

Strawberry Acres

Grace S. Richmond

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Strawberry Acres

By GRACE S. RICHMOND

1911

TO THE OWNER OF "GRASSLANDS"

CONTENTS

PART I.--FIVE MILES OUT

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CHAPTER

- I. Five Miles Out
- II. Everybody Explores
- III. The Apartment Overflows
- IV. Arguments and Answers
- V. Telephones and Tents
- VI. In the Pine Grove
- VII. Everybody is Satisfied
- VIII. Problems and Hearts
- IX. Max Compromises
- X. Jack-O'-Lantern

PART II.--THE LANES AND THE ACRES

- I. What's in a Name
- II. In the Old Garden
- III. Afternoon Tea
- IV. Two and Two
- V. On an August Evening
- VI. Time-Tables
- VII. The Southbound Limited
- VIII. From April North
- IX. Round the Corner
- X. Green Leaves

Strawberry Acres

PART I.--FIVE MILES OUT

CHAPTER I

FIVE MILES OUT

The four Lanes--Max, Sally, Alec and Robert--climbed the five flights of stairs to their small flat with the agility of youth and the impetus of high but subdued excitement. Uncle Timothy Rudd, following more slowly, reached the outer door of the little suite of rooms in time to hear what seemed to be the first outburst.

"Well, what do you think now?"

"Forty-two acres _and_ the house! Open the windows and give us air!"

"Acres run to seed, and the house tumbling down about its own ears! A magnificent inheritance that!" Max cast his hat upon a chair as if he flung it away with the inheritance.

"But who ever thought Uncle Maxwell Lane would ever leave his poor relations anything?" This was Sally.

"Five miles out by road--a bit less by trolley. Let's go and see it to-morrow afternoon. Thank goodness a half holiday is so near."

"Anybody been by the place lately?"

"I was, just the other day, on my wheel. I didn't think it looked so awfully bad." This was Robert, the sixteen-year-old.

As Uncle Timothy entered the tiny sitting-room Sally was speaking. She had thrown her black veil back over her hat, revealing masses of flaxen hair, and deep blue eyes glowing with interest. Her delicate cheeks were warmly flushed, partly with excitement, and partly because for two hours now--during the journey from the flat to the lawyer's office, the period spent therein listening to the reading of Uncle Maxwell Lane's will and the business appertaining thereto, and the return trip home--she had worn the veil closely drawn. Her simple mourning was to her a screen behind which to shield herself from curious eyes, always attracted by those masses of singularly fair hair and the unusual contours of the young face beneath.

"I think it's a godsend, if ever anything was," she was saying. "Here's Max, killing himself in the bank, and Alec growing pale and grouchy in the office, and even Bob--" She was interrupted by a chorus of protests against her terms of description.

"I'm not killing myself!"

"Pale and grouchy! I'm not a patch on--"

"What's the matter with Bob, Sally Lunn?"

"And Uncle Timmy," continued Sally, undisturbed by interpolations to which she was quite accustomed, "pining for fresh air--."

"I walk in the park every day, my dear," Uncle Timothy felt obliged to remind her.

"Yes, I know. But you've lived in a little city flat just as long as it's

good for you, and you need to be turned outdoors. So do we all. Oh, boys, and Uncle Timmy!--I just sat there, crying and smiling under my veil in that dreadful office--crying to think that I _couldn't_ cry for Uncle Maxwell, because he was so cold and queer to us always, and yet he had given us this property, after all--."

"And a mighty small fraction of the estate it is, I hope you understand!" growled Max.

But Sally went on without minding. Everybody was used to Max's growls. "And smiling because I couldn't help it just to think we had a chance at last to get out of the city. We can do it. Five miles by trolley is nothing for you boys, or for me, when I need to come in."

"You're not talking about our going to live out there!" Max's tone was derisive.

"Why not?"

"Have you seen the place lately?"

"Not since I was a little girl, but I remember I thought it was lovely then."

"It isn't lovely now, if it ever was--which I doubt. In the first place it belongs to that little suburb of Wybury--as commonplace a village as ever existed within five miles of as big a city as this. In the second place it's as much an abandoned farm as neglect can make a place that was once, I suppose, an aristocratic sort of country home. The old mansion is as big as a barn, and as hopeless. You couldn't any more make a home out of it!--Why, you could put this whole apartment into the room at the left of the hall!"

"How do you know so much about it?" demanded Sally. "None of us has been there since Aunt Alicia died--that was when we were children, and Uncle Maxwell used to spend his summers there."

"He hasn't spent them there since she died," Max asserted. "How do I know so much about it? I was down there last summer with Frank Sustis. His father sent him out to look the place over, with a view to buying it himself for a summer home. You should have heard Frank jeer at the idea while we were going about."

"It makes no difference," persisted Sally, removing her hat and folding the veil with care. "I want to see it. We'll go out to-morrow, won't we?"

She appealed to her second brother, Alec, a young fellow of twenty, who had thrown himself listlessly into a chair but who was listening attentively to the discussion. He nodded. "Of course. You couldn't keep one of us away, even Max. He wouldn't be done out of the pleasure of showing us over the place and pointing out the defects, if, by keeping still, he could own the whole ranch himself."

"It'll be jolly fun to go!" cried Bob, quickly. He could not bear sounds of disagreement between the members of his family, because he knew Sally did not like it.

"What do you think about the old place, Uncle Timmy?" questioned Sally

presently. She had taken off her one carefully-used street suit, and had put on a fresh little black-and-white print, in which she was setting the table for dinner. All the others except Uncle Timothy had gone out on various errands.

"Well, Sally," said Mr. Timothy Rudd, thoughtfully, "I don't know that I'm a competent judge. Your Uncle Maxwell's place was considered a fine one in its day. Before he made so much money and took to living in town, he used to like it there, I think, though he didn't say much about it. I'm sorry it's been allowed to run down. There was a pine grove on it, and a splendid young apple orchard, and a timber tract at the back that ought to be worth considerable money by this time, if it hasn't been cut. Probably it has, with timber bringing the prices it does now."

"About the house," inquired Sally, after Uncle Timothy had gone into more or less detail concerning the place itself. "I'm especially interested in the house. Do you think it would be out of the question for us to live there?"

"I don't know. It would be something of a change from this," he admitted, looking about the little dining-room. "You've managed to make us all pretty comfortable here, with what there was left of the furniture after the sale. I don't know how far it would go in Maxwell's big house. It's pretty large, that's a fact. According to Max, it's in need of a good deal of repair. Of course, as far as I'm concerned, I should like to live out in the country among the green things, as I used to do, up in New Hampshire. It would be good for us all. But you can tell better after you've seen the place again."

There was no denying this. Sally's head was so full of plans it was difficult to wait until the afternoon of the next day, when everybody should be at liberty to make the trip to Wybury. The moment luncheon was over they started, and by two o'clock the trolley-car, whizzing out through the suburbs to the open country, then following the curve along the river edge to pass through the small settlement called Wybury, had deposited them in the centre of that village.

The Maxwell place lay a quarter of a mile down the river road, and the party set off promptly to cover the short distance. It was early April, sunny and mild, but still rather damp under foot. After leaving the board sidewalks of Wybury there was no accommodation for foot passengers except the path at the side of the road.

"Imagine tramping through this mud every night and morning," was Max's first contribution to the effort he meant to make to disillusionize his romantic sister, whose dreams of life in the country he considered worse than folly. He turned up his trousers widely at the bottom as he spoke.

"It's such a little way, we could soon have a better path," Sally replied. "Look, there are the chimneys, I'm sure, just beyond that grove of pines. It's hardly more than five minutes' walk from the car."

"Five minutes through a February blizzard is five minutes too much."

"But five minutes through a midsummer evening is an hour too little," Sally gave him back.

"That pine grove belongs to the place," called back Bob, who was considerably in advance of the others. Sally, in spite of her eagerness,

was adapting her pace to the limitations of Uncle Timothy, who at sixty could hardly be expected to walk in competition with nineteen.

"Pine groves are worth something these days," said Max, eyeing the thick tops critically.

Sally had charmed eyes for the pine grove; but she did not look at it long, for beyond showed the great chimney-tops she remembered from her childhood, when it had been the happiest treat she knew to be invited by Aunt Alicia to spend the day at Uncle Maxwell's country place.

The young Lanes had all been born and brought up in the city. Their home had been one of moderate luxury until, three years before, their father had died suddenly, leaving the mere remnant of an estate which had been supposed to be a large one. The shock, and the change from a life of ease to one of close economy, had weakened the always delicate constitution of the wife and mother until, a year after her husband's death, she had followed him.

Max had left college at the end of his third year and gone into the bank of which his Uncle Maxwell was vice-president. Alec, just ready for college, had reluctantly resigned his purpose and taken a position in the drafting-office of a firm of contractors, friends of his father. Even Robert, the youngest, had found something to do. The family had sold the old home to obtain money with which to meet expenses until the salaries of the workers should begin to count, and had moved into the little flat where the nineteen-year-old sister had, for a year now, done her girlish best to make a home for her "four men," as she called them, while she kept many violent attacks of heartache bravely hidden--for the most part--under a bright exterior. Nobody knew how Sally disliked the flat--unless it was Bob, who was her closest confidant.

"There's your fine family mansion!" called Max, pointing from the curve of the road, which he had reached close after Bob.

Sally stood still in astonished surprise. Could that really be the aristocratic old place of her memory? Max could hardly be blamed for his derisive comments.

A noble house gone to decay is a sight infinitely more depressing than that of an humble one. This once had been an imposing structure; it looked now like a relic of war times.

"Look at the tumbling chimneys!" crowed Alec. "Look at the broken shutters, swinging by one hinge. See those porch pillars--were they ever white? Behold that side entrance--looks as if a cyclone had struck it!"

Sally was silent. Even her buoyant hopes fell before the indisputable evidence given by her eyes. It was so big--the old place! A small house one might hope to repair, but a large building like this--it would cost more than they would have to spare in years. If the outside were any indication of the inside, the situation was hopeless.

She followed Alec in through the gateway, at the dilapidated stone side-posts of which Max gave a significant wave of the hand as he passed. An overgrown hedge ran along the entire front of the place, its untrimmed wildness adding to the general unkempt look, as did the sodden, tangled surface of what had once been a lawn, the rank bunches of shrubbery which half hid the front windows from sight, and the broken bricks in the old

walk which led, beside a grass-grown driveway, from gate-post to porch.

"How did Maxwell ever come to let this place go to seed like this?" lamented Uncle Timothy. "He must have cared nothing at all for it. One would think it was forty years instead of only ten that it had been left to wind and weather."

"It's a wonder that some passing tramp hasn't set fire to it," commented Max, searching in his pocket for the key which had been delivered to him by Mr. Sidway, his uncle's executor. "Take a long breath before I let you in. It'll be musty and fusty enough to stifle you, probably."

With considerable difficulty he turned the key in the rusty lock and opened the door, which turned creakingly upon its long unused hinges. But with the first step inside Sally's drooping spirits leaped up again.

"Oh Max," she cried, "what a beautiful old hall!"

"Beautiful, is it?" inquired Max, laughing contemptuously. "Well, I can't say I see it."

"Looks just like a barracks to me!" sniffed Alec. "Phew-w--what air--or lack of it!"

"But it is beautiful," persisted Sally, in genuine enthusiasm. "See how wide and high, sweeping straight through to that door at the back. And see the wide, low staircase with the spindle railing and the curved posts at the bottom. See the carving over the doors--and the fanlight over the outside ones. And look at that fireplace!"

She dragged Max by one arm and Uncle Timothy by the other, to stand in front of it. Halfway down the hall, sharing one of the great chimneys with another fireplace on the other side of the wall, was a chimney-piece of fine old colonial design. The proportions were colossal.

"It would take a cord of wood to keep the thing going an evening," asserted Max.

"And then nobody'd be warm unless he was sitting with his head inside the hood," supplemented Alec.

But Sally was already off upon explorations. She rushed into the room upon the left of the hall; it was a drawing-room thirty feet long by twenty wide. She darted into the room on the right--it was twenty feet square, and back of it lay another of similar size. She could no longer wait for her party, with their slow and indifferent following of her, but ran from room to room, calling back injunctions to note special points of interest.

Bob kept close behind her. If he cared little for old houses, he cared much for Sally, and he liked to see her eyes sparkle and her lips laugh. Sally had times of being very sad and discouraged, as no one knew so well as he, and if she could find interest in this old barracks--he thought Alec had struck the right word--he was not the boy to dampen it.

"Let's skip up this back staircase, Bobby," proposed Sally, as they turned about from exploring the kitchen and store-rooms. "I'm crazy to find if there aren't some smaller rooms--nice, cozy ones, you know. It can't be all so big everywhere."

"Don't you suppose the upstairs rooms are just the shape of the lower ones?" suggested Bob, as they ran up.

"In front, perhaps, but not back here. There ought to be some lovely rambling passageways, and steps up and steps down, and rooms where you don't expect them, and a splendid attic--and perhaps a secret staircase. Bob--what if there should actually be a secret staircase!"

Bob laughed. "You've been reading spooky stories. I suppose--"

"Robert Rudd Lane! Will you behold that little flight of five steps, leading up to that door!"

Sally was down the hall and up the five steps in a flash. She would have burst into the unknown region beyond, but a locked door barred her way. Bob stood below and laughed at her baffled expression. "You'd rather see through that door than into any other spot in the house that isn't locked up, wouldn't you, Sally Lunn?" he commented, knowingly.

"Run down to Max for the keys, will you, dear?" she begged, and Bob ran.

The others came up. Max and Bob, Alec, and even Uncle Timothy, tried every key in the bunch in vain. Sally attempted to peer through the key-hole. Bob ran outside, and returning reported that there were no shutters in the region opposite the probable position of the door.

"It's undoubtedly a dark store-room, with a row of empty shelves," said Max. "Give it up, Sally. There are places enough to explore. A regiment of infantry could be bivouacked in this second story. See the rooms, and rooms inside of rooms."

"Oh, come away home!" cried Alec, impatiently, before Sally was half satisfied.

"I'm going over to the timber tract. You'd better come along, Al. Let Sally stay here and plan her hotel. Maxwell Inn--eh, Sally? A number on each door, and a fire-escape at each end of the hall. A bell-boy and two chambermaids for this floor; in time, an elevator and a manicure shop!" And Max clattered laughing away down the front staircase, the shallow steps of which he took two at a time.

"It isn't a very cozy nest, is it, Sis?" said Bob, sympathetically, as Sally, after one look into the great square rooms over the front, closed the doors with a bang.

At mention of the timber tract Uncle Timothy had gone downstairs after the others. They heard him shut the front door, and from an upper window saw him walking briskly away.

"No, it isn't--now," she admitted, soberly, "but--what a home it could be made!"

"It's pretty near twice as big as our old one, and that was a fairly good size. We could camp out in a corner of it, but that would be lonesome, don't you think so? We might keep summer boarders."

Sally shook her head. She began to walk back through the upper halls. Bob followed her, and they climbed the attic stairs, finding a great space

above, lighted by low windows shut in by patterns of ironwork.

"Jolly, what a place for rainy days!" ejaculated the boy, moved to greater enthusiasm than he had felt anywhere below stairs. "You could have a workshop and a gymnasium and all sorts of things. You could make it really festive with a few rugs and pillows and hammocks and things. How the fellows I know would like to get up here!"

He lingered behind his sister, who, after one comprehensive look round the big, bare, dusty place, had slipped away downstairs again, guarding her skirts carefully. When Bob, after planning in detail a possible and desirable arrangement of the attic, reluctantly descended, he found her at the top of the little flight of steps which led to the one locked door.

"Look out! The family skeleton may be hidden behind that door!" he called, racing down the hall. "Or worse. Come away, Fatima!"

"Bob," said Sally, regarding him from the top of the steps, her cheeks brightly flushed, her eyes alight with interest, "I simply have to know what's beyond this door."

"What are you expecting to find there, Sis? Trunks full of gold? Family papers, leaving all the Maxwell Lane estate to the Lanes of Henley Street?"

She shook her head with a laughing challenge. "Wait till I get a locksmith here!" she said.

"I'll wait," and Bob sat composedly down on the bottom step, grinning up at his excited sister. "Going to get him out by wireless?"

CHAPTER II

EVERYBODY EXPLORES

Alighting from her mother's carriage in front of the Winona apartments in Henley Street, Josephine Burnside dismissed her coachman and hurried eagerly into the florid vestibule.

"I don't see how Sally endures this sort of thing," she thought, for the hundredth time since the Lane house, near her own in Grosvenor Place, had been sold. The door-latch clicked promptly in answer to her ring, and at the top of the third flight she met Sally.

"I was sure it was you! I'm so glad! I'm all alone," was Sally's joyful welcome; and the next minute Josephine found herself inside the small passage, her outer garments being forcibly removed, and herself borne into the little living-room and established in Uncle Timothy's reading chair, which was the most comfortable one in the place.

"Sewing--as usual? What are you making now? Something lovely out of nothing at all, I suppose?"

"Of course. It's a convenient accomplishment. You didn't know that four

and a half yards of Swiss muslin would make a whole frock, did you? Well, it will--under some conditions." And Sally proudly held up the work of her hands, a nearly finished product at which her friend, attired at the moment in some fifteen yards of silk, stared in amazement.

"Sally Lunn! You didn't--you couldn't! It's not skimpy in the least. You must have pieced out with something else. But where?"

"The remains of my old one, re-enforced underneath, and used where the least wear will come on it. It's not an exact match, but I don't think it will show."

"Show! Not a bit. But I thought putting old and new wash goods together wouldn't do."

"I've shrunk the new, and, as I told you, re-enforced the old with some very thin, cheap lawn. I shall wash it myself--with the ends of my fingers, and my eyes looking the other way. Find the old parts!"

Thus challenged, Josephine brought a pair of very bright black eyes to bear upon the pretty frock, turning it over critically, and after some search discovered the resourceful trick which had made the whole lower half of the skirt and part of the sleeves out of the old muslin.

"You genius!" she cried. "I wish I were half as clever as you." She regarded her friend with the genuine admiration and affection which had carried the comradeship of the two girls safely through the test of the Lanes' altered fortunes.

"How good it is to have you back!" said Sally, returning the look. "You haven't half told me about your winter."

"Yes--but never mind that just now," said Josephine. "I've come to hear about you. Jarvis met Max this morning, heard the news, and told it at luncheon. I simply flew down to show you how glad I am, and to hear more. Tell me, is it a beautiful old place, and shall you go there to live? I suppose I've seen it, but I've forgotten."

"It's a forlorn old place, dreadfully run down, but I want to live in it. The boys won't hear of it--as yet. We've only been there once. We're going again Saturday--you know that's the only time they can all get away."

"What fun. Can't I go, too? There must be something nice about it, or you wouldn't want to live there."

"There's a locked door in it," said Sally, smiling, as her thoughts turned to the mystery. She described the finding of the door to Josephine, who exclaimed:

"I must be there to see it opened! What do you suppose you'll find?"

"Dust and empty shelves, Max says. Blue-beard's murdered wives, says Bob. Alec guesses a lot of broken-backed chairs and a desk with the hinges off. Uncle Timothy thinks it merely leads to the roof. But the steps from the attic do that."

"What do you think?"

"I think everything," admitted Sally, "from antique mirrors and old clothes to empty flower pots and battered and rons. I'm prepared for anything--except the empty shelves. Why should the door be locked so securely if there's nothing behind it?"

"Why, indeed? I don't know why, but my imagination shudders deliciously at the thought of seeing it opened. May I go on Saturday? May Jarvis go? He wanted me to ask. He's having a bad time with his eyes again, can't read, and pines for something to do. A locked closet will interest him."

"Of course you may both go, if you'll get Jarvis to promise not to throw any cold water on my schemes."

"He's not likely to discourage any of your schemes, you know well enough. Hasn't he always taken your part, even against me, since we used to quarrel over which should have the shady side of the sand pile? 'Sun won't hurt your gipsy face, Joey,' he'd say. 'Give Sally the shade, like a gentleman.'"

Both girls laughed. Then Sally grew sober. "Seems to me it's only a little while since Jarvis had his last siege with his eyes," she observed. "Are they quite as bad again?"

"He's not shut up in the dark this time, but has to wear blue goggles in the daytime, is forbidden reading and writing absolutely for weeks, and goes to Doctor Meyer every other day for treatment. He's getting as rampageous as a caged lion, and vows he'll go off to the South Seas, or Labrador, or some other place where books and libraries and literary work won't tantalize him. He'd go to-morrow, I believe, if it weren't for mother. She can't bear the idea."

"It was that last awful year's work at college," said Sally regretfully. "Why did he ever conceive the idea of doing two years' work in one--and why did his friends let him do it?"

"I know--that's what we all say now. So does he."

"Of course he must go Saturday; tell him I particularly want him."

"That will please him. Now do tell me about the whole place," and Josephine settled herself to listen.

Long before Sally had finished, her friend was as eager as herself to see the old house, and was planning with all the help of a vivid imagination what it would be like when it should be "restored." When she went away, just before Sally set about getting dinner for her family, it was with assurances that she and her brother would help Sally, to the best of their ability, to realize her hopes.

This assurance was renewed when, on Saturday afternoon, the Lanes met the Burnside's at the appointed hour to take the trolley-car. With the exception of Uncle Timothy, they were all there, even Max, who had declared his only interest in the place was to sell it. But, hearing that Jarvis Burnside was to inspect it, he had decided to point out to Jarvis the impracticability of making a home out of the property--unless for

some rich man who might be induced to buy it at a figure worth while. He sat beside Jarvis in the car, talking to him, as Sally could see, in a way intended to prejudice him against the place.

But as the party left the car, Jarvis joined Sally, smiled at her from behind the ugly goggles which half disguised a face by no means ugly, and said in an undertone:

"I believe I'm in possession of all the facts. From now on I intend to let the fancies have full play."

"Good for you! I knew you'd never desert me, no matter how much in the wrong I might be," answered Sally, gratefully.

Jarvis had been a fourth brother to her for so long that it seemed a matter of course for her to depend upon his support, but she appreciated it when occasionally the real brothers failed to remember how lonely the young sister was, with no mother at hand to love or advise her. All but Bob. He, the youngest of the family, was like a faithful dog, always beside her when the others jeered or reproached, and always her strongest, most faithful, ally.

"The walking is better today," Sally called out, as they started. Max, true to his cause, promptly denied the truth of this statement. Josephine came to the rescue.

"Who cares what the walking is like, on an April day like this?" she challenged Max. "Isn't the air glorious? And won't it be lovely, across the bridge and along the river, as soon as the leaves are out?"

Max was escorting Josephine, and as they turned the bend in the road he pointed out to her the boundary lines of the estate. She asked him about the values of land in this neighbourhood and the possibilities of making such a place profitable.

"You sound like a business woman," was his comment. "Thinking of investing out here? You ought to get Sally to talk the place up to you. She estimates that by raising violets on the whole forty-two acres and selling them to the florists in town we can be millionaires the first year."

"Why not, at a dollar a bunch?" laughed Josephine. "And think how picturesque your property will look, all a soft purple in the sunshine!"

"Won't it!" agreed Max. "There, that's the house. I suppose you're prepared to fall into ecstasies with Sally on the door-step, and dance a reel with her down the hall."

"Of course I am. But what I really came for is the locked door."

"The door! I believe Sally's forgotten the subject of her dreams. We haven't a tool, any more than we had a week ago."

"Haven't we though?" shouted Bob, from the rear. He began to extract various implements from his pockets on the spot. Sally herself waved her shopping-bag. Jarvis Burnside pulled off his glove and began to search his own pockets.

"I think we'll effect an entrance," he declared, and produced a curious-looking skeleton key. "This will open any ordinary lock."

Josephine said everything Sally could have hoped for about the exterior

of the house, and a few things more. It did seem a little less forlorn than before, the effect, perhaps, of the April sunshine, which lighted its red brick walls into warm and cheerful hues. Jarvis, within the door, removed his goggles and blinked approvingly at the fine colonial features of the wood-work, the lines of the stairway, and the proportions of the fireplace.

"Anybody can see those two are loaded," complained Alec in Max's ear, as they brought up the rear of the procession. "Trust Jarve Burnside to back up Sally every time, and Josephine to join 'em. It's all right enough for him to talk about restoration. He could do it by putting his hand into his pocket. Between 'em they'll get Sally completely off her head."

"There's no harm in looking the thing over," Max replied, absently, but Alec continued to rail. Bob turned and frowned at him as meaningfully as Bob's round and sunny face could frown. Why must Alec follow Max's lead? he thought. One could gain one's point quite as readily and much more agreeably by being amiable. At least, this was Bob's philosophy.

"The door, Sally, the door!" urged Josephine, as the party finished the survey of the lower floor. "I can't take an interest in any more open rooms while I know there's a closed one waiting. Do lead the way up that impressive staircase and take us straight to the place of mystery!"

"Sally's still young enough to want to save the plums in the cake till the last," said Jarvis, as they went up. "Well, well, this stairway is certainly a quaint one--risers about five inches, aren't they, Max? Treads fourteen, at least. Fine for infants and invalids. And comfortable for sitting out dances, Sally!"

"But not so interesting as the five steep steps we are coming to," and Sally led the way down the hall to the side passage, from the end of which rose the little flight which approached the locked door. "Here we are. Now who'll let us in?"

It took the combined efforts of Jarvis and Max, working with one tool after another, to effect an entrance. Clearly this was not an ordinary closet lock which barred the way. But at last, with a vigorous wrench, Jarvis held the yielding door under his hand. From the top step he waved his free arm at the company, standing below.

"One last guess apiece," he demanded of them, "before you look."

"Old seed catalogues and empty hair-oil bottles," said Alec.

"A skeleton in armour!" cried Bob.

"All your Aunt Alicia's ball-dresses and your Uncle Maxwell's wedding clothes," guessed Josephine.

"A mahogany sideboard, dining-table and chairs," murmured Sally, at which there was a general shout.

"Dead beetles, fallen plaster, and a musty copy of 'Plutarch's Lives,'" was Max's cynical contribution.

"Open the door!" cried Bob.

But Jarvis still held it. "I think I'll let in one at a time," he

declared. "Who'll venture first?"

Sally walked up the steps.

"Oh, don't send her in all alone!" begged Josephine. "Think, what if there _should_ be--"

"The skeleton in armour," urged Bob.

"Go on, Sally, you're game," and Max grinned at Josephine and Bob. "It doesn't take much to rouse some people's imaginations. Go ahead, and confront the seed catalogues and the beetles with a bold front."

Jarvis, smiling at Sally and taking note of her pink cheeks, detained her with an injunction. "Whatever you find," he stipulated, "make no outcry. Retain your composure. Remember your friends are close at hand. Three raps on the inside of this door will summon four stout retainers to your side. Are you ready?"

"Ready."

"Remember that defunct beetles are harmless, old clothes retain no characteristics of their former owners, no matter how blood-thirsty, and empty bottles probably never contained fatal potions. If the place is dark, press your finger on this"--he thrust a small electric search-light into her hand--"and the mystery will be illumined. Brave lady, enter!"

He opened the door just wide enough to admit the slim figure in black, which slipped through and promptly closed the door upon itself.

Josephine interfered.

"Jarvis, don't let her shut that door! Something might happen! There might be a--hole in the floor."

"She has blue eyes and you black!" retorted Jarvis. "She has golden locks, you raven. Don't let the outward attributes belie themselves like that."

"_Sh!--Sh-h!_" Josephine held up a beseeching finger.

Everybody listened. A silence ensued, unbroken by raps or sounds of any sort. When this had continued for some five minutes, Josephine spoke urgently: "Jarvis Burnside, open that door! It's all right to joke, but things do happen, and it's not right to fool this way!"

"What's the matter with you, Jo Burnside?" demanded Max, while Jarvis, looking quizzical, still held the door. "Don't you know Sally well enough to know she's not afraid of her shadow? She's playing the game through. She'll come back in her own good time, when she's thoroughly explored whatever's behind that door. A mouse won't give her hysterics, or a flapping window-shade make her scream."

Josephine held her peace, but she looked at Bob. Bob was genuinely uneasy, though determined not to show it. There is undeniably a peculiar atmosphere about old and unused houses, and queer fancies are prone to take possession of those who explore them. It was ten years since this house had been lived in. There was something odd about its having been so completely deserted, with not even a tenant left to occupy its kitchen

regions and look after it. And the lock on this door had been strangely resistant.

Josephine suddenly opened her lips to say: "I shall not stand here waiting another minute!" when three raps on the door brought back her composure.

Jarvis, himself looking a trifle relieved, promptly turned the knob. But he could not open the door.

"It must be a spring-lock," he grunted disgustedly. "Idiot that I was! All right, Sally!" he called. "Got to work the tools over again."

"Sally, O Sally, are you all right?" called Josephine.

There was no reply. Jarvis worked rapidly, repeating his former processes with an impatient hand. When the lock yielded once more, he threw the door open, and the others crowded up the steps.

"A staircase!" was the common ejaculation.

Bob pushed by the rest and ran up it, closely followed by all except Jarvis. "I'll stay on the outside of this fool lock!" he called. But a moment later, investigating, he found that it could be rendered inoperative by a catch on the inside, which, being set, allowed the door to open and close freely. So, after the others, he hurried up the stairs.

These ascended straight between the walls until a sharp curve at the top brought them to a door now wide open. Within the room beyond stood the party, exclaiming at the tops of their voices.

They might well exclaim. Of all the guesses, none had come within distant range of the real thing.

The room was that of a collector of old books, and it had been closed and left precisely as its former owner had arranged it, so far as could be judged by its present appearance. A faded Turkey carpet covered the floor; sun-rotted and dusty draperies hung at the windows, which were of the same sort as those in the attic, close under the eaves, and shut in by a pattern of ironwork. All around the walls stood bookcases, filled with a large collection of books, the greater proportion of them of an age suggestive, to the inexperienced eye, of worthlessness, to the more discerning, of value. An antique desk and a few straight-backed chairs were all the other furnishings of the room, but of these it needed none. Even in its dust-covered condition it was a room to command respectful consideration.

As Jarvis came in, Max was studying the rows of books. He turned about with a small calf-bound volume in his hand, and his eye fell on Jarvis, entering.

"Jarve," he exclaimed, "I believe this is treasure-trove, sure enough! If this isn't a 'first edition,' I'll eat the book, covers and all!"

Jarvis hurried to his side. He took the book, examined the fly-leaf, and turned its pages. His eyes lighted with interest. "Of course it is!" he declared. "And by the looks of them, there are plenty more. How on earth do they come to be here? This is a gold mine that beats the mahogany sideboard out of sight."

"It's more than I know. Uncle Maxwell was no book-lover, as far as I've ever heard. Perhaps Uncle Tim can tell, though he's on mother's side, and never was here much."

Bob's eyes were round with delight. He did not know much about books, but the flush on Sally's cheeks and the excitement in Max's voice were enough for him. He could not resist giving his elder brother a rap on the back.

"How about the dead beetles now, Max?" he exulted.

Alec was poking in the pigeon-holes of the desk. There were no papers to be found except one bundle of letters, yellow with age. In one of the drawers, there were a few old daguerreo-types in velvet cases and a yellowed meer-schaum pipe.

"'Eliphalet Lane, Esquire,'" read Sally, from the addresses on the letters, which were written on the folded outer sheet of the letters themselves. "Why, I know who he was. He was Uncle Maxwell's elder brother. He lived with them all his life. He died before we were born, but I've heard father tell about him. He was a queer old man when father was a boy. This must be his collection."

"And Uncle Maxwell didn't think enough of it to take it to town with him--just locked it up and left it." This was Max's theory. "Uncle Maxwell knew nothing about books and cared less; he was all for business."

"Luckily for you. This must be worth a good deal, if you care to sell it," said Jarvis, who, close by one of the odd windows, was studying the fine text of a set of English dramatists.

Sally walked over and gently took the books out of his hand. "Jarvis Burnside," said she, decidedly, "the value of this collection is nothing beside the value of your eyes. Put on your goggles, and don't look at another line of type!"

CHAPTER III

THE APARTMENT OVERFLOWS

The telephone bell in the Lanes' apartment rang sharply. It had rung once before, but Sally, half-asleep on the couch in the middle of a warm April morning, had not roused enough to notice. She moved reluctantly toward it. Max's voice speaking urgently brought her back to her senses with a jump.

"Sally, where on earth are you? I've just had a wire from the Chases that they're coming through, and will stop off to see us. We'll have to put them up somehow. Of course they don't know how we're fixed, but they'll find out."

"Oh, Max!" Sally's tones were dismayed. "Why, we _can't_!"

"We'll have to. What would you have me do--wire them not to stop?"

Besides, I couldn't get them. They've left the place they wired from--reach here to-night at nine. You'll have to have some kind of supper for them."

"But, Max--where--"

"Oh, figure it out somehow--you can, you know. I haven't a minute more to talk--inspector's here--everybody busy--" and the click of the receiver in Sally's ear ended the interview.

The Chases! They were young married people, who had been neighbours and schoolmates of the Lanes. Dorothy Eustis, as an older girl, had been much admired by Sally and Josephine until she married Neil Chase; that event had made a great difference in their warmth of feeling. Sally did not like Neil, never had liked him, and never would like him. A certain pomposity of manner, which had been a characteristic of his, ever since the days when he wore dresses and lorded it over the other infants in the park, had made him unpopular. He had, however, become a successful young attorney in his father's law firm, and had within the last year gone to a larger city several hundred miles away to start practice for himself.

The thought of entertaining Neil and Dorothy Chase in the little apartment was almost too much for Sally Lane. The Chases had gone away just before the Lanes had sold the old house, and knew nothing of the new quarters--evidently realized nothing of their small dimensions. It had been characteristic of them to telegraph that they were coming, without waiting for a reply. That was precisely like Neil.

Something must be done, and at once. It was now eleven o'clock. There was none too much time in which to make ready. Sally began reluctantly to plan. The Chases must have her room, of course; it was the best in the flat, measuring eight feet by ten. Bob would have to go in with Uncle Timothy and let Sally have his usual quarters, the couch in the living-room. Sally's room must be hastily put in guest-room order--no easy task, in a space where every inch counts because it must be made the most of. She was thankful, for once, that she need expect none of her family home to luncheon.

At noon, however, quite unexpectedly Bob ran in upon her, an errand from the office where he worked having brought him within a stone's throw of home. He liked to surprise Sally with two-minute visits, when he could do so by making time over the rest of his course.

"Hello, what's up?" was his greeting, as he surveyed his sister standing in the centre of an extraordinary confusion of furnishings which seemed to him to extend over the entire flat.

Sally flung down her dust-cloth and sank into a chair, showing a flushed face and disturbed eyes.

"Max telephoned that the Chases are coming to-night--Neil and Dorothy, on their way somewhere. Isn't it horrible? What do you suppose they'll think of things here?"

"Well, well--old Neil's coming to show us his chest expansion, is he? And my Lady Dolly! Hum--well--I guess it will do'em good to see how some people live. Mrs. Chase will bring four trunks and a lot of hand stuff, will she? If she does, we'll move out and leave them the place."

"Mercy! They're only going to stay overnight--at least, I _think_ that's all. The only thing that keeps me up is the thought that at this time to-morrow they'll be gone! A hospitable hostess I am, Bob. But--Oh, Bobby, my head aches so this morning I just can't rise to the occasion!"

"Your head aches? What's the reason for that?" Bob asked, in some dismay. "You're not a headache sort of girl."

"No, and that's why it seems to take the pluck out of me so. It ached yesterday, too. And I feel just heavy and stupid."

As she spoke, she turned and laid her head down on her arms on the back of her chair. Bob darted across from the doorway and laid an awkwardly sympathetic young hand on the flaxen masses of his sister's hair.

"It's a shame!" he said, warmly. "I wish I could stay and help you. But I tell you what I'll do. I'll be up the minute I get out of the office. Leave the heavy things for me to do. And don't try to house-clean the whole flat just because of Mrs. Dorothy Chase. She isn't worth it."

He was as good as his word. Five o'clock in the afternoon saw him at home again, helping Sally in every way he could think of. Bob was good help, and she had seldom needed him more than to-day. She went about with flushed cheeks, moving languidly, yet keeping steadily at work with the determination of the young hostess who sees nothing else to do.

She had spent the afternoon in the kitchen; she spent the evening in all those little final tasks which seem so small and yet in the aggregate do weigh heavily, upon the eve of entertaining.

Work at the bank kept Max until he had barely time to go to the station for his guests. Alec, coming home to dinner, and finding himself put off with what he hungrily characterized as a mere "bite," on account of the necessities of the occasion, went off again somewhere, declaring that he did not see the occasion for starving the family just on account of entertaining two already overfed visitors. Uncle Timothy, as was to be expected, as soon as he heard of the emergency, joined Bob in coming to Sally's aid, and at half past seven in the evening might have been discovered by the curious, sitting in the small kitchen, a blue-checked apron tied about his neck, busily polishing silver.

"It seemed to me pretty bright before, Sally," was his only comment as he worked. "But I suppose no man could really comprehend the difference between the degree of brightness suitable for one's family and that demanded by company."

