, spread out below the hills in the twilight, with the windmills silhouetted against the sky. At one end is the little stone belfry of St. Peter's, at the other the square gray tower of the Academy of the Holy Angels; and just between, swinging low over the hills in the faint afterglow, the pale golden crescent of the new moon. After all, it's a good old world, Joyce, and I 'feel it in my bones' that little old Bauer is going to bring us some great good that shall make us thankful always for having come. In some way, I am sure, all our '*rough ways shall be made smooth.*'"

CHAPTER IV

MARY FINDS GAY

The day before Thanksgiving saw the Ware family fully settled in their new home. The trunks had been unpacked and their contents disposed of to make the little cottage look as homelike as possible. Even the preparations for their Thanksgiving dinner were all made. They had been simplified by Mrs. Barnaby's gift of a jar of mince-meat, and the plump hen, which was to take the place of a turkey, had been bought already dressed.

Now at only nine o'clock the morning work was all done, and Mrs. Ware sat sewing on the south gallery where Jack had wheeled himself into the sunshine. Mary came and stood in the doorway.

"Things stay so clean here," she grumbled in a laughing way. "I could do everything there is to be done with one hand and not half try, and when you all help we get through so fast it makes me dizzy. Then there's nothing left to do but sit in the sun and wait till time to get the next meal ready. I wish I hadn't been in such a hurry to put everything in order. I wouldn't be so restless and idle now. It makes me fidgety to have nothing to do."

"Take the basket and dishes back to the rectory," suggested Mrs. Ware, after Jack had proposed several occupations to no purpose.

"But I've never met Mrs. Rochester yet," objected Mary, "and it would be sort of awkward, going in and introducing myself."

"No more awkward than it was for Mr. Rochester to come here and introduce himself," said Jack. "You can tell her for me that that charlotte russe was perfection."

"I wonder what she is like," mused Mary, half persuaded to go and see. "If I thought she'd be approachable and easy to talk to – but –"

"Oh, you know she's all right," urged Jack, "or she never would have been so good to a family of strangers. I'll bet she's a dear, motherly old soul, in a checked apron, with gray hair and a double chin."

"Why, she couldn't be!" cried Mary. "Not and be Mr. Rochester's wife. He doesn't look much older than you do, and for all he's so dignified there's something so boyish and likable about him that I felt chummy with him right away."

"Well, the things she cooked tasted as if she were the kind of woman I said," persisted Jack, "and I shall keep on thinking of her as that kind until it's proved that my guess is wrong. I should think that anybody with as much curiosity as you have would go just to satisfy it."

"You mean you want yours satisfied," retorted Mary. "Well, she'll do it herself in a few days. She sent word that she'd call soon, so I believe that I'll wait."

Coming out she stood leaning idly against one of the gallery posts, a restless, dissatisfied little figure. Then she strolled out to the front gate and stood there awhile, looking down the deserted road. Jack's gaze followed her sympathetically, and he said to his mother in a low tone, "Poor little kid, it's going to be a dull winter for her I'm afraid. She was never cut out for solitude. She'd 'rather dwell in the midst of alarms,' and this place isn't much more diverting than a country graveyard."

Mrs. Ware's glance followed his, then she replied confidently as she looked down to thread her needle, "Oh, she'll soon adjust herself. She'll find something that will not only keep her busy but will amuse all the rest of us."

Jack picked up the magazine from which he had been reading aloud the evening before and resumed the story, but he was conscious all the time of the little figure at the gate, and saw her without seeming to notice when she slipped around the corner of the house presently to the back yard. Then he looked up with a smile when he heard the creaking of the windmill crank at the back of the house.

"She's stopping the wheel," said Mrs. Ware, "so that she can climb to the top of the tower again. It seems to have some sort of fascination for her."

Jack went on with his story, and Mary, perched on her watch-tower, clung to the bar above and looked down over the town. The currents of air were stronger up at the height to which she had climbed. Down below scarcely a breath was stirring, but here a fresh breeze blew the hair into her eyes and began to blow the discontent out of her mind. Her wish that Jack could see the view was followed instantly by the thought that he could never, never have any other outlook than the one the wheeled chair afforded.

"It's wicked of me to be discontented one single minute," she thought remorsefully. "There I was fussing right before him about having nothing to do, when he'd give worlds just to be foot loose – to climb up here and walk about the place. And he was so dear and considerate, never once reminded me how much harder it is for him than me, and that he has nothing else to look forward to as long as he lives."