"If you had seen Dorothy Chase's wedding silver--" responded Sally, and stopped there, as if words could no further go.

"Yes, yes, I suppose so." Uncle Timothy was rubbing away at a set of thin old teaspoons which had belonged to Sally's grandmother. "Still, my dear, it seems as if things taste better out of these old spoons than out of those handsome new ones the boys gave you Christmas."

"Oh, I love the old things." Sally held a china sugar bowl with a gold band round it up to the light as she wiped it. She had taken all the best old china out of its hiding place under the couch, and was giving it a hot-water bath, drying each article herself, not daring to trust the

frail pieces to Bob's hands. "But Dorothy hates old stuff, and wants everything modern."

"I remember," said Uncle Timothy, mildly. "I was always too antique for her to notice. I sha'n't be surprised if she stumbles over me to-night, not noticing that I'm here."

"If she does," called Bob, from the depths of a closet which he was sweeping out under Sally's direction, "she'll settle with me! She'll find I've grown a few inches since she used to call me Sally's 'everlasting little brother.'"

It was all done at last. Sally went to dress, wearily exhorting herself to remember that her room was not her room to-night, and that she must not forget and leave so much as a stray hair-pin on the freshly washed and ironed linen of the little toilet-table.

She stowed away, under the couch on which she was to sleep, the clean cambric house-dress she meant to put on the next morning, feeling that it would not be at all surprising if she were unable to rise from that couch to get breakfast, and wondering what Dorothy Chase could do about breakfast if thrown upon her own resources. It was so unusual for Sally's vigorous young frame to experience such exhaustion after even more severe effort than that of the past day that she could only wonder what it meant, and finally decided, after some speculation, that it was the effect of these first warm days of spring, combined with the stress of entertaining under difficulties.

"Well, here we are!" Max's voice could be heard in the hall outside, ushering in his guests. "Go single file down this passage--you can't get through side by side!"

Sally went hurriedly forward and met Dorothy Chase's smartly tailored figure in the middle of the tiny passage.

"Goodness gracious!" Bob and Alec and Mr. Timothy Rudd heard a familiar high-pitched voice exclaim. "You don't mean to tell us you live in this mouse-hole! Actually, my hat hits on both sides!"

Then came Neil Chase's barytone drawl--how well Bob remembered hating the sound of it with a profound hatred when it had been addressed contemptuously to him! "Really, Dorothy--you know--I told you that brim of yours was an inch and a half beyond the limit, and this proves it!"

But Sally's pretty head was held high. If she had a headache, its effect was visible only in her brilliant cheeks.

"You always ran to extremes, Dorothy, dear. Why didn't you take that absurd creation off in the vestibule? Neil, how are you? Have you your best Chesterfieldian manner with you? Because you'd better leave it outside; the apartment's not large enough for you and it, too!"

"The same impertinent child," declared Mrs. Chase, surveying her hostess in the light of the living-room. "And here's smart Alec," as that youth came forward, his smile of welcome undergoing a wry twist at this somewhat unusual greeting. "And Bob--heavens, child, how you've grown! And this is--oh, yes--Mr. Rudd!"

Her careless hand, in its travelling glove, met Uncle Timothy's grasp,

and left it as casually as her bright hazel eyes left the glance of his faded blue ones. Bob, watching, grinned at Uncle Timothy meaningly, and received in return the mild sparkle of amusement with which the "antique" was accustomed to show himself invulnerable to neglect from young persons of Dorothy Chase's stamp.

Neil's greetings of the family were also highly characteristic. One who had never before seen him might have argued many things from the style of his opening address:

"This is Alec, eh? Well, Alec, I see you're still the flower of the family. Bob--how do you like sweeping out offices? Better than going to school? And here's Uncle Thomas--beg pardon--Uncle Joshua. Not got it right yet, Sally? Confound my memory--yes, yes--Uncle Timothy. How are you, my dear sir?"

"I see," responded Mr. Rudd, suddenly grown quietly dignified, as he surveyed this jocular young man whom he remembered as a youth whom he had frequently longed to thrash, "that in spite of the pressure of years and responsibility you happily retain your boyish characteristics."

Young Mr. Chase regarded Uncle Timothy for an instant without speaking. Then he turned to Sally with a quite audible comment: "The old gentleman hasn't changed much, has he? Keep him with you all the time?"

"We couldn't live without him," was Sally's quick reply. Uncle Timothy, catching the answer, smiled to himself. It would take more than the advent of these gay comets in his sky to disturb his content in the stars which revolved loyally about him.

The two hours which followed were occupied in instructing the guests how to bestow themselves in the unaccustomed limitations of the Lane apartment without doing themselves physical injury. The Chases evidently felt that the surest way to show their appreciation of the hospitality offered them was to be uninterruptedly mirthful at its character.

"For goodness' sake, Sally," cried Mrs. Chase, with a little shriek, "you're not going to put us both in here! Neil, don't you dare to come in until I get out--there isn't room. Where shall I hang my coat? Oh, is there a closet behind that curtain? Six hooks! Neil, you can't have but one of them--I want the rest. Sally, how did you ever come to it, after that great roomy old house of yours? I should suffocate in a week! It's lucky we're going on to-morrow. I couldn't change my gowns in here."

"I thought you were an experienced traveller," retorted Sally, lightly enough. She had known quite what to expect from Dorothy; it did not disturb her seriously. "Good travellers can tuck themselves away anywhere. Besides, this room is palatial in comparison with Uncle Timothy's. There's not room for a dressing-table in his. You should be thankful that you have one, and a mirror. The mirror's the one real essential for Dorothy Eustis Chase. I made sure you had that."

"It's just like you not to own up that you're cramped." Dorothy was taking full advantage of the mirror pointed out. Her elaborately waved chestnut locks received her full attention for a space, and Sally slipped away to the kitchen.

They sat down presently to something which was not a dinner, and proved decidedly more than a lunch. The guests ate ravenously, but did not

forget to take note of their surroundings. Neil's back was too close to the wall for Sally to squeeze by him when she rose to change the plates, and this amused him very much. "Two more guests, and the room would burst, wouldn't it?" he suggested, as he handed a plate at her request. "I didn't know they ever made a flat as small as this"

"They make them much smaller," declared Max, with a sparkle of the eye. "I assure you we have never felt crowded--until to-night."

"Oh, don't mind us!" Dorothy cried. "You see, we've just come from visiting the Grandons, and their house is so enormous it makes everything seem small. It was a day's journey across our room, and Neil's dressing-room was as big as this whole flat. It's a lovely place to visit, they do everything for you. They have so many servants, and such well trained ones, you absolutely forget how to wait on yourself."

"How long were you there?" Alec inquired.

"Why, from Wednesday to--when did we leave there, Neil? Oh, yes, it must have been yesterday morning."

"Three days? No wonder you became too used to such luxury to be able to come down to waiting on yourselves." And Alec applied himself to his plate with a sense of having evened things up with Mrs. Chase in return for her "smart Alec."

It was Sally who kept matters running smoothly, her head throbbing all the while. When the Chases had been finally tucked away--still ironic--in their quarters, and the rest of the family had bestowed themselves in the space belonging to them, she sat down by the open window, too weary to undress. Here Bob, emerging from Uncle Timothy's room in search of belongings necessary to his comfort, found her.

"Why don't you go to bed?" he asked.

"I'm going. But I'd like to sit here all night."

"You'll catch cold by that window. Head still ache?"

"I suppose so. I'm too tired to feel anything any more."

"Cheer up. I'll be around bright and early and do everything I know."

"Of course you will, Bobby," and she held out her hand. He grasped it.

"Your hand's hot," he observed. "Aren't sick, are you?"

"Of course not. I'm never sick. Go to bed, dear. I'll be all right in the morning."

Optimistically, Bob thought she would. The next morning, however, the Sally who confronted him looked so far from herself, as she went slowly about the little kitchen, that he was worried, and said so.

"Never mind. Don't say anything. After breakfast I can rest."

"Can you brace up to get through breakfast?" demanded Bob, anxiously. Sally assured him that she could, and proved it. Somehow, after the manner of women, she came to the table with a smile so bright that nobody

noticed that she ate almost nothing, that her hand shook as she poured the coffee, and that her long-lashed blue eyes were very heavy.

Immediately after breakfast the Chases were off--in a cab engaged by Max, in deference to Sally's wishes. Neil and Dorothy took a jocose farewell, the one declaring that their presence had stretched the apartment till it could be seen to gape at the seams, the other vowing that Sally must come to see her soon, in order to be able to take a full breath again. Then the cab bore them away.

"Well, of all the--" Alec left the sentence unfinished.

Max completed it for him. "Nerve! If that's a sample of legal brilliancy of wit, I'm sorry for the defendant who employs him," he grunted.

The Chases had arrived on Saturday night, and were continuing their journey without reference to the fact that it was Sunday. Sally turned back into the passage, remembering that on Sundays her family were to be provided for in the matter of luncheon, and that they were in the habit of looking forward to the extra good things she was accustomed to serve them upon that day. She sank into a chair and stared at the breakfast-table standing just as they had all left it.

"Don't you stir, Sis!" cried Bob, returning with the others. "Al and I'll do the dishes." Then, as he saw an expression of disfavour cross his brother's face at this unwelcome proposal, he added quickly, "She's sick, Sally is, with all this, and it's time somebody noticed it."

They all looked at her. She tried to smile up at them, but the unwilling tears came instead. "I'll be all right, if I can just lie down a while," she said.

Then they rallied, in alarm. Not one of them but loved Sally as the dearest thing in the world, however careless of her comfort one or another of them might now and then seem to be.

Max put a brotherly arm round her. "Tired out, little girl?" he asked, gently, and led her toward the couch in the living-room.

"All for those ungrateful duffers!" As he followed to put a pillow under his sister's head Alec looked as if he would like to knock at least one of the "duffers" down.

"She's had all she could do to keep up, for twenty-four hours!" cried Bob, pulling a small knit rug over Sally's feet.

She managed to smile at them, choking back quite unwonted tears--Sally was no baby, to cry at a touch of fatigue. She had known they would be very good to her, once they understood.

It was Uncle Timothy who at once became practical. He drew up a chair beside the couch and took Sally's wrist in his, counting carefully. Then he laid his hand on her forehead, against her flushed cheeks. He bade her put out her tongue, and surveying that tell-tale member through his spectacles, came to his conclusions. These he did not inflict upon Sally, who had closed her eyes, and lay like a tired child. Instead, he beckoned Max into another room, and said, "She's sick, sure enough. Pulse jumping, skin hot and dry--and too tired to move. Suppose you telephone Doctor Wood to look in this morning."

Max lost no time. He went down stairs to telephone, that Sally-might not hear, and in his suddenly roused anxiety made his message so urgent that the doctor arrived within the hour. He was the family physician long employed by the Lanes, and he had known Sally from her babyhood. It took him but the space of a brief, yet thorough, examination to form his opinion. He communicated it, under his breath, to Sally's "four men," who had tiptoed anxiously out into the hall where he had beckoned them.

"It looks mighty like typhoid," he said--and they winced at the word. "It's too soon to be certain, but there's more or less of it about. You can't take care of her here, and she'll be far better off at the hospital. I'll send a carriage and a nurse by twelve o'clock."

So do hours change outlooks. The last thing any one of the Lanes had expected to be doing at noon on that peaceful spring Sunday was to be standing in the vestibule of the Winona flats, watching the little sister being conveyed away, in the care of a nurse. But so it was.

"Don't look so blue, dears," Sally had murmured, as she left them. "I'll soon be back, you know."

"Heaven grant it!" ejaculated Uncle Timothy, in his heart. As for the others, they filed silently up stairs again, and into the empty room. It was full of all the things that had seemed to make it home--with Sally there. But somehow it looked empty now.

Nobody said much of anything unless it became necessary, but before bedtime four pregnant sentences had been uttered.

"That nurse looked as if she knew something," said Max, suddenly.

"There's not a man in the city equal to Wood," declared Alec.

"Seems as if she couldn't smile quite like that if she was going to be awfully sick," was Bob's contribution to the sum total of hopefulness.

But it was Uncle Timothy, as usual, who hit the nail on the head. "Boys," said he, "we can do our part--on our knees."

And, to a man, they nodded. Suddenly, they could not speak.

CHAPTER IV

ARGUMENTS AND ANSWERS

"I'm sure that's as good a report as we could hope for," urged Josephine Burnside. But the anxiety in her eyes somewhat qualified her cheerfulness.

Maxwell Lane shook his head doubtfully.

"'Holding her own'--that's all they've said the last three days," he said.

"Yes, but that's a good deal at this stage. It's the end of the second week."

"She's out of her head."

"They usually are, I think."

The pair emerged from the door of the hospital.

"Well, I'm glad I met you here," said Max. "It's kind of you to come so often."

"It's not kind at all. I couldn't stay away. And if I could, Jarvis wouldn't let me. No telephone messages will satisfy him."

"Good old fellow. How are his eyes?"

"Worse than ever. Mother and I take turns reading to him, while he tramps the floor. We should try to get him off somewhere into the country, but he won't leave until Sally is out of the hospital. And I've no idea he will leave then, he'll be so anxious to do things for her."

"Good old chap," murmured Max again, absently. He was looking at Josephine as if an idea had struck him. "Are you going to do anything in particular the rest of the afternoon?"

"I don't know that I am. Why?"

"Don't you want to invite me to drive out into the country in your trap? The roads are pretty good now, and I ought to go out and take a look at the farm. Besides, I'm too restless to keep still. Saturday afternoons and Sundays are tough to get through with, just now."

"I shall be delighted. Come home with me, and we'll start right away. I should like to see the place again, too."

Fifteen minutes by trolley-car, and ten to allow for the ordering of the trap, and the two young people were driving away. Josephine held the reins over the back of a fine gray mare that seemed glad to get out of the stable on this sunny May afternoon. The roads were even better than Max had predicted, and the seven-mile drive was soon over.

"There are the pines," Josephine pointed with her whip. "How far away they show, against the lighter foliage. I'm fond of pines--they make me think of the mountains. You're lucky to have that grove. If you ever live here, it will be a lovely spot for hot summer afternoons."

"We'll never live here, if I can help it," answered Max. "As for the pine grove, the best thing to do with that is to cut it down and get the money out of it."

"Max!" exclaimed Josephine. "Don't do that without the permission of every member of your family and most of your friends. What's the money?"

"The money's a good deal to me. This illness of Sally's--"

"Sell the books, if you must, but not the trees. Of course you ought to keep both, but don't--_don't_ cut down those trees!"

"You're as bad as Sally about this old place. Hello, there's some one in the grove now! What's he doing? Standing on his head?"

For a leg could be descried waving in the air, while its owner apparently lay partly on his back, his shoulders against a tree trunk. As the trap came nearer, the man could be seen distinctly; he was reading, with one leg balancing across the knee of the other.

"Seems to have taken possession of my grounds. I suppose he also would object if I offered to cut down the grove. Is he going to see us? No--too absorbed in his yellow novel."

"He sees us. But we're nothing to him. He's turned back to his page. Shall we drive in? Are you going to get out?"

"Yes, of course, if only to show that chap I'm the owner of his lounging place."

Josephine turned in, and the trap swung through the gateway and on past the pine grove. Max saw the reader get to his feet.

"Coming to apologize," murmured Max. "Well, if he asks permission, he can stay--till I cut down the grove."

Before the horse had been tied, the stranger was at hand. "Since I'm caught in the act, I'll come and ask if I may," he said, genially. "This is Mr. Lane, I believe. I'm Donald Ferry, a neighbour of yours. Your fine grove is a sort of 'call of the wild' to me."

Max shook hands, attracted at once by both voice and face. Donald Ferry was a sturdy young man, with broad shoulders and a thick thatch of reddish-brown hair; he possessed a pair of searching but friendly hazel eyes. He was dressed in a rough suit of blue serge, and a gray flannel shirt with a rolling collar and flowing blue tie gave him an out-door air confirmed by the tan and freckles on his face and the sinewy grip of his brown hand. He had closed his book and tucked it under his arm, so that its title could not be observed, but it had not exactly the look of a "yellow novel."

"You're entirely welcome to make use of the grove as much as you like," Max answered, with the cordiality he could not help feeling toward the possessor of so frank and genial a look as that with which the strange young man continued to regard him.

"I live with my mother in the little house on the other side of the grove," explained Mr. Ferry. "We've been living there for a fortnight, but this is the first time I've caught sight of anybody about the place. It seemed so completely deserted I've been proposing to my mother that we appropriate the house. But she seems a trifle appalled by the size of it. On the whole, for us, ours is rather the better fit."

"This house is too big to fit anything but an orphan asylum," said Max, with a wave toward the brick walls now heavily vine-clad with the tender green leafage of May. "It's in bad shape, from chimneys to cellar. Just the same, I've a sister who is wild to live here."

"Yet you are the one who comes out to look over the place? Perhaps you have a sort of sneaking fondness for it, after all!"

"My sister would come if she could. She's in the hospital with typhoid," explained Max, wondering, as he did so, how he came to be giving details like these in his first conversation with a stranger. He really liked the look of the fellow extraordinarily well.

"This will be a great place for her to grow strong in, by and by," suggested the other, his tone indicating his sympathy with the situation. "The pine grove, in June, will be better than a sanatorium."

Max shook his head. "It's not practical for us to think of living here. Of course we can bring her out for a day at a time."

"You might put up a tent in the grove. Nothing like out-doors for convalescents--and for well people. Well, Mr. Lane, thank you immensely for letting me feel free of the grove--until you come to live. I am fairly sure you will come to live here some day. It's an irresistible old place."

He took his leave with a pleasant grace of manner which, in spite of the rough old suit and flannel shirt, spoke of training in other places than pine groves.

When he had gone off among the pines toward the hedge, which lay between the grove and the little white cottage on the side toward Wybury, Max rejoined Josephine. "He looked a pretty good sort, didn't he? If anybody did live here, he'd be an interesting neighbour. I hardly knew there was a house there, did you?"

"Oh, yes, I saw it as we came by. It had been freshly painted white, and I noticed how pleasant it looked. It's a tiny house. Unless his mother is smaller than he is, it certainly must be a tight fit."

"She's probably about the size of a pint pot. Mothers of strapping fellows like that usually are."

"He wasn't any taller than you."

"Wasn't he? I thought he was a giant. He'd outweigh me by fifty pounds."

Josephine glanced at him. It struck her that Max, never of stalwart build, looked paler and thinner than usual. There was a slight stoop in his shoulders. She recalled the straight set of those belonging to the strange young man.

"Max," she asked, quite suddenly, "how much light do you have in your office?"

"Floods of it," replied Max, promptly. "I have to wear a shade sometimes."

"Daylight?"

"Bless your soul, no! What do you think a ground-floor banking house gets, between a lot of ten-story buildings? Electrics, of course, are the only things possible."

"Then you don't have the daylight at all?"

"I have plenty of light to work by."

"I think it's dreadful!" cried Josephine. She had never thought of it before, or considered Max's pale skin as the direct result of spending his days under such conditions. "If you could see the difference between your face and Mr. Ferry's--"

Max stared at her. "That red-headed, freckle-faced chap seems to have made a great impression on you," he complained. "He probably has an out-door job of some sort--his clothes showed it. Engineering, more than likely. That was undoubtedly a book on dynamics or hydraulics, or something of that sort. You can't expect a bank clerk to have a skin like an Indian's--under electric light. Come on, shall we walk back to the timber tract? That's what I want to look at. I suppose you won't object to my cutting there? There must be a lot of stuff fit to sell, and, as I told you, I need the money. When Sally gets out of the hospital, it will be a long time before she's fit to work. Uncle Tim says typhoid convalescents are pretty slow at getting back to the working stage. We'll have to keep on hiring that Mary Ann Flinders. She polishes the stove with the napkins, I think--they look it."

"Goodness! How poor Sally would feel if she knew!"

"She does know. I told her the last time I saw her--before she got these funny notions in her head. To-day she thought I was an Episcopal bishop come to marry her to the doctor--they got me out right away."

"Max! You must not tell Sally disturbing things about home. She will be anxious enough when she's herself, without hearing about napkins and things from you."

"I suppose so. But I've been so blue ever since she went I couldn't keep in."

"Then keep out."

Max looked at her. Josephine's dark cheeks were pink, partly with indignation, partly with the brisk progress over the slightly rising grade of the cartpath through the fields toward the timber tract.

"Well, you are sort of down on your friends to-day, aren't you? I'm an idiot to think of cutting down the pine grove. I'm a milksop compared with a red-headed Indian you never saw before. Now I'm a blunderbuss for answering a simple question asked me by my sister. What do you think I am, anyhow? Fit to cumber the earth?"

Josephine returned his gaze. She seemed not in the least awed by this burst of wrath. She replied with spirit, not unmixed with good humour:

"I think you're peppery--as usual. Hasn't an old friend like me a right to try to keep things straight? You ought to know better than to say one word to Sally that will give her a minute's anxiety. Goodness knows she's had enough of it, keeping house for you four people for three whole years."

"Haven't we been taking care of her all that time?" demanded Max, with rising colour of his own. "Haven't we all been working our heads off to pay expenses, and giving her every cent we could get to run things with?"

"Of course you have. It's what you ought to do, but I certainly give you

credit for doing it. Only I don't think you've fully appreciated Sally's part. She's worked harder than any of you."

"Has she told you so?" Max was looking straight in front of him, and his eyes were angry.

"Never! You know she hasn't. She's not that kind of girl. But I'm another girl, and I can see for myself. Sally's worked hard to make that apartment seem like home. No matter how blue she felt herself, she's never acted blue before you--now has she?"

"I can't say that she has. She's a light-hearted girl--always was, and--"

"Don't you think it. Sally's been putting on a brave face and letting everybody suppose she's cheerful. She's kept you all up when she was bluer than you are now."

Max stopped short, stood still in the cart-path and looked Josephine in the eye. She stopped also, and faced him coolly.

"Will you tell me how you know all this?" he inquired, fiercely.

"I've put two and two together, and found they make four," replied Josephine. "See here, Max"--she spoke more gently, but quite as decidedly as before--"you mustn't think I'm trying to be disagreeable, now, of all times. Of course I know you boys all love Sally as devotedly as brothers can, and do a great deal to show it. But when it comes to sparing her anxiety and letting her have her way about things she has set her heart on, I don't think you're always quite as considerate as you might be. I didn't dream of saying all this to-day. But when you began to talk about cutting down that pine grove, though you knew what a fancy Sally took to it, it came over me that you would be just as likely as anything to do it right now, while Sally is sick--and I just couldn't help speaking out."

The two walked on in silence for some distance. Then Max spoke, gloomily:

"It's all right enough to consider sentiment, and I know you well enough to understand what you mean by pitching into me this way. But the craze Sally's been in over this old place seems to me a thing out of all reason. What are we, a family of bank clerks and office boys, to shoulder a proposition like this? We can't think of moving out here and living in that barracks, and trying to make a living off the soil. Neither can we put a tenant on here, and fit him out with farm tools, and take the responsibility and the risk of his running the place. He'd undoubtedly run us into the ground the first year. I've thought it over and thought it over, and the only course seems to me to be to find a buyer for the place. Money isn't easy just now, and I've no doubt we'd have a hard time to get a decent price. Meanwhile it seems to me only common sense to get what income we can out of it. If I could sell that big pine grove, and cut off what timber is ready for the axe up here, it would bring us something quite substantial."

Now this certainly was a presentation of the case which called for a considerate listening. But, quite as if she had not heard a word of his argument, Josephine cried out:

"Max, why not do what Mr. Ferry proposed, if you think the house can't be lived in? Put up a tent in the grove and bring Sally there as soon as

she's fit for it. She'd get strong twice as fast as in that stuffy flat!"

Max gazed at her. "That's just what you get," he ejaculated, "when you try to talk business with a girl. Show her a good and sufficient reason why you can't do a thing, and she instantly asks why you can't do something ten times harder. Will you tell me how, with Sally out here in a tent, we fellows are going to get along in the flat? And what would she do out here, all by herself?"

It was now Josephine's turn to gaze with scorn at her companion. "Do you think I'm proposing for Sally to camp by herself out here, while Mary Ann Flinders keeps house for you in town? No; bring Mary Ann out here to cook for Sally, and you boys come out for the nights. If you had a bit of camp spirit, you'd jump at the chance to get a real outing right along with your work."

"Camp," exclaimed Max, "in your own front yard!"

"The pine grove isn't your front yard, and the farther end of it is so far away from the road, nobody could tell who was who, back there. Besides, what difference, if Sally gets strong again as fast as out-door life can make her?"

"It's not practical," Max continued to object, and Josephine realized afresh that the Lane temperament was not one easily swayed by argument or appeal. There was a stubborn streak in Max which was as hard to deal with now as it had been in the days when Josephine had fought it out with him in playground affairs. Yet she did not lose hope. She had known Max to come round, if left to himself, convinced in the end by logic derived from his own consideration of the case. If he could once see a course as fair and right he would accept it. Clearly, he did not yet see this thing in any such light, and it was of no use to persist in heated argument which would only result in prejudicing him yet further against the plan which seemed to Josephine so wise a one.

The two walked through the timber tract, Max pointing out trees which he thought could be sacrificed with a real gain to the timber to be left standing. Josephine listened and agreed, finding genuine interest in the long vistas of oak and chestnut pillars stretching away to what seemed an infinite distance, for dense undergrowth at the back of the wood prevented the appearance of an outlet anywhere.

As they drove away, they noted with new interest the small white cottage on the farther side of the dividing hedge.

"There's your friend Ferry," observed Max, as they flew by at the gray mare's smartest pace, "working away in a strawberry patch as if his life depended on it. That's where he gets his beautiful Indian complexion you admire so much, when he isn't doing engineering stunts. Probably he's home just now between jobs, fixing up his mother in her new place. Well, we can't all grow strawberries and lie round on our backs reading hydraulics. Some of us have to do the in-door jobs. Of course those are useless--mere folly. All the really sensible chaps are looking after the colour of their skins!"

TELEPHONES AND TENTS

"Hello, Jarve! This you?"

Over the telephone Jarvis Burnside recognized Max Lane's voice, eager and cheerful. The last time he had heard it, it had been so despondent that his own anxiety had been heavily increased. He answered eagerly:

"Yes. What is it?"

"There's a break in her temperature."

"A break! You mean--"

"A drop--a landslide--during the last twelve hours. She's sleeping quietly. She's--"

But something suddenly interfered with the speaker's articulation. Although Jarvis continued to listen with strained attention, a silence succeeded. His imagination filled the gap. He essayed to offer congratulations, but found something the matter with his own powers of speech. After a moment's struggle, however, he was able to say, "I'll be round as quick as I can get there."

Mrs. Burnside, passing the telephone closet at the back of the hall, heard a rush therefrom, and found herself suddenly embraced by a pair of long arms. Although blue goggles concealed her son's eyes from her look of sympathetic inquiry, the smile which transformed his face was not to be mistaken.

"Jarvis, dear--you've had good news!"

"Max couldn't say much, but his voice told. The fever's down--she's sleeping!"

"Oh, I am glad--so glad! The dear child! I couldn't sleep last night, after the discouraging news."

Her son did not say that he had not slept, but he looked it. His finely cut features showed plainly that for more than one night he had been suffering severe and increasing strain.

"We must tell Josephine," said his mother happily, proceeding on her way with Jarvis's arm about her shoulders.

"You look her up, please. I'm going to bolt down to see Max and the rest. Uncle Timothy was about all in last night when I met him. These last five days--"

Jarvis released his mother, seized his hat from a tree they were passing, and escaped out of a side door. Mrs. Burnside hurried away upstairs to find her daughter. If the Burnside family had been bound to the Lanes by ties of blood, each member of it could hardly have been more intimately concerned with the issue of Sally's illness.

Away down town, at the Winona flats, Jarvis's ring brought an instant response, and a minute later Bob was shaking his hand off at the half-way

landing. Then Alec was rushing to the top of the stairs, and Max was shouting from the bath-room, where he was shaving. Uncle Timothy alone remained quiet in his chair, but his worn face was bright.

"It's great news, Mr. Rudd, great news!" cried Jarvis, wringing Uncle Timothy's out-stretched hand of welcome.

"Yes, Jarvis--yes. But--I must warn you all to make haste slowly in the matter of assurance. It looks favourable, certainly, but the child has been through a hard fight, and she is not out of danger yet. You know I don't want to dampen your happiness, boys--" and Uncle Timothy looked tenderly from one face to another, out of the wisdom of his greater experience.

Their faces had sobered. "I understand, sir, of course," Jarvis agreed. "But the drop in the fever and the quiet sleep surely mean a promising change?"

"Very promising--no doubt of it. And we are thankful--thankful. It is a wonderful relief after the reports we have been getting." He took off his spectacles and wiped them. Then he wiped his eyes. "With care, now--" he began again, cheerfully.

But Bob could not help interrupting. "She's getting splendid care," he cried. He could not endure the thought that it was still necessary to exercise caution lest they rejoice prematurely. He had taken the leap from boyish despair to boyish confidence at a bound, and he had no mind to drop back to a half-way point of doubt and depression.

"I suppose we ought to wait a few days before we run up any flags," Max admitted, and the others reluctantly agreed.

During the following week they learned the reasons for respecting Mr. Rudd's advice. Though Sally's bark had certainly rounded the most threatening danger point, there yet remained seas by no means smooth to be traversed, and more than once wind and waves rose again sufficiently to cause a return of anxiety to those who watched but could not go to the rescue. But, in due time, recovery became assured, convalescence was established, and finally the great day was at hand, when she should come home from the hospital. She looked still very pale and weak, as they saw her lying in her high white bed in the long ward--how they had mourned that they could not afford to give her a private room!--But she was Sally herself once more, and looking so eagerly forward to being at home again that it was a joy to see her smile at the thought of it.

"I wish it were not so excessively hot," said Uncle Timothy, regretfully.

He stood in the doorway of Sally's room. It had been put in order by Mary Ann Flinders--or, to be more exact, Mary Ann Flinders had attempted to put it in order for Sally's reception the next day.

Max looked in over his uncle's shoulder. "I don't know that it's any hotter in here than anywhere else!" he demurred, irritably. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and he had that moment removed his collar and neck-tie. Uncle Timothy had got as far as taking off his waistcoat and donning an old alpaca coat, in which he had been striving to imagine himself comfortable.

"I think it must be several degrees warmer in this small room than in the

dining-room," asserted Uncle Timothy. "And it is ninety-two there. It is unfortunate that the poor child should have to come back to such an oven as this. At the hospital a breeze circulates through the wards. Here there seems to be none."

"She could sleep on the couch in the living-room." suggested Max.
"_Whew!_ It _is_ hot! What possesses the weather to start in like this, before June's half over? I believe it was one hundred and twelve in the office to-day."

He threw himself on the couch. After a moment of reclining upon it, during which he mopped his brow and drew his handkerchief about his neck, he rose and jerked the couch toward one of the two open windows. When he had lain in this new situation for the space of two minutes more, he got up again and sought the tiny kitchen, where he could be heard drawing water from the tap. "Ugh--warm as dish water!" Uncle Timothy could hear his distant splutter.

Bob and Alec were out somewhere--presumably cooling off in one of the city parks or on the river front. Also, they were getting impatiently through the hours before Sally's return. The entire Lane household had reached the point where her coming home seemed a thing never to be attained. To a man, they felt that one week more without her would be unendurable.

But the next day--it was Sunday again--she came home. Josephine and Max, with the Burnside carriage and horses, brought her to the door. Max and Alec, making a "chair" of hands and wrists, carried the pitifully light figure up the four flights of stairs, and Josephine hovered over the convalescent as she was established upon the couch, among many pillows. The rest of them stood about in a smiling circle.

"Oh, but it's good to be home!" sighed Sally, happily, looking from one to another with eyes which seemed to them all as big as saucers, so deep were the hollows about them and so thin her cheeks. "But how pale and tired you all look! What in the world is the matter with you?"

"The truth is, I think, dear," explained Josephine, glancing from Max to Uncle Timothy, "your family have been having typhoid." Then, at Sally's startled expression, she added, gently, "It's almost as wearing, you know, to have a fever of anxiety over somebody you love as to have the real thing in the hospital."

"Oh!" exclaimed Sally, softly, and her eyes fell. Then she drooped limply against her pillows. "It's--just a little hot to-day, isn't it?" she murmured.

Alec consulted the thermometer. "It's ninety here now," he announced. "At ten o'clock in the morning! About three this afternoon, Sally, you'll see what we can do here. And no let-up promised by the weather man."

Bob brought a palm-leaf fan, and perching himself at the head of Sally's couch, began to fan her. "I'll produce 'breezes from the north and east,'" he promised. "Al, why don't you get her some ice-water? We began to take ice yesterday."

"Only yesterday?" questioned Sally, with her eyes closed. But she forbore to ask why they had delayed so long. Well she knew that illnesses are expensive affairs.

"If you only had let us take you to our house!" cried Josephine, for the tenth time since she had first proposed that plan. "We could have made you so much more comfortable."

Sally opened her eyes again. "No, you couldn't, Joey," she said, "unless you had taken all the rest of them. I couldn't spare my family another day!"

"May we come in?"

It was Jarvis Burnside, bringing his mother to see Sally. Neither of them had yet set eyes upon her since her illness. Sally had been at home for two days now, two intemperately hot days. During this entire period she had lain on the couch, which was drawn as close to the window as it could be placed. Uncle Timothy had remained at hand with fans and iced lemonade and every other expedient he could think of for mitigating the perfervid temperature of the flat. Just now, at five o'clock in the afternoon, with no breeze whatever entering at the window, the small living-room was at its worst.

"Oh, I'm so glad to see you!" Sally held out a languid hand, but her face lighted up with pleasure.

While his mother bent over Sally, Jarvis pushed up his goggles, then pulled them off. The room was shaded, but even so, the daylight made him blink painfully for a minute. But by the time he got his chance at greeting the invalid, he was able to see clearly for himself just how Sally was looking. He stared hard at her, noting with a contraction of the heart all the evidences of the fight for life she had been through. There was no doubt about it, it was as Josephine had said: she looked as if a breath might blow her away.

"I look like a little boy now, don't I?" suggested Sally, smiling up at him as his hand closed over hers. She put up her other hand to her head, where the heavy masses of fair hair had given way to a short, curly crop most childish in its clustering framing of her now delicate face. "It's a blow to my vanity, but it's growing fast, and by the time I can hold my head up good and strong, like a six-months-old baby, it will be long enough to tie with a bow at my neck."

"You can't hold your head up yet?" questioned Jarvis anxiously.

"Oh, yes, I can," declared Sally, cheerfully. "I just don't seem to want to--not when there's a convenient pillow to lay it on. But I shall get strong pretty soon now. When the weather changes--why, even to-day, if I were lying down on the bank of a brook somewhere, or in the woods--or almost anywhere out-doors--I believe I'd feel quite a lot stiffer in my backbone."

"And still you won't come to us and let us make you comfortable?" Mrs. Burnside looked as if she would enjoy doing it.

But Sally looked over at Uncle Timothy, and her shake of the head was as decided as ever. "Not while Uncle Timmy and the boys stay here. Have you seen Max and Alec lately, Mrs. Burnside? I don't believe I'm a bit paler than they are, working in those hot offices in the artificial light. I shall grow strong fast enough--the nurse told me people always feel like this after typhoid. And when I do get strong I shall be a

Trojan--just wait."

"We don't like to wait," said Jarvis, still watching Sally, although his eyes were feeling the adverse influences of the white daylight which beat into the room underneath the shades. He put up his hand for an instant to shield them, and Sally was quick to notice.

"I thought you were wearing goggles, Jarvis," she said. Mrs. Burnside turned with a reproachful expression, and with a laugh Jarvis drew the goggles out of his pocket and replaced them.

"A fellow gets tired of viewing life through these things," he explained. "And I've been seeing you in imagination through blue spectacles, so to speak, for five weeks now. I thought I'd like a glimpse of your true complexion."

Sally put up two thin hands and pinched her cheeks fiercely. "I believe I must resemble a tallow candle," she complained. "What can you people expect of a patient just out of the hospital?"

"We'd like to get you where nature would attend to putting on the rouge--eh, mother?" and Jarvis thought of his friend Max with a strong desire to take that refractory young man by the collar and argue with him with his fists. If it had not been for Max's stubbornness, Sally would not now be suffering the discomfort of this unspeakable apartment.

When he and his mother had reached the outer air again and were driving away, Jarvis burst out: "Something must be done! If Sally won't let you and Jo have her--and that wouldn't be getting her out of the city, only into a more bearable in-door atmosphere--she must be taken into the country. Jo's plan is perfectly feasible. A tent in that pine grove would do the business. Mother, I'm going to put one there. If Max doesn't like it, he can stay away."

"Jarvis, dear, how can you do that? Max would resent that high-handed way of managing his affairs."

"I dare say he would. What of that? If ever a frail child needed to get out-doors, Sally does. Aren't we old friends enough to take things into our own hands?"

"Max won't accept a tent from you--or Sally, either."

"Won't they? They won't have to. It'll be my tent; I'll lend it to them." Jarvis grinned, his white teeth making a striking contrast to the sombre effect of his big goggles.

"Hold on, Cheney," he said to the coachman. "Let me out at the corner of Seventeenth. I will look up the tent business right here and now."

His mother looked after his tall figure as he hurried away through the down town crowds, his straw hat a little pushed back, as it was wont to be in moments of excitement. She herself felt like heartily aiding and abetting his friendly schemes, for Sally was very dear to her motherly heart, and it had seemed to her impossible that the girl should recover her strength while shut up in the little flat. If the heat lasted--and there were no indications of any near break in the high temperature--it would certainly be a severe test on the young convalescent, and might seriously retard her in the important business

of getting back her old vigour.

Within an hour Jarvis was at home again, in time for dinner. He came to the table with a catalogue in his hand. Determination was written large upon his face. Josephine had heard from her mother of his expressed intention, and she eyed the catalogue eagerly.

"Are you really going to do it, Jarve?" she cried.

"Of course I'm going to do it--with your help."

"Help! I'll do any thing. Have you told Max?"

"I'll tell him nothing till the tent's up--and furnished. Here, look at this list, and advise me as to size. Would an eighteen by twenty-four wall-tent--of the heaviest duck--be about right?"

"Eighteen by twenty-four! Why, that's--how big would that be?"

"About the size of this dining-room. I could get an eighteen by thirty-four--"

Josephine interrupted him with a burst of delighted laughter.

"You might get Sally a circus tent," she cried. "As big as this dining-room! Why, Jarve--"

"She wants the whole family with her," explained Jarvis, with composure. "That means the tent must be divided off into rooms. And she must have one section for a living-room. I'm going to have a floor made--the carpenter will go out in the morning, if he keeps his word. By quick work we ought to be able to take her out there to-morrow night, but allowing for delays, the next evening will have to do. Mother, have we any cots?"

"I'm afraid we have no cots. There are two single-width white iron beds in the attic--"

"All the better. May I have them?"

"I wonder you stop to ask permission of anybody for anything," observed Josephine. "Mother, have you seen Jarvis look so waked up since he put on goggles?"

Mrs. Burnside smiled. She was very glad to see her son so interested, although she felt decidedly doubtful as to the way in which the Lanes would take his interference in their affairs. Still, as Jarvis had urged, people who have been friends from childhood, with an old family friendship of fathers and grandfathers behind them, should have some rights when it comes to matters so important. And if anybody could manage Max's proud and intolerant temper, Jarvis, with his quiet firmness, should be the one. Josephine, also, was of the make-up which can fight for that which seems right. Between them, if they could not put the thing through, it would be rather remarkable.

"Joey, will you and mother drive out with me this evening and decide on where to put the tent?" Jarvis rose from the table, after having made a hasty meal which did not include any superfluous courses.

"Of course I will." Josephine pushed aside her dessert.

"I will stay at home and look up blankets and bedding," announced Mrs. Burnside. "Have you thought of the cooking question? Shall we try to supply the utensils?"

"If you can spare them, mother. I'll buy what you can't contribute. I've bargained for a little gasoline stove and a small tent for a kitchen. As for the cooking, is that specimen they have in the flat now good enough to import to the camp?"

"She's pretty poor. I had luncheon there yesterday with Sally." Josephine's face spoke louder than her words.

"Mother, could you spare Joanna for a week or two, till they can find somebody? She can cook almost as well as Sarah, you know. She cooked for me last fall, when you were away and Sarah was taken ill."

Jarvis's mother looked at him doubtfully. "I think you had better not go as far as that. Be content with supplying the tent and its equipment, and see how Max and Alec take it. The young girl they have now will do for a time, surely."

"All right--if you think that's the better plan. Ready, Sis?"

Jarvis put the gray mare through her paces, and there was still an hour of daylight left when he and Josephine reached the pine grove.

"It's ten degrees cooler out here than it is in town at this hour," declared Jarvis, with satisfaction. He pushed up the goggles and lowered them again quickly. Even the subdued light in the grove, at a point where the setting sun did not penetrate, was too much for his eyes. "Confound the things!" he exploded. "Shall I ever be anything again but an owl in daylight? Well, where shall the tent go?"

"Over there," replied Josephine, promptly. "There's just one perfect spot for it--on the top of that little rise, looking toward the south, and away from the grove."

"Right you are. But the trees are too thick."

He pulled out a foot-rule and began to measure. Presently he announced the result: "One tree, this little fellow, will have to come down."

"Do you dare?"

"Of course I dare. Where can I get an axe?"

Josephine glanced toward the house. Then she thought of the Ferry cottage. "The little house beyond the hedge--I know the people--at least, I've met one of them. Shall we go and ask?"

Jarvis was already hurrying toward a distant gap in the hedge. "I'll go!" he called back.

In two minutes he reappeared. With him was a sturdy figure. Josephine recognized the broad shoulders, the thick reddish-brown hair, the gleam of the hazel eyes. She nodded at Donald Ferry, noting that he was not now clad in a gray flannel shirt, but in one of white, with a low collar and

silk neck-tie, similar to Jarvis's--hot-weather dress with an urban air about it. He carried an axe.

"Thank you," said Jarvis, when they had reached the spot which Josephine had designated. He held out his hand for the axe.

Ferry shook his head, smiling. "Which is the tree?" he inquired.

"Give me the axe, please," repeated Jarvis. "There's no reason why you should chop down trees for us on a sweltering night like this."

"It won't make me swelter as much as it will you," asserted Ferry retaining his hold on the axe. "I'm an old woodman. Come, show me the tree, or I'll chop at a venture. Miss Burnside?"

Josephine pointed out the tree. Ferry lifted the axe and swung it, and it sank deeply into the trunk. Another blow; it struck the same spot. Another and another, with an unerring aim. "You are a woodman," admitted Jarvis, admiringly, watching the powerful swing and the telling blows.

Ferry laughed, without abating the vigour of his work. "There's no better out-door fun that I know of," said he, "than chopping down a tree. I couldn't think of missing this chance."

CHAPTER VI

IN THE PINE GROVE

"Sally, will you and Max go for a drive with us? It will cool you off for sleep." Josephine stood looking in on them, herself in white from head to foot, a refreshing sight for tired eyes to rest upon.

Sally drew herself up eagerly upon her couch pillows. Max yawned and stretched in the chair in which he had been half asleep.

"Oh, it would be so good to get out!" Sally rose unsteadily to her feet.

Max rubbed his eyes. "Sally can go. I think I'll go to bed. Much obliged."

"Please go, Max. We want you very much, and it's too hot here to sleep."

"He's worn out," explained Sally. "But the drive will rest you, boy," she insisted.

"Jarvis is driving. He has something to talk over with you," urged Josephine.

Max unwillingly put on his coat. He felt tired enough. He had never known so trying a period of work as that which had been driving him now for weeks at the bank, with this accompaniment of intense heat which made his labours seem doubly hard. He gave Sally his arm, down the stairs, wondering if she felt much weaker than he did, and reflecting that in one thing she had the advantage over him--she need not work until she should feel fit. As for himself, he must work, fit or not.

The rest of Sally's family were out. She had been sending them away nightly to sit in the park by the river bank, allowing only one to remain with her. Although she had been at home nearly a week, it was difficult for them to see that she had made any gain in acquiring strength. Each evening Bob and Uncle Timothy searched the daily paper in vain for prophecy of change in the weather, and each morning they eyed the flags upon a certain tall building with a distinct sense of resentment toward them for persistently indicating "Fair and dry."

"Good! Delighted to be able to lure you out!" called Jarvis, from his driver's seat. Although it was evening, he wore his goggles, on account of the myriad bright lights of this down-town district, and they shone upon his guests like welcoming lamps above his satisfied smile.

"Tired out, old fellow?" he asked Max, as he wheeled the horses about.

"Absolutely done. This heat is the worst I ever knew. The place where my desk stands is the hottest corner in the hottest bank in the hottest city in the universe!"

"This certainly has been the worst day yet. That's why I thought you might like to get out into the country."

"Don't care where I go," said Max. "Excuse me if I shut my eyes and keep quiet. I haven't energy enough to say any more for a mile."

"All right. Shut your eyes, and I'll tell you when to open them."

Max turned sidewise in his seat, rested his elbow on the back, propped his head upon his hand, closed his eyes, and appeared to slumber. Jarvis drove on silently, noting with pleasure the subdued murmur of talk going on behind him, where Sally, after a long and lonely day, was enjoying the chance to visit with her friend. The girl lay back against the luxurious padding of the Burnside carriage, resting and drinking in the refreshing sense of coolness caused more by the motion than by a greatly lowered temperature, for the evening was very warm. Presently, however, as they left the city and turned out upon a country road, the lessening heat and freer stirring of the air became distinctly perceptible.

A passing stream of automobiles, setting out for some scene of festivity at a popular resort several miles away, roused Max from his lethargy with their tooting horns and brilliant lights. "Lucky ducks!" he muttered, in surly tones. "They can always stir up a breeze."

"They're not the only ones who can stir up breezes," rejoined Jarvis. "I'm about to stir up one myself."

"I should think you'd own a runabout," remarked Max.

"Perhaps I will some day--when you people get to living out here."

Max looked about him. "Headed for the farm, are we? You seem to have a fancy for this road."

"It's the prettiest outside the city. Look here, Max"--he lowered his voice, that Sally might not catch a word of the coming talk--"I want to own up to something. I've been taking liberties with your place out here."

Jarvis pulled off his goggles and turned his eyes upon his companion. Max yawned once more--it was the last time he yawned that evening. From that moment he became thoroughly awake.

"Well, what is it?" he asked. "Had the house painted and moved in?"

"Not quite so bad as that. I've put up a tent in your grove and moved out."

Max stared. "_What_?"

"Let's keep our voices low for a bit," urged Jarvis. "I want to surprise Sally. I knew if I asked your permission to camp in your grove you'd give it to me without a minute's hesitation, so, banking on your generosity, I took possession. I wanted to surprise you all. It struck me that every last one of you needed an outing, and I thought if you found a tent all in order out here, perhaps you'd like to try camping through this hot spell."

Max was still staring. Jarvis faced him silently, straining his eyes in the darkness to see what manner of expression might be discovered upon the face beside him, showing so whitely through the obscurity. Max did not reply for the space of a full minute. When he did it was not necessary for Jarvis to strain his eyes to make out the expression. He could tell what it was quite without seeing it.

"It may be the proper thing to bank on a person's generosity," said Max, in a tone of deep displeasure, "but as a rule I think it pays to consult a man before you take possession of his property."

Now this speech was highly characteristic and therefore not unexpected. Nevertheless, it made Jarvis Burnside feel exceedingly like kicking his friend violently from his seat into the road. For a moment, all he could command himself to do was to tighten his grip on his horses and send them at a considerably accelerated pace along the smooth turnpike. When he spoke, however, it was with no change from the quiet good humour of his former tone.

"You don't mean just that, with an old friend like me. Mother and Jo are with me in this attempt at a pleasant surprise. They will be tremendously hurt if you get up on your dignity and take it this way. We knew you had no time to be arranging camps, here or anywhere else, yet we saw you working yourself to death, and Sally needing to get out of the heat--"

"I understand. Jo talked this thing at me the last time we were out here. It's a trick to get round my refusal to live here. You think you can get in an entering wedge. It's no use won't live out here. It's nonsense, and--"

Sally's voice interrupted from behind: "Max, isn't this glorious? Don't you feel like a new person? We must be almost at the farm. Just think, I haven't seen the farm since April, before a leaf was out!"

But Josephine, who understood the situation, and was anxious to prevent any interference with the conversation now going on upon the front seat, promptly drew Sally back to their own interview.

"Max, listen to me." Jarvis spoke in a still lower voice. "Do one thing

for the sake of my pride, if not for yours. I may have blundered, but you know I didn't mean to. I thought I could count on your understanding my motives. But anyhow, just for to-night, give way to my schemes, and don't let the others see that you're offended with us. If after a night here you still honestly think I'm a fool and a meddler, I won't say another word--"

"A night here! Do you expect to keep us here all night?"

"Why not?"

"You must think I'm--"

"I think you're a reasonable being and a kind-hearted brother. If Sally likes the plan and wants to stay, let her. If she doesn't, I'll cheerfully take you both home. Mother's here to welcome us and make the thing proper, and we've all planned to stay. Think of the oven your flat is to-night. Come, be good, and you'll be cool!"

"Do you realize you're treating me like a small boy?"

"I feel rather like one myself--one who has stolen a cake out of the pantry and is in danger of a thrashing," was Jarvis's whimsical admission. "See here. I'll give you leave to take it out of me all you like. I'll agree to meet you at midnight in the timber tract, and take whatever you see fit to administer--provided you'll keep in before the rest. What do you say?" In making this preposterous proposition he was apparently perfectly serious.

It was as Mrs. Burnside had said. If anybody could manage Max's proud stubbornness, it was Jarvis, with his cool command of himself and his inborn habit of courtesy to everybody. Yet even Jarvis had his hands full to-night. Max's physical condition of fatigue and overwrought nerves made him more than ordinarily captious and difficult to handle.

"Confound you, you've got me in a corner!" he muttered. "That's what I don't like. If you had come out in the open with your plans--"

"You'd have refused me."

"You just said you counted on my generosity. If you were so sure of it, why didn't you ask for it?"

Jarvis laughed. "Oh, be reasonable! Don't you let people plot, at Christmas time and on birthdays, to take you by surprise? You hardly call it not being in the open because they don't ask your permission to present you with a house-jacket or a fountain-pen!"

The horses trotted briskly on, quiet ensuing behind them for a little while. Max fell into a sulky silence; Sally into a happy one, as she leaned out, watching for the final turn in the road before the pines should come into sight. Jarvis was wondering just how Max would behave, and hoping that Sally's pleasure would blind her eyes to her brother's dissatisfaction. He was counting a good deal on the impression his camp would make. As he thought it would look in the moonlight, with a little camp fire before it, it seemed to him it must appeal to anybody.

Sally gave a little cry. "There's the grove! How big and dark it looms up at night! I can smell it before I get near it--in my imagination. I've

been smelling it all these hot days, and longing for it. Oh, what's that at the back? Didn't you see a flash of something?"

Sally was fairly hanging out of the carriage, her gaze feasting on the cool depths of gloom under the tall trees, when she caught sight of the little leaping flames of the camp fire.

"Somebody must be in there," agreed Josephine. "Perhaps it's Mr. Ferry, who lives next door, in the white cottage. Remember my telling you about him? Max gave him leave to inhabit the grove all he liked."

"Everything's so dry, he might set it on fire," considered Sally anxiously.

"You won't fear any such carelessness on his part when you see him," Josephine assured her confidently.

The carriage turned in at the gate. In another minute it had reached a point where the tent began to show from behind a clump of bushes. Sally's hand clutched Max's shoulder. Her brother was ill-humouredly surveying the signs of occupancy of the debatable ground.

"Why, there's a tent there!" she cried. "A big tent, and some one in front! Who is it--do you know?" She turned excitedly to Josephine; then she touched Jarvis's shoulder. "I seem to be doing all the exclaiming," she declared. "You people must know about this. Is it--is it a _surprise_?"

"It seems to be," replied Jarvis, turning to see her face, as the fire-light struck it, aglow with wonder and anticipation.

Josephine caught her hand. "It's on your land, Sally dear," she said. "Do you mind?"

"Did it ever strike you," said Jarvis, quickly, in Max's ear, "that this _is_ Sally's land, and Alec's, and Bob's, quite as much as yours?"

Mrs. Burnside came out to greet the party, and Sally tumbled into her welcoming arms, hugging her frantically, and pulling away from her again to look about her. She seemed a different girl from the limp and languid one who had climbed into the carriage an hour before.

"Isn't it absolutely enchanting?" she exclaimed, gazing eagerly into the big tent, the open flaps of which showed an outer room arranged with rugs, chairs, couch, and table. Other open flaps at the corners of this outer enclosure invited exploration, and Sally promptly obeyed the summons. She found four smaller rooms, securely partitioned by high, tightly stretched canvas walls. She came back beaming.

"What does it all mean?" she begged. "Are we to stay here to-night? Was there ever anything so inviting as those beds and cots? I could hardly keep from falling into one of them."

"You may fall into one as soon as you choose," said Josephine, gleefully. "The one on the southeast corner is yours, the one with the blue Japanese rug on the floor and the wicker chair with the blue cushion. We've sent a telephone message to the rest of your family, so they won't expect you back."

Jarvis, returning with Max from the bestowal of his horses in the barn, found his mother and the two girls sitting in a row upon a rustic seat at a little distance from the tent, their faces toward the camp fire, now a mere flicker, which nobody had taken the trouble to revive. It was too hot a night for camp fires, except as welcoming beacons.

"Well?" questioned Jarvis, standing before the three, upon whom the bright midsummer moonlight streamed so luminously that the white figures were visible in every detail.

"Well?" responded Josephine.

"Very well, I think," added Mrs. Burnside.

"More than well!" And Sally clasped her hands in a way both characteristic and eloquent. "A dozen tonics couldn't have made me feel so much stronger as the notion of sleeping in that big white tent. I wish I knew just what the thermometer says it is in the flat at home. Oh, poor Uncle Timmy, and Bob and Alec! How I wish they were here--don't you, Max?"

It would have taken a harder heart than that which beat wearily in Max's breast to allow him to answer his sister sullenly.

"You like it, Sally?" he asked, taking a position where the moonlight did not illumine his face.

"Like it!" she exclaimed. "Jo says we're to stay if you are willing--live in this tent, and have the others out, and Mary Ann Flinders! We won't need Mary Ann long. I'll be strong enough myself to cook in another week. Oh, wasn't it dear and kind of these people to plan this for us?"

What could he do or say against it all without seeming a churl and an ingrate? But before he could formulate the inwardly grudging yet outwardly appreciative reply he felt forced to make, Jarvis himself had interposed with a flow of lively talk, explaining to Sally various details of arrangement, and sparing Max the necessity of making any insincere speeches. And the next thing that happened was the setting forth by Josephine, on the table in the tent's outer room, of a light but tempting supper, brought from home in a hamper--the product of no Mary Ann Flinders, but of the Burnside cook.

"Mm--mm!" The soft but eloquent sound came from Sally's closed lips when she had taken her first taste of a sandwich of unknown but delicious compound. "Was ever anything so good? Max, boy, please try one, quick! What is this perfect drink, Joey?--how it does go to the spot! Oh, if you are all half as happy as Sally Lunn, you don't know how to express it!"

"We're even happier," said Josephine, laughing softly, "for it seems at last as if we have Sally Lunn back."

Jarvis had hard work to keep his own pleasure properly subdued. He sat just across the table from Max, and the light from two candles shone revealingly into his satisfied face. He put on his goggles to screen his eyes, hoping that they might assist in concealing his content. Until Max gave in and agreed to it all, it would never do to let anybody but Sally crow with delight.

Mrs. Burnside insisted on an early bedtime for Sally, and the

convalescent reluctantly admitted that not even joy was wholly sustaining to such weakness of limb as was still hers. So she submitted, with a sigh of appreciation, to being tucked away in the bed in the southeast enclosure of the tent, and soon was lying peacefully there, watching through her open tent-flap the moonlight as it lay on the open lawn, beyond the vista of trees. The air was now stirring refreshingly through the grove, and Sally, under the thinnest of light summer blankets, was absolutely comfortable and restful, as she had not been for many weary nights.

In the adjoining room, Max was asleep in two minutes after he had stretched himself upon his cot. Outside, by the embers of the camp fire, Jarvis and Josephine exchanged a brief conversation.

"Is he taking it worse or better than you expected?" Josephine asked, in the lowest of whispers.

"He took it like the bumptious idiot he can be, at first. He's a trifle calmer now. I'm hoping by morning he'll be reasonable."

"Don't you think he must see the beauty of it when he looks at Sally?"

"One would think so. I suppose we mustn't blame him too much, for he certainly is worn out with work in this heat, and isn't himself. If he'll only be sensible, the staying here will do him as much good as it will Sally. She is pleased isn't she?"

"Pleased doesn't express it. But she thinks it's all my doing."

"Don't let her think anything else. It was your suggestion, and you've done half the work."

"It was Mr. Ferry's suggestion. Did you know he put up that rustic bench out there this afternoon? Made it out of the tree he chopped down."

"I didn't stop to wonder how it came there. I wonder if Max noticed it? I suppose he will think that was more of our impudence. It was kind of Ferry, though. He'll be a good neighbour for them."

"Oh, Jarvis, how I wish we could all stay here, too!"

Her brother gave vent to a curious little ejaculation, whether of agreement or dissent she could not tell. "Of course we can't," he said shortly.

"Perhaps Max will come round and ask us to put up another tent for ourselves."

"Not much he won't. Never mind, I'm satisfied if he submits to this."

When Max opened his eyes the next morning it was difficult for him to realize where he was. He lay staring at the flecks of sunlight on the pine-needle-strewn ground, wondering how it happened that he had not wakened in damp discomfort from hot and perspiring slumbers. Before he felt himself fully awake he was conscious of a voice a few feet away, exclaiming:

"Oh, Mr. Ferry, how kind of you! What splendid strawberries! Out of your own garden? You must be an accomplished gardener." It was

Josephine's voice.

"Only a novice, but I'm rather proud of these. I hope the first night was a comfortable one?"

"Perfect! Our friends are still sleeping--though they won't be long if I shout like this."

"I've been up so long I didn't realize it was barely seven o'clock. But I wanted to make sure of your having these for the first camp breakfast. I'll disappear now, and perhaps I can venture to appear again, later in the day, with my mother. We want to offer our services as neighbours from whom anything, from axes to apricots, can be borrowed."

Max could hear Josephine's low laugh echoed by a small ecstatic chuckle from the other side of the canvas wall which separated his head from Sally's. Her whisper came from very near his ear:

"Max, are you awake? Did you hear what Jo said? We're to have fresh strawberries, right out of a garden, for breakfast. Aren't you glad you're alive?"

Where was his ill-temper? He felt for it, in the recesses of his inner man, and couldn't seem to find it. He had had nine long hours of refreshing sleep, in the purest air to be found in the country, and had wakened with a sense of refreshment and well-being such as he had not experienced in many months. A faint, but appetizing, odour of cookery, including that of fragrant coffee, was in the air, and there were to be freshly picked strawberries for breakfast. And on the other side of the tent wall was a happy young convalescent, demanding of him whether it was not good to be alive. He found himself answering, in a genuinely cheerful tone:

"I'm certainly mighty glad you're alive, Sally Lunn!"

CHAPTER VII

EVERYBODY IS SATISFIED

"Bobby, let's have a garden, you and I." Bob looked up from the front of the tent platform, where he sat polishing a pair of much-worn russet shoes. Riding back and forth, nights and mornings, on a bicycle, over very dusty roads, made it necessary to polish often. But Bob didn't mind. The two weeks of camp life he had enjoyed had made him indifferent to any extra trouble involved.

"Looks as if you had a garden somewhere," he responded, eyeing with favour the pailful of red raspberries Sally held up. "You must have got up with the lark, to have picked all those. Mary Ann hasn't more than started the fire in the kitchen tent. I had to go and help her. That girl doesn't know how to boil an egg. She cracks it getting it in. Her coffee is a thick, dark, wicked looking stuff. What do you suppose she does to it?" he asked in a whisper.

"Never mind. I'm growing stronger every minute, and mean to begin to

cook, next week."

"Thank goodness!" murmured Bob. "I mean," he explained quickly, "that I'm thankful you're well enough."

Sally laughed, pulled off her wide straw hat, and sat down beside Bob.

"Your cheeks are pink as hollyhocks," he observed, eyeing her with satisfaction.

"I had a lovely time picking those raspberries," she said. "There must have been a big patch of them back there once. Bob, I want to start a kitchen garden. Max and Alec haven't waked up yet to the fun it would be to grow things on this old place, but you're always awake. Come on!"

Bob stood up.

"I'm ready for anything you say, but I don't know any more about planting gardens than I do about building bridges. You don't plant a garden in July--I'm sure of that."

"Isn't there a thing that can go in late, and produce a late crop?"

"Don't ask me. Maybe our friend Ferry would know. If there's anything he doesn't know, I haven't found it out. It's funny a preacher should be such an all-round sort of fellow, isn't it?"

"A--what?" Sally nearly dropped her raspberries, she was so astonished.

"A preacher. He preaches in the old white church with the big pillars, away down town in the middle of everything. I just found it out yesterday from a fellow in the office."

"Why, it can't be! He's always busy round that garden--or chopping wood up in our timber tract. He asked Max to let him work at that--for the sake of his muscle, he said."

"If you'll just stop and think, you'll find he isn't round all the time. He's in the city every day--has to be. He holds a half-hour noon service in the old church every day in the week for men. Fred Kentner says they flock in there like sheep--says he goes in often. It's cool in there, and he likes the things Ferry says. I'm going in with Fred some day soon. I'd like to find out what a fellow that can chop trees and fight with his fists can find to say in a pulpit."

"Fight with his fists!"

Bob chuckled. "I tackled him the other evening, out behind his house, just for fun. I got all I wanted in about two minutes. He was laughing all the time, but I couldn't get near him. He laid me on my back as helpless as a baby. Say, if Mary Ann doesn't get round with the oatmeal pretty soon, I'll have to go without. It's twenty minutes past six now."

"I'll see about it," and Sally hurried away, revolving in her mind this astonishing news.

"He can't be as young as he looks, then," she said to herself. "I shouldn't say he was a minute over twenty-five, but he must be."

Her mind turned later that day to a project more immediately promising than the garden. She wanted to have a house party--a tent party, to be accurate. The Burnside's had driven out twice to see them since they had become established, but Jarvis had been having another siege with his eyes, and Josephine had been entertaining visitors. Sally, in the fast-increasing strength and enthusiasm of returning health, longed for her friends, and began to plan how she could have all three with her for the space of at least two days.

"Wait a little longer," counselled Uncle Timothy. "Your strength is more that of happiness than of real physical gain, though you are certainly acquiring health rapidly. There will be plenty of hot weather in August, and you will be better fit to exert yourself."

Max and Alec backed him, for they were still more or less indifferent to the charms of active exercise, and when they had been fed, each evening, were in the habit of falling into postures of ease on the ground before the tent, while they discussed the happenings of the day.

At the end of another fortnight, however, everybody admitted that Sally seemed enough like herself to be permitted the mild dissipation of a tent party, and she proceeded joyfully to plan for the occasion.

"Alec and Bob will have to sleep outside," she decided.

"Thank you, not for me!" said Alec.

"Oh, don't go and be a spoil-sport now, Al!" cried Bob. "I'd a good deal rather sleep outdoors than not."

"You have my permission," rejoined Alec.

"I will sleep out-doors, with pleasure," said Uncle Timothy.

"Never, if I give you my room!" and Sally looked indignant.

"I should enjoy it," Mr. Rudd insisted. "This out-door life has renewed my youth. If the weather is favourable during your friends' visit you can count on having my room for them."

Of course Alec could not allow such a reversal of the natural order of things, and he announced the fact with firmness mixed with irritation. Uncle Timothy, however, also persisted, went into town and bought a hammock, and returning hung it under the trees.

Sally, with the help of Mary Ann, did considerable preliminary baking, and the Ferrys, hearing of the coming event, contributed a large basketful of garden produce. Sally, running over to thank Mrs. Ferry, told her all about her plans. She had already grown very fond of the little lady, whose happiness at being with her son, after a long period of separation from him, made her a cheery companion.

"I hope you and Mr. Ferry will come over this evening," urged Sally. "We want to make it a jolly time for our friends, and I'm sure you'll enjoy knowing Mrs. Burnside."

"Mother's a little shy," said a voice from behind Mrs. Ferry, who stood in the small porch, looking down at her visitor. Sally, in a crisp frock of white with tiny black figures, her sunny head uplifted, and her

cheeks now round and rosy with returning health, looked past Mrs. Ferry's shoulder, smiling. "She is decidedly modest about showing off before people, but she could entertain your guests quite by herself, if she would."

"Donald!" The small lady faced about, as her son's arm came round her shoulders. "What an idea!"

"She's the finest reader in the state," asserted the young man. "She's a scholar, she's--"

"Donald, you will lose your car!"

"She taught me all I know, and a great deal more that I don't know, because my head wouldn't hold it.

'And still the wonder grew,
That one small head could carry all she knew.'

Now I shall have to run for it, which will be most undignified. Good-by, mother!" He kissed her. "Good-by, Miss Sally! We'll be there to-night."

He swung away down the road at a brisk pace, turning once to wave his hat at the figure on the porch.

"Such a boy!" breathed the mother. "Yet such a man, Miss Sally, though his mother says it. And he'll go off with all that nonsense on his lips, and a head full of talk for those men in the church at noon--talk that will go straight to their hearts--and, better, to their judgments."

"I haven't yet been able to realize that he's a minister," Sally ventured. "Somehow, seeing him out-doors here--"

Mrs. Ferry nodded. "I know. Nobody takes him for what he is, because he will not do what he calls 'dress the part every day.' And he is such a believer in making the physical life offset the mental and spiritual--if I may put it so--that I tell him he may be in danger of becoming so athletic--and so agricultural"--she smiled--"that he will crowd out the spiritual. Yet he knows I don't mean that. He turns up many a rich nugget of thought, when he is hoeing the ground--and chops down many an error when he fells a tree, perhaps!"

"I don't doubt it," agreed Sally, regarding the proud little mother with real envy of her fortunate son. "Please come over early," she begged, as she took her leave, after lingering a little to tell Mrs. Ferry more about her plans for the evening.

"Sally Lunn!" Josephine exclaimed, a few hours later. "What have you been doing to yourself? You never looked so well. Behold her, Jarvis! But don't dare take off your blue goggles. Her radiance is fairly dazzling, and is liable to blind you."

"It's partly sunburn," confessed Sally. "I go deliberately out and let the sun smite me, first on the right cheek and then on the left. For awhile I burned my nose at the same time, which was not picturesque. But now I put a thick coating of talcum powder on my nose, and burn myself only where it is artistic."

"There's an honest confession for you," and Jarvis shook hands so

heartily that Sally's fingers ached for a minute afterward. "I can see some of the rouge through my glasses."

"I must look purple to you, then. Red and blue make purple, on cheeks as well as palettes, don't they? Joey, what made you put on a white dress? I planned to take you all blackberrying over in the pasture."

"Lovely! Lend me an apron, and I'll risk the dress. This is a beautiful time of day to pick blackberries."

The three set off. As they passed the garden on the farther side of the hedge they were hailed by Donald Ferry. "May I go, too?" called the young man, and he leaped lightly over the hedge.

Jarvis Burnside went forward and held out his hand. "I heard you speak, this noon," he said, in a low tone.

Ferry returned the pressure heartily. "I saw you," he answered.

"You did? I was away back by the door."

"My eyes are pretty good. And it's easy to see a friend, you know."

"I'll be glad to have you call me that," said Jarvis.

"I've wanted to since I saw you first," replied Ferry, with the simplicity of manner which won him confidence and warm liking wherever he went.

He was in a holiday mood. He insisted on carrying all the pails, and juggled with them, producing a clash of sound which echoed through the meadows. In his gray flannels and flowing blue tie, he looked much more like a college boy than a member of the most dignified of professions.

"How strong and healthy he looks!" observed Jarvis to Sally, as they led the way toward the blackberry pasture. "He couldn't have got his education without spending more or less time in-doors, but he must have put in every spare minute in the open air. The sight of him makes me feel more than ever that I was a fool to dig away as I did, ruining my eyes for the sake of doing two years' work in one. Gained a lot, didn't I? Do you realize it's more than a year since I took my degree? And not a blessed thing since but idle around, waiting for these eyes to get back into shape."

"It must have seemed a long year," agreed Sally, sympathetically. "But haven't you made things worse by using your eyes every now and then against orders?"

"Guilty. The sight of a book is like cheese to a mouse, to me. Just after a visit to Doctor Meyer I'm meek and obedient as a lamb; then I pass a book-shop, look in at the windows, glance round to see if any oculists or mothers observe me, dodge in, get into a corner with some book--and an hour is gone before I think I've done more than inspect the table of contents."

"I knew you must be breaking rules, when you had so many relapses, after Jo had said the eyes were better. It's a pity you live in a stone block, instead of a place like this, where there is out-doors enough to keep any one busy."

"It is a pity. I wish we lived on a farm like this. I'd like nothing better than trying my hand at scientific farming. If I'm going to be everlastingly handicapped by these eyes I might as well look round for an out-door job. You can't think how I wish now I'd put in my time studying civil engineering."

"I thought scientific farming called for lots of reading."

"It does, properly. I should have to have a partner to do the studying. But it also calls for plenty of open-air work, and that--well, it's getting to have more and more attraction for me. Look up the pasture there. Isn't that a beautiful scene at this hour of day, even through blue glasses?"

"If Max only felt as you do! But don't you think he's looking better since he's been sleeping out here? He actually owned this morning that he was sorry he couldn't get back in time for the blackberry picking."

"Really? The old boy must be waking up a bit. I'm thinking of offering to rent a few acres out here, so as to start a market-garden next spring--if my eyes still need favouring, and there's not much doubt of that. Perhaps the sight of me digging round here will stir him up."

"If it only would! Oh, Jarvis, how I'd love to spend the winter in that house!" and Sally turned to gaze back at it.

"Would you--clear off out here among the snow-drifts? Well, I could imagine myself doing it with enthusiasm--under two conditions. The use of my eyes and the use of the library at the top of those stairs. By the way, has Max taken any steps to sell that?"

"He's been consulting a man or two, and he had one out here not long ago. I've begged him to be careful, if he must sell it, lest he shouldn't get all it's worth."

"He'd better be mighty careful. I wish he'd trust me with that commission. I believe I'll mention it to him to-night. I understood he didn't intend to do anything about it at present, but if he has his mind on selling it I must have a word with him. I believe the collection is worth a good deal more than any of us appreciate."

Jarvis did not fail to follow up this idea. When the party returned to the tent Max was coming from the house. Jarvis talked with him for some time, and the conference ended with both of them looking cheerful.

Max was undoubtedly feeling the benefit of his taste of out-door life. He joined in the festivities of the evening with more zest than he had shown in a long time, greatly to the delight of everybody. It was a merry evening, and was followed by much jollity over the bestowing of so many people comfortably for the night.

Going to occupy his hammock, Mr. Rudd found a long figure swinging reposefully in it.

"Why, Jarvis!" he ejaculated. "This is my place. You are to have a room in the tent."

"Not while you sleep outside, sir," returned the guest, remaining

composed for slumber. "Beside, I don't get a chance to sleep outdoors very often, and on such a night as this I wouldn't miss it."

"I don't suppose I can forcibly eject you," admitted Mr. Rudd.

"No, I think not. I may not be as muscular as our friend Ferry, but I haven't given up my morning exercise before my cold plunge since I left college, and I'm in fair shape to hold my own with whoever attempts to take this hammock away from me. Go back to your room, please, Mr. Rudd. I never was more comfortable in my life."

To prove it, Jarvis went promptly to sleep, and nearly every one else did the same. Mrs. Burnside was awake for some time, but she, too, fell asleep at last, leaving only one pair of wide-awake eyes in the tent. Sally, for some unknown reason, could not feel the first inclination to repose. She was up and sitting on a pillow beside her open tent flap, gazing out into the night, when she heard a singular noise.

It was like the distant roar of the sea, but there was no sea within many miles. It did not sound in the least like wind, yet wind it must be, she thought, and in the space of a half minute the roar had so gained in volume that it appeared to be approaching with great rapidity. Sally rose and peered up toward the sky, for usually she could see a small patch of it beyond the grove. But she could discern no appearance of the sky, although a few minutes before the stars had been shining brilliantly.

She had no time within which to take any further observations. Before she had fairly begun to wonder what might be coming, and to tell herself that she had heard no growl of thunder and that therefore this could not be the approach of one of those severe electrical storms with which a period of intense heat sometimes terminates, the thing had happened. With a burst, a tremendous blast of wind struck the tent. It swayed and strained at its guy-ropes, the poles creaked and cracked, and in less time than it takes to tell it, the whole flapping structure had gone down with one ballooning heave, flat upon the ground, covering its inmates with billowing canvas.

Then came a terrific clap of thunder and a flash of the fiercest lightning Sally had ever seen. Instantly there was a sudden and overwhelming downpour of rain, as if the heavens had opened. Then everybody was shouting or calling. Outside the tent, Jarvis, in his hammock, and Bob, on his blankets on the ground, had been soaked to the skin before they knew what had happened, and were trying to discover a place where they could crawl under the wrecked canvas and find a shelter from the deluge.

"Where are you all? Anybody hurt?" cried Jarvis, groping in the blackness.

"All right!" screamed Josephine, who had put her hand under the canvas partition and found her mother, whose bed was next her own.

"All right!" shrieked Sally, who had received a soaking by having been close to the open tent-flap when the flood came. But she did not mention that just now.

"Here's a place to get under!" cried Bob to Jarvis, and the two managed to work themselves under cover. A convenient table made a nook to receive them, and kept the tent off their heads.