The yellow walls of the rectory gleamed through the trees at the north end of the little hamlet, reminding her of Jack's laughing wish to know what Mrs. Rochester was like.

"It's as little as I can do to go and find out for him," she thought, "even if he did ask it in a joke. I ought to be willing to do anything in the world he expresses a wish for, poor boy. There's little enough here to amuse him."

A few minutes later, in her travelling suit and hat, with Mrs. Rochester's basket on her arm, she interrupted the reading on the gallery.

"I'm going to see your motherly friend," she announced – "to find out if she is gray-haired and double-chinned. Maybe I'll tell her how you described her."

"Don't you dare," warned Jack, laughingly. "I'll get even with you if you do."

"You've already done that on a dozen old scores," answered Mary gaily. "Good-bye, my friends and kinsmen dear! As the story books say, 'we shall see what we shall see.'"

What she saw when she rang the bell at the rectory was the exact opposite of the motherly creature whom Jack had pictured; for Mrs. Rochester, who came to the door herself, was tall and slim and very young, with the delicate, spirituelle kind of beauty that had always been plump little Mary's greatest admiration and desire. One part of Jack's guess was correct, however. She wore a big checked apron, for she was making cake, and she invited Mary into the dining-room where the materials were all spread out on the table.

With the girlish cordiality that had won her so many friends even in unsociable Bauer, she made Mary feel so much at home, that in a few moments she was insisting on helping with the cake. It seemed a matter of course that Mrs. Rochester should hand her the egg-beater, and before the eggs were whipped into a stiff white mountain of snow, they were exchanging experiences like old friends. Mrs. Rochester had found Bauer a lonely place too, at first.

"Jack says there was some great mix-up made when I alighted on this planet," said Mary. "I should have dropped down some place where 'the breaking waves dashed high on a stern and rock-bound coast.' He says I wasn't meant for a quiet fish-pond existence."

"I know," laughed her hostess. "You feel as if you were bound into the wrong book. You'd be perfectly satisfied to find yourself in one of Scott's novels, in a jumble of knights and tourneys and border wars, but you would be bored beyond endurance to have to be one of the characters in Jane Austen's stories."

"Oh, you *do* know," cried Mary eagerly, emphasizing her pleasure with a harder bang of the egg-beater. "You understand exactly. There's nothing tamer than Miss Austen's stories. Why, there's pages and pages taken up with just discussing the weather and each other's health; and they do such trivial, inane things and go around and around in such a deadly monotonous circle that sometimes I've been so out of patience with them that I wanted to throw the book into a corner."

"But you never did throw it down," answered Mrs. Rochester, "you read on to the end and in spite of yourself you were interested in those same commonplace happenings and conversations, just as readers before you have been interested in them and always will be as long as those books live."

And I'll tell you why. You read them to the end because they are true pictures of the lives of average people. The majority of us have to put up with the humdrum, no matter how much we long for the heroic, and it's a good thing to read such books as 'Emma' and 'Pride and Prejudice' every now and then, as a sort of spirit-level. We're more satisfied to amble along the road if everybody else drives a slow nag too."

"I'm not," declared Mary. "I want to whizz past everything in sight that is poky and slow. I know it would be lots easier for me if I could only make up my mind to the fact that nothing exciting and important is ever going to happen to me, but I can't break myself of the habit of expecting it. I've felt that way as far back as I can remember. I'm always looking for something grand and unexpected, and every morning when I wake up it gives me a sort of thrill to think, maybe it will come to-day."

"Well, if you're going to stay in Bauer for awhile you certainly do need another dose of 'Emma,'" answered Mrs. Rochester, nodding to the shelves in the adjoining library, where stood a well thumbed edition of Miss Austen's works. "Take her home with you, and any of the books you think your brother would like. We are glad to make our library a circulating one."

Mary's face showed her pleasure quite as much as her words, as she left her seat by the table to slip into the great book-lined room and glance around it.

"You've made up for one of my disappointments," she called back. "I had counted so much on having the library in San Antonio to draw on this winter, and this is even better, for I'm sure that they haven't all these rare old prints and first editions that I see here."

Her five minutes' call stretched into an hour, when she found that Mrs. Rochester had been brought up in Washington and had spent her school days there. Then it stretched into two, for some one drove in from the country with a carriage load of autumn leaves, and Mary stayed to help arrange them in the little church for the Thanksgiving service next day. It was nearly noon when she finally started home with several books under her arm, her usual hopefulness and buoyancy of spirits quite restored.