"I've crawled under my cot!" announced Alec, at the top of his lungs.

"So have I!" called Mr. Rudd. He was congratulating himself that he had not slept in the hammock, but he was much worried concerning Jarvis and Bob.

Then Max fired the shot that, sooner or later, he might have been expected to fire. As loudly as he could vociferate against the roar of the storm, he sent a triumphant challenge to the party: "I hope you're all--_satisfied_--with the beauty of sleeping in the--_open air_!"

CHAPTER VIII

PROBLEMS AND HEARTS

The storm had passed almost as abruptly as it had come. The rain ceased as if a trap-door in the heavens had been suddenly closed. The wind had gone when the rain came, so that the moment the downfall was over the whole affair was ended. It had not occupied the space of more than four minutes, but it had managed to make as complete a wreck of the sleeping arrangements in the pine grove as if it had been of an hour's duration.

"The stars are shining!" announced Bob, putting his head under the edge of the canvas the moment the rain had stopped. "The show is over."

"So is the tent--and sleep," added Alec. Crawling along under the wreckage, he had encountered Bob's heel. "This is a nice mess! What on earth are we to do now?"

"Get everybody out under the sky," commanded Jarvis, working his way out. He ran round to the back of the tent and found Sally emerging. He gave her a hand.

"Why, you're wet!" he said, as his hand touched the sleeve of the blue kimono she had been wearing when she sat in the open doorway.

She felt of his sleeve in turn. "I'm not a circumstance to you," she answered. "You must be soaked to the skin, you and Bob."

"That's no matter, this warm night. Mother, Jo, where are you? Max, lend a hand here, and let's lift this canvas so they can get out."

"But it's not a warm night now," declared Mrs. Burnside, when she had reached the open air, and had found out for herself how wet at least three of the party were. "We must manage to dry you all, somehow."

"I hope you people are satisfied," Max reiterated. It was the fourth time he had said it.

"Of course we're satisfied!" cried Sally, with spirit. "Who wants a camping party without any adventures? We can't have bears here in our pine grove, so we have thunderstorms."

"Thunderstorms! That was a cyclone, if it was anything!" growled Max.

"If it was, we're safe from ever having another!" cried Bob. "They never hit the same place twice, I'm told. Hello, there comes a lantern through the hedge. Thought Mr. Ferry'd be looking us up."

"Ship ahoy!" called a hailing voice. "All hands on deck? Shall I man a lifeboat? Well, well," in astonishment, as he came nearer, "where are you, anyhow? Where's the tent?"

"Don't look so high up!" Jarvis called back. "Lower your glass to the horizon line. We're out in the open sea!"

Ferry surveyed the group by the light of his lantern. "Anybody get wet?" he asked. "Yes, I should say you did. See here, you wet ones, don't delay a minute, for the storm has made the air twenty degrees cooler. Run over to our house. Mother's expecting you all."

"We can't all get inside your house!" chuckled Bob.

"Let's go into our own," urged Sally. "Max has the key, and we can carry in the cots--they're not wet--and have a fire in the big fireplace--"

Bob pinched her arm. "Say, Sis, it's a chance for you to get into the house."

"Of course it is," Sally whispered back, her eyes dancing in the light from the lantern.

"I think that is the best plan, don't you, Max?" questioned Jarvis.

Max nodded reluctantly. No matter how hospitably the tiny cottage might be thrown open for their reception, it would certainly be overtaxing its capacity to attempt to make nine extra people comfortable there for the remainder of the night--it was barely one o'clock.

"We'll gladly stretch the walls to take you all in," said Donald Ferry, "but perhaps the big house plan is the better. Suppose you ladies go over and let mother satisfy her longing to be of use by making Miss Sally dry, while we fellows get the cots into the house, and bring over some wood from our pile for the fireplace. It will need open windows and a rousing fire in there to freshen the musty air."

"Jarvis, you must come, too--you and Bob. You're both very wet," urged Mrs. Burnside.

"Yes, go over, Burnside, and ask mother for some dry clothes of mine," said Ferry. "Bob--"

"I've got some dry clothes packed away somewhere in the tent, if I can only find where they've gone to," answered Bob.

"I'll work myself dry," and Jarvis suited the action to the word by beginning to unfasten the guy ropes.

"Jarvis!" It was his mother's voice. At the note in it, he stood up again, laughing. "All right, mother," he agreed, and walked away with her toward the cottage.

"These people who have been so anxious to camp," said Max to Ferry, "I

hope they're satisfied now."

"Oh, such experiences are a part of the fun of camping," asserted Ferry. "Mr. Rudd certainly looks cheerful," and he held up his lantern so that its rays illumined Uncle Timothy's face.

The elder man smiled. "It seems to me we are fortunate to have had no worse happen," said he. "That was the most violent wind I have ever known."

"It shook our little house to its foundations," replied Ferry. "I think it took down a chimney, but I didn't stop to find out. Mother was certain your camp must be blown over into the next township, and could hardly wait for me to get out and see. Well, shall we go to work? Tent down first--and that will take all hands, for wet canvas is heavy."

They fell to, Jarvis soon returning to join them. It took considerable time to remove the tent from its position, for much care was necessary to prevent its dampening the tent furniture beneath. But after that it was easy to move the cots and bedding to the house, the hallway of which was now lighted by two lamps brought over from the cottage.

"We'll make up the beds!" cried Sally, appearing with Josephine in the big hall, her face radiant. "I can't lose any more time tamely discussing this event over there, when I can be here in the midst of things."

"Good for you! Now, Bob, suppose you and I leave the others to bring over the rest of the stuff, while we haul some wood for the fireplace," and Ferry beckoned Bob away to the next job. He was smiling back at Sally as he went, for her joy, though he did not quite understand its cause, was contagious.

So it was not long before a cheerful blaze was throwing grotesque lights and shadows down the hall, showing up the odd array of cots and beds which had been brought, without regard to final disposition, into the hall. Sally selected the long room on the left of the hall, its doorway directly opposite the fireplace, for the feminine portion of the family, announcing that the others could sleep in the hall itself. Into this room she directed Uncle Timothy and Alec to move four of the cots, and set Mary Ann at work making up the beds in the hall.

"Isn't this more fun than the jolliest picnic you ever went to?" exulted Sally, as she and Josephine spread sheets and blankets upon the beds.

"It's great! I'm so glad it happened to-night, when we were here. Sally, do you suppose they can dry the tent and get it up again by to-morrow night?"

"I hope not! If it would only rain again to-morrow! I'd give worlds to be forced to stay here in the house, much as I've enjoyed sleeping in the tent. If I could only make Max take a little liking to the house--and I could if I just had our things out here from town. But of course he'll never let me. Hasn't he been funny to-night, with his solemn 'hoping we're satisfied'? Oh, if the poor dear only had just a tiny sense of humour!"

"I'm sure he has, if we could wake it up. This scene ought to do it, if anything would," agreed Josephine. "Look at Mr. Rudd, with his hair all

rumpled and his sleeping-cap still on. See Mary Ann out there; doesn't she look dazed and serious? Here I am, with my hair in two tails down my back--and it's the first time I've thought of it. As for you, in that red sweater jacket, with your curly mop of hair, you look more like a lively small boy than ever before."

"I'd like to be one. Do you suppose we can ever settle down to slumber again to-night? I'd like to have larks the rest of the time, till morning. We will have them to-morrow night, Joey Burnside, if we can manage to stay in this house."

It certainly was hard to get to sleep under these new conditions. Even after everybody was quiet, there were still sources of amusement for Sally. The sound of a low growl in the hall was enough to set her off, and she leaned over to Josephine's cot to whisper: "That's Max, muttering, 'I hope you're satisfied!'"--at which Josephine began to laugh, and the two shook together for some time thereafter.

The first thing in the morning of which Josephine was conscious was Sally again, breathing joyously in her ear, "Jo, Jo--it's raining!"

So it was. The long dry spell had been broken by the severe storm of the night, and a heavy rain was now falling. As she dressed, Sally gazed out upon it with satisfaction.

"How on earth are we to have any breakfast?" came booming from the hall, as Max, reluctantly getting to his feet, took in the situation.

"Mr. Ferry and I brought all the kitchen tent stuff into the back of this house," said Bob. "He said it was best in time of peace to prepare for war, and we might get another storm before morning. So we're all fixed."

"Very nice for those who can stay here, but not so fine for the ones who have to catch the trolley." Max applied himself discontentedly to the business of dressing.

"Oh, what's that! Who minds a little walk in the rain? I wouldn't be such a granny. You've done nothing but fuss ever since the tent came down. Nobody else has howled a minute. You must enjoy being everlastingly in a grouch."

It was not often that Bob's good humour forsook him to the point of addressing his elder brother in such disrespectful terms, and Max glared at him wrathfully.

"Cut that! I'm a few years older than you are, and you've no business to be impudent. When you work the way I do, you'll earn the right to have your rest undisturbed."

"Yes, grandpa," mocked Bob. Alec, sitting on the edge of his cot, laughed. This was too much for Max. He seized his younger brother by the collar and attempted to shake him. But Bob was more athletic than Max had realized. The sturdy young figure resisted doughtily, and Max, who was by no means muscular, found his hands full. Uncle Timothy and Alec looked on in amusement as the battle raged, and when Bob finally succeeded in depositing Max on the latter's own cot, back downward, the victor's knee on the conquered one's chest, they applauded heartily.

"Take it good-naturedly, nephew," advised Mr. Rudd, catching sight of

Max's angry countenance. "It was a fair encounter, and the lad is stronger than you."

"If there was any way of pounding a laugh into Maxwell Lane, I'd tackle him myself," declared Alec.

"Boys, what are you doing?" called Sally. "Are you dressed? May we come through? We want to help Mary Ann about breakfast."

Max rose to his feet, his face red and his collar awry. As the girls appeared he strode away up the stairs affecting not to see them.

"Max, are you going up to find out if any burglars got in overnight?" called Sally after him, "If you are, please see if my jewel case is undisturbed."

To Sally's intense gratification, it rained all day. To be sure, she had invited her friends to a tent party, not to stay in an empty house, but it seemed to be so much more fun for everybody to roam about the house, exploring it from attic to cellar, suggesting what could be done to make it all inviting and attractive, that the hours by no means dragged. Mrs. Burnside, especially, seemed to take deep interest in every detail of the rooms, declaring them to be susceptible to treatment which should easily make them homelike and beautiful.

The rugs from the tent had been laid in the hall, by the fireplace, where a small fire burned, its cheer and warmth grateful to those who gathered round it, for the change in the weather had become more pronounced as the day advanced, and a north-east wind was doing its part in making indoors desirable. Such of the camp furniture as fitted the uses of a sitting-room had also been placed in the hall, and the result was that at least one spot in the big house presented a highly inviting appearance.

"I wish we had some books and magazines now," said Josephine, disposing herself comfortably in a steamer chair, with her back toward the fire. "I've read all those we had in the tent."

"I'll find you some," and Sally disappeared--by way of the kitchen, where Mary Ann was sure to need coaching from time to time. Thence she ran up a back stairway to the floor above, and on to the small flight of steps which led to the door opening on the stairway between the walls, above which was the old library. She meant to make a selection of volumes for Josephine's delectation, more as a joke than as an offer of reading matter, for she did not suppose there was much in the collection which might serve to entertain her friend. To her surprise, she found it unnecessary to use her key, and went on up the stairs, remembering that she had not seen Jarvis for the last hour. If he should be up here reading, it was well that she had come, for the fine print of the old books was the worst thing possible for his eyes.

But Jarvis was not reading. Instead, she found him standing by one of the windows, staring out through the curious old wrought-iron latticework, which, after the fashion in many old houses, made the upper windows impregnable. His hands were in his pockets, his eyes were fixed on the outlook of field and meadow stretching away up the slope of the hillside to the woods beyond. It was a fine prospect, even through the falling rain, and Jarvis appeared to be fascinated by it, so that he did not hear the light fall of Sally's footsteps on the stairs.

She came softly up and stood beside him. "Isn't that lovely off there?" she asked, and Jarvis started. Then he laughed, bringing his gaze back to rest with a look of pleasure upon the girl at his side.

"It certainly is. From this height one gets a better idea of the way the farm lies than from below."

"Do you wonder I want to live here?"

"Not a bit. The idea of it grows more attractive to me every time I come here. If it were any place but yours, I should be strongly tempted to buy it myself--mother and I, of course, I mean. She would jump at the idea, I fancy, of this for a summer home."

"Oh, Jarvis!" Sally looked so dismayed that he reassured her in haste:

"Of course I'd never mention such a thing unless you yourself wanted to sell. But you can see I'm in sympathy with your longing to live here. I only wish I could see you carry out your plan. If there were anything I could do to bring it about, I certainly would do it. Look here." He paused to consider an idea which had just occurred to him. "Do you suppose if I were seriously to talk of buying the place it might make Max want to keep it? By all the laws of human nature, the thing ought to work that way."

"I don't know. You never know how Max is going to take things. If you offered a good price he might jump at it."

"I wouldn't offer a good price--that is, not the price I would give if I were very anxious to get it."

Sally thought it over. "I don't know," she said again. "You told me you were thinking of offering to rent a few acres of us and try some market gardening."

"I have thought of that. If I could only get 'the leader of the opposition' interested to go in with me, your case would be won."

"You never can. He'll have to see somebody making a success of it before he will think of it for a minute. There's nothing anybody can do before spring, I suppose."

"There's considerable to be done in winter, I understand. And the spring work begins so early it's practically winter then."

"You can't think how I want to stay here this winter!" sighed Sally.

"You really mean it? Snow-drifts and isolation, empty rooms and cold winds, and all?"

"The Ferrys don't think it isolated. When they came, they expected to go back to rooms in town for the winter, but they've fallen so in love with their cottage they're going to stay. This isn't the country; it's only the suburbs, eight minutes' walk from the electrics."

"True enough. It depends upon one's point of view, doesn't it? There's a lot of fun made of the commuters, but they're not by any means to be placed all in the same class. To people who genuinely love the country

it's a delight to get out here, no matter how many minutes it takes to make the run. And it really takes only about twenty-five minutes to get into the heart of the city. So you honestly want to stay here, do you, Sally Lunn? From this hour I'm committed to the task of trying to bring that thing about."

"Jarvis! That's lovely of you! You did bring about my getting out here in the tent. Yes, I've heard the whole story from Jo--I know what a strategist you were. You're such a good friend, to take so much trouble."

"Am I? There's nobody I'd rather take trouble for. You know that, don't you?"

If there were more than friendship in his eyes and voice, Sally did not perceive it. She was so accustomed to kindness and consideration from this young man, who had grown up only a few years ahead of her, and who had been her champion so long that she had never thought of him in any other light, that no such declaration of his friendly feeling for her was likely to impress her as at all out of the ordinary. The eyes behind the blue goggles were hidden from her, the voice to her ear had merely its usual warm ring of comradeship, and she did not note the fact that upon the smooth, dark cheek a touch of unwonted colour spoke of feeling deeper than that hinted at in the simple words.

"I know you're my stand-by, and you know I appreciate it. If you can possibly bring such a thing about, I'll bless you forever. Now help me find some books that will entertain Jo and your mother, for I must go down to them."

He pointed out a number of quaint volumes whose contents he thought might prove interesting, and she selected several, with which she departed, taking a gay farewell of him and adjuring him not to use his eyes.

"Thank you, I'll use my brains instead," he answered.

"It will take all you've got!" she called back.

"I wonder if hearts are any help in solving problems?" Jarvis thought, half-smiling to himself when she had gone. "Hers certainly isn't concerned with anybody at present. But I wonder if I'm a wise fellow to be plotting to help her spend the winter next door to the finest chap I know. I wonder! But I'm certainly committed to the endeavour."

Whatever was the result of his use of the brains with which he had been endowed, he lost no time in making his first effort. That evening, as the company finished their dinner and strolled back into the hall, Jarvis challenged Max to a walk up the cartpath toward the timber tract.

"Too wet," objected Max. "The rain stopped only an hour ago; everything's soaking."

"I know it, but we've both been shut up all day in-doors, and need the exercise. Besides, while we were at dinner I saw Ferry making for the woods with his axe over his shoulder. We'll find him there and have a jolly visit. He's great company when he's at work--which is saying a good deal, for better company at any time I don't know of."

Max reluctantly submitted, turned up his trousers widely, shouldered an umbrella, and the two set out. Sally looked after them, her hopes

following them, for she had received a meaning look from Jarvis which told her that his schemes were already on foot. She had seen him in conference with his mother that afternoon, and was sure the two were agreed upon whatever suggestion of purchase Jarvis might be about to make. Yet Sally held her breath. What if--what if--Max should, after all, jump at the offer?

CHAPTER IX

MAX COMPROMISES

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Maxwell Lane. "I'll compromise. If Sally and the rest of you will let up on your nonsensical plan of staying in this barracks all winter, I'll agree to stick it out till--November."

He encountered Sally's gaze. They were all upon the great, high-columned porch which gave to the front of the house its impressive air of being an old family mansion. It was a fortnight after the tent party--a fine August evening. Josephine and Jarvis Burnside had just driven out, and Donald Ferry, seeing them come, had strolled over. So not only Sally, but six other people, were hanging on Max's decision.

He had meant to say "till October." But as he met his sister's eyes it occurred to him that a compromise, which offered one month instead of six, might perhaps be considered a trifle too one-sided to be accepted as a compromise at all. So he finished the sentence, after a perceptible pause, with "till November." That, surely, was being generous, he considered. Just why all decisions should be made by him, as supreme arbiter, can hardly be explained, except that he had assumed that position three years before, when the other young Lanes had been negligible factors in all matters of business, and he, by the divine right of his twenty-one years, had, upon the death of his father, taken the management of the family affairs into his own hands.

Sally drew a long breath of relief. Anyhow, she now had more than two months' reprieve. By the end of that period something might happen to make Max willing to extend it. The tent had been put up again, and all but Max had returned to sleeping in it. He had announced that he cared to take no more chances with thunderstorms and cyclones, so Sally had arranged comfortable quarters for him in the house, in one of the smaller downstairs rooms, looking out upon the grove. There was a fireplace in this room, and Bob had placed a well-stocked wood-box beside it, so that his brother might have no excuse for feeling himself neglected.

"Your compromise gives you so much the bigger half of the bargain," said Josephine, her brilliant dark eyes fixed on Max, "that I think you ought to give Sally something to boot. Isn't that the word?"

"What does she want? The house furnished for the two months?"

"Much simpler than that. Sally and I want to have our friends out for a frolic."

"In an empty house?"

"Yes. What jollier place for a lot of fun? Only it wouldn't seem empty by the time we had put up a lot of flags and bunting and goldenrod and balsam branches. That long drawing-room of yours, with crash on the floor--and a harp and violins behind a screen--and Chinese lanterns all over the rooms and on the porch and down the driveway--"

Josephine's imagination worked fast. She had gone into a dozen specifications before Max could get a chance to interpose.

"Very fine, very fine! And a supper-table, loaded with salads and ices. Glorious idea! How much do you think all this would cost? Of course that's of no consequence, but just out of curiosity I should like to know."

"Goodness, we've boxes of lanterns, rolls of bunting and flags, and yards of crash left from parties way back to my first birthday ones," Josephine assured him. "As for the supper--" She paused to think it out, for party suppers are unquestionably expensive details.

"Wait till October and make it a husking-bee," suggested Donald Ferry. He had become in these few weeks as much a member of this circle of friends as if he had always belonged to it. "Then you'll need only coffee and doughnuts and apples and that sort of thing. There'll be corn enough in my patch to trim your rooms, and plenty for the husking."

"Jolly!" exploded Bob.

"Fine!" cried Alec.

Sally's eyes were radiant. Even Uncle Timothy smiled. Max himself, being, after all, in spite of his grave air, only twenty-four, and capable of enjoying gay times like the rest of them, felt his indifference melt away.

"That would give us a chance to do something in return for all the invitations we've had ever since we've been in the apartment," urged Sally. "Wouldn't you like to ask your friends in the bank, Max?"

"If we had the thing, I shouldn't mind asking two of the fellows--Harper and Ward," Max admitted. "Oh, I suppose we'll have it. When Jo and Sally get their minds on anything, it has to go through. If you can figure it out so it doesn't mean a big bill, it may do very well as a wind-up to this out-door business."

This was being condescending, for Max; and Jarvis smiled to himself as he reflected that there's nothing like having your own way in big matters to make you decently amiable as regards small ones.

From this evening the arrangements for the October husking-bee occupied a more or less prominent part in the plans of the Lanes and their friends. Meanwhile everybody, including Max himself--although he could seldom be made to admit it--thoroughly enjoyed the intervening weeks.

"Did you ever see finer corn than this?" asked Ferry, as he and Bob set up a great shock of rustling stalks at one end of the "drawing-room." "To be sure, I didn't plant it--I owe the owner of the place for that--but I hoed it, and I cut it, and I'm reaping the credit."

"It's magnificent, Mr. Ferry," Sally agreed readily, from the floor where

she sat, fitting candles into Chinese lanterns of every form and hue, from small round ones to gorgeous great affairs of fantastic shape and design. It was Saturday afternoon, and the entire force was busy. On the front porch Max and Josephine were hanging lanterns, while Alec was stringing wires among the trees and down the driveway. It was extraordinary how many lanterns the Burnsides seemed to have stored away, and in what fresh condition they were; the bunting and the flags, also. Although some of this material showed unmistakable signs of use, bales more of it had had to be hastily rumpled by Josephine, to get it into the proper condition for lending.

"I'll tell you where I've put in my fine touches," chuckled Bob. "Those twenty jack-o'-lanterns of mine have teeth, every one of 'em. Maybe you don't think that was some work."

"Not only was it work, but it shows a trained sense of artistic effect," Ferry assured him. "That monster you've put on the porch, with four faces pointing to the four points of the compass, has Janus, the god of beginnings, beaten to a finish."

"Sally," Josephine called in at one of the front windows, "I've forgotten to tell you who are in town! Neil and Dorothy Chase. They just came last night. Don't you want to ask them out to-night?"

Alec, down the driveway, heard, and was first to shout his approbation of this idea: "_Sure_"! Get 'em here and ask 'em if they think there's room enough to turn round in!"

Max, from the top of the step-ladder, added his approval: "Have them, whatever you do, Sally. Of all the chumps!"

Bob whistled. "Neil was afraid he'd burst our rooms in town," he recalled. "He can get as chesty as he likes out here. You'll have him, won't you, Sally?"

Sally looked up at their neighbour, who was laughing quietly at the comments. "You must think we have odd motives for our invitations."

"I think the house is going to give the impression to-night of being a hospitable mansion," he returned. "It will be just the time to invite anybody who likes space and effect."

There could be no doubt of this. When all was done, even before the lanterns and the fires were lighted, the drawing-room, the hall, and the dining-room all had taken on such a festal air that it could occur to nobody to miss the furniture which ordinarily occupies houses of this character. Across the hall two rooms had been arranged for dressing-rooms, and even these were highly attractive.

After the lanterns were lighted, outside was fairyland! Inside, with the fireplaces burning huge logs and flashing intermittently over the scene, the jack-o'-lanterns grinning cheerfully from every corner, the flags and bunting contributing colour, and the masses of evergreen and clumps of corn-shocks adding nooks and corners for shadows to dance in, there certainly could have been no quainter or prettier background for a party.

"What I want to know is, whether the lady of the manor feels her part. She certainly looks it!"

It was Jarvis's greeting as he came up the steps into the big porch, after a hasty trip home to dress. Just as he approached the house a figure in white had come out of the doorway, and he congratulated himself on having caught Sally alone for the first time in several days.

Sally met him with an eager welcome: "Oh, I'm so glad you got back before the rest came! I wanted you here to help make things go from the beginning. Max is having fits with his tie, and Alec is in distress because his pumps don't look as smart as he thinks they ought. Even Bob is more than usually fussy about the parting of his hair!"

"Too bad, but such small anxieties always go along with dress occasions. You don't answer my question. Do you feel like the mistress of an ancestral home?"

"Do I? I should say I didn't. I feel like a small girl giving her first party. I hadn't a thing to wear but this old white frock--it's lucky for me our lights are the sort they are. Electrics would show me up for what I am."

"Do you know what you are?"

"Hardly--to-night. What am I, do you think?"

"A healthy, happy, sensible girl, who doesn't care if she isn't wearing a fussy frock from the most expensive place in town. And if you were, you couldn't look nicer."

"Thank you. That's a straight masculine compliment, and I appreciate it. How good it seems to see you without those blue glasses! Are you going to leave them off to-night?"

"I certainly am. I don't care to contribute to the weird effects among the jack-o'-lanterns. I want to see everything as it is to-night--including Sally Lane."

She looked straight into his eyes, with the frank friendliness which never dreamed of turning these pleasant speeches into meaning ones. She was heartily pleased to see him without the disfiguring glasses, for the brown eyes were fine ones, and the face was full of character as well as comeliness.

"No girl ever had such good friends as Sally Lunn," she said. "Do you think I don't know that no decorations of your house in town ever called for so much bunting and crash and so many flags and lanterns as we have here to-night? The others haven't thought of it, but I've done a bit of estimating, if you please."

Jarvis laughed. "It's hard to get round you. But you don't mind? Mother and Jo are certainly near enough to being mother and sister to you to be allowed a bit of fun like this."

"You are sure brother Jarvis didn't have a hand?"

It was on his lips to tell her that whatever relation he might hold to her, that of brother wouldn't do--but he restrained the words. Not yet! It would be a pity to risk anything yet--certainly not now, when her mind was full of the coming party. Beside, he was not at all sure that a word might not spoil all his chances. Sally, in spite of her twenty years,

was, in some ways, still such a girl.

So he only answered gayly: "Both hands, if you don't mind. It took hands, shoulders, and back to get the stuff down from our attic!"

Donald Ferry and his mother now came up the steps, and Jarvis and Sally turned to greet them. Ferry had given them both a quick look of keen scrutiny as he saw them standing there alone together under the lanterns. For some time he had been observing that the two seemed to be close friends. What he thought, however, could not have been told from his manner, for he had never seemed in a blither mood as he shook hands and presented himself to Sally in the capacity of one of her right-hand men.

"Thank you," she answered, looking at him precisely as she had looked at Jarvis, with the girlish fearlessness and absence of coquetry which is so charming at her age, much as a younger brother sometimes looks at an elder one whom he sincerely likes and admires. "I've just been telling Jarvis that no girl ever had nicer friends. You've all worked like slaves, and I do hope you'll have good times enough to-night to half pay you. Jarvis, please present Mr. Ferry to the prettiest, jolliest girls we know, won't you? And don't forget to take advantage of your chance to dance with the nicest ones yourself," she added, laughing, and leading the way into the house with Mrs. Ferry, who, with Mrs. Burnside, was to chaperon the party.

Both Jarvis's and Ferry's eyes followed the graceful young figure as it made its way with the elder one down the hall, among the parti-coloured lights. Then, for some reason, they turned to look at each other, and smiled. "Are you prepared to do your duty by those prettiest and jolliest girls?" inquired Ferry.

"If you are. It's the surest way of pleasing Sally," replied Jarvis, with conviction.

Sally's characterization of the girls who were her guests was undoubtedly a true one. They were attractive young people, indeed, who shortly came trooping up the steps, in gauzy gowns of all hues. Youth and happiness are always good to look upon, and freshness of skin and brightness of eye make features not strictly beautiful charming in their own way.

There were plenty of young men and youths, Max's companion bank-clerks were among them, clear-eyed, keen-faced fellows whom the Lanes liked upon sight and were glad to entertain both for Max's sake and their own. Alec and Bob had not been denied the privilege of inviting certain youthful intimates, so it was a somewhat diversified company, in point of age, which laughed and danced and talked and sang, under the lanterns. For sing they did now and then, when tempted by some popular air from the little orchestra--which somehow had been enlarged to include several other instruments besides harp and violin, Josephine arguing that there must be sound enough to be heard upon the porch and lawn. It was a gay company, and the fun was at its height when the last guests to arrive drove up with a proclaiming flourish of a musical horn.

"It's the Chases--we must go out and meet them, Max," and Sally caught at her brother as he was hastening by. They reached the porch as Neil and Dorothy descended from their car and looked about them.

"Well, of all the surprises!" was young Mrs. Chase's greeting, as she swept across the porch in a Paris gown which fairly took one's breath

away, as it was disclosed by the falling open of a gorgeous evening wrap.

Jarvis Burnside, looking out of a porch window at the moment, as he fanned one of the "prettiest and jolliest girls," after a brisk "two-step," noted the contrast between Dorothy and Sally. Mrs. Chase was twenty-four, as he happened to know, but she looked considerably older, and one would have said there were at least eight years between them. Yet Sally, although she seemed so girlish, had the hostess's pretty air of self-possession which is equal to greeting any number of Parisian gowns and their wearers.

"Yes, we hoped you would enjoy seeing us again with room enough to shake hands in," and Sally made them welcome with a hearty greeting apiece.

"This you, Sally?" asked Neil Chase, surveying her with interest. "You look more like sixteen than ever. Going to put your hair up when you get to be thirty or forty?"

"My hair is as much up as it can be in the circumstances," retorted Sally, gayly. "Unless I wear a wig, the best I can do is to tie it this way with a bow."

"That's so; we did hear you had a fever in the spring. You don't look much like it now--more like an infant cherub. Well, Max, this the old place you had left you? My congratulations. It's not half bad, you know--at least as it looked coming up the drive, by the light of the lanterns. You must hug yourselves to get out of that six-by-nine flat, if this is a good way out in the country. Country places are getting to be the thing these days. Anybody here we know, or is it a neighbourhood blowout?"

Max stiffened--as he usually did by the time Neil Chase had got out a few of his patronizing sentences. "I think you'll find the same set here you'd find in town," he answered. "We haven't asked a crowd--just enough to be comfortable and have plenty of room. But we have some of our neighbours here, and jolly people they are, too."

"Sally, I can't possibly husk any corn," Mrs. Chase murmured, as Sally led her into the drawing-room. "This gauze is a fright now, and I've worn it only three times. It's awfully expensive--but it's the thing now, you know, so one must have it." Her eyes fell on Sally's dress as she spoke. "Sally Lane!" she half-shrieked into Sally's ear, as, at the moment, the orchestra burst into a swinging waltz, "if that isn't the very same embroidered Swiss that you had for my wedding, almost four years ago, when you were a mere child!"

"Absolutely the same. Doesn't it wear well?" Sally answered, serenely. "Much better than gauze. No, you needn't husk any corn. That's just for those who want a little fun for a few minutes by and by. Mr. Ferry!"--as that young man passed with an inquiring look at her which meant, "Do you want me for anything in connection with these new arrivals?"--and Ferry was at her side.

She enjoyed presenting him to the Chases, for she wanted to see what would happen. She had noted a new side of their neighbour to-night. Thus far their acquaintance had been carried on in tents and wood-lots, in an out-door, every-day environment, so to speak. Donald Ferry as a good comrade she had come to know well; Donald Ferry as a popular preacher she knew by many an enthusiastic report from Jarvis, Alec, and Bob; but the

same person as a society man in evening dress, with most engaging manners, was a new acquaintance! She observed him with interest as he made himself entertaining to Neil and Dorothy, and blessed him for his tact when he presently went off with Mrs. Chase, to do her special honour as the only young matron present. She observed that Dorothy seemed very ready to accompany him.

Neil looked after his wife and her companion with an expression of curiosity. "I'd like to know how you came to have him here?" he suggested. "Isn't he that chap the papers are full of, who holds forth to a crowd of men every day down in the Old Dutch Church?"

"He's the one," Max replied. "I haven't heard him yet, though I mean to soon. Burnside and the boys say he's great. He lives next door to us here."

"He's not at all the sort I expected to see, from the stories about him. Still, the sanctimonious sort probably couldn't hold the class of men they say go there regularly. He lives next door to you here, does he? That's odd. My brother Ches didn't talk about anything else than Ferry this morning at breakfast. Says he refused a flattering invitation to a church in Washington because he preferred to stay by the Old Dutch. Well, Dorothy didn't realize he was a parson, or she wouldn't have gone off with him with such a flourish. If she finds it out, you can look to see her begin to be demure. I say, you've certainly got a stunning old place here."

"Think so?"

Chase gazed about him at the details of the long drawing-room, noting its wood-work and general proportions. "I'd rather like to look it over," he proposed. "Mind taking me about?"

"No, only it's not furnished, nor lighted, except down here where we're entertaining."

"No electricity, or gas, I suppose, out here. Well, you can raise some kind of a light to trot round by, can't you? I'm a crank on ancient houses and furniture. Wish you had some old mahogany--that's what you need in these rooms."

Max procured a small hand-lamp from the kitchen, and proceeded to escort his guest about. Neil began by showing a patronizing approval of details here and there, but as the survey continued he became less conversational, and walked about in silent inspection of everything, floors, walls, windows, and ceilings, putting on a pair of eye-glasses and assuming a hypercritical expression in excess even of his ordinary attitude.

"Very fair, very fair," was his reply, when Max asked him, at the conclusion of the round of the second story, how he liked it. Determined to make the most of his chance to interest this ordinarily bored young man, Max led the way up the stairs to the old library. Here Neil opened his eyes. But as he immediately narrowed them again, and began to examine books with an indifferent air, Max was not sure how much of an impression the collection was making.

Neil presently sat down. "Suppose we stay a few minutes. Quiet spot. Rather enjoy getting away from the crowd. Er--not intending to furnish up

and stay here, are you? Quite a distance from town, isn't it?"

"That's the objection to living out here."

"Have you heard that I'm coming back to practise in the city?"

"No. That so? With your father's firm?"

"Yes. Dad's made me a pretty good offer, and while it was considerable of a sacrifice to leave the business I've built up down there, I'm willing to humour the old man." He crossed his legs in a superior sort of way, his head thrown back after a fashion which always made Max want to throw something at him and disturb his pose. His tone was immensely condescending.

"When do you make the move?"

"Right away. The governor's in a hurry, and I've agreed to lose no time. Don't care to live with the old folks again, so I shall look round a bit for a place. I drive a car, you know, and I've rather taken a fancy to having a country place, something on the old-style order. I've picked up rather a decent collection of old mahogany and prints, Sheffield plate and Lowestoft china--that sort of thing--that needs a certain background to show it off. I've heard of a number of places that might suit me; there are a good many abandoned country places these days--people like to get into town. Not many care, like me, for the artistic point of view in such matters. Er--I suppose you'll sell this place?"

His tone was careless, but Max, who was watching him closely, saw a peculiar gleam in his eye which put him on his guard. Neil Chase was nothing if not shrewd and sharp to the point where the man who dealt with him must look closely after his own interests.

"Oh, I don't know," Max replied, slowly. "Haven't made up my mind. I'm considering an offer now for the place. Some people like to get into town, as you say, but plenty more appreciate life in the country, when they can get such a spot as this. Values in such property are going up, not down, in my opinion."

If Sally could have heard him!

CHAPTER X

JACK-O'-LANTERNS

To the strains of the intermezzo from the "Cavalleria Rusticana," which the orchestra was sending out through the open windows, Max was returning from the gateway to the house. The October night was so mild that he had stolen out bareheaded upon the errand which had taken him to the road. The errand might have been considered an odd one: he wanted to look at the house!

To be sure, illuminated as it was by many gayly coloured lights, the lanterns glowing all across the porch and down the driveway, it was well worth looking at. But it was not this decorative effect which the young

host had come out to exult over. And, viewed as a residence only, he had certainly observed it many times before, and under varying conditions. He knew to a nicety just how many slats were lacking from certain of the blinds, just how the ragged edge of the great chimney showed against the sky line, precisely where the big pillared porch needed repairing. No, it was not in any of these aspects that he had come curiously out to view it now. He wanted to see it with the eyes of the prospective purchasers, Jarvis Burnside and Neil Chase. He wanted particularly to see it as Chase saw it, that upon mention of the fact that Max had already been interviewed by a prospective buyer, he had, in spite of his effort to appear indifferent, really shown such eagerness to be given an option upon the place.

Max walked slowly back toward the house, under the shadow of the row of great trees bordering what had once been a lawn. Two figures had just come out upon the porch; he recognized them, even at this distance, as the Chases. At the moment, nobody else occupied the porch. Neil and Dorothy stood for a moment under the lanterns, looking back into the hall, then turned and descended the steps. They surveyed the house as they did so; they backed farther away from it; they strolled round to the west side, and viewed it from that point. Finally, as Max halted beside a tree-trunk, watching them, they began to walk slowly down the driveway, turning from time to time to gaze back at the house-front.

As they passed Max, catching no hint of his presence in the shadow, they conversed in phrases which were of interest to him, and to which, since they intimately concerned himself, he might be excused for listening.

"It's simply stunning," Dorothy was saying eagerly, as they passed. "I'd rather have it than forty new houses. When it's restored it will have such an air! I don't suppose they appreciate it at all, do they? Oh, do get hold of it before anybody tells them!"

"Max says Sally is crazy to live in it. But that can't be because she realizes its value."

"No, she's just old-fashioned child enough to like it because it's homelike, and her uncle and grandfather lived in it, not because it's such a swell type of the real old thing that people rave over now."

"Max isn't the sort to care for it either. But he has an eye on the cash. I shall have to put up a fair price, all right, to get it. I'll try bluffing first, though. He's too much of an office grind to care for anything else, so long as he gets his money. I say, won't that gateway be a corker, when it's put right?"

They walked on out of hearing, but Max had heard all that was necessary to make him tingle.

"Oh, it will be a corker, will it?" he said to himself, as he made for the back of the house by way of the pine grove. "Maybe it will, old man--but not when you put it right! An office grind, am I? Too dull to know a good thing when I own it, eh? And you'll try bluffing, will you? All right, bluff away--and much good may it do you! I'd sell it to Jarve Burnside before I'd sell it to you, but I--Hello, where are you going?"

He had almost run into Jarvis, hastily emerging from the kitchen door with a smoking jack-o'-lantern, the declining candle of which had made of it both a wreck and the source of a horrible odour. Jarvis cast the

pumpkin to one side and wiped his hands on his handkerchief. "Just prevented a small conflagration of corn-stalks," he explained. "What are you doing, prowling round your own back door?"

"Making up my mind not to sell this place to you or to anybody else," said Max, promptly, speaking under the impulse of his irritation.

"Good work! I don't blame you. I certainly don't want it--_if you do_. I hope you won't go back on letting me rent a few acres, though, to try my hand at farming, in the spring?"

"Jarve,"--Max sat down on the kitchen step--"do you seriously think a fellow could make a living off this land--taking into account all the squash-bugs and fruit-tree pests and tomato-grubs and every other thing that I've always understood makes the life of the farmer miserable?"

"I think," replied Jarvis, laughing a little at Max's way of putting it, but awake to the importance of discussing the matter seriously, if Max showed an inclination to do so, "that trying to do it, with the help of all the experience that modern experiment stations have placed at our hands, would be about the most interesting thing possible. You might not want to give up all other business till you had proved that you really could do it, but I certainly do think the thing would be well worth trying. It's being attempted more and more these days by educated men, college graduates and professional men of all ranks, partly for the pure interest of the thing, partly because the out-door life is about the best worth living. Look at Don Ferry, for an example. Could he possibly have the hold he has on that crowd of his at the Old Dutch if he weren't a man made of substantial flesh and blood, his brain as healthy and his heart as warm as exercise and oxygen can make them?--Well, perhaps he could, if he were one of your pale and scholarly ghosts, but I doubt it."

"This idea of living out here in winter--" Max went off on a new tack--"it's seemed to me absolute foolishness. But if Neil Chase is so, confoundedly anxious to move in before we can move out--"

"Neil Chase!"

"Yes. He practically made me an offer for the place to-night."

"Well, well!" Jarvis's eyes gleamed with satisfaction in the darkness. So old Neil was helping the thing along, was he? Nothing could have been better. "Going to consider it?"

"Hardly! See here, could we keep warm in that barracks this winter?"

"You don't have to live all over it. With those fireplaces and waste wood enough in your lot up there to run a blast-furnace, I don't see why you should have any fear of freezing."

"Our little stock of furniture wouldn't go anywhere in furnishing."

"It would furnish a certain amount of space. Keep the rest shut up till you could furnish it."

"I shouldn't think of the thing for a minute," said Max, in the tone of one who explains the inconsistency of so sudden a change of attitude, "if I hadn't this day been notified that the price of our flat is to go up ten dollars a month on the first of November. It's an outrage!"

"It's an extraordinary piece of luck," said Jarvis to himself. But aloud he admitted that it was a good deal of a jump, and a pretty high price for the flat.

At this moment some one looked out of the kitchen window, and then asked Mary Ann inside if she had seen anything lately of Mr. Max.

"I suppose we'll have to go back to the crowd," admitted Max, and they returned just in time to see the first guests taking their leave.

When all had gone, Jarvis hunted up Sally. He found her in one of the dressing-rooms, extinguishing candles which had nearly burned to the bottoms of the lanterns, and were threatening their inflammable surroundings.

"Here, don't touch those things, with your thin clothes on!" Jarvis cried. "We fellows must go round and make all safe--no taking any chances with the house full of dry corn-stalks. But first--have you had a good time to-night?"

"A glorious time. All the evening I've felt as if I lived here--it looked so furnished, somehow, with all the lights and decorations."

"It made you want to live here more than ever, didn't it?"

"It did, indeed. And in ten days we shall be going back to town,"

"Perhaps you won't."

She stared at him. "What in the world do you mean?"

"I don't mean anything," said he, laughing. "I'm like a small boy bursting with the secret information that there's to be ice-cream for dinner. So I don't mean anything--but I'd like to shake hands on it, just the same."

"Jarvis!" She let him seize both her hands and shake them up and down. "You do mean something!"

"Come out in the hall and do the corn-stalk prance with me."

"The corn-stalk prance! What in the world is that? Are you crazy?"

"I'll teach it to you," and he led her out into the wide hall, which had been all the evening the most attractive spot in the house. He pulled two stalks from one of the sheaves which stood on each side of the great fireplace. He handed her one, and throwing the other across his shoulder as if it were a gun, marched to the drawing-room door. The musicians were just putting away their instruments, having played till the last guests were out of hearing.

"Just one more, will you?" he asked, grinning at them in a way which they understood meant an extra fee.

Then he came back to Sally. "Now for it!" he said. "I never did this myself,--nor heard of it--but if we can't do an impromptu turn to-night, on our high spirits, we never can again. Come on!"--as the music burst forth. And he made her an impressive bow.

Smiling, and ready enough to follow his lead, Sally returned him a sweeping courtesy, in minuet style.

"Hi, what's this?" cried Bob, returning from the porch, where he, with the others, had been watching the departure of the procession of carriages and automobiles which had borne the guests away.

"Here, come and see what's going on!" he shouted back to the porch, and they came hurrying in. Mrs. Burnside and Donald Ferry, Josephine and Max, Mrs. Ferry and Alec and Uncle Timothy ranged themselves along the walls, their faces all enjoyment of the somewhat remarkable affair now in progress.

Jarvis and Sally might have been improvising, there was no doubt that they were, but the result was the product of inspiration. Up and down, double and single, in and out, round and round, with all manner of fancy steps, both surprising and picturesque, saluting each other every now and then with bows, with wavings of the corn-stalks, with gestures of greeting and farewell.

Jarvis, without his glasses, his face brilliant with life and merriment, looked a different fellow from the one his friends had been accustomed to see of late; and Sally, her cheeks like crimson carnations, her eyes dark with fun and happiness, her steps the embodiment of youthful grace, was a fascinating figure to watch.

"Isn't that the prettiest thing you ever saw?" asked Josephine of Donald Ferry, as he stood beside her with folded arms.

He nodded.

"I suppose they're making it up as they go along," he said, "but it's very clever and charming. I didn't know your brother had it in him to be so gay."

"Oh, he has. It's this long bother with his eyes that has made him look like an owl, and feel like one. He has plenty of fun and energy in him when it gets a chance."

"I'm beginning to find him out. I like a chap who can relax like that, and show the boyish side of himself now and then."

"And isn't Sally perfectly dear? I never saw her look prettier than to-night," declared Josephine, with an unconscious glance from Sally's white frock, which she knew was an old and much mended one, down at her own pale blue gown, just home from an expensive shop. She was thinking that if she looked half as well in her fine things as Sally in her simple old ones, she should be quite content.

Ferry looked down at the dark head beside him. He remembered no less than three fair maids who had, that evening, called his attention, by one means and another, to points less attractive than their own in other girls. It struck him, as it had done more than once before, that a very warm generosity characterized the friendship between Josephine and Sally, inasmuch as each had seemed to him to be most anxious to have him appreciate the charms of the other.

As for Josephine herself, though he would not bluntly tell her so, she

had seldom presented a more winsome picture than to-night. Her dark colouring and piquant features possessed a quality very close to beauty, and her smile at Sally, at a moment when the girl, sweeping close, made her friend a special salutation, was undoubtedly a very attractive thing.

A burst of enthusiastic applause greeted the final whirl and bows of the "corn-stalk prance," and Sally, breathless, dropped upon the bottom step of the wide staircase. Jarvis, coming close to Max, whose hand-clapping was of the heartiest, said in his friend's ear, "Why not tell her now that you've decided to stay here? If you do, you'll make this the happiest night of her life."

Max looked at him. Sally's elder brother was in a more genial mood than he had been in for some time. Somehow his new understanding that the Lanes possessed a more valuable piece of property than they had realized, property for which two buyers were ready at any hour to give them a satisfactory price, had put him into good humour. Then he had been all the evening playing the pleasant part of host under conditions which had called forth many complimentary remarks from guests whose opinions he valued, and he was experiencing the comfortable glow which comes with such a role.

Just now, the sight of his little sister making of herself so charming a spectacle, had caused him to feel an unusual stirring of pride in her. All these factors combined to help Jarvis's suggestion.

He approached his sister as she sat, rosy cheeked and laughing, on the lowest stair, and stood before her. "That wasn't so bad," he said, approvingly. "You and Jarve had better get out a copyright on that--you worked in some pretty fancy steps. Got your skates on to-night, haven't you?"

Sally thrust forward a small, white-shod foot. "No, only some badly used-up pumps. If it hadn't been for Bob and his pipe-clay they would never have been presentable again."

"You're certainly great on making things go. Er--that is--suppose you could make six chairs, a table, and an old couch furnish that room in there--for the winter?"

Their eyes met. Those who happened to be observing from a little distance--and of these there were at least three who had as yet been unable to take their eyes off Sally--saw such a wave of delight sweep over her expressive face as made it even more vivid than they had ever seen it. After an instant's wide-eyed silence, her lips parted, the girl was on her feet.

"Max! Do you mean it? Are we to stay? Oh--you old dear! Make our things furnish that room? Of course I can!"

Her arms were round his neck for the space of two seconds; then she had seized his hand, and was pulling him toward the others. Jarvis, watching Max's face, saw there more amiability than he could have hoped. Yet it would have been a strangely flinty heart, he thought, that could have resisted Sally to-night.

"Ladies and gentlemen,"--Sally made them a low bow,--"we are so glad you've enjoyed our hospitality. Allow us to express our hope that we may have the pleasure of entertaining you often during the winter. We shall

be at home here every Saturday evening throughout the season--pop-corn refreshments and corn-stalk-fiddle music, with conversation!"

Bob was first to respond. With a shout, he dashed into the long drawing-room, from which the musicians had now departed, and relieved his feelings by turning a series of handsprings from one end of it to the other.

Alec, who had not much cared to spend the winter in the country, but had of late become immensely drawn toward Donald Ferry, reflected that there might be good times forthcoming out here which would never happen in town. So he grinned pleasantly enough.

Uncle Timothy, beaming, said, "That's very good!" to Mrs. Burnside, and she returned warmly:

"Indeed, I think it is, Mr. Rudd."

Josephine clapped both her hands, then ran to wring Sally's and Max's, declaring joyfully:

"You'll be the most popular resort outside the city."

Jarvis followed, to observe, in a calm tone--to cover his delight, though he succeeded in only partially concealing it from Max, and not at all from Sally--"I think it's a wise decision, and I hope it will mean a partnership in strawberries and squashes next summer. You'll see me out soon with seed-catalogues--since we didn't find any behind that locked door last April."

"We shall be so glad to have such neighbours for the winter," said Mrs. Ferry, with genuine pleasure in her face. "And I hope Donald and I can do something toward making you feel that you have real country neighbours of the kind who are counted as assets."

"If it weren't for you people, I don't think I should have the courage to try it," acknowledged Max.

"We'll make it such a winter you'll never have the courage to go back," prophesied Ferry. "I have a pair of toboggans stowed away somewhere; I'll send for them when the snow comes. That slope from your timber lot down across the fields--"

Bob, returning from the handspring episode, caught these words and raised a whoop of anticipation. "Hi--toboggans!" he was heard to ejaculate at intervals during the next ten minutes.

"Sally," said Uncle Timothy Rudd, "up in New Hampshire, where I used to live before I came to stay with your family, there is an attic full of old furniture which belonged to my father. I have never disposed of it, because certain associations made me have an affection for it. It is pretty old style, and not, I am afraid, in very good condition, but if you care for it--"

"Oh, Uncle Timmy! No matter how old it is or how shaky, we can use it."

"Probably the older and shakier it is, the more valuable when it has been restored," suggested Mrs. Burnside.

"I should say so," declared Jarvis, with emphasis. "You should have heard the Neil Chases rave over some of theirs. Neil found a sideboard in an old cabin down South; it had the doors nailed on with strips of leather; they kept corn meal and molasses in it. He wouldn't take five hundred dollars for it now."

"I don't imagine," said Uncle Timothy, cautiously, "that any of my things are as valuable as that, so don't get your expectations too high, Sally. But they may help you in the matter of supplying chairs and beds for your friends. I take it this will be a hospitable homestead, when Sally is mistress of it."

"How could it help being hospitable," cried Sally, happily, "with friends like ours for guests?"

"Let's make a circle on the hearth, for good luck," proposed Josephine.

Beckoning, she led the way toward the fireplace, where the flames of the big logs, which had leaped and danced there all the evening, carefully fed by Bob from time to time, had now died down into a mass of brilliant coals.

On either side the sheaves of yellow corn-stalks stood like sentinels, and above a row of jack-o'-lanterns, whose candles had been renewed when they threatened to burn low, looked cheerfully down from the high chimney-piece.

"All join hands," commanded Josephine, "and sing 'Auld Lang Syne.'"

"Will you let such new acquaintances join in that song?" asked Mrs. Ferry, as Alec, who was next her, caught her hand in obedience to orders.

"Of course we will. We hope that time will make you old friends," answered Uncle Timothy, gallantly, stretching out his hand, as he stood next upon her other side.

It is rather curious how, in any such grouping, certain combinations come about. Neither Jarvis Burnside nor Donald Ferry seemed to make any abrupt moves, and there certainly was a moment when it might have seemed the natural thing that Jarvis should grasp Uncle Timothy's hand, Ferry seize upon Bob's. But so it did not turn out.

When the circle began slowly to revolve before the fire, one of Sally's hands was in Jarvis's, the other in that of the neighbour who could chop down trees as easily as he could address audiences, and whose hand, therefore, possessed a warm and even grip which suggested both friendliness and strength. Upon Donald Ferry's farther side was Josephine, and Max clasped her other hand. As for Alec and Bob, it did not matter much to them whose hands they held, so that the circle moved briskly and sang lustily. And this it surely did.

"Are you happy, little girl?" asked Jarvis, bending to speak into Sally's ear, as the circle broke up.

Smiling, Sally dashed away a tear. "So happy I'm almost crying," she owned. "It's beginning to seem as if we were going to have a--home, a real home once more--as much as we ever can--without--"

"I understand," he whispered, and led her away down the hall, that she

might recover the poise the singing of the old song had shaken.

"They must have been here often when we children were little," she murmured, pausing by the open door under the staircase, which led to a side porch. Just here she was hidden from the rest.

"I'm sure they were. I remember driving out here once with your father, and seeing him sit in front of that hall fireplace with your Uncle Maxwell, talking business. They were here more, I imagine, when you were very small, than afterward, when you were old enough to remember."

"They've been here," said Sally softly. "They've walked about these old floors and looked out of these windows. That makes it home to me. And if I can only make it home to the others--"

"You couldn't help making it home--anywhere."

"Oh, Jarvis, you're such a good friend!--I keep telling you that, till you must be tired of hearing it."

"I'm not tired of hearing it."

There followed an eloquent little silence, during which Jarvis took the girl's hand in both his own and held it close in a way which meant to her the comprehending sympathy with all her joys and sorrows which he had long given her. To him it meant so much more that he dared not give expression to it in any but this mute fashion. But his heart beat high with longing and with hope, though he was firmly bidding himself wait--and wait a long time yet before he put his fortune to the touch, "to win or lose it all!"

Then Sally wiped her eyes, put her handkerchief away, and faced about.

"Now I can go back," she said. "Thank you for giving me a chance to put Sally Lunn in order. The mistress of a mansion like this must always have herself in hand, mustn't she?"

Standing on her own hearth-stone, Sally said good-night to all her guests like the grand lady she gayly affected to be. But like the girl she was, she ran after them to wave her hand at them from the big porch, crying, "Come again--please _all_ do come again--oh, _very_ soon!"

PART TWO

THE LANES AND THE ACRES

CHAPTER XI

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

"Well, here he comes," announced Maxwell Lane. With his hands in his pockets he was standing by a window which commanded a view of the gateway

and approach to the house. "He 'phoned me this morning he'd be out-loaded for bear. I'll wager if he has one treatise on farming in that cutter he has forty."

Sally ran to look. "I don't see anything unusual," said she, her eyes on the trim sleigh drawn by a pair of fine grays, the driver waving an arm at the window as he caught sight of the faces thereat. "Expect to see horse-hoes and threshing machines sticking out from under his furs? Jolly!--that's a magnificent fox-skin robe he has over his knees. Looks like a farmer, doesn't he, now? Think a fellow in a silk-lined overcoat and driving-gloves like those knows anything about farming?--Or ever can know?" he added skeptically.

"I don't see why not. There's nothing about a silk-lined overcoat to prevent." Sally's tone was spirited. She thrust her hands into the pockets of the small ruffled apron she wore, and her elbows assumed an argumentative air. The black ribbon which tied her lengthening curly locks into a knot upon her head seemed to acquire a defiant effect. Evidently she was prepared to take sides in this matter. "If rich men's sons can learn railroading and mining and every other kind of business that soils their hands, I don't know what's to prevent one of them from learning farming."

"Oh, he'll get hold of a tremendous amount of book wisdom--I'm prepared for that," admitted Max. "But it takes a practical man to be a farmer. He'll want to use up a lot of money in experiments, of course--"

But Sally had disappeared into the hall, and was throwing open the front door. The sleigh, however, was going on past the house to the barn. "That means he intends to stay," reflected the girl and ran back to the kitchen for a few hurried words with Mary Ann Flinders. It was not the habit of the house materially to change any plans for the table on account of unexpected arrivals, but there were certain dishes Jarvis was known to enjoy so much that Sally liked to confront him with at least one of them, when she could.

"Make some of the apple-fry to go with the baked beans, please, Mary," she directed. "And be sure to put in plenty of sugar so it will get brown and candied, the way we like it. Use the Baldwin apples, and leave the red skins on the slices--that makes it look prettiest."

She peeped into the small kitchen mirror as she went by, the mirror whose presence was designed to point out to Mary Ann that her rough red locks might now and then need smoothing. Sally's own hair was the source of considerable bother at present, it having reached that stage, in its growth since her fever, when it was neither short nor long, and called for much skill in arrangement. She tucked in a stray curl or two, gave a perk to the black bow, stood on her tip-toes to make sure that the silk knot which fastened her sailor collar was in trim shape, and felt of the crisp strings which tied her decidedly coquettish apron, to ascertain that that bow was also snug. Then she looked round at Mary Ann, and caught that young person eyeing her slyly, but with great admiration. Sally laughed, and Mary Ann giggled. Then the latter glanced significantly out of the kitchen window toward the barn, whence a tall figure was issuing with its arms full of books and magazines.

"I guess I'd know, Miss Sally," ventured Mary Ann, "who was comin' if I didn't see for myself. Apple-fry, an' you primpin' up like that when you don't need it at all, bein' always tidy--"

"Mary, I'm surprised at you," said Sally severely, and walked out of the kitchen with her head up. But she had laughed, and Mary Ann was not afraid.

"Ridiculous!" said Sally to herself, in the hall. "I shall never look in that kitchen glass again, when anybody is here. As if I ever did any special 'primpin' for an old friend like Jarvis! Girls like that are always thinking silly things." And she walked on to the hall door, of half a mind not to open it after all, lest Jarvis himself think his welcome too eager. Yet, as she always did open it for him, or for any other of their special friends whom she chanced to see approaching, she promptly discarded this line of conduct as absurd, and threw the door wide with the hospitable sweep to which he was so accustomed that he would have been surprised and puzzled at its absence.

He looked at her over his armful of books, his face red with the sting of the sharp January air, his eyes keen through the eye-glasses astride his nose. Goggles were now a thing of the past, but the eyeglasses, their lenses thick with the combination of formulae which had ruled their grinding, were a permanent necessity. It was the first time Sally had seen him since he had acquired them.

"Very becoming," she said, critically, as he put down the books on the hall table, pulled off the handsome driving-gloves which, according to Max, helped to disqualify him for his present ambitions, and shook hands with heartiness. "You no longer look pathetic, but distinguished--even scientific."

"'Scientific' is the word, if you want to flatter me," he declared, throwing off his overcoat and gathering up the books again. "I'm acquiring agricultural science by the peck measure--chock full and running over. I've reached the point where I must get rid of some of it upon my partners or suffer serious consequences. Max here? Was it he at the window? I can't see more than a rod through these things yet--not used to them."

"Yes, he's here. He always spends his Saturday half-holiday at home now. The rest are away. Alec and Bob are off on the hill by the timber lot, trying Mr. Ferry's toboggan with him--it's just come. Uncle Tim has gone over to see how they're making it go."

"Glad the coast is clear. It might embarrass me to set forth my schemes to more than two at once."

Sally led the way to the living-room--in old times the "drawing-room," but now deserving the less imposing title after a fashion which made it the most homelike of apartments. It was the only room on the lower floor--except the dining-room and kitchen--which the Lanes had attempted to furnish for the winter, so the rugs and chairs, tables and couch, of the little flat had been all that was necessary to make it habitable and pleasant. A brisk fire burned on the wide hearth, of itself a furnishing without which many a sumptuous room may seem cheerless and in-hospitable. The walls were covered with a quaint old paper of white, with gold stripes about which green ivy leaves wound conventionally. This might have given the room a cold aspect, but Sally had hung curtains of Turkey-red print at the windows, and had covered the couch and its pillows with the same warm-coloured fabric, with a result so pleasing to

the eye that visitors, at the first sight, were wont to exclaim: "Who would think you could have made this big room look so homelike? How have you done it?"

"Thirty-two yards of Turkey-red," was Sally's customary demure answer, and the visitor, if a woman, was sure to respond, "Oh, yes, of course. Such a lovely idea for winter." If a man, he was more apt merely to stare at Sally, with real respect for the feminine comprehension of the influence of a hue upon a general effect, not understanding the matter himself, but dimly comprehending that the result had been accomplished and the room made to look like a refuge from the bitterest storms which might sweep outside.

"Well, primed to the muzzle?" was Max's greeting. He had not taken the trouble to go to the hall to welcome the guest, but had thrown himself among the red pillows, facing the fire. The wide couch stood always in comfortable proximity to the hearth, and was a favourite resort for the entire household. Not unadvisedly had Sally covered the eight pillows with the strong red fabric. It could withstand the wear and tear of pillow fights and of use as seats upon the floor before the fire better than almost any material that could be found at the price.

"Look at the titles of these, and see if I haven't a right to be primed. Mother and Jo have taken turns reading to me for a week--they too are possessed of an extraordinary amount of miscellaneous information."

"Miscellaneous--that's undoubtedly the word. It will be a long day before any of us have any classified and usable knowledge to work with."

With a critical eye Max scanned the titles of the books as Jarvis set them forth in an impressive row upon the old mahogany table where the reading lamp stood, surrounded by books, magazines, and papers, in generous quantity.

"Strawberries--Market Gardening--Analyses of the Soil--Bacteria--Nitrogen--Drainage--Agricultural Implements--Increasing the Fertility of the Land--and so forth--and so forth," Max murmured, as his eye ran hurriedly along the subjects represented. "Well, you've certainly gone in deep."

"Nearly submerged, at times. But I think I've got my head out of water now, and have evolved a scheme that will do to begin on--with your approval. I wish you'd go at the reading of these--some of them, anyhow. I've marked what seemed to be the most important. You can do it while I'm away. I'm planning to take a trip around to the best farms I can hear of, and have a series of talks with the owners. I shall end up with a scientific experiment station, for by that time I ought to have some working knowledge to build on, and can understand what I'm trying to get at."

From among his pillows Max gazed at his friend. Saturday afternoon was always a time of relaxation for the bank clerk, when he could get through with his work and hurry home. He did not as yet feel a particle of enthusiasm over the farming plans, and it was difficult for him to comprehend Jarvis's interest. But he had ceased to oppose the project, except by comments skeptical to a degree. Jarvis was to assume the risk of all expensive experiments during the first two seasons, and Max was not to leave the bank, so there was everything to be gained and nothing to be lost by giving the experimenter a free hand.

Jarvis was sitting bolt upright by the table, his shoulders back, his head up, energy in every outline. Sally, studying him, and remembering his long exile from all active labour while his eyes were recovering from their misuse at college, silently rejoiced in his appearance of vigour. Just now, as he spoke of his plans, he seemed especially full of life and determination, and the contrast between the two young men was one which made the girl wonder rather anxiously if they could really become partners in this new enterprise.

"When will you go?" Max inquired. "Wish I weren't tied to a desk. I'd go too--for the trip."

"I wish you could. You'd enjoy not only the trip but the interviews. I'd guarantee your interest before we'd made half our rounds."

"Any idea what you'll make the chief crop?" Max inquired, his eyes again wandering over the titles of the books.

"Strawberries," his prospective partner responded, at once.

"Strawberries! Expect to make a living off those?"

"Strawberries!"--This was Sally, in a tone of delight. "Lovely! I'll help pick. Can we have them next June? Oughtn't we to have sowed them last fall?"

A roar from the young man on the couch, and an irrepressible broad smile on the face of the one by the table, made Sally colour with chagrin. "I suppose I've said something awful?" she queried.

"Max and I'll make worse blunders than that before we are through," Jarvis consoled her, while Max, chuckling, attempted to instruct his sister and prove that after all he did know a thing or two about farming.

"You don't sow strawberries for a crop," he explained, wisely, "you set out plants. And you don't get a crop the first year, either--eh, Jarve? So Sally needn't begin to make a sun-bonnet to wear picking berries next June."

"Nor the second June, either, perhaps," admitted Jarvis, reluctantly. "To get the best results we shouldn't use land that's just been ploughed where there's been only sod for years. We ought to plant potatoes or cabbages the first year, to get the ground in shape. Then it'll need a lot of fertilizing after that. We have to get rid of the grubs in the old sod--"

"Grubs!" Max sat upright with a jerk. "There you are, at the first drop of the hat. Grubs--pests--not only after you get your plants out but two seasons beforehand."

He eyed his friend, as if he had presented a conclusive argument against strawberry raising. But Jarvis only laughed good-humouredly.

"That's part of the game," said he. "Meanwhile, there are some quick crops we ought to be able to market the first year. But, after talking with several city dealers and commission men, I'm confident it will pay us to go about strawberry culture with the most careful preparation we can make. Some cities are surrounded by strawberry gardeners, but there's

almost nobody in that business around here. No reason why not--soil and climate all right enough--so it seems to me it's our chance. The city gets most of its 'home-grown' strawberries from a hundred miles away, which means that they can't be marketed as fresh as ours can be. I propose to build up a demand for absolutely fresh berries, picked at dawn and marketed before the dew is off, strictly fine to the bottom of the full-sized basket. Several grades, but our reputation on the big ones, of course. There's no reason why we can't do it--"

But he had gone as far as could have been expected without an ironic comment from Max. "Oh, it's all clear as daylight!" that young man agreed. "Even the grubs that infest the soil now will take to the woods when they hear of the onslaught that's coming. We've only to set out the plants, sit on the fence till the gigantic berries are ripe, than haul in the nets. No May freezes, no droughts, no--"

"You are a pessimist, aren't you?" Jarvis broke in. "I know of only one thing that will ever work a reformation in you--and that's a summer's work in the open air."

"Pessimist, am I? Well--"

It was Sally who interrupted, this time. During Jarvis's explanation of his plan she had been absorbed in the contemplation of a new idea. She proceeded to launch it against the tide of Max's retort, and her enthusiastic shriek overbore his deeper-toned growl. "I've a name for this place!" she cried, clapping her hands. "A name! I've tried and tried to think of one, you know, Jarvis, and nothing has suited. Uncle Maxwell never named it anything. Uncle Timothy thinks 'The Pines' would be a good name but I'm sure there are hundreds of country places called 'The Pines.' Alec says 'Woodlands,' and Bob votes for 'Farview'--though there's no far view at all till you get up to the hill by the timber lot. But now--I have the name!"

She spoke impressively, and they both looked at her, waiting for the revelation about to fall from her lips. She did not keep them waiting long.

"'Strawberry Acres.'"

Silence ensued. Sally looked from one to the other. Max began to laugh.

"Better call it 'Prospective Strawberry Acres.'" said he.

"It's certainly an original name," mused Jarvis. "Not a high-sounding one, certainly. But you don't want a high-sounding name--for a farm."

"It's a nice, colourful name," argued Sally.

"Colourful!--Now, by all that's eccentric, what's a colourful name?" demanded Jarvis, laughing.

"Think of strawberries among the green leaves, in the sun--Jarvis, let's have green leaves on all the baskets!--and think of crushed strawberries, and the beautiful, rich, red juice. It's a nice, rich name, just as my Turkey-red curtains make a warm, homey-looking room."

Jarvis shook his head. "These are mysteries too deep for my imagination," he owned. "But you can call it 'Pumpkin Hollow,' if you like--that's a

colourful name, too, I should judge--a fine natural yellow."

"Oh," Sally exclaimed, "we must raise pumpkins, among the corn--of course we'll have corn. Pumpkins lying about among shocks of corn in the fall sunshine make the most delightful picture."

Max lay back among his pillows, apparently overcome with emotion. "Oh, you're a practical person for a farmer's housekeeper!" he jeered. "Your one idea will be to have the crops look pretty in the sunshine. You'll be tying ribbons on the strawberry baskets to match the fruit."

Sally nodded. "Maybe I shall," she acknowledged. "Anyhow, I know people buy the things that are most artfully put up."

A loud bang of the front door made her pause to listen. Hurried footsteps clattering through the hall prepared the party for the bursting open of the door. Bob, his cheeks like winter apples, his boots crusted with snow, shouted at the company:

"Oh, pull yourselves loose from this stuffy fire and come up on the hill. Mr. Ferry's toboggan goes like lightning express from the top of the hill clear down to the big elm in the middle of the south meadow. He's a dandy at it. I can't steer the thing yet, at all, but he'll teach me. Put on your duds and come on--he sent me for you."

Max settled himself more reposefully than ever among his pillows. "Go 'way," he commanded. "My half-holidays are not for work."

But Sally sprang to her feet, seeing which Jarvis got promptly to his.

"Sorry we haven't blanket tobogganing suits, Bob," said Jarvis, "but we can try it in derby hats and kid gloves. I'm ready."

Sally rushed away to array herself in a miscellaneous costume composed of Max's gray sweater-jacket, Bob's crimson skating cap, Uncle Timothy's white muffler, and a short, rainy-day skirt of her own. The others eyed her approvingly as she rejoined them, the crimson cap on her blonde curls proving most picturesque. Out of doors the colour in her cheeks, stung by the frosty air, presently brought them to match the cap. By the time the three reached the hill they looked as ready for sport as Donald Ferry himself. That young man, in a regulation toboggan suit of gray blanket cloth, with a cap of the same, looked like a jolly boy as he brought the toboggan into place with a flourish and invited his guests to "pile on."

It was glorious fun. Certainly Ferry was an accomplished tobogganist, for he steered with great skill over a somewhat complicated course, including excursions between trees set rather closely together, over hummocks and through erratic dips, at a pace which quite took his passengers' breath away.

"It's the best fun I ever had in my life," cried Sally, as they climbed the hill for the third time. "What a shame for Max not to come."

"We'll have him out next time. To taste tobogganing is to become an enthusiast," declared Ferry, walking at one side of the crimson cap, while Jarvis kept close upon the other. Alec and Bob were doing tricks in the snow all the way up the hill, to the amusement of Uncle Timothy Rudd, who watched interestedly from the top, but could not be prevailed upon to try a journey.

Suddenly Sally looked down toward the house. She shielded her eyes with one hand.

"There's Mary Ann Flinders, watching at the kitchen window," she exclaimed. "Poor child, how she must envy us!" She stopped short and looked at the toboggan's owner. "Why can't we ask her up for a little while, Mr. Ferry?" she suggested. "You wouldn't mind, would you?"

"Not in the least. Shall I go for her?"

"I'll go. Please don't come." And Sally was off like the wind, down over the path which much tramping had made through the snow. Jarvis and Ferry looked at one another and smiled.

"Do you know another girl in the world who would have thought of doing that?" asked Jarvis, with amusement.

"Not many, out of those who happened to have devoted cavaliers beside them, certainly," admitted the other young man, looking after the rapid transit of the crimson cap across the snowy fields. "But Miss Sally is a law unto herself--and the unexpected is the thing one may expect from her every time. Yet she's not capricious purely for the sake of being capricious, like so many girls. She can be counted on--at the same time that one doesn't know exactly where to find her." He laughed. "There's a paradox for you."

"Counted on to do the thing you're glad afterward she has done," supplemented Sally's old friend.

If Sally could have heard them, her small ears--burning with the transition from cold air to warm, as in the kitchen she hurriedly forced Mary Ann, protesting with feeble giggles, into whatsoever garments could be adapted to the purpose--would have burned even more fiercely. But it is quite safe to say that she had no thought whatever of the effect her impulsive little act might have upon anybody--except Mary Ann herself.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE OLD GARDEN

"Mother, won't you drive out to the farm with us? Jo will tell you I drive like a veteran, and the roads aren't bad--with chains on the rear tires."

Jarvis's hand was on the door as he spoke. He wore a motorist's cap, coat, and leather gauntlets.

Mrs. Burnside shook her head, smiling. "I'll make my first trip into the country when the chains are not needed, son. Give Sally my love, and tell her that now spring is at hand I shall come out with you often."

"Let me tell her you'll come out and spend the whole season there. Furnish the west side of the house, take Joanna, share expenses--and chaperon her."

"Whom--Joanna?" Josephine Burnside, sheathing herself in veils for the drive in the chilly early April air, glanced at her brother with a mischievous air. "She's forty, if she's a day. Surely she doesn't need--"

"I wish you people would take me seriously. Could you find a pleasanter place to spend the summer? I expect to spend every daylight hour of every day there, from the fifteenth of April on."

"Then it's you who need the chaperon," declared Josephine. "Uncle Timothy Rudd is dragon enough for Sally."

"I shall want to be out there for every noon meal. Can't break off work and rush home three times a day, even with the new car--and she'll make it in twenty minutes, when the roads are good. I shall have to take my lunch in a pail, like my farm hands, if you don't come, for I'm not going to cast myself on the Lanes for food, except now and then."

"Come on, I'm ready. Talk to me about it on the way out, and when I come back I'll put it to mother so artfully she can't refuse." And Josephine took the control of the door-knob out of her brother's hand.

Jarvis applied himself silently to his steering-wheel until they were out of the city, for although after a month's practice he drove with considerable skill, he had not yet reached the point where steering through city traffic becomes purely mechanical. But once on the open road, with few vehicles in the way, Jarvis continued the subject.

"Do you think mother really dislikes the idea? It seems to me the most practical in the world. Those west rooms would be fine, furnished with summer stuff--I wouldn't for the world have you put anything in them that would make the other part of the house look shabby by contrast."

"Jarvis! As if we would! Why, it would be just mattings and wicker chairs, muslin curtains, and that sort of thing. And I think mother rather likes the idea. But she is afraid we should be forcing ourselves on them, as we did last summer with the tent. She doesn't doubt they would all like it, except Max. But he's so queer--he never likes what he's expected to."

"Max is the very one who would favour it this time. He said the other day he wished I could live out here, since I'm to run everything this season. I said I'd like mighty well to be on the ground, but couldn't, of course, in the circumstances, unless the family were along. He said, 'Set up for yourselves in the west wing, and be here to get up with the lark, in the approved farmer's style. I propose to sleep till the last minute, and let the early birds get all the worms they like.'"

"Oh, he was only joking."

"Of course he was joking, but I feel certain he'd favour the plan. He has reason to give me my head in every way, hasn't he? I'm equipping the place with farm tools and machines at my own expense, hiring help out of my own pocket, and taking all the risk. If I can't have the west wing for the summer I'll send back that disc-harrow that arrived yesterday--I'm as proud of it as I am of the car."

"Would you dare mention it to Sally?"

"The disc-harrow--or the plan? If she likes the plan as well as she does the harrow, she'll welcome it with open arms. I tell you, if I could strike the sparks out of Max with an expensive seed-sower that the mere sight of a set of hoes and rakes for her flower garden does with Sally, I'd be content. No, I don't dare mention it to Sally, but I should think you might. She'd certainly be delighted to have you and mother there--and she has to have me there anyhow, whether she likes it or not."

"Whether she likes it or not! Of course she likes it! Aren't you and she the best friends in the world?"

"I'm not so sure. Sally's good friends with everybody--but 'the best in the world'--well--I don't know!"

His tone was peculiar. Josephine looked quickly at him, through her enveloping veils. He was staring at the road ahead--as the driver of a high-powered motor through April mud must do, of course--yet his sister thought she detected a curious compression of the lips not due wholly to the strain of driving under difficulties.