"Mamma and I can't both be away from Jack at the same time," she said in response to Mrs. Rochester's invitation to attend the service next day. "I want her to come. I've already had my share of Thanksgiving. I've been thankful every minute while I've been here that I discovered you. It's been a beautiful morning."

"Come over often," urged Mrs. Rochester cordially. "I can always find something for you to do, and I'd love to have you come."

Mary's wave of the hand as she turned to latch the gate at the end of the walk was answered by a flutter of Mrs. Rochester's apron in the doorway, and each went her way smiling over the recollection of the other.

"She's a diverting little piece," Mrs. Rochester reported to her husband at noon. "I laughed all the time she was here."

"She's a darling," Mary reported at home, and quoted her at intervals for several days.

"She's promised to take me with her sometime when she drives out to call at the ranches. Nearly all the members of St. Boniface are out-of-town people, so they'll probably not call on us she says. But she's coming as soon as she can get around to it. I saw our name on a list she has hanging beside her calendar. But there's nearly a week full of things for her to do before she gets to us. I wish that I had a list of duties and engagements that would keep me going every minute, the way she has to go."

"You can easily fill out a list that will keep you busy for awhile," answered her mother. "While you were gone Jack and I got to discussing dates, and it was somewhat of a shock to find that Christmas will be here so soon. One forgets the calendar in this summer-like climate. Whatever we send to Holland and Joyce must be started from here in less than three weeks, and as our gifts must be all home-made we cannot afford to lose any time in beginning."

The problem of Christmas giving had always been a knotty one in the Ware household, but it was especially hard this year. Mary spent nearly all afternoon making her list of names with the

accompanying list of gifts that seemed suitable for each one. There were so many to whom she longed to send little remembrances that the length of it was appalling. Then she revised it, putting in one column such people as Madam Chartley and Mrs. Lee, to whom she decided to write letters – the gayest, brightest greetings she could think of. Still there were a goodly number left to provide with gifts, no matter how simple, and she was busy till bed-time measuring and figuring over the amount of material she would need for each, and how much it would cost. It had been decided that she should go to San Antonio for a day to attend to the family shopping.

"The trouble is," she sighed next morning, "it's the simplest things that are always the hardest to get. Don't you remember, in the story of Beauty and the Beast, the father had no difficulty in buying ropes of jewels and costly things for his oldest daughters, but it almost cost him his life to get the one common little white rose that his youngest daughter so modestly asked for. I could do this shopping in a few hours if I did not have to stop to consider pennies, but there are several little things that may take me all day to find. I'm sure that that particular kind of narrow beading that I need for Lloyd's present will prove to be the fatal white rose. I can't make it without and there isn't time to send back East for it."

"Maybe you'd better arrange to stay over night," suggested her mother, "and take two days to look around for what you want. Of course you couldn't go to a hotel alone, and it would be too expensive even if you had company, but Mrs. Rochester might be able to recommend some private family who has rooms for transients."

Mary caught at the idea so eagerly that had it not been Thanksgiving Day and she feared to intrude, she would have gone that very hour to ask if the Rochesters knew of such a place. She remembered that they were to have guests to dinner. Fortunately for her peace of mind the rector and his wife called for a few moments just before dusk. Mrs. Rochester did know of a quiet inexpensive place where she could spend the night, and then and there slipped off her gloves to write a cordial note of introduction.

It rained the Friday after Thanksgiving, but the next day was fair, and Mary insisted on doing the week's washing Saturday morning, and as much of the ironing as she could accomplish in the afternoon, in order to be able to start early Monday morning. Several times she left her tubs to run into the house and jot down some small items on her memorandum, which she remembered would be indispensable in making up their Christmas packages. Once she thought of something in the night, when the barking of a neighbor's dog awakened her.

If she had been alone in the room she would have lighted a candle and made a note of it. As it was she was afraid to do so lest she waken her mother, and afraid not to lest it should slip her mind before morning. Finally she settled the difficulty by putting her hand to her head and pulling out several hairs which she twisted together and tied around her finger.

"There!" she said to herself. "Hair will make me think of herring, and then ring will make me think of the little white celluloid rings that I must get for those safety-pin holders."

Armed with Mrs. Rochester's letter she started off gaily on the Monday morning train. It was not due in the city till nearly ten, so she decided that it would save time to go at once to the largest department store, check her suit-case and wait until shopping hours were over before going out to the boarding-house which Mrs. Rochester had recommended.

She had thought San Antonio charming the first time she saw it, but it seemed doubly so now that she came back to it, as one familiar with its principal streets and landmarks. The life, the color, the holiday air of the crowds, the fête day atmosphere of the old town itself, exhilarated her till her cheeks glowed like roses, and several times, both on the street and in the stores, she caught herself whistling half under her breath.