"You're not afraid of her next-door neighbour, are you?" ventured the girl, casually, as if she meant nothing by the query.

"I like him immensely, as you know," was the quick reply. "And trust him, too--like a brother. But--well--it's no use talking about it. It's a fair field and no favours--and I can't complain of that. But--I'd rather like the advantage of being on the ground all summer, don't you see? Alone, there, even though I'm off in the fields half the time, I'll have to be everlastingly careful that I don't make myself intrusive. With you and mother there, the whole situation would be different. You do see, don't you, Sis?"

He looked round at her for an instant, to search her face beneath the masking veils, confident that if he could be sure of her sympathy his sister was the strongest ally he could have. The subject had never been brought up quite so definitely between them before, although Jarvis had no doubt that both mother and sister understood the long persisting intention which within the last year had grown in him so overwhelmingly strong.

The machine, after the manner of motor-cars, took the opportunity of his momentary relaxation of vigilance to skid rather alarmingly in a particularly slippery section of clay road. Though Jarvis promptly brought it about and had things in hand again, Josephine forgot to answer while she resumed control over the function of breathing. But when her brother gently repeated his question she answered warmly:

"Indeed I do, boy--and more clearly than I have before. For myself, I should love to spend the summer with Sally, and I'll do my best to bring it about."

That was all he wanted, and he plunged into talk about the farm, what had been done, what was being done, and what remained to do. It seemed that, while much had been accomplished, a mountain of tasks remained. The place had been running down so long that every inch of it required immediate taking in hand.

"There's not much to expect the first year in the way of crops," he explained. "We shall plough all we can in April, and sow it in May to

buckwheat."

"Buckwheat! What do you want of that?"

"Nothing--but to turn it under and give the ground a chance to enrich itself. All the north meadow we shall let come to the haying--by the way, that'll be a jolly time for you to be there. I believe Sally has great plans for the haying. The old apple orchard we had carefully pruned in February, and we're going to plough it--Sally's not pleased at that, she says it will be prettier not ploughed; but the poor old roots need to be saved from starving. We nearly came to blows over that, and of course I was sorry to oppose her about anything that has to do with the beauty of the place. But the quickest road to lasting improvement is the one we must take, and I hope there'll be enough more blossoms on the trees in the future to make up for the loss of the grass."

"You won't lose ground with Sally by opposing her, now and then. She'll come round in the end to seeing you're right."

"I'll have plenty of chances to win favour by opposition with everybody. Even Mr. Rudd has his ideas about what ought to be, because of what was when he was a boy on the farm up in New Hampshire. Max wanted the new fence posts of ash, though locust is much more lasting, and there's plenty to spare in the timber lot. As for the neighbouring farmers, they're already keenly alive to our first efforts, and some of them are watching eagerly to see us make mistakes--but not all. There are several who are progressive enough themselves to want to see us win out with modern methods."

"With all your studying, I suppose you'll make some mistakes."

"Mistakes!--Dozens of them. But we won't make the same one twice. Jo, if you could have heard those fellows talk whom I heard on my trip, the ones who run the really successful farms on scientific methods, you wouldn't wonder at my interest."

He was still talking away when he turned the car in through the now restored gateway. It may be worth while to mention that the first thing in which Max had shown a real interest was the restoration of that gateway. He had declared--nobody knew why--that it must be in absolutely correct shape before the Neil Chases came through it again. So the mason who came to mend the broken chimney found himself, much to his surprise, put first at the tumble-down stone pillars of the gateway. The carpenter, also, who arrived prepared to repair the porch columns and floor, and to mend the broken shutters, was led at once by the young master of the place to the gateway and instructed that he must make the old gate itself substantial, and hang it so that it should swing true. But although it was nearly six months since the Chases had tried to buy the place, they had not yet driven through that restored gateway. Possibly they did not care to be in haste to look at the place they could not own.

"There's Sally, in the old garden. She told me she could hardly wait to begin on it," and Josephine waved her hand at a distant figure with a spade in its hand. The spade was promptly cast aside and the worker came running around the house to meet the arriving car. "Isn't she looking splendidly?" Sally's friend murmured in her brother's ear, as the figure came near enough for a pair of very blooming cheeks to show clearly in the April sunshine.

"Never better. Out-door life is going to make her a Hebe," replied the driver of the car, under his breath, though he kept his eyes dutifully on the roadway until the car came to a standstill and he had stopped his engine.

"Come and see the garden, and listen to my plans," commanded Sally, the moment her friends were on the ground. "No, I don't mean Jarvis. I know he has more important business--in the orchard, or the barns, or the woods, or the south lot--"

"Meadow, please," corrected Jarvis, with a smile which suggested past efforts to teach Sally the nomenclature of the farm.

"--or anywhere that he can walk to in the mud, and come back covered with stick-tights, with a tear in his coat. He looks happiest when his clothes are most demoralized and his boots thickest with clay."

"The sign of your true farmer," urged Jarvis.

But Sally had no further attention to bestow on him, and immediately led Josephine away over the damp and spongy sod to that portion of the ground at the rear of the house which showed, by a few lingering signs, that it once had been a proud and stately old-time garden.

"You see the old box border is still in pretty good condition, only winter-killed--is that the word?--in a few places. I shall try to fill those in, for I care more for the box than for anything I could have. See how it outlines all those funny little curving paths, where I suppose roses and larkspur and bleeding hearts and sweet-williams used to grow. They're going to grow again, if I can make them."

"Lovely! I can see it now. And phlox--Sally, you must have masses of phlox--and candy-tuft, and mignonette, and sweet alyssum--"

"And love-in-a-mist, and forget-me-nots, and sweet peas, and hollyhocks. Only the hollyhocks are not going to be in the garden, but in a long row back there, to screen away the kitchen garden from the lawn. Only--oh, dear, you have to wait so long for the things you want most! Hollyhocks don't bloom the first year from seed--and I want to see them there this first summer, pink and white and red and yellow in the sun, like a row of children dressed for a party."

"Can't you get plants somewhere?"

"Perhaps, from the neighbours--only country people don't go in much for the old-fashioned flowers now. They have rubber-plants and hydrangeas--in tubs--just think--in tubs! And geraniums in tomato cans!"

"Sally! Not all of them. They have nasturtiums--."

"Yes, and pink sweet peas beside them, to set one's teeth on edge. By the way, my sweet peas are in!" Her voice proclaimed triumph, and she led the way down one of the damp, moss-grown paths to a sunny spot where a long strip of freshly raked earth showed that somebody had lately been at work. "Bob dug it up for me, Uncle Timmy fertilized it, I raked it and planted the seeds, while the whole family stood around and gave advice. Max wanted them sowed thinner and Alec thicker. I consulted the seed catalogue and the directions on the paper packet, and then sowed them

just as my judgment directed."

"As you haven't a particle of judgment--"

"Experience, you mean. No, I haven't experience, but I consider that I have judgment, and I sowed the seeds according to that. In June I will pick you a gorgeous bunch of them."

"In June--if I'm not away somewhere. In which case you can send them to me in a paste-board box."

"Joey Burnside!" Sally picked up a rake lying in the path and brandished it fiercely. "Don't you dare to go away--anywhere. You're to come and visit me--from June till September."

"How would May till November do?"

"Still better. The idea of your expecting me to get along without you, the very first summer I live in a place big enough for anybody to visit me in! You can go off to your fashionable resorts in the winter, if you want to--I can spare you better, then. But this summer! Jo, think of the moonlight nights, with the odour of mignonette coming up to the porch from the garden--"

"I don't think the odour of the mignonette would carry so far."

"We can walk within range, then. And the evenings on the porch, with Mr. Ferry and his sister over--and his sister's friend--"

"I didn't know he had a sister--or that the sister had a friend."

"She's been in Germany the last two years, living with an aunt, and studying music--the piano. The friend has a voice. Oh, we'll have the jolliest times--you can't think. And in July will be the haying. Jo, we'll have larks during haying--real country larks--and a barn dance. You can't go away anywhere--not even for a week-end house party! Say you won't!"

"You artful schemer--I don't see how I can," and Josephine looked as if she couldn't. "But see here, Sally. I couldn't come and visit you here and leave mother alone. You know she would go with me, if it were to the mountains or to the sea-side."

"I'd love to have her come too," said Sally, quickly, "if she would care to. How I wish she would. Then I shouldn't have to bother Mrs. Ferry to come over every time we had the young people all here. If I could just furnish the west wing for you--"

"Why not let us furnish it?" Josephine jumped at her opportunity. Somehow, during the last few minutes she had become firmly convinced that she could not think of spending the summer months anywhere but at the farm. All sorts of pictures had leaped into her mind at Sally's outlines of what the summer was to be. The stage seemed set for happenings of extraordinary interest, from which she did not want to be left out. There would be other things going on at the old place besides ploughings and plantings, harvestings and threshings--or perhaps it might be that these very terms in the vegetable kingdom might come to be used significantly of doings in the human sphere of action.

Sally looked up with a flash of protest in her eyes. "Let you furnish it!" she exclaimed. "Oh, but I couldn't--I know what your furnishing it would mean. Persian rugs and silk hangings, Satsuma jars and cut-glass bowls filled with roses. And on the other side of the hall our poor things would look"--she stopped short, and was silent for an instant. Then, "I'm an envious pig," she owned. "If you'll only come you may furnish it in teak wood and Chinese embroidery, and I'll be contented on my--bare floors."

But Josephine's affectionate arm was around her friend's shoulders. "Sally Lunn," said she, soothingly, "give us credit for better taste than that, entirely from the standpoint of harmony. In a summer home on a farm people of sense don't use Persian rugs or teak wood. We'd put plain white straw matting on the floors, hang muslin curtains at the windows, and use the simplest willow furniture to be had. The windows should be open every minute, and there would be bowls of roses about--only I'd rather it would be sweet-williams or clove-pinks. Sally, don't you adore the old-fashioned clove-pinks, with their dear, spicy smell? And the bowls themselves wouldn't be cut glass--I despise cut glass for old-fashioned flowers, and so do you. Now, will you let us come?"

Sally looked at her friend for a minute, thinking as she did so that for a rich girl Josephine Burnside possessed the sweetest common sense ever owned by anybody. Then she dropped her rake and pulled at Josephine's hand.

"Come!" she cried. "Let's go back and look at the west wing. And the bedrooms over it are the nicest in the house. I haven't used them only because they were so big. But you won't care how many acres of straw matting have to be used to cover them."

"Do you think Max will be willing for us to come?" Josephine asked with some anxiety, as they went in. "You remember, about the tent--"

"Oh, he's anxious now to get Jarvis on the ground. And he's spoken more than once about the desirability of our renting some of our unused space, only of course I wouldn't hear of it, before, to strangers."

Josephine plunged into details. They would bring Joanna for the season, that paragon of cooks. She should assist Mary Ann--

At which Sally laughed, and said that if incompetent little Mary Ann could assist dignified, competent Joanna, it would be a matter for congratulation.

"We'll all dine together every night in the big dining-room, with all the windows also open, and more flowers on the table."

Josephine would have gone on to further details, but as they crossed the hall to the west wing, the knocker on the front door banged with a decisive sound, and Sally opened to find Donald Ferry on the threshold.

"I came on a matter of business," said he, when he had shaken hands, "if you can call asking a favour business. Shall I plunge into it?--A certain storage house in a city near our old home has gone out of commission, and we are notified that everything my mother has had stored there since we left the home must be moved at once. Now that my sister and her friend are to be here with us through the summer we should like to have my sister's piano where she could use it. But"--he spread out his arms with

a gesture conveying the idea of great proportions--"the piano is a grand--and not a miniature grand at that--concert size. We couldn't possibly put it in our little house. Would it be asking too much of you to allow it to stand in one of your rooms through the summer, where Janet could do some practising on it? I assure you her practising is of the nature of a morning musicale," he added--as if Sally might need assurance in the matter.

Sally turned to Josephine. "It's a special providence," said she solemnly, "to keep me from envying you your matting and willow furniture. Will you have a concert grand in the west wing? I trow not."

Then she answered to her questioner. "Of course we shall be delighted," she told him. "And as I say, it will have a chastening effect on the Burnside family, who are thinking of furnishing our west wing and spending the summer with us. I'm sure they won't think of bringing a grand piano out here."

Donald Ferry looked greatly pleased at this news. "That's fine," said he. "Mother has been promising Miss Constance Carew and Janet all sorts of pleasures in the country, and I should say this makes a sure thing of it. If four girls on a farm can't have a good time together--even when not aided and abetted by as many boys--there will be something wrong with them--and the boys. Can't we be called boys?--That's great news. And I may tell mother you will prove your good friendship by taking the white elephant of a piano? May we send it right away? You see, since it must be moved at once, it had best come where it is to stay. And we'll send around a tuner. Please use it all you can, just to keep it in good shape."

"I'm not the tiniest sort of a musician," said Sally regretfully. "But Josephine is--she'll keep it in tune for you. I'll merely see that it's dusted."

When he had gone Sally and Josephine looked at each other. "Miss Burnside," said Sally, solemnly, "I feel it in my bones that you and Miss Ferry and Miss Carew and Miss Lane are to take part, this summer, in a melodrama of thrilling interest. Country setting, background of hay-field, with cows coming down the lane. Curtain rises to the time of 'Sweet Lavender.' Miss Burnside is discovered, sun-bonnet on head, rake in hand, pretending to accomplish the bunching up of one hay-cock before the sun goes down. Enter at right young city clergyman, also in rustic attire. At the same time, enter, left, Miss Carew, in rival sun-bonnet. Miss Burnside gives one glance at her rival--"

But a warm hand over Sally's saucy mouth, and a protesting--"Sally Lane, if you begin that sort of thing I won't live a minute in your west wing,"--put an end to the stage directions.

"All right, dear," agreed Sally. "We won't talk any such silly stuff. We'll be four little country girls together, playing in the hay, and if we want to go barefoot we will--when there's nobody to see. But I hope, don't you, Jo? that 'Miss Carew' isn't as grand as she sounds!"

CHAPTER XIII

AFTERNOON TEA

"I feel," said Sally Lane, impressively, "that the way to receive them properly is to have afternoon tea on the lawn. What is the use of having a lawn--even though it's still rather hummocky--and four magnificent ancestral oaks--ancestral oaks sounds like an English novel--if we don't have afternoon tea on it--under Them?"

She stood in the doorway of the front room in the west wing, where Mrs. Burnside and Josephine were sitting, the one busy with some small piece of sewing, the other writing letters at a desk.

"Are they coming over before we call on them?" Josephine inquired, with poised pen. "Coming to-day? Why, they only arrived last night."

"I saw Mr. Ferry this morning, and he said he did not want to wait for us to come over with our hats and gloves on and call, he wanted to bring the girls and his mother over this afternoon, so as to lose no time in having them find out what was on the farther side of the hedge. I asked him why he hadn't brought them with him then--it was at eight o'clock this morning. But he said he wanted to bring them himself, and he was then on his way to his car--otherwise he thought he should not have hesitated at all on account of the hour. He said they were crazy to come."

"Sally! He didn't say they were crazy to come."

"He didn't use that particular word, perhaps--men never do, of course. But he said 'eager,' or 'anxious,' or something like that--it means the same thing. Evidently they've been told all about us. What would you give, Jo Burnside, to know how we've been described?"

"We probably haven't been described. Men never describe people. They just say, 'She's all right, you'll like her,' or something equally vague."

"It would give me a chance to wear my lilac muslin," mused Sally quite irrelevantly, but Josephine caught her meaning.

"Afternoon tea on the lawn? Then do let's have it. Anything to see you in that lilac muslin."

"Then we'll trail over the lawn to meet them--only the lilac muslin doesn't trail--and we'll hold out our hands at a medium sort of angle, so that we'll be prepared to reciprocate whatever sort of high-low shake fresh from abroad they give us. Since Dorothy Chase came back last fall she gives a side-to-side jerk that stops your breath short just where it happens to be at the moment. What do you suppose they'll be like? Young ladies from two years' residence in Germany, or just plain, jolly girls?"

Josephine shook her head, but her mother replied in a quiet tone of conviction: "I doubt if the daughter of that family will be anything but a simple-mannered girl, no matter how experienced she may be in foreign usages."

Sally nodded. "So I'm hoping. But 'Miss Carew'--with a voice--sounds more formidable. It's for Miss Carew I'm going to have afternoon tea. I'll go out now and make my little cakes. And I'll have very, very thin bread and butter. I've just one cherished jar of the choicest Orange Pekoe, so the tea will be above reproach. And my one pride is my linen--you know how

much mother always kept--not only her own but Grandmother Rudd's." Then she vanished, quite suddenly, from the doorway, as if, having once mentioned the mother of whom she seldom spoke, she could not come back again to other subjects until a period of silence had intervened.

"I'm so anxious to see her put away the black clothes," said Josephine to her mother. "It will be good for her to wear the lilac muslin, for now she's made it she can't bring herself to put it on, though she knows how we all want to see her in colours again. Speaking of colours--Jarvis said this morning that by the fence in the south meadow the grass was blue with wild violets. I believe I'll go and pick a big bunch for Sally's tea-table."

"It seems rather early for tea on the lawn," suggested Mrs. Burnside, "though I couldn't bear to damp Sally's ardour by saying so."

"Oh, it's really very warm, and the lawn seems quite dry. I don't blame Sally for wanting to show off the 'ancestral oaks.' It's almost like June."

But--alas for plans which count upon the most June-like May weather--no guests were served with afternoon tea that day except under a roof more substantial than the low-hanging boughs of the great oaks. At mid-afternoon, treacherously enough, the sky showed not a cloud, except over beyond the timber lot, where they had risen to some height before they could be discerned from the lawn. There Sally, lilac-clad, was laying her fine linen cloth, setting out her thin teacups of the old gold-banded china, and arranging Josephine's blue meadow-violets in a curious, engraved glass bowl of Grandmother Rudd's. A small gust of wind, lifting the edges of the heavy damask cloth and nearly capsizing the violets, first called her attention to a change in the weather. Uncle Timothy, bringing out chairs at her behest, paused and scanned the horizon with an experienced eye.

"Looks a little dubious to me, Sally," he observed, although he came on with his chairs. "Company due pretty soon?"

"It's four o'clock--they'll come very soon, for I sent word that we'd have tea early on account of its growing cool after five. Yes--there is a little bit of a dark cloud in the south beyond the woods, but you don't think it will bring rain right away, do you?"

"If it begins to blow, it will--look out, there--" for another brisk little zephyr lifted the corner of the tea-table cloth again, and threatened the teacups. "Weather changes pretty suddenly sometimes, in May."

"But the sun is so bright--and a minute ago I was thinking that it was lucky the branches are so thick on this old oak, for the sunshine was really uncomfortably hot. It can't rain right away. I'll bring out everything, and be ready to offer them tea the minute they've said 'Good afternoon.'"

Sally hurried away to the house, leaving Uncle Timothy standing guard over the tea-table and keeping a weather eye on the gathering patch of clouds.

But it could rain right away, as it presently proved. By the time Sally crossed the lawn with her plates of bread and butter and tiny sugary

cakes, Mary Ann following with the tray holding the tea equipage, there were strong indications of what was soon to happen. Sally had not more than decided that it was best to retreat to the porch and await developments, than the first drops on her upturned forehead warned her that the retreat could not be too hasty.

The Ferry party, coming through the gap in the hedge a few minutes earlier than they would have done if it had not seemed expedient to forestall the gathering shower, saw the scurrying hosts. Jarvis and Max were with them, for it was Saturday afternoon. The Ferrys themselves were forced to make haste also, and as a result, guests and hostess, tea-tray and chairs, bread-and-butter and violets, reached the shelter of the big porch at nearly the same time, and sixty seconds later the first pursuing dash of rain rattled against the pillars.

"It's too bad," cried Sally, breathless and laughing, as she turned around to greet her guests, little curls escaping about her forehead and over her ears, in spite of all her previous care to insure their smooth order. But her hand gave warm welcome all around the circle, and she led the party into the wide hall, now transformed by the waxing of its dark floor and the presence of several old-time rag rugs, into a hospitable-looking entrance. "Put the tea-table here by the open door, please, Max," she directed. "We'll be as near out of doors as we can."

At the first sound of voices Mrs. Burnside and Josephine had appeared, and between them things were in order in the new setting in less time than it takes to tell it. A great bunch of daffodils on an old table near the door made the spot seem quite festive enough for the occasion, and Sally, when she had caught her breath and pushed back the distracting curls, proved herself to possess a fair amount of the poise of the accustomed hostess whom nothing can really upset. She rearranged her tea-table just inside the hall door, and before she had finished, a dash of sunshine fell across it, making her declare, as she settled the bowl of violets, that if the shower could just have confined its efforts to her garden, which needed watering, and not to sprinkling the lawn, which didn't need it, she would not have felt so ungrateful to it.

"And we came especially to see the garden," said Janet Ferry. "We've heard of that garden in every letter since the first of April." She looked at her brother with a mischievous twinkle in her hazel eyes, much like his own.

"Do tell me what you have heard," said Sally serenely, preparing to make her tea, and sending Max for the hot water. "The really important things, like the coming up of the sweet peas, or unimportant ones, like the strange way the weeds have of appearing faster than the seeds?"

From the nonchalance of this question it will be seen that Sally herself thought nothing of the fact that items concerning her garden should have seemed of sufficient importance to go into the letters of a brother whose time was ordinarily occupied with affairs much more momentous. The garden was of overwhelming importance to Sally, why shouldn't it be interesting to everybody? But there were two people in the company besides his sister who glanced rather quickly at Donald Ferry. He, however, seemed to think there could be no reason for anybody's minding what he might choose to write about.

"Here were two girls," he said, from his position in the doorway, where he stood leaning against the lintel, watching the process of tea

making, "writing long descriptions of all sorts of rural beauties they had discovered in their travels about Germany and France--given them as a reward for long study by a discerning aunt. They professed special interest in gardens. Should I refrain from telling them about the only one in sight, even though it couldn't be said to have reached the show stage?"

"You certainly didn't refrain," said Miss Constance Carew, smiling at him from her seat near Sally. "We were told that if we would spend the summer here, one of our chief joys would be the old, box-bordered garden."

"So long as it helped to bring you, I don't regret it," said he, returning the smile in a way which made those who observed decide at once that these other two were old and familiar friends. Miss Carew, though she was not precisely a pretty girl, was really beautiful when she smiled, and had, at all times, an undeniable charm about her which came from one knew not just what. She was rather tall but very graceful, and her manner had about it an indefinable something which made one like to watch her, admiring each move she made as something done just a little differently from the way other people did it.

Sally poured her tea, and the three young men handed about the cups. Everybody fell to talking at once. Max, who had had an approving eye on Miss Janet Ferry from the first, and had decided that he should much prefer her conversation to that of her more impressive friend, drew up a chair beside her when his duties were over, and presently proved her to be as blithely entertaining as her appearance had promised. She was a small person in stature, but her personality was one not to be ignored. She looked like a miniature edition of her brother, heavy braids of the same red-brown hair wound about her small head, the same brilliant, good-humoured hazel eyes looking out of a prepossessing young face, and the same seemingly quick appreciation of everything other people said and did making her a delightful person to talk with. Max, as he supplied her with bread-and-butter, plied her with questions about her life in Germany, and listened to her vivacious stories of her experiences, thinking that it was a long time since he had met a girl he liked so well.

"You don't know how much it means to Constance and Janet to find two girls of their own sort so near," declared Donald Ferry, bringing his cup to take it with Josephine close beside the doorway. "I think they've been feeling a little dubious over finding us out here in a place which had neither lake, seashore, nor mountains to recommend it."

"Perhaps they're still feeling so," suggested Josephine. "There's not much about tea in a shower to cheer their spirits."

"Do they look as if they needed cheering?"

Josephine glanced from Janet, laughing whole-heartedly at something Max was apparently describing with great eloquence, to Constance Carew, leaning back in her chair and looking up at Jarvis, who stood beside her, with the smile which made her face a picture to study.

"It's delightful for us, I'm sure, that they've come," Josephine said warmly.

"You'll find Janet up to the wildest schemes for sport you can devise. And Constance, though she looks so stately, can unbend like a

school-girl. As for her voice--you must hear her pretty soon. Janet is anxious to touch her old piano again, and both are always obliging with their music. They are equal to quite a concert between them."

"So we've been hoping. Sally has dusted the piano no less than five times to-day in anticipation. You can't think what a pleasure it is to Sally just to see that piano standing there. It happens to be almost the precise duplicate of the one that was sold when her old home was broken up."

"I'm glad. I hope she uses it?"

"Not in a way that she would let me call using it. She sits down and plays little bits--mostly out of her head, I think. She--Why, what's that?"

It was Bob, tearing by the front door and yelling as he ran:

"Team running away in the south meadow--man knocked down!"

In an instant three teacups clinked and clattered as they were set hastily down, and three male figures bolted out of the door, without apology further than three ejaculations of surprise and chagrin. Mr. Rudd followed at a brisk walk. As for the portion of the company remaining, they also put aside teacups and plates, and followed Sally to the living-room.

They ran in to the four windows of the long room, between two of which stood the piano. Janet Ferry gave it a private nod and pat as she went by, whispering, "You dear old thing! I'll speak to you as soon as I can."

They could see the runaway team, a plough jerking at their heels, dashing madly across the furrows, one of the horses apparently much wilder than the other. They saw Jarvis, Ferry, and Max reach the rail fence at nearly the same moment, and go over it at a rate of speed which suggested danger to trousers-legs. Bob could be discerned, racing frantically in the wake of the careering horses, and in the nearer distance Mr. Rudd could be heard shouting something wholly unintelligible.

One of the running figures halted near the fence, stooping, and the watching eyes understood that the presumably injured ploughman was lying there.

"It's Don that has stopped," said Janet Ferry to her mother. "Now he'll probably have a new case on his hands. I do hope the man isn't much hurt."

"I can't stay here to look!" cried Sally, and, gathering up her lilac skirts, ran away out of the room. In a moment they saw her flying across the wet grass, her tea-party forgotten.

"I am going too," and Janet Ferry, delicate folds of pale gray silk caught up as Sally had caught up her muslin, was off in Sally's train.

Josephine and Constance Carew looked at each other. The guest nodded. "I don't mind the wet grass," said she--though one glance at the ephemeral fabric of her frock made Josephine say, as the two hurried to the hall, "Had you really better? The grass is soaking."

"Who cares for clothes when there's a runaway?" replied Miss Carew. "Besides, this will tub, and yours won't."

"But the man may be badly hurt," and away went Josephine, high-heeled pumps making her flight a trifle dangerous, over the slippery turf. And her guest ran at her side.

By the time they reached the meadow fence the team had been brought panting to a standstill, cornered by Bob and Jarvis at the far end of the meadow. When Donald Ferry looked up from the prostrate form of the ploughman, he beheld four figures in dainty dresses also brought to a stand-still by a splintery rail fence over which it did not seem discretion to attempt to scramble unless the need were dire.

It was not dire. Jake Kelly had only been stunned by striking his head upon a big stone just upturned by his plough. He was already opening his eyes and the colour was returning to his sunburned face. He put his hand to his head.

"All right," called Ferry to the row of anxious faces by the fence, at which the tense expressions relaxed, and certain dimples began to play. If nobody were seriously hurt, the situation certainly had its amusing side. Five minutes ago they had all been demurely drinking afternoon tea, with the most correct society manners evident on all sides. They had not known each other very well, but each had wondered what the others were like upon less formal occasions. And suddenly a decidedly less formal occasion had been precipitated into their midst.

"Guess I ain't much the wuss for wear," declared Jake Kelly, sitting up. "All's hurt's my feelin's at havin' that there team git away from me like that. The old mare's steady's a clock--thought she could hold the young one down, if he did git lively. Dunno now what he took off at. Serves me right for trustin' 'em a minute while I lit up my pipe."

Bob, on the old mare's back, and Jarvis, at the bits of the young horse, were bringing back the plough undamaged by its brisk career across the field. Jarvis certainly presented a somewhat incongruous appearance in his afternoon attire, as he plunged along the furrows in foot-gear not intended for locomotion over freshly ploughed land. Jake rose to his feet, answering the queries of Ferry at his side as to his fitness for continuing work with a decided: "Sure I am. Sha'n't get even with myself for that fool trick till I've done a good dozen furrows. You don't ketch that there pair o'hosses gittin' away from Jake Kelly again this day!"

"The rescue party may as well go back to the teacups," observed Jarvis, as the whole group, standing partly on the one and partly on the other side of the rail fence, watched the now subdued team take a fresh start under the guidance of a vigilant driver with a large bump on the back of his head, which he had refused to have treated in any way but with contempt.

Saying which, Jarvis mounted the fence--tearing a slight rent near the hem of his trousers-leg because he was not looking where he went. He had been observing the effect of the now brilliant sunshine on an uncovered fair head, and in the fashion of Jake he accepted the proffered sympathy of Bob on the disaster to his clothing with a murmured: "Serves me right for not attending strictly to business."

The company marched back in more orderly ranks than it had come forth.

Max found himself by the side of Constance Carew, and discovered that she had quite as strong a sense of humour as Janet Ferry, for she described to him most amusingly the way in which the four girls had abandoned all concern for their afternoon finery, and had rushed forth prepared to help bear a stretcher down a wet ploughed field, or share in dashing about in the attempt to catch the runaway team.

"This is what comes," said he, in reply, and looking around at Sally with mirth in his eye, "of trying to be fashionable on a farm."

"Trying to be fashionable!" cried Sally, behind him, catching the words. "I was merely trying to be hospitable. But Fate evidently didn't mean I should be either. Twice in one afternoon!"

"Let's go back and turn the tea-drinking into a musicale," suggested Ferry. "I know my sister is longing to get her hands on the piano."

"You shouldn't propose to have your own family perform," Janet reproached her brother.

"Why shouldn't I? I haven't heard you play for two years, nor Constance sing for three. No false modesty shall keep me from demanding to be satisfied."

"I heard somebody telling somebody else I had dusted the piano five times to-day," said Sally, as she led the way in, "and I surely ought to be rewarded for such care as that."

So they trooped in, a somewhat less faultlessly attired party than they had gone out, for Sally's curls were more rebellious than ever, Josephine's skirts had a mud stain on their hem, Jarvis's rent showed plainly, and everybody's foot-gear was decidedly the worse for the run over wet sod and fresh earth. But they had left behind them all stiffness born of untried acquaintance, had discovered that there was nobody in the company who could not be depended upon to play a gallant part in whatever emergency might arise, and were in a mood thoroughly to enjoy the remainder of the visit.

Without being asked again Janet went straight to the piano, sat down at it as if it were the old friend it claimed to be, and with one or two affectionate soft layings of her hands upon it in almost noiseless chords, as if she were asking it something to which it responded under its breath, swept into a movement from one of the greatest compositions the world knows.

When she finished she looked up at her brother, who had come to stand close beside the instrument. Her eyes were full of tears, and his were by no means free from a suspicion of moisture. Evidently the sound of the familiar keys had many associations for both, and they were associations which their mother shared, for her face was turned away toward the open window, and she was very still.

But in a minute more Janet had turned to beckon to her friend, and was beginning an accompaniment without so much as waiting for Constance to reach the piano. Smiling, the tall girl found a place beside it just in time to take up her part. And then--the listeners held their breath. The golden notes rang through the rooms and out upon the warm May air, while the singer herself seemed as little to be "performing" as if the song had been a mere child's play tune.

"What made you start with that?" protested Constance, in her friend's ear, the moment it was over. "Such a show song!"

But Donald, from the other side of the piano, leaned across. "Don't mind," he whispered. "Any of the simple things would have done us out just now."

Constance nodded quickly. The next minute, with a word to Janet, she had plunged into a gay little German song, with a spirit in it as light as the spring itself, and every one was smiling.

When they had gone, Jarvis, passing through the hall with a glance into the room where the piano stood, caught a glimpse of Sally standing by the open window, looking after the four who were just disappearing through the hedge. He crossed the room softly and looked out over her head.

"They're all right, aren't they?" said he.

"Splendid!" agreed Sally. "I like them both, even more than I expected." Then she added, in a lower tone, "I'd give the hair off my head to be able to make such music as that, either with my hands or with my voice."

Jarvis, smiling to himself, unperceived touched one fair strand with a reverent hand. "I wouldn't give," said he, "even for such magnificent music as that, so much as that one curl over your right ear--if another wouldn't grow there in its place."

Sally faced about. "The idea!" said she. "Of course you wouldn't. It's not yours, sir, to give! But I'd cut it off, when you weren't looking!"

CHAPTER XIV

TWO AND TWO

"Shall we make the haying a society affair for ladies in French frocks, or an athletic event for a lot of young fellows who don't know a rake from a pitchfork?"

The questioner was a tall young man in corduroy trousers and high boots, a blue flannel shirt and a nondescript hat--though the hat had come off as he approached the garden, where Sally Lane, in blue gingham and short sleeves, was carefully setting out some spice-pink roots.

Sally looked up. She had become accustomed in a measure to seeing the heir of the house of Burnside thus attired, and to noting the daily deepening coat of tan upon his face and arms, but it never failed to strike her afresh as a miracle which a year ago would not have seemed possible.

"I haven't the faintest intention of inviting any ladies in French frocks," she replied. "Do you know any gentlemen in frock coats who wish to be asked?"

"Plenty--but I'm not asking any invitations for them--this time.

No--it's a bunch of the Reverend Donald Ferry's friends I want to invite."

"The Reverend--how odd that sounds!--Who are they?"

"News-boys, boot-blacks, office-boys, messenger boys--every kind of boy. He proposes to buy or borrow the rakes and pitchforks, have out a different set of lads for two days running, and present us with the labour of the crowd in return for the lark he expects it to be for them. Janet and Constance will supply the lunch. Of course the amount of work the boys do isn't to be reckoned on like that of trained hands. But our ten acres of hay isn't a tremendous crop, and with Jake Kelly and myself to boss the job, we ought to get through in respectable season, if the weather favours."

"Do have them come. Max is going to let Bob have his way at last, and leave the office, so he'll be on hand, too."

"Good! Bob's been on tenter-hooks all the week, I know, but I didn't know old Max had given in. Alec will be the next deserter from the ranks of the business men. Max may hang on through this season and next, but you'll see him with us the third, or I'll sacrifice my hat." He surveyed the specimen in his hands as he spoke. "Valuable offering it would make, wouldn't it? That hat began its career at a university and ends it on a farm. In my present state of mind I don't call that a come-down."

"Don't you?" asked a voice behind him, and Jarvis swung round to behold Janet Ferry, gloves and weeding instrument in hand. "Then I suppose it's not a come-down for my gloves, bought in Berlin, worn in London, and worn out in Sally's service in a garden composed mostly of weeds."

"Weeds! Will you have the goodness to look at my sweet-peas?" Sally indignantly waved an earth-bestained hand toward the trellis, where three pink, one white, and one brilliant crimson blossom flaunted themselves in the July sunshine as the first blooms of the sweet-pea season.

"I take it back," admitted Janet, "and I'll not call my work 'weeding.' What are you doing, idling here, Mr. Farmer? I thought you never allowed a moment to go to waste."

"I'm not wasting any now," disputed the farmer. "I merely paused a moment on my way to the barn where I intend to rig up a fork for unloading. I'm consulting the Lady of Strawberry Acres about letting your brother's boys come and rake hay for us."

"Oh, yes. He's full of that plan. I'll give you fair warning, Sally, if you give Don half an opening he'll have you overrun here with his proteges. Have you the least idea how many men, boys, and babies he has on his lists? And every one of them is a personal and particular friend of his."

"I know he's a tremendous worker." Sally rose to her feet and surveyed the result of her labours. "They look dreadfully droopy, don't they?"

"You need more water. I'll get it." And Jarvis picked up her sprinkling-can and was off with it.

"I shall be delighted to have the boys come, Janet," Sally went on heartily. "I think your brother's work is fine--great--and if the old

farm can help in any way I shall be glad."

"I thought you were arranging to have a house-party from town, and I was afraid his plan would interfere."

"I did plan that, some time ago, but I like this idea much better. What's the use of exerting ourselves to entertain a lot of indifferent people when we can give a jolly time to the ones who never have any fun at all?"

"That's what Don says. And these boys are his special care. He has club-rooms for them in the city, and he's working now to get all sorts of additions to it--baths and showers and gymnasium apparatus. Oh, I think it's fine, too. I didn't at first, when he wrote me about it, but now that I'm here and see for myself, I'm immensely interested and want to help."

They discussed the coming event fully as they worked. It was discussed by everybody during the next few days, and plans were carefully perfected with the view of combining a good time for the young guests with the serious purpose of getting the haying done as promptly and effectually as possible.

So, on a certain day in early July, Jake Kelly cut the hay, the entire ten acres, and reported a fair crop for land that had been running wild so long, a rather rainy spring having helped matters considerably. On the morning of the next day Ferry's boys were to arrive.

"I wish it were a holiday for me," admitted Max, as he left the house to catch his car. "I'd rather enjoy seeing the mess Ferry and Jarve get into with a corps of bootblacks to make hay for them. They'll '_make hay_', all right, mark my word."

"Each of us girls is going to drive one load down to the barn," called Sally gayly, from the porch.

As he ran down the driveway, Max waved his hand with a gesture of despair as if to indicate that this announcement certainly finished the prospect of getting anything done on the farm.

"Don't mind him," said Jarvis, appearing in the doorway behind her. "I'm going to drive out the Southville road about five miles after a hay-fork and tackle I've bought of a man who's selling out. We don't really need one for our small crop, but it's too cheap to refuse. Back in a jiffy. Don't you want to go?"

"Thank you--too busy."

"You don't look it--" for she was starting away at a moderate pace down the driveway, her fresh blue-and-white print skirts giving forth a crisp little sound as she walked.

"But I am. I'm going on an errand."

"Which way?"

"Down the road--Mrs. Hill's."

"Wait a minute and I'll have you there quicker than you can walk."

He ran in for his driving-gloves, and out through the back hall to the old carriage house where the car stood. He was only a minute in getting under way, for he had learned to leave his machine in a condition in which it could be used the next time without waiting to fill gasoline tanks or radiators. It was natural for him to go at things in a systematic way, and he kept his car, as he kept his books and papers, in order, quite without thinking much about it.

But with all his haste Sally had reached the driveway and gone a rod or two down the road before he overtook her. He slowed down at her side.

"Why didn't you wait? Jump in," said he, "and I'll have you there in one burst of speed."

Sally stepped up on the running board and stood there, her arm on the back of the roadster's seat.

"Get clear in, please," requested Jarvis. "There'll be no bursts of speed with you standing there."

"I can hold on perfectly well."

"So can the car stand still. It will stand still till you get in."

Sally took the seat. "Now hurry up, please," said she. "There isn't any use in my getting in at all, just for a foot or two of ride."

The car moved off. "Let's make it longer," Jarvis urged. "Drive out with me for the fork. We won't be half an hour away, and you can't have anything very pressing left on hand, with all the work you girls have done to get ready for those youngsters."

He opened his throttle, as he spoke, and the car responded. Sally shook her head, decidedly.

"No, no--I'm not going. I told Jo I'd be back in five minutes with the big pail Mrs. Hill said we might take for the lemonade."

"They won't need lemonade for two hours yet. Come on--I want company."

"Slow down, please," requested Sally, for the car was already approaching the farm house which was her destination. But instead of slowing down Jarvis deliberately increased his speed.

"I'm in the habit of doing most things you ask me to," said he, "but this time I'm going to have my way. There are plenty of people there to finish it all, this morning. I'll have you back before they miss you." And the car shot by the Hill farm house at a pace which supported his promise.

Sally sat back silently. Although Jarvis went on talking about various things she did not reply, and her silence lasted until, having gone a mile on his way, Jarvis slowed down a little and turned to look at her.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "You're certainly not angry with me for running away with you?"

She nodded, looking straight ahead. This was not like Sally, who, though she possessed plenty of spirit, was seldom known to sulk.

"Well, I'm sorry if you are--but not sorry I ran away with you. You can talk to me or not, but you can't get away. I'm in too much of a hurry to have time to take you back, so I can keep you to myself for one straight half-hour. And that's--whether you know it or not--more than I've had for a month--six weeks--two months."

This declaration unlocked Sally's lips. "How absurd," said she, still gazing straight ahead.

"It may be absurd, but it's true. You may not have noticed it, but it's true just the same. I don't know whether it's intentional on your part or not--and I don't know which I would rather have it, that you've meant to keep away, or that you haven't noticed that you have. I think," he added, judicially, "that not knowing that you have would be much the worse, so I choose to think you've meant to do it. And I want to know why."

He turned and looked at her again. The cheek next him was pink, and momentarily growing pinker. Sally again murmured something which sounded like "perfectly absurd." But Jarvis considered that no answer at all. The car began to climb a long grade.

"Please tell me," he urged.

"There's nothing to tell," said the girl, reluctantly. "There are ever so many of us, now, and we're naturally all together--or some of us are together--"

"And some of us aren't."

"We're just a lot of boys and girls--"

"Are we? I feel rather grown up myself."

Sally spoke quickly. "I'm not. Or, at least, I don't want to be. I want to stay a girl--a little girl, I'd be, if I could--just as long as I can. I want to have good times--all together. Not--two and two." The cheek next him was a very deep pink indeed, now.

"Do I try to make it 'two and two'?"

"You seem to."

"And you don't want me to?"

"No."

"If I happen to see you alone in the garden, must I go and get your Uncle Tim or my mother?"

"Not if you'll talk sense."

"I don't talk sense?"

Sally did not answer this question, so he repeated it, in the form of an accepted statement: "So I don't talk sense."

This certainly called loudly for an explanation, and Sally made it--in a way. "I think you know what I mean."

"I know what _I_ mean, but I didn't know it deserved that name."

"It's only--" Sally hesitated, then she went through with it, speaking hurriedly: "I don't want you to bother about me--doing things for me--except as you do them for us all. You--you--are getting--"

"Well, what am I getting? Out with it!"

"To seem--not like my old friend Jarvis Burnside. And--I'd rather have him back."

It was certainly out now. Jarvis drove on up the hill steadily, without any further questioning. It was precisely like Sally thus bravely to have shown him where he stood. It was a position clearly defined; he had stood on it so long that he ought surely to be able easily to go back to it. But he had driven to the top of the hill and on for two miles down the road, had taken the turn to the left and pursued that road for another mile, so that he was nearly at his destination, before he spoke. When at last he did speak it was only to say, very quietly and cheerfully--at least, so it sounded:

"All right, Sally."

Then he turned in at an open gate, and in less than five minutes, with the hay-fork and tackle and ropes at their feet, he was turning out again.

The drive back was rather a silent one. Jarvis spoke often, and Sally replied, but it was about things to be seen along the wayside, or of the plans for the day. The trip was made rather faster than it had been done in coming, and the pace was excuse enough for there being no prolonged conversation on any subject. Jarvis was now an expert driver and by no means an over-cautious one, though he took no risks that he would have called by that name, when he was not alone. More than once his passenger held her breath, but realized afterward that she had been in no real danger. Then they were at home, and Sally was saying, "Thank you very much," as she jumped out, quite as if she had eagerly requested to be taken.

"You are entirely welcome," was his response, in such an odd tone that she looked round at him. He was smiling, but not at her--at the driveway before him, and she could not help noting that he did not appear to be at all crushed by anything that had occurred that morning. It struck her that he had never seemed a stronger or more attractive figure than he looked at this moment, sitting at the wheel with the bright July sunlight touching his brown cheek and clean-cut profile; his head, with its heavy crop of dark hair, bare and breeze-tossed; his powerful engine throbbing before him. Suddenly she wanted to say: "You don't mind, do you?" with a queer little feeling that he didn't mind quite enough! But the car was already off, and she went on into the house with a sense of not feeling quite so relieved as might have been expected at having brought about something she had been wishing for some time to accomplish, but hadn't known just how.

But she had no time left in which to do any thinking about her own affairs. As was easily to be discerned by the distant shoutings, Ferry's city guests had arrived, and had taken possession of the hayfield. From the kitchen window they could be seen, swarming about with rakes and pitchforks, like so many black spiders. There were many more of them than

could possibly be used to any advantage, it seemed; but as about half of the distant figures appeared to be standing on their heads it might be taken for granted that employment of some sort could be had for everybody.

At noon the four girls captured Jake and his horses, filled the bottom of the hay-wagon with baskets and pails, and were borne up to the fields, where they were hailed with cheers. Under a tall elm, at one side of the scene of operations, they spread the lunch, and a motley crowd was presently encamped around it. Their entertainers thought they had never seen a happier lot of youngsters. They were of all sorts and sizes, but in one point they were alike: their ignorance of the country and their delight in this interesting and novel experience. They were very plainly all devoted friends of the young man who had brought them there, as could be seen in their every look at him.

"How long have you known Mr. Ferry?" Josephine asked of one slim, tall lad, with black hair drooping over a pair of sharp black eyes, his pale face full of animation.

"Oh, ever since he come down our street one day an' axed me 'bout a feller I knowed that jes' come back from the horspital. Chap got run over--Mr. Ferry was feared he wouldn't have no home to stay in when he got out o' horspital. No more he didn't--till then. After that day, he did, all right."

Josephine glanced toward the subject of these remarks and then back at the lad, who nodded. "Bet yer life 'twas him fixed it," he declared. "There don't no kid go without some kind of a home, if he can fix things for 'em."

"You boys must think a good deal of him," suggested Josephine.

The boy's lips answered only "You bet!" But his face instantly became eloquent.

After lunch the first load of hay was pitched upon the wagon, Jarvis, Jake, and Ferry wielding the pitchforks, Sally driving, and a big boy at the bridle of the colt that had run away during the ploughing season and so could not be trusted entirely to Sally, although she begged to be allowed to manage him without help. He was not exactly a colt, after all, being four years old, but he was new in the traces of the work-horse and Jake kept an eye on him.

"You fellers pitch pretty well fer green hands," acknowledged Jake, when the load was nearly on. He was on the wagon with Sally, placing the forkfuls as they were pitched on. "Expected to see one or 'tother of you git winded and go set down under the ellum. 'Bout the third load'll git you, though, I calc'late."

The two contestants exchanged laughing glances under the forkfuls at the moment lifted above their heads. "This fellow's a Hercules for muscle," said Jarvis to Jake, "but I've discovered several places in my anatomy not so well developed as they might be. I'm going to get after them right away and train them up to the standard. Great Caesar, but it's a hot day!"

He stood up and wiped his perspiring brow.

"I think it's deliciously cool," remarked Sally from the top of the load.

"It's perfectly comfortable here," called Janet, from the fence near by, where the other three girls were perched.

Jake grinned. He had been grinning more or less all day. This "haying it" with a field full of boys and young ladies was a new and interesting experience for Mr. Kelly.

At this moment a diversion arose. Two of the guests, disputing for the possession of a pitchfork, both naturally preferring it to a rake for bunching up from the winrows--being raked by Bob with a horse-rake--had decided to settle the matter, street fashion, with their fists. They were pretty evenly matched and a rough-and-tumble fight ensued. Ferry stopped to watch the bout and see that fair play was enforced. Everybody else stopped work also, and stood looking that way. Jake Kelly, perhaps the most interested spectator in the field, slid down from the load and strolled toward the affair, still grinning. Jarvis, with the precaution of a glance around at the wagon, on the top of which perched Sally, took a few steps in the same direction. It was hot, and he was glad of a moment's respite from his labours. He did not see that the lad at the bridle of the "colt" had relaxed his hold.

Suddenly one of the lads in the affair of the pitchfork got in a bit of unfair work--unfair according to the standards Ferry had introduced among these young friends of his. A protesting yell from at least a dozen throats instantly called the fighters' attention to this fact, and Ferry himself called out, "No fouls, Bates!"

At the yells the "colt" plunged, carrying his mate with him. Sally, though unprepared, hung on gallantly to the lines, trying hard to pull the pair to a standstill. The ground was uneven, and not free from an occasional stone. The wagon had not gone its own length before a shriek from the girls on the fence had brought Jarvis, Jake, and Ferry to the right-about, and all three rushed for the horses' heads. But they were too late to prevent the accident which is always liable to happen in a hayfield, particularly when the driver is a novice. The right front wheel swerved into a hollow, the wagon tipped, the "colt" plunged again. Sally slipped, and tried to throw herself down in safety upon the top of the load, but it slid with her, and in an instant the spectators and the three dashing to the rescue saw the whole load go like a green mountain to the ground, covering Sally from sight.

Now a forkful of hay is light, but a load of the fragrant stuff is very heavy and very smothery, and it depends entirely upon where the victim lands under such an avalanche whether the matter is serious or otherwise. For a minute nobody could be sure just where the slender, blue-clad figure might be, for it made no outcry. The hearts of them all were in their throats for a minute, as the men tore at the hay with their hands, Jarvis thundering at the tall lad, who seized upon a pitchfork, "Don't touch it with that, you fool!"

He was blaming himself savagely as he worked for leaving the girl for an instant, under such conditions. Ferry was calling, "Don't be frightened, we'll have you out in a minute!" Jake was grunting, "Hope the little gal ain't far under--hope to mercy she ain't!" and Josephine, Janet, and Constance were trying to get a chance to help, though the most they could do was to keep clear of the desperately working arms of the men.

It was Jarvis who, with a hoarse ejaculation of thankfulness, came first upon a fold of the blue skirt. Sally had not been under the heaviest part of the load, and doubtless it was only the smother of the hay which kept her from calling out--if the fall itself had not hurt her. In a minute more they had her out, very red and choky, her eyes blinded with dust, her curls full of hay-seed; and she was lying on a soft mound of the fragrant stuff, the girls fanning her, Ferry bringing her lemonade from the pail, and Jarvis watching her with his heart in his eyes--only, fortunately, considering the conversation of the morning, her own eyes were too full of sticks to see.

"You're not hurt anywhere, dear?" one or other of the girls asked her, at close intervals, and Sally shook her head each time, until at length she was able to clear her throat enough to murmur: "Only my feelings, as Jake said. It was so--silly--of me!"

"It was much worse than silly--of us," vowed Donald Ferry, his fine, freckled face a deep Indian-red with heat and anxiety, his breath still a trifle laboured with the furious exertion of the rescue.

But in a very short time she was all right again, and sitting up on her hay throne, watching the wrecked load being pitched back upon the wagon.

The horses had not escaped, for a dozen boys had set after them, headed by the tall youth, and the boot-blacks and news-boys had proved themselves decidedly more efficient at stopping runaways than at making symmetrical hay-cocks.

"If you have any regard for my pride," said Sally suddenly, when the load was half replaced, "you'll let me drive down to the barn."

The three men stopped and looked at her.

"That's mighty plucky of you, Miss Sally," declared Donald Ferry, "but--if you have any regard for our feelings--" and he let an eloquent shake of the head finish his sentence for him.

Jarvis said nothing. But a certain peculiar set of his jaw, as he went on with his pitching, spoke volumes.

As for Jake Kelly--"Wall, I want to know!" said he. Then he laughed outright. "I calc'late, miss," said he, "ef you ride on that thar' load o' hay again to-day it'll be because them two's rendered incompetent o' action! An' they don't look to me much 'sif paralysis would set in yit awhile!"

CHAPTER XV

ON AN AUGUST EVENING

"Oh, dear--who's this coming?--just as we've settled down to accomplish something!"

"It's the Chases. Girls--we simply can't stop work to entertain them!"

"We don't need to stop--this sort of work."

They bent over their sewing--all but Sally, who with inward reluctance got to her feet as the Chases' big car rolled up the driveway and approached the porch, where the four girls were sitting, busy with some extremely important matters. But of course the work had to be put down for a little when Dorothy Chase actually set foot on the porch.

"Oh, what an energetic crowd!" she cried, "this hot August morning, too. Sally, where are your men? Neil wants to see some of them while I talk to you."

Sally pointed off into the distance. "Jarvis and Bob are hoeing potatoes over there in the field. There's a tree near by, and Neil can sit in the shade of that. You don't mind going, Neil? They're 'way behind with the potatoes."

Neil Chase bowed impressively to the group on the porch. "I should much prefer to stay here," said he gallantly, "but business reasons impel me to seek that inferno out yonder. What Jarve finds interesting in that sort of thing is beyond me."

He drove on by the house and over the grass behind, getting as near to the corn-field as possible, that he might have to walk only the least necessary distance. Meanwhile his wife sat down and inspected the quality of the work being done on the porch.

"Are you people sewing for an orphan asylum?" she inquired, after discovering that red and blue gingham and white cotton cloth of a grade only moderately fine were the materials being used for certain small garments.

"Something like it. One of Mr. Ferry's poor families was burned out the other day--five children and an invalid mother."

"Of course--the mother's always an invalid, isn't she? I believe they make themselves invalids on purpose. Well--it makes no difference how important it is. Those children won't freeze in this weather, if you don't get these things all done to-night. And I'm in a perfectly awful difficulty. You all have simply got to help me out."

"What's the matter?" Josephine asked the question calmly, being used to Dorothy Chase's fashion of putting things. She threaded her needle as she spoke, as if she had every intention of continuing to work for as long a period as she had planned to do. The other girls resumed their sewing also. The cause of their being at work at all certainly was apology sufficient for going on with it, in spite of the visitor.

"Just listen--and nobody is to say a word till I'm through. It's no use raising objections--you're to do as I ask, if you care anything whatever about my friendship." She grasped the ends of the lavender-silk parasol lying on her lavender-linen lap, nodded her head violently, causing several lavender plumes to nutter agitatedly upon her lavender-straw hat, and plunged into her subject.

"I'm entertaining to-night for our new bishop--and he's a distant connection besides. I made it an evening affair, because it's so hot, and our new house opens up so beautifully. I planned to have some informal music--and at this last minute Herr Braun and Madame Hafsky have failed

me. It was a misunderstanding about the date. It turns out they were engaged for to-day weeks ago by somebody very important--they won't give it up. I must have music--and everybody is out of town. Now what I want is to have you four go back with me to luncheon, help me about the decorations and things this afternoon, and then have Miss Carew sing and Miss Ferry play for us in the evening. Neil will come back for the men for the evening. You know I didn't ask you in the beginning only because I knew you didn't want to be invited. But now--you must come!"

It was precisely like Dorothy Chase. That was all that could be said. Nobody said it, but Sally and Josephine thought it, and Janet and Constance told themselves, as they sewed on, that the young matron who made this decidedly startling proposition must be accustomed to having things her own way, or she would not have acquired so confident a manner of making her demands.

Sally was the first to give voice to her astonishment. "Well, Dorothy," said she, "you certainly take us off our feet. Here are we, just settled down to work that absolutely must be done, and in you walk and ask us to lay it down and go off to help entertain a bishop who's probably wishing you wouldn't do anything special at all for him this hot weather!"

"Nothing of the sort. He's heard all about Miss Carew's voice--people that met her last year in Leipsic."

Constance sat up. "Who, please?"

"The Markhams--and the Carrolls. Now will you be good?"

Constance leaned back again, applying herself to her sewing.

"I don't remember anybody of that name," mused Janet, looking at Constance.

"Yes, you do--friends of Mrs. Sears--just stopping over a day?"

The two pairs of eyes met. There must have been something in Constance's--invisible to other beholders--which recalled some incident or other to Janet, for after staring a minute she suddenly dropped her eyes, said, "Oh, yes--" and sewed away faster than ever.

"Will you come?" demanded Dorothy Chase.

They tried to get out of it--they pointed out various reasons why it would be difficult for them to come away. Dorothy overrode all their objections, and became so persistent that at last the four agreed, but refused to go until evening. As for the young men of the household, it would be of no use to ask them.

"Send out for us just in time for your affair, and we'll come," promised Sally. "But what you want of Jo and me I don't see. We can't perform for you in any way."

"Oh, but you can help make things go. Sally can talk to the bishop--"

"I can't," cried Sally, dismayed.

"And Jo can be nice to Mrs. bishop. I don't see why your men won't come. It's so hard to get men for anything except sports in summer."

How perfectly absurd it is for Jarvis Burnside to prefer hoeing potatoes in this frightful sun to playing society man for an hour or two in the evening!"

"It's truly incomprehensible, but so it is. Besides, he looks like an Indian, and in his evening clothes would resemble a fiend. Be satisfied, Dorothy, now you have us for victims, and let the men stay at home." And Sally slashed a seam open with shears that clipped like her speech.

But Mrs. Chase was not satisfied, and berated Jarvis roundly, when, presently he came walking up to the porch with Neil, looking the picture of well-browned contentment. He took her displeasure lightly enough, and presently had her laughing in spite of herself.

"Well, I know all about it now," Neil Chase informed the company, as he got into his car. "We ploughed seven acres and sowed it to buckwheat, turned the buckwheat under and have now planted the ground to potatoes. In the end there are to be strawberries on the seven acres--or a good share of it--and Burnside, Lane & Co. are to become the most successful strawberry culturists in this part of the country."

"Right you are," agreed Jarvis placidly, sitting down on the edge of the porch and poking about in Janet Ferry's work-bag until he found a thimble, which he placed on the only finger it would fit, the smallest one on his right hand. He had washed the hands before he came to the porch, but they were so brown that the little gold thimble looked most absurd in its new position.

"If I sew for you for an hour, Miss Janet," he proposed, as the car bolted away down the drive, "will you come and hoe potatoes for me until lunch time?"

"I would gladly hoe potatoes all day if I could be let off from going to play for Mrs. Chase's friends this evening." The fierce energy with which Janet pulled out a row of bastings gave emphasis to her words.

Jarvis looked at his sister. "How did you manage not to let me in for this affair, Sis?"

"I knew you wouldn't go, and Janet knew her brother wouldn't. Sally said Max would be too used up. Happy boys--we saved you from it at the price of going ourselves."

"Self-sacrificing girls! We'll have to make it up to you somehow. When I see Ferry I'll--Hold on, I've an idea. How are you coming home?"

"In Neil's car--as we go."

"We'll see that you come in a better way. Be good little girls, do your stunts, keep up your courage, and we'll rescue you promptly at eleven o'clock," and putting down the thimble Jarvis went away, deaf to entreaties to tell what his interesting plan might be.

"Oh, dear, isn't it horrid?" demanded Sally that evening, running into Josephine's room in the course of her dressing to have certain unreachable hooks and eyes fastened. "After sewing all day we deserve something better than one of the Chases' fussy affairs."

"Stop fuming and stand still. Anybody who looks as pretty as you do in

this white swiss--"

"Poor old white swiss--the same one. I wish Dorothy could forget the pattern of it. She'll undoubtedly mention that I wore it at her wedding,--she does, every time."

"Don't you care a bit. Those touches of blue make it seem perfectly fresh to me, and I've seen it much oftener than Dorothy Chase has."

"You're a comfort. You look like a dream yourself, in that peach-coloured thing."

"A midsummer day's dream, then--with my gypsy skin. Oh, there's Neil and his car."

"A nice lot you are," Neil Chase was exclaiming outside, as he drove up to the porch and eyed the male figures occupying its comfortable recesses. Max reposed in a hammock; Mr. Timothy Rudd swayed to and fro in a rocker, reading the evening paper by the sunset light; Alec and Bob, sitting on the steps, were playing a game of some sort; and Jarvis lay stretched at full length on a rug, his arms beneath his head, luxuriously resting after his bath and change of work clothes for fresh flannels, enjoying the sense of virtue earned by having hoed many rows of potatoes with a vigorous arm.

"A nice lot," Neil went on. "We have it in for you particularly, Jarve. Max never was much of a society chap, but you once could be depended upon to do your duty like a man. Bob, run in and see if those girls are ready. Dorothy won't be easy till she sees them. One thing I know--you'll soon tire of this playing at farming. To be the real thing you fellows ought to work till the sun goes down, doing 'chores.' I'll wager a fiver you come in and get your bath every night before dinner, eh?"

"We certainly do," Jarvis laughed.

"And you don't sit down in your shirt-sleeves?"

"Well--hardly."

"You're not the real thing--never will be. Look at those girls!" He pulled off his straw hat as two figures appeared in the doorway. "Nice farmers' folks they are!"

"We're glad you think we're nice," responded Sally, gathering her white skirts about her. "Jo, be careful--don't get that peaches-and-cream frill against the running board."

Jarvis's reposeful posture had become an active one, and he took care that neither peach-coloured skirts nor white ones fluttered against anything on the outside of the car that might soil them.

"Here come Constance and Janet. Aren't they imposing society ladies now?" and Sally stood up to wave at the two coming through the hedge, accompanied by Janet's brother. Ferry had an eye upon the porch and meant to spend the evening consoling his friends for the absence of the usual feminine contingent.

"You exquisite person--may I venture to sit beside you?" whispered Sally, as Constance, in trailing pale gray with bands of violet velvet, a

shimmering cloak of the same hues enveloping her like a mist, took the place beside her. "This is the singer, not my friend Constance. I'm--just--a little--afraid of you!"

"Nonsense!" Constance's warm hand caught Sally's beneath the cloak. "You know I don't like show singing--or anything that goes with it."

"Don't forget your promise--" Josephine called back, as the big car, with its rainbow-tinted load rolled away.

An answering shout from the porch, accompanied by the waving of several arms, conveyed assurance.

"What promise?" asked Janet, turning to the others. Being the smallest of the party she occupied one of the folding seats which enable a roomy tonneau to hold five people.

"The boys are coming after us--we don't know how. Doesn't that give you courage to face the evening?" murmured Josephine, and the expression on Janet's face became decidedly more hopeful.

"But how can they come? They've only your brother's car!" she said in Josephine's ear.

"Don't know, and don't care. They'll come--and rescue us from our fate."

They felt, during the following hours, that they needed the cheering prospect of a merry home-going, to enable them to bear the rigours of the form of entertainment offered them. It was not that the affair differed much from affairs of its sort, but the fact that it did not materially differ might have been what made it seem so tiresome. Possibly the effect of a summer of out-door, home merrymaking, under the least conventional of conditions, had been to make formal entertaining under a roof seem more than ordinarily fatiguing and pointless. The handsome rooms were hot, in spite of open windows; the guests quite evidently were making heroic efforts to seem gay. Somehow even Janet's brilliant music stirred only a perfunctory sort of applause.

"Never played so badly in my life," whispered the performer, when she regained Josephine's side, after her second number.

"You played perfectly, as you always do."

"I played like an automaton--a 'piano-player.' Don't pretend you don't know the difference."

"I understand, of course. But, you know, we shouldn't really like to have you play for the bishop and these people as you do for us on your own piano."

"The poor bishop! Doesn't he look like a martyr? I'm sure he's delightful--in his own library, or at his friends' dinner-tables--but he hates this sort of thing. He's beautifully polite, but he's bored. My only hope is that Con will revive him. It's her turn next."

If anything could revive a weary bishop, who had that day attended two funerals and a diocesan convention, it would be both the sight and the sound of Miss Constance Carew.

"Isn't she _dear_?" breathed Sally, in Josephine's ear, as Constance took her place, her slender, gray-clad figure and interest-stirring face a notable contrast to the personality of the professional singer who had opened the program of occasional numbers, interspersed through an evening of--so-called--conversation. Sally's hands were unconsciously clasped tight all through the song, and her eyes left the singer's face only long enough to observe that the bishop's tired eyes were also fixed upon the creator of all those wonderful, liquid notes, and to fancy that, for the moment, at least, he forgot how hot his neck was inside his close, clerical neckwear.

"That pays me for coming," was the reward Constance had from Sally, whose praise she had somehow come to value more highly than that of most people she knew. Sally might be no musician herself, but she was a most sympathetic listener, and could appreciate the points singers love to have appreciated, as few people can.

"That pays me!" Constance answered, drawing a long breath. "But, Sally, will it never end? It's nearly eleven, now."

"Thank heaven! I'd lost all count of time. The boys said they'd be here at eleven. But Dorothy is not to know they're within five miles of here. She'd never forgive them."

As she spoke a maid came to her elbow and handed her a note. Retiring to a secluded corner to read it, Sally returned with triumphant eyes. "We're to go down the lawn to a gate that opens on the other road. They're there. Now--to get away from Dorothy."

This proved difficult.

"Not let Neil take you back? Why not? How will you get back? But you're not going yet?"

"Both the girls have performed twice, with two encores. You don't expect any more of them this hot night? Your bishop is going to sleep; do let him off and send him to bed. Yes, we must go now. They've sent for us. Don't bother about how we're going to get back--Neil will be thankful not to have to take us."

Thus Sally. And when Dorothy persisted in exclamations and questions her guests fell into a little gusto of enthusiasm over the stately old house which Neil had bought after he had to give up the Maxwell Lane place, and diverted Dorothy's attention. Sally also praised everything she could honestly praise in relation to the affair of the evening--and not a thing she couldn't, for Sally was the most honest creature alive. Somehow at last she got her party away from their hostess, taking advantage of the bishop's approach to whisper hastily--"Here comes your guest of honour. Now do attend to him and forget us!"--and so had them all out a side door and off down the lawn out of range of the lighted windows. As they hurried along in their airy dresses, they were pulling off long, hot gloves, and saying, still under their breath, "Oh, isn't it good to get out?" They were laughing softly, and breathing deep breaths of the warm summer air, and looking up at the starlit sky.

"Now where is that gate?" They had reached the high fence at the back of the grounds.

"Here you are--this way," came back a low voice, and a doorway in the

fence swung open. There was a rush of skirts, and the four were out in the road at the back of the suburban place, a country road on which stood, most appropriately, a long hay-wagon, cushioned with hay and rugs, drawn by a pair of farm horses, with Jake Kelly in command. Four other dark figures were grouped about the back end.

"You splendid things!"

"What a jolly idea!"

"Oh, what a delicious change from a hot music-room!"

"Here's Mother Burnside, tucked away in the corner. How good of you to come, you patient person!"

"Now tell us all about it," demanded Donald Ferry of Sally, next whom, at the end of the load, he sat. It may be noted that Jarvis had not been found, of late, at Sally's elbow. Without a suggestion of seeming avoidance on her part, or of umbrage on his, the two no longer fell to each other as a matter of course. Sally's plea had had the effect she wished for. Both Constance and Janet appeared to like Jarvis immensely, and Sally could not detect any failure on his part to enjoy their society. She told herself it was a very good thing that she had been so frank with him.

"All about it?" She was answering Ferry's question. "Why, I don't need to tell you. You know, without having been there, exactly how things went."

"More or less, probably. Was it very hot?"

"Stifling! How could it be anything else on an August night? Janet vows her fingers burned on the keys. But she played beautifully, of course, and the bishop had a little interval of being glad he was there. Poor man--I wonder if anything can be warmer than a clerical waistcoat."

"Nothing, except a clerical collar, I believe. Did Constance have a bad time of it, too? She doesn't like singing in hot rooms."

"She sang like an angel. The bishop opened his eyes and stared at her all through, and applauded so vigorously it must have made him several degrees warmer. But she deserved it."

"I don't doubt it. And what did you and Miss Josephine do?"

"Stood about and tried to look pleased and happy. My gloves felt like furs and a soapstone, and I couldn't think of anything intelligent to say to anybody."

Ferry laughed. "I wonder if anybody ever does say anything intelligent at such entertainments. Did Mr. Neil Chase himself rise to the occasion and play the genial host as he should?"

"I think he mostly spent the evening sitting on the porch rail at the farthest corner away from the drawing-room."

"The memory of the fellows lounging comfortably on your porch undoubtedly made his role seem the harder by contrast. I saw a longing look in his eye as he drove away, and had an idea he might be back. But I suppose he couldn't get out of it."

"No--their 'country home' isn't much like our 'country home.' Oh, isn't this air delicious? Do you suppose Constance would be willing to sing in it? Wouldn't it sound like a part of the summer night out here?"

They were bowling along the quiet country road, only the chirp of many locusts, the rumble of the wheels, and the sound of their own voices to break the stillness. Ferry leaned forward. Constance was at the farther end of the wagon, between Jarvis and Max.

"Constance!" he called softly. Sally thought she would not hear, but she did. Ferry's voice, even in its subdued tones, possessed that carrying quality which is the peculiar acquirement of the trained public speaker.

"Yes, Don," she called back, and everybody stopped talking. People had a way of stopping other talk to listen when either of these two had anything to say.

"Here's a person, at this end of the chariot, who wonders if people with drawing-room voices ever venture to test them in the open air."

"What do you think about it?"

"That one of them will, if we ask her. Therefore, we ask."

Constance considered an instant. "Will you and Janet sing 'My Garden' with me--especially for Sally?"

For answer Ferry tried for the proper key, found it--under his breath--and began, very softly, and on a low note, to sing. Janet joined him with a subdued contralto, and the two voices, without words, made themselves into a harmonious undertone of an accompaniment. Upon this support, presently, rose Constance's pure notes. It was no "show singing," this time, and the song did not lift above a gentle volume which seemed to fit, as Sally had anticipated, into the night. But the listeners gave themselves to the listening as they had never done before, even in the many times they had heard this girl. Even Jake Kelly, on his driver's seat, turned about to hearken with held breath. The farm-hand drew his horses down to a walk, that not a note might be marred.

"A garden is a lovesome thing, God wot!

Rose plot,

Fringed pool,

Ferned grot--

The veriest school

Of Peace, and yet the fool

Contends that God is not--

Not God! in gardens! when the eve is cool?

Nay, but I have a sign:

'Tis very sure God walks in mine."

The words[A] were familiar to some of them--the music new. Together words and music were something to remember.

[Footnote A: The words are those of Thomas Edward Brown.]

Certain of these phrases came in over and over, throughout the song--taking hold of one's heart most appealingly. "_Not God--in gardens!--when the eve is cool_" came again and again, till one felt

it indeed to be the word of the fool. Then, in exquisite harmony, fell the assurance--"_Nay, but I have a sign--a sign--a sign--'Tis very sure God walks in mine_!"

Everybody but Sally found words in which to tell, in some sort, how the song had seemed to them, even Alec observing boyishly, "I say, but that's great. I didn't know you folks could all sing."

After some minutes had gone by, Donald Ferry bent to speak in Sally's ear. She was looking off into the night, her hands clasped tight together in her lap. "I know," he said, very gently.

"You always know," she answered, under cover of the talk, which was now going on again. "Tell me,"--wistfully--"do you think--He--walks in mine?"

"I know it. He walks in every garden--when He is wanted there."

CHAPTER XVI

TIME-TABLES

"If ever I felt weepy over seeing people off, it's this minute!"

"We feel just as weepy over going, Sally Lunn. But cheer up. We shall come out every other minute, Jarvis and I, and mother will be planning all winter, I know, how early she can get back in the spring."

Josephine gave Sally a tremendous hug as she spoke, and Mrs. Burnside, in her turn, took the girl into her motherly embrace.

"I shouldn't have believed," she said warmly, "how reluctant I should be to go back to town in the fall, after this charming summer--nor how willing I should be to promise to return in the spring. Sally, dear--do make use of our rooms all you care to--though they're not half as cheery as your own, for the winter."

"It _has_ been a lovely summer, hasn't it?" cried Sally, as the Burnside carriage, fine bay horses and liveried coachman, appeared upon the driveway, looking suggestively like city life again. "A successful one too, don't you think, for the boys? They're confident they have improved the ground so much that their first real crops, next year--will begin to show what crops ought to be."

"Yes, it has all been a success," agreed Mrs. Burnside, "in spite of the mistakes they own to and laugh over. Jarvis himself has received a world of good from his out-door life. I'm hoping that all your brothers will make the most of next season--especially Max."

"Oh, Max will come round in time," declared Josephine confidently. "I caught him feeling enviously of Jarvis's arms the other day. When Jarvis said he felt like a giant, Max said he thought he'd have to begin giant culture, whether he succeeded in making any squashes grow or not."

This thought cheered Sally through the trying moment of watching her friends drive away. Their going took place at rather an unfortunate time

for her. Uncle Timothy was off on a visit to his old New Hampshire home; Constance Carew had departed the week before--though under promise to return for a long visit the following summer; and Janet was away for a wedding in which she was to play the part of bridesmaid. Sally's one consolation was that Joanna was to take the place of Mary Ann Flinders in the kitchen.

This arrangement had been made by Mrs. Burnside. On just what terms it had been effected Sally was not permitted to inquire. She had protested against it, but the argument had ended by the elder woman's saying gently, "Sally dear, I shall spend a happier winter if I know you have my good Joanna here. She likes the place, it is a pleasant change for her from the responsibilities of my entertaining, and her sister is eager to take her place with me. So let me have my way--at least for this winter." It was a way of putting the matter which could not be set aside.

When the carriage had disappeared, Sally wandered out to the kitchen to console herself with the sight of Joanna. There was no doubt that the presence of that capable, comfortable person, possessed as she was of intelligence and common sense, would be a real support to the young mistress of the house. But at this moment even Joanna failed her, for she had gone to her room, the hour being that of mid-afternoon. Sally wandered back again into the living-room, feeling too disconsolate even to make the effort to cheer herself by going for a brisk walk in the keen late October air, a measure which usually had a prompt effect upon her spirits.

From the living-room window she saw a messenger boy approaching, and hurried to the porch door to meet him, hoping he brought no ill news. Two minutes later she was reading the message, alone in the living-room, while the boy waited in the hall. Its purport banished all thought of present circumstances, except to bring the wish that it had arrived a half-hour earlier. "Mr. Rudd seriously ill anxious to have you come at once" it read, and was signed by the name of one of Mr. Rudd's old New Hampshire friends.

After a minute's deliberation, Sally wrote her reply "Will come at once. Leave to-night if possible," and sent the boy off with it. As he departed Jarvis came into the hall from the door at the rear. Sally turned with an exclamation of surprise and relief.

"Oh, I thought you had gone."

"Without saying good-by? You ought to know better. But I'd have been off when the others went if I hadn't had some unexpected magneto trouble. All right now, and I'm going at once. What's that?" as he caught sight of the yellow envelope in her hand. "No bad news, I hope?"