Although the usual Monday morning bargain hunters were out in throngs, she found no trouble in making her purchases. Everything seemed to be in her favor this morning. The shop girls were unusually responsive and helpful, showed her just what she wanted or suggested something better

than she had thought of. Only once or twice did the prices go above the limit she had set for them, and several times they were lower. By quarter to twelve she had checked off two thirds of the articles on her list.

Elated by this success, she stood waiting at the transfer desk for her change, looking around with unabated interest. Suddenly her attention was attracted to a girl in a brown tailor suit, standing in the next aisle. Her back was turned towards Mary, but there was something familiar looking in the poise of the graceful head; something very familiar looking in the puffs of soft auburn-bronze hair held by amber combs, and arranged so becomingly under the big brown hat.

Mary had been on the look-out all morning for the girl whom Jack had recognized at the hotel as Gay Melville. She might have missed her had Gay been an ordinary blonde or brunette, but as Jack said, there was no mistaking that glorious hair. Snatching up the proffered change, which the cashier put through the cage window, she pushed her way into the next aisle. The girl turned. The big plumed hat drooped over her face, still Mary recognized the delicate profile, the slight tilt of the slender chin. It was an opportunity which she could not afford to lose, and as the girl turned her back again to receive a package held out to her by a clerk, and started slowly to the door, Mary hurried after her.

Almost breathless in her eagerness she exclaimed impulsively, "I beg your pardon – but aren't you *Gay*?"

There was an instant of freezing silence as the eyes of the girl in brown swept Mary from head to foot.

"Well, not particularly," was the indignant reply.

The roll of her r's emphasized Mary's mistake. It was evidently some stranger from the North whom she had accosted. One glance into her full face made Mary see how dire her mistake had been. There was no resemblance whatever in that to Gay. Wishing that she could drop out of sight through the floor, she hastily apologized and hurried out into the street, her cheeks burning, as she smarted under the recollection of the stranger's supercilious glance.

"She needn't have been so snippy," Mary thought. "*Anybody* is liable to make such mistakes."

Not until she had crossed the street and was stopped short by her own reflection in a mirror in the show window opposite, did she realize how her question might have sounded.

"Oh, she must have thought that I was asking her if she wasn't *gay*! *Gay with a little g!*" she gasped. "No wonder she looked at me so freezingly."

She was so perturbed by this discovery, that she walked on, unmindful of the direction. When a group of children crowded past her on the narrow pavement, she turned into a side street to avoid being jostled, and walked aimlessly for some distance. It was the sight of a green kettle swinging above a door which she was approaching that brought her to herself with a start. Mrs. Rochester had told her to stop at the Sign of the Green Kettle for lunch, and had given her directions for finding it. Here she had stumbled upon it unaware, just as the city bells were beginning to clang for noon.

At the next glance her heart went to thumping so hard that she could plainly hear it. There on the step leading up to the door of the Green Kettle, stood Gay Melville; the real Gay this time. There was no shadow of doubt about it. As she looked, Mary wondered how she ever could have mistaken the other girl for her, although each had hair wonderfully like the other.

This one carried a violin case. She had paused on her way in to call back something to the girl in the carriage, who had brought her down town. And the girl in the carriage was Roberta – Roberta of the boyish speech and coquettish eyelashes, whose laughing question held the girl on the step long enough for Mary to reach it too, and stand there beside her while she gathered courage to speak.

It was the little pin thrust through Gay's tie which finally brought the words trembling to Mary's lips, for it was the Warwick Hall pin which only its alumni might wear; those who had kept the four years' tryst with all its requirements. It was a mailed hand rising from a heart to grasp a spear, the motto and the crest of Edryn.

All diffidence fled at that familiar sight, but this time Mary did not ask if the girl were gay. With a gesture toward the pin she cried breathlessly, "Oh, I know by *that* that you are Miss Melville. *Aren't* you!" Gay after one look into the eager gray eyes said quite as cordially, "And you're Mary Ware! I had a letter from Betty Lewis this very morning telling me to be sure to find you."

She gave a quick glance at the chatelaine watch she wore. "I haven't a minute to stop – I'm to play an obligato for the great prima donna, Madame de Martel, and she has a beast of a temper which she lets loose if a person is one second late at rehearsal. But I must take time to say one thing if she wipes me off the face of the earth for it. The girls' letters have made me wild to know you. At what hotel can I find you? I'll call this very day."

"We've taken a cottage in Bauer," Mary answered hastily. "I came down on a little shopping expedition, and am on my way in here for luncheon."

The heavy chords of a piano accompaniment rolled threateningly through the music rooms upstairs, and Gay shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "Do be a long time over it," she begged as she turned towards the stairs. "I'll get through as quickly as possible and hurry back for another word with you."

Mary watched her out of sight before starting into the dining-room of the Green Kettle, and then deliberately pinched herself to make sure that she was awake. It was a good hard nip, which hurt, and smiling to herself because it proved that she was not dreaming, she sat down at a table near the window to gloat over the fact that one of her best dreams had come true at last. She had met Gay Melville.

The lunch was a good one, but it would have made no difference to Mary what was put before her that day. Anything would have been nectar and ambrosia served to the accompaniment of the music overhead. A chorus of cherubim and seraphim could not have left her more uplifted. Madame de Martel might have the temper of a beast at times, but she had a voice of rare sweetness and power, and the knowledge that it was Gay's violin pouring out that tremulous, tender, heartbreaking obligato, enhanced Mary's enjoyment of every note.

The rehearsal was a short one. All that the famous visiting singer wanted was to make sure, since her own accompanists had failed her, that the local ones were satisfactory. It came to an end just as Mary began her dessert, and almost instantly it seemed Gay was at her elbow, and seating herself in the chair beside her.

"Isn't it a shame I haven't more than two minutes to stay," she began. "This is like having Warwick Hall and Lloydsboro Valley rolled into one, to find somebody who loves them both as much as I do. I could talk a week without stopping about each place, and ask a thousand questions, but I'm due at a luncheon out on Government Hill by the time the next car can put me there. Immediately after that is over we're all going to the polo tournament. All during rehearsal I kept trying to think of some way I could arrange to see you, and there's only one. You've simply got to come home with me to stay all night. Go on and finish your shopping, and I'll come down for you after the tournament and meet you anywhere you say."

The invitation, as cordial as it was sudden, was gladly accepted and Gay exclaimed, "Oh, I'm so delighted to think I've found you at last! You've no idea how often you were quoted the summer I was in the Valley. Lloyd and Betty and the old Colonel and Dr. Alex Shelby were always saying 'as little Mary Ware says.' I feel as if I'd known you from babyhood up."

"And I know all about your past," laughed Mary. She was about to mention several incidents to prove her claim, when Gay stopped her by a glance at the clock and the question: "Wouldn't you like to see the dress parade at the Post this evening? Most people do, and it's well worth seeing."

Would she *like* it! Mary's beaming face answered the question before her usually ready tongue found a word, and Gay smiled as she hastily drew on her gloves and picked up her violin case.

"I'd like to keep you all to myself to-night," she said, "but I do want you to meet some of the people that Kitty Walton liked best when she visited me last year. I'll pick up Roberta and Lieutenant

Boglin to take dinner with us if I can get them. They're always so nice to my Warwick Hall friends. They were both wild about Kitty. Well, at quarter to five, then, I'll meet you – where?"

Finally the glove counter at Joske's was agreed upon as a meeting place, and with a friendly pat on the shoulder in passing, Gay hurried away to keep her engagement. Smiling blissfully after her, Mary whispered to herself with one of her old childish wriggles of pleasure, "And *Bogey*, too."

CHAPTER V

AT FORT SAM HOUSTON

Promptly at the time agreed upon, Mary took her station by the glove counter, almost sure that Gay would be late. It was one of the Warwick Hall traditions that something tragic always happened to Gay's clothes at the last moment, to delay her departure. But she had scarcely seated herself and deposited her suit-case on the floor beside her when the door opened and Gay came breezily into the store. Her hat was awry and her hair disheveled.

"On time for once," she exclaimed triumphantly with a glance at the clock. "But I couldn't have been if Roberta hadn't come to the rescue. She brought me down in their carriage. It's Roberta Mayrell," she explained, as they made their way as rapidly as possible down the crowded aisle.

"She isn't really one of the Army girls, but she lives just outside the Post and has always been counted in everything there, since she was old enough to talk. I've been telling her all about you on the way down."

"Well, I hope she'll find me as interesting as the alligators," began Mary, remembering the speech she had overheard from the hotel balcony. But Gay was stopping to apologize to an old lady whom she had bumped into, and did not hear the remark. The next moment they were outside and at the curbstone, where a carriage drawn by two Kentucky horses was in waiting, and Roberta was stepping down with outstretched hands to welcome her.

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