"Uncle Timmy's very sick--up in New Hampshire. I'm going to him as fast as I can get off."

"Uncle Timmy? Oh, I'm mighty sorry! You're going, you say?"

"Of course. He asked me to come. I was just going to telephone to find out about trains."

"I'll see to all that--if you must go. But, Sally--have you let Max know?"

"Not yet."

"Have you sent an answer saying you will come, on your own responsibility?"

Sally's slight figure drew itself up. "Why not? There's nothing else to do but go--and if there were, I wouldn't do it."

"It will take you at least twenty-four hours to get there."

"Yes. What has that to do with it?"

Jarvis's face looked as if he thought it had a good deal to do with it. He knew that, dress as quietly as she would--and Sally's dressing for the street meant always the plainest and simplest of attire--there was that about her which invariably attracted attention. He understood with just what a barrier of youthful reserve she would be likely to surround herself upon such a journey, but he understood also that barriers of reserve are not all the defences sometimes necessary for a girl who travels alone. For one moment he felt as if he must go along to take care of her, in the next that nothing could be more out of the question.

"I'm glad it's no farther, anyhow," he replied to Sally's quick question. "But hadn't you better let the boys know, before you go at your preparations? Max wouldn't be pleased at not being consulted, you know."

"Will you tell him, please? But first find out what train I must take, so you can be definite with him."

"But, Sally--really--shouldn't you ask old Maxy's consent?"

"Why?"

"Well--it's the diplomatic thing to do."

"I don't care one bit about diplomacy. Uncle Timmy's sick and wants me. I'm going up to get ready. You can telephone what you like." With something in her voice which sounded suspiciously like a sob, she ran away up the stairs.

Knitting his brows, Jarvis went into the west wing to the telephone, that instrument having been promptly installed upon the Burnside family's arrival for the summer. After considering a minute he called up a railway ticket-office and learned that the best through train Sally could take would leave at 5.30 that afternoon. His watch told him that it was then nearly half after three. There must be rapid work if Sally was to catch that train. Then he had Max on the wire. Statement, question, and answer now came back and forth in quick succession.

"What, start to-night?" Max's tone was incredulous.

"So she wants to do--with your permission. I suppose you'll give it. By the despatch we judge he's pretty ill."

"Well, but--look here. I must say that's asking a good deal for her to go off up there. Why not wire whoever sent the thing to keep us informed, and if he gets much worse--"

"Won't do, she's already answered she'll go."

"Well, of all the--see here--but we can't really afford--"

"I'll see to that--don't mention it." Jarvis's tone was curt. He was beginning to sympathize with Sally's reluctance to consult her elder brother. He wondered if Max would ever outgrow his habit of objecting to everything first and unwillingly taking it into consideration afterward.

"I'm awfully busy here--can't do a thing to get her off--can't get away from the bank before five."

"Don't try. Meet us at the train. I'll engage a berth for her--mustn't lose more time about it," and Jarvis hang-up his receiver without waiting to hear anything further. Then he had a wrestle with the Pullman ticket-office, in the attempt to secure a full sleeping-car section for Sally.

"Can't do it," came back the answer.

"Too full?"

"No, but we don't give a section to one passenger."

"Not if it's paid for?"

"Not on one ticket."

"On two tickets, then?"

"Why, of course, if you want to pay for two full-fare tickets."

Jarvis considered rapidly. If he secured the section on two tickets, Sally would be forced to show them both, so she couldn't be kept from knowing about it--unless he--yes, he could hunt up the Pullman conductor and give him one ticket. Wait--why not engage a state-room--if he could get it at this late hour?--though the train was a fast and popular one, and he knew this was doubtful. But a moment's reflection negated this idea. Sally would certainly resent his taking the liberty of paying all the difference between one ordinary berth and a luxuriously private state-room. He realized, with a sense of irritation, that it was of no use. He could not send Sally up into New Hampshire packed in jewellers' cotton, marked "Fragile and Valuable," a registered package conveyed by special messenger. But he could make sure that nobody else shared the section either by night or day, and this he did, and double-tied his reservation until he could get to town to see about it personally.

Then he ran over to the Ferry cottage, thinking that Sally might be glad, in the absence of the girls, to have Mrs. Ferry come over and help her with her hurried preparations. But he found the place locked and silent, and understood that the mistress of it had probably gone into town for the day, as she frequently did. So he dashed back and upstairs to Joanna's room, where he routed her from her sewing with the request: "Go see if you can be mother, sister, and friend to Miss Sally, Joanna--there's an angel!" Which intimate form of address may be comprehended if it is added that Joanna had been in the Burnside family since Jarvis himself was a small lad in knickerbockers--and the good woman's especial pride--and that therefore a warm friendship existed between them.

Joanna made all haste to Sally's room, ready to do her best, but she found her charge already clad in travelling dress, pinning a veil about her hat, her gloves and purse laid out, and a bag packed with necessities. The mind of the young mistress of the house was concerned less with her own preparations than with the comfort of those she was to leave behind.

"You'll take good care of them, won't you, Joanna?" begged Sally. "Give them the things they like best--_all the time_. And you'll see that the living-room looks the way I like to have it when they come home, won't you?--the fire blazing, and the couch pillows plumped up. And you know they like a nice lot of shiny red apples brought up to eat before they go to bed!"

"Yes, Miss Sally, I'll remember all the things. Don't you fret yourself. I can't take your place, but I'll see that the young gentlemen have their buttons sewed on, and plenty of good food. But I'm hoping you won't be gone long. Most likely you'll find your uncle better--I hope that, indeed I do, Miss Sally."

"Thank you, Joanna--indeed I do, too. And--Joanna--I'm so glad you're here. I don't think I could go away and leave my brothers with just little Mary Ann to look after them!"

Sally held the big hand tight a minute, looked into the plump, kind face with eyes which were suddenly like drenched violets--then dashed away the tears, smiled at Joanna, caught up her belongings, and ran downstairs, followed by the woman, who felt relieved when she saw Mr. Jarvis waiting in the hall below. It had suddenly seemed to Joanna as if she must go with the girl herself. It must not be supposed that Sally did not possess plenty of the air of capable independence. It was only that--well--the fair, curly hair, the dark-lashed blue eyes, the flower-like bloom of the young face, appealed to her, as they did to Jarvis, as needing protection from the eyes sure to follow her wherever she went. Looking up at her from below it also occurred to Jarvis that the plain and unrelieved dark blue of Sally's whole attire somehow served only to heighten the probable effect of her upon the observant public, and he longed fiercely himself to double the thickness of that veil and tie it tight about her head, requesting her not to untie it till she was safe in Uncle Timothy's presence!

But all he said was: "Ready? You're a quick one--wouldn't have thought any girl could make such time. This all your baggage? Come on--the car's at the door."

Outside he spoke hurriedly: "Sally, you haven't given me a chance to ask you about funds for this trip. One can't always lay one's hand on just the amount--and Max is busy, so--"

But Sally answered with assurance. "It's all right, thank you, Jarvis. I've a little fund of my own. There isn't any need to bother Max. I'm so glad of that. How lucky for me you hadn't gone with the car! I should have been so flurried, trying to catch the trolley with my bag and umbrella."

She took her place and in a minute they were off. And there had been nobody but Joanna on the big porch to wave good-by at Sally Lane!

Then came a fast drive to town, during which neither of them talked much.

"I wish there were time to take you up to the house to see mother and Jo," Jarvis said, as they came into the down-town streets. "But Jo may be at the station. I telephoned the house, but they'd evidently driven somewhere else before going home. I left word, so I'm hoping Jo will get it. She'll be heart-broken if you get off without her seeing you."

But Josephine was not at the station. Alec and Bob were there, however, and they told Sally that Max would come in time to see her off. Personally they were much upset at the outlook.

"I don't see why you have to be the one," protested Alec. "Uncle Timothy must have some ancient sister or cousin or aunt to see to him, without sending for a girl like you."

Jarvis had rushed away to the ticket-office, and Sally had her brothers to herself for the time. She made the most of it.

"But he hasn't, Alec," she explained. "I simply have to go. But I want you boys not to mind my being away. Joanna will take beautiful care of everything, and you must have your friends out, and crack nuts and pop corn and roast apples in the evenings, and be just as jolly as if--"

"Oh, _wow_!" cried Bob. "Sally, what do you take us for? What we'll do will be to moon around the fire and wonder what you're doing. We--"

"No, no! It will be winter soon, and you must go tobogganing--"

"Why, you aren't going to stay away all winter, are you?" Alec grew wrathful. "Look here--I won't stand for anything like that--neither will the rest. You've got to--"

"Listen, dear. I may be back in a--well--in a very short time, if Uncle Timothy gets on. But you know how it was a few years ago when he had pneumonia--he was a long time getting about. He's older now, and--"

"Yes, but we've first right to you. Besides, you'll use yourself all up trying to nurse--"

"No--I'm strong and well, Alec--I won't use myself up. But Uncle Timmy is all we have left--and--oh, please don't talk about it!--I'm so anxious lest I can't do anything for him when I get there." She conquered a constriction in her throat, while they waited, for that last phrase had silenced them. They were all fond of Uncle Timothy--they didn't want to lose him. In a minute Sally went on cheerfully: "If you'll only write to me I can stand anything. Tell me all about everything. Oh, here's Max!"

She turned to meet him. He was looking gravely disapproving, as was to have been expected, but something in the sight of his sister's face made him refrain from reproaching her for not having consulted him, as he had intended to do. Besides, the hands of the clock were pointing too nearly to the time of her departure for him to feel like thrusting upon her the weight of his displeasure.

Jarvis came back, tickets in hand, and gave them to Sally with the little purse she had handed him. Announcing that there was no time to lose he then convoyed the whole party through the door to the trains, using some influence which he possessed with the blue-capped official thereat to obtain the favour. So the passengers already in the crowded sleeper were

treated to the somewhat unusual spectacle of a particularly charming girl being brought aboard her train by a party of four quietly solicitous young men, even the youngest of them, by virtue of his height and broad shoulders, counting as a male "grown-up."

Jarvis went off for a hasty interview with the Pullman conductor then hunted up the porter of Sally's car, the "Lucatia," and gave him certain instructions, accompanied by a transfer of something which brought a broad grin to that person's dusky face, with the assertion, "Suah, sah--I'll make the young lady comfortable--thank you, sah."

He got back to the "Lucatia" only in time to hear the call of "all aboard," from outside, to see the blue veil surrounded by three leave-taking brothers bestowing hurried but hearty testimonials of their affection and bidding her "Take care of yourself," "Write often," and "Don't kill yourself working," and to push past them as they made for the door, to say his own good-by. It was easy for the interested fellow-travellers to see that this young man evidently was not a brother, for his farewell consisted only of a somewhat prolonged grip of the hand, his hat off, his eyes searching the blue ones lifted to his with the expression of one who cannot quite trust her lips to speak. Then, without a word on either side, Jarvis had dropped Sally's hand and was rushing to the door, for the train was under way.

Remembering suddenly that this happened to be the last car on the train when she came in, Sally hurried through it to the rear. There they were, lined up in a solid row, and as she appeared, their hats came off and were waved in the air. Beneath the bright electric lights of the station she could see their cheerful smiles, and she smiled back, waving her handkerchief as long as she could see them. From their point of view the picture was quite as absorbing as from hers, for her slender figure holding to the brass rail of the platform against the background of the car looked both girlish and solitary, and as they watched it recede into the distance they were all of them hoping that it would not be long before they could welcome her back into that same great dingy station.

"If you have any pity on us, Jarve, come back to the house, and don't go home to stay in town till she comes. We shall be bluer than tombstones."

This was Max's double tribute to the homemaking qualities of his sister and to the partnership qualities of his friend, and Jarvis responded readily, for, truth told, it was the very thing he wanted to do most. It seemed to him that while he should not miss Sally less in the house whose every corner would be eloquent of her absence, there would be a certain consolation in being there. He had a queer feeling that she had not gone for a speedy return, and that more than one moon would change before they should see her again. Meanwhile, it occurred to him that she would like to have him there for her brothers' sake, since they wanted him.

Alec and Bob eagerly echoed Max's plea.

"Bachelors' hall? Well, I don't know that I mind, since my stuff hasn't gone back yet. Mother and Jo have company asked for next week, and will expect me to help entertain, but I can be out at Strawberry Acres more or less. Come up to the house in the car with me, while I explain; then we'll drive out. Al and Bob can ride on the running boards, if they like."

They jumped on, feeling that to stay together was to mind things less.

It was odd how low of spirit they all were already. Surely, one would think that four strapping fellows might contemplate getting on for a space without one slim young person who was accustomed not only to humour them, but to make three of them toe certain well-defined marks in the matter of clean linen, fresh cravats, and carefully parted hair. Yet not one of them was really willing to go home till the others should be coming along too.

In front of the fireplace, later, when Joanna had given them so good a dinner that it would seem as if their content could hardly be preyed upon by any contemplation of the future, Bob suddenly voiced the general sentiment. He was lying on his side upon the hearth-rug, his round face fiery from his proximity to the blaze.

"Why does it feel so different when you know people are miles away and getting farther every minute than when you know they've just gone to town for a party?" he queried, thoughtfully. "They're away just the same--they aren't here, I mean. Why isn't being away the same thing as _being away_?"

At any other time this somewhat involved statement of conditions would have provoked jeers from the company. But no jeers were forthcoming. Max grunted, lying flat on his back on the couch--whose pillows Joanna had carefully plumped up--his heels on the arm at the end. Alec, standing at the window with his hands in his pockets, staring out into the frosty night, turned about and remarked that on a train averaging sixty to seventy miles an hour Sally must already be out of the state.

"Wonder if she's asleep," speculated Bob. "She used to like sleeping on sleepers, when father and mother used to take us around so much. Say, she had a whole section to herself--at least till we left, and nobody was coming aboard then. Hope she has the luck to keep it. Funny! The car was crowded, and so was the next one. I looked in."

"Plenty of people may get on before midnight." reflected Alec.

Jarvis picked up a magazine. "Suppose I read aloud this article on railroading," he proposed. The company consented and he began. He had not read two pages before he ran, so to speak, into a series of frightful railway wrecks. But, wishing he had chosen something else, he kept on till suddenly Bob interrupted with a fierce: "Cut it! I've got her knocked into five thousand pieces now--I'll dream of those confounded smash-ups and Sally in the midst of 'em, if you don't drop that magazine."

The others murmured a somewhat sheepish assent, and Jarvis turned willingly enough to a tale of adventure at sea. A snore from the couch interrupted him in the middle of a most thrilling crisis, and only the appearance of Joanna with a big dish of shiny apples prevented Bob from following suit.

"Jove, Joanna, you're a good one. How did you come to think of it?" asked Alec, selecting a beauty and setting his teeth into it with a sense of refreshment.

"Miss Sally said I was not to forget anything she usually did, Mr. Alec," replied Joanna.

"If you remember everything she usually does you'll be a brick, Joanna,"

cried Bob, rousing to his opportunity and getting up on his knees to accept his apple.

"There's one thing she does, that nobody can possibly do for her," thought Jarvis as, consuming the crisp, cool specimen Joanna had bestowed upon him with a motherly smile for the boy she had known so long, he paced up and down the room, passing the piano at the end with a vivid recollection of how Sally was accustomed to play what she called "little tunes" upon it in the firelight.

"And that's to fill one small corner of her place in the home she has made here."

CHAPTER XVII

THE SOUTHBOUND LIMITED

Sally's first letter home was a short one, stating merely that Uncle Timothy was very ill, very glad to see her, and that she was extremely thankful she had come. The second letter, two days later, showed strong anxiety. The illness was pneumonia, although not in its severest form; but Mr. Rudd's age was an important factor in the case. For a week bulletins were brief, then came a long letter, telling of improvement.

"The minute he is well out of danger she ought to come home," was Max's opinion.

"She won't, though," Alec predicted. "She'll stay till she can bring him with her."

"Not if she listens to me," and Max set about writing a reply which would indicate to his sister in no uncertain terms the course he thought she should pursue.

Her answer was prompt. "I want to come home just as much as you want to have me, Max dear, but it is so much to Uncle Timmy to have me with him I can't think of leaving."

Max frowned over this. "She seems to consult me precious little about anything lately," he observed to Jarvis.

"You must admit she's grown up and can think for herself. Besides, much as I'd like to see her back, I think she's right," was Jarvis's opinion.

"Of course you'd side with her against me every time. But I think her brothers are a trifle nearer to her than her uncle."

"She'd undoubtedly think so too, if you were in bed with pneumonia. Since you're all in vigorous health she imagines you can get on without her. But she's not having a very jolly time of it, I should judge. Cheer her up with a lively letter, not a peevish one," was Jarvis's advice.

"You can do that."

"I'm not writing."

"Not?" Max was surprised. "You and Sally haven't quarrelled, have you?"

"Not at all. But I've no reason to think she would care to hear from me. You fellows are undoubtedly telling her all the news."

Jarvis flung a fresh log on the fire as he spoke, then took his place on the hearth-rug with his back to the blaze and his face in the shadow. Max stared at him interestedly, and was about to begin a discussion of the subject when his companion abruptly opened up a new line of conversation, in relation to plans for the farm, and the moment for asking certain questions did not occur again.

The days went by, brief letters from Sally arriving at frequent intervals. They reported very slow improvement in the invalid, with a return of strength so tardy that she still felt she should not leave him. The home in which they were was not that of relatives, and she was unwilling to leave the responsibility of Mr. Rudd's care to those who had expected to have him with them only for a brief visit. A month passed, and then, just as her brothers were making up their minds that the limit had certainly been reached and her duty done, came a letter which gave a blow to their hopes. It read:

"DEAREST FAMILY:

"Doctor Wood has ordered Uncle Timmy South. The doctor says he positively must get out of this wretched climate, and he must not think of coming back before spring--and spring well advanced. If you could see what a shadow of himself the poor dear is you would understand that I simply must do what I have agreed to do--go with him. He will pay all my expenses. I think he must have quite a bit more property than we have known of, the matter of finances seems to trouble him so little. Of course I know how you will feel about this--and I want you to believe that I feel a thousand times sorrier than you possibly can. But I know there is nothing else to do. He can't possibly go alone, and I can't see mother's only brother have to hire some stranger to be with him when he has a niece who loves him dearly and owes him for a deal of love he has always lavished on her. It isn't as if you needed me in ways that Joanna couldn't supply--for actual food and drink, I mean. Of course I hope--I know--you all miss your little sister. I'm afraid I should feel very badly if I thought you didn't!

"We plan to start Thursday evening, December third. We can't make quite as good connections as I did in coming, so, according to Doctor Wood's figuring with the time-tables, we shall go through the home city at one o'clock on Saturday morning. We shall be in the station twenty minutes, being switched around, and--well, I don't like to ask anybody to stay up till that hour, but--I shall be up, and looking out--and--and--I'm almost afraid that if I didn't see anybody, I should shed just a tear or two! You see I haven't really cried once yet--and I don't want to break my record.

"Your Sally."

It really is not necessary to report what was said in Sally's home upon the receipt of this announcement. There was a good deal of excited talking done, and a number of statements were made to the effect that it was out of the question for Sally to be spared all winter, that she should have waited for the consent of her family before deciding on such

an absence, and that it absolutely must not be allowed. Yet, after all, when it came to forbidding it, nobody seemed to have quite the authority to do that. Even Max, protesting that the thing was out of all reason, and going so far as to take his pen in hand to write his refusal to permit it, found himself brought to a halt by the remembrance that Sally was showing more and more evidences of possessing a will of her own, and of being perfectly competent to carry out its dictates when they seemed to her right. Clearly she did not want to go South with Uncle Timothy--or with anybody else. There was a homesick touch in more than one line of the stoutly written letter--unquestionably Sally would not be doing this thing if she were not persuaded of her duty.

At one o'clock in the morning of Saturday a party of people stood in the great electric-lighted station. Again the offices of Mr. Jarvis Burnside had taken the group past the usual hindrances and established them on a certain platform, nearly in the centre of the rows of tracks, where the Southbound Limited would come in. This time their numbers were considerably augmented by the presence of Mrs. Burnside and Josephine, Donald and Janet Ferry. Various packages encumbered the arms of each member of the party, and appearances certainly boded well for the reception of the young traveller who at the moment was watching eagerly, as the train rolled through the familiar streets, for the first sign of approach to the station.

"Here she comes!" Bob was the first to cry, pointing to a brilliant headlight just rounding into view on the distant track. "Jolly, I'll bet Sally's wide awake, if she ever was in her life!"

"I expect we're going to find out now how dreadfully short twenty minutes can be," said Janet Ferry to Jarvis, beside whom she stood, an attractively put-up basket of hot-house grapes in her hand.

He nodded, watching the great headlight grow all too slowly bigger and bigger. "Even the twenty minutes will probably be cut short. The train's considerably overdue now."

The long line of sleepers came to a stand-still beside them, and they scanned the cars anxiously for the first sign of Sally. Far down the track could be seen a coloured porter waving in their direction, and the next instant a girl in dark blue jumped off the step of the Pullman and ran toward them. They ran to meet her, Bob and Alec outstripping the rest, and when the others arrived all that could be seen of Sally Lane was the top of a bright head on Bob's shoulder, both blue arms about his neck, his affectionate hand patting her back.

Then they had her in their midst, and everybody was trying to greet her at once. Josephine's arm was about her, and Sally was regarding the group with a radiant smile, crying girlishly; "Oh, how good you people do look! How dear of you all to come down! If I only could stay just a little longer! We don't stop but ten minutes, instead of twenty, the train is so late. Uncle Tim doesn't know you are here--I was afraid he would be too excited to sleep the rest of the night, and he's only just dropped off. Oh, how are you all? You look perfectly fine--I don't believe you've pined away a bit, missing me! Let me look at you."

She studied each in turn, missing nobody. Her clear gaze, the blue eyes black beneath the shadowing thick lashes, met each answering pair of eyes with a steady scrutiny which did not once waver.

"That was a review one would be sorry not to be able to stand," said Ferry to Josephine, as Sally ended by thrusting her arm through Max's and leading him off by himself. "Miss Sally put us all to the test in that minute, didn't she? She gives the impression of demanding the best one has--rather an unusual characteristic in a girl of her age."

"She does demand the best--and gets it," answered Josephine warmly.

Ten feet away Sally was speaking hurriedly: "The thing I wanted most to see you for, Maxy, was to make sure you weren't really angry with me for taking my own way about this."

Her hand pressed his arm. She was looking up into his face. He returned the gaze. "I was angry, Sis," he admitted. "But, somehow, now that I see you, I can't seem to get up steam to tell you so. I suppose you're right--but the place is mighty lonesome without you. If it wasn't for the Ferrys--"

"Are they over much?"

"We get them over as often as we can. I say, I've been noticing that Jarve and Janet seem to hit it off pretty well."

"Do they? That's very nice. You like Janet yourself, don't you?"

"She's the belle of the ball, now you're away, and a mighty jolly girl to have around. If you don't look out your old friend J.B. will slip away from you."

Sally's head went up, her cheeks bloomed a deeper colour. "If I weren't going to leave you in a minute I should punish you for that piece of brotherly impertinence," said she, with spirit. "Have I ever laid hands on anybody to keep him, for you to talk of 'slipping away'?"

"No--you're not that sort," conceded Max, with a laugh which certainly carried a hint of brotherly admiration.

Sally walked straight over to Janet, at whose other side stood Jarvis. "Janet," said she, "Max says you are the life of them all. I'm so glad--and it's so kind of your mother and brother to bring you over to make the evenings pleasant. You'll keep on being good to them all winter, won't you?"

"Sally"--Janet caught hold of both her hands--"let me give you an illustration of how nobly and completely I fill your place. The last time we were over I played for them--played my best, too. I ended with my most brilliant performance of Liszt. Two minutes afterward, when I had gone back to the fire, I heard somebody very softly doing a one-finger melody, picking it out note by note. I listened, and presently made out one of your favourite 'little tunes'--'A Red, Red Rose.' I looked around the group to see who was missing. It was not Bob. It was not Max. It was not Alec. It was not Don. It was not--"

"Anybody. It was--a ghost," supplied Jarvis. He was looking intently at Sally, but she was smiling back at Janet, and the colour in her face was not less than it had been a moment before.

"My ghost, probably," she said lightly. "I'm sure if it were with you all by that fire as often as I think about you, it would be playing

little tunes for itself, most of the time. Now I must spend my next minute with Alec," and she was away again.

The minutes certainly were flying.

Janet looked after her. "There's something perfectly irresistible about her, isn't there?" she suggested to her companion. He did not answer and she glanced at him. He had pulled out a card-case from his pocket and was writing something on one of the cards. He slipped the card into the big, green paper-box he held.

"Suppose I take all our packages to the porter and have him put them in her berth while she is off with Alec. Then she'll not have to bother with them, getting on," he proposed. Janet assented, and in a minute Jarvis, laden with packages, approached the porter. Retaining half his burden he followed the porter into the car. He did not immediately return therefrom, and when, three minutes afterward, the signal came for the departure of the train, he was not in the group of whom she took leave.

"Has Jarvis gone? Say good-by for me to him, please, Jo," she whispered as she embraced her friend. Waving the others back Max escorted her into her car. In the passage they met Jarvis. Over her head the two young men looked at each other.

"Good-by, sister," said Max, and kissed her, "I see Jarve wants me to cut it short." With which tactful brotherly explanation he abruptly retraced his steps to the vestibule, where he waited.

In the half-lit narrow passage Jarvis made the most of his minute of grace, although Sally's hand was already extended, and a friendly good-by, with a frank smile, was on her lips.

"Are you in such a hurry to be rid of me?" said he, taking the hand. "You make me feel somehow as if you didn't care even for the old friendship. Is that so, Sally?"

"Not at all. I care very much. It seems so good to see you all."

"To see 'us all' doesn't flatter me much." He smiled a little. "Sally, may I write to you?"

"Do. Tell me all about everybody."

"Will you answer?"

"Now and then."

"You are--" He stopped, with a half impatient movement of his broad shoulders.

"I'm Sally Lane." She said this very distinctly, even though both were speaking under their breath. Then she laughed, with a delicate touch of defiance.

"You certainly are," he agreed. "No doubt in the world of that. But I want you to know I'm Jarvis Burnside, and that stands for something too--something positive--and permanent. My letters will be signed by that name."

"Mine--if I write any--now and then--will be signed by mine--The train is moving. Good-by--old friend!"

She was a slim maid to oppose so colossal a resistance as she did to anything in the least suggestive to sentiment in the leave-taking. Oppose it, however, did the small hand which drew itself away with decision, the pretty lips which smiled again that coolly friendly smile, the blue-black eyes which were steady as ever in their straight look. Max, peering in upon the two to tell Jarvis to come along, saw his sister break down in her self-command, but only at sight of himself. As Jarvis turned away she ran after him to reach beyond him and clutch her brother's arm for one quick pressure, with the low cry, "Oh, Max--_please--please_--write to me often!"

As Max jumped off, Jarvis turned again. Sally was upon the platform. "That almost makes me wish I were a brother," said he rapidly, from the bottom step, looking straight up at her. He prepared to drop off. "_But not quite_" he added--and swung himself off and out of sight.

Back in her berth, the little electric side-light on, Sally opened her bundles. Their contents made her feel like laughing and crying both together, all by herself, there on the fast train flying southward through the night. Janet's superb grapes, Mrs. Ferry's preserved Canton ginger, Donald Ferry's little book of verse, with the ribbon mark opening it at "My Garden," all pleased her greatly, each in its way. Then there was a fascinating little traveller's work-box from Josephine, a letter writing-case from Mrs. Burnside, an ink-pencil from Max, a package of current magazines from Alec, a box of chocolates from Bob. The cards and merry messages accompanying these remembrances made pleasant reading, and Sally put them all together in her handbag, that she might look them over many times.

Jarvis's box she did not open till the last. Why, might be a subject for speculation. Does one leave the most interesting letter or package till the last--or does one eagerly open it first? When everything else had been disposed of Sally's fingers untied the cord slowly, she lifted the cover with apparent reluctance, she drew aside the sheltering sheets of green tissue as if she feared to disclose that which they protected. But then, when the bright light at her side shone in upon fresh tints of pink and white and lilac, she drew one deep breath and buried her face in the mass.

"Sweet peas!" she murmured, and shut her eyes and thought of her garden, lying forsaken and desolate in the December frost.

Then she picked up the card. On its back she read, in vigorous pencilling:

"A ghost from the garden, sent by the ghost who tried to pick out the 'little tune.' There seem no other tunes in the world worth listening to."

The next morning Mr. Timothy Rudd had many questions to ask his niece. He sat comfortably among pillows and rugs, his breakfast brought in from the dining-car and served in his section by a waiter who was ready to show him every attention, to oblige the young lady whose smile he liked to win.

"You say they were all down, Sally? This breakfast looks very nice, my

dear--I wish I could eat more of it." He laid down a half slice of toast and brushed his thin fingers.

"Uncle Timmy, are you sure you can't manage just a little more? Two spoonfuls of boiled egg, half a slice of toast, and a cup of coffee--that's no breakfast at all. If I tell you all about it, won't you eat just half the egg?"

"I'll try, child, but--really--the old fellow who is wearing my clothes--and not half big enough for them--doesn't seem to be able to summon much of an appetite."

"If you don't eat a good breakfast I shall feel more than ever guilty for not telling you they were coming--though of course I didn't dream of their all coming. But if you had seen them you wouldn't have slept a bit."

"No, like enough I shouldn't. I'll be satisfied if you tell me how they all looked. The boys--Max?"

"Very well, indeed--he's a trifle heavier than when I went away. Joanna's cooking is beginning to tell. I think she pampers them, don't you?--I'm so grateful to her for that."

"Alec?"

"Just as usual. He was wearing a new overcoat, and looked a glass of fashion! He says as long as Mr. Ferry lives in the country in the winter he's willing to stand it there. Isn't it lucky they're staying at least one more year? By another winter the demands on Mr. Ferry in town may be so heavy he can't take time to go back and forth."

"Yes, I should say it was a very good thing for Alec to be as much under the influence of such a man as could be brought about, until he is where he can do his own thinking along the right lines. How is my nephew Robert?"

"Oh, Bob's cheeks are so round and red they look like a very large infant's. Dear Bobby--think he misses us most. He ran in and peeped into your berth while the train stood there. I think he rather hoped to wake you."

"Bless the lad--I wish he had." Mr. Rudd took another spoonful of egg under the stimulus of the wish, forgetting that he had not meant to take up that spoon again.

"Mrs. Burnside and Jo looked their own dear selves--every line of them. It struck me afresh, as it always does when I see them after an interval, how beautifully yet quietly dressed they are, and how their photographs might be taken at any minute with delightful results. 'Portrait of a Lady and her Daughter' it would be." And Sally sighed a little sigh of a quite feminine sort, looking down at her own blue travelling attire and wondering how the same material would have looked if made up by Mrs. Burnside's tailor.

"And Jarvis--how is he? I am very fond of Jarvis. I suppose he has lost some of the summer's tan?"

"If he has it's been put back again by the frosty winds, for he's the

image of health. Mr. Ferry and Janet are very much themselves, too. And they all sent you something." Sally reached under the berth and drew out a big florists' box, signalled the waiter to remove the remains of the breakfast, and then spread forth the cards which accompanied the great bunch of crimson roses, enjoying Mr. Rudd's almost boyish pleasure in the remembrance of his friends.

"These must be for you too, Sally," said he, burying his nose in one fine half-open bud.

"Not a bit of it."

"No flowers for you, child?"

"Fruit and chocolates and writing-tablets and other delightful things. You must have some of the grapes, Uncle Timmy--I ought to have thought of them for your breakfast."

"These roses are as good as a square meal--but they should have been for you, not for an old fossil like me."

"Don't you dare call yourself an old fossil, Uncle Timmy. Now look at all these pretty gifts," and Sally brought them forth, exhibiting them well concealed from the other passengers. Uncle Timothy looked and exclaimed and admired, and did not note that one person seemed to be unrepresented by any remembrance. Neither did he guess that tucked far away under Sally's berth was a box containing a mass of sweet peas which had that morning been carefully sprinkled, but which were destined never to be seen again by mortal eye except her own.

CHAPTER XVIII

FROM APRIL NORTH

During a winter which seemed, in spite of all the beauties of the far South, the longest she had ever known, Sally was kept well in touch with affairs at home by the letters. If it had not been for these she thought she could hardly have waited for the spring to come. Mr. Rudd had gained slowly but positively throughout the winter, yet it was not thought best for him to come home until the spring should be well advanced. The first of May was the date set, and proved a judicious choice, for April was a cold and rainy month. There was just one odd fact about this month of April--during its course Sally received at least one letter from every member of her own family and from each one of those other two families most closely connected with her history. In an idle hour one day, just before she went home, she carefully selected one letter from each of these correspondents, in the order received, and tied them in a bunch, labelling them "April North to April South." Whatever may have happened to other letters, this packet remained in her possession for many years.

The first of them arrived on April fourth, and was in the round, school-boy hand of young Robert Lane.

"DEAR SALLY:

"This is April Fool's Day, and I've had a great old time fooling everybody. Sewed down the knives and forks to the breakfast-table, tied the chairs to the legs, salted the coffee, and did quite a few little every-day stunts like that. Max got maddest when he ran onto a big lump of cayenne in his oatmeal, but Joanna gave him another dish right away and another cup of coffee. She's awfully soft over old Max. The best lining I did was the way I fooled Jarve on a letter from you. I knew he had had one from you sometime in March, so I looked in his coat-pocket while he was up in the timber lot with a sweater on. I found it--pretty much used up with being carried around--suppose he forgot to take it out. Got a fresh thin envelope, put the old one inside, traced the address through, pasted on a postmark from your last one to me, and put three heavy sheets inside to make it fat--a lot fatter than the one I got out of his pocket. Stuck on old stamps--two of 'em--overweight, you know.

"When he came in to luncheon he found the letter with his other mail. I had my eye on him--I was pretending to read the morning paper. He read all his other letters, but he put that one in his pocket. He got terribly jolly after that--cracking jokes and everything. The minute luncheon was over he went off to his room, and I cut for out-of-doors. Didn't let him get a sight of me for hours. When I did come in I thought maybe he'd have got over being fussed, but--pitchforks and hammer handles!--if the minute I hove in sight he didn't get after me! He must have put on a lot of muscle chopping wood and hoeing, for I thought a cyclone had struck me. I'm resting up now, but I feel pretty sore yet--in spots. That's why I'm writing to you. I think you'd better write him once in a while, so that getting what he thinks is a letter won't go to his head like that.

"It'll be the first of May in one month more, and you'll be home! Jolly!--that seems good to think of.

"Heaps of love from BOB."

On the following day came a letter from Janet Ferry. It was a letter of several sheets, and the last two pages ran thus:

"The boys think you ought not to know about it, and intend it for a surprise, but I am so sure that it will do you even more good to hear while you are waiting to come home, I'm going to tell you. Alec and Bob have been rolling the lawn with a roller they were at great pains to get from the Burnside place in the city! You should have seen them at it, encouraging each other to do the thing thoroughly. Afterward they scattered wood ashes in all the thin places; Bob said they had been saving them all winter from the fireplace. I didn't know Alec could be so interested in out-door labour, but this winter seems to have given him an impetus toward following Mr. Burnside's example--and Don's--for I think Don has had a hand in waking him up.

"Speaking of Don--I found him out in your garden yesterday, pruning your old rose-bushes--the ones that you inherited with the garden. He says you are particularly fond of the many-leaved pink ones that smell so much sweeter than any hot-house rose that ever grew.

"Mr. Burnside has been busy all through March, and already has garden peas in. It seems absurdly early, but he prophesies that there'll be no more frosts that they can't stand, and promises us peas on the table three weeks earlier than our neighbours. He is nothing if not daring. He reads and reads in those books and magazines and papers of his, and then starts out, armed for action. He and Jake spend much time arguing over

details, but I believe he usually carries his point.

"Don says that while he was finishing his work in your garden your brother Max came home and strolled out to see what he was doing. Don mentioned the fact that it would soon be time for the whole garden to be dug and raked and put in spring order, and Mr. Lane answered that he would see that it was done--in fact he thought he should do it himself. I don't exactly understand why this should seem to give Don so much satisfaction, but it does. He told me to be sure to tell you."

Clearly it gave Sally satisfaction also, for she read this particular paragraph a second time, smiling to herself, before she put the letter aside.

On the seventh of April came a screed from Alec of quite surprising length--for Alec, and it interested his sister more than any letter she had had from him during the winter.

"DEAR SALLY LUNN:

"Haven't time to write much. Have hired out J.B. as a farm hand, and he keeps a fellow some busy. For two weeks, now, we've been clearing up the old wood in the timber lot and getting out new stuff for fence posts, etc. Evenings he gets me at books. Am reading up on soil now, surprised to find it quite interesting. J.B. and I talk plans a lot more than Max does, though I think the old boy is going to get into it in time all right. Maybe you'd like to know what our plans are. Well, here goes:

"Cut off the suckers in the orchard, plough, and later spray--before the leaves come. That means hustle--but we're nearly through with the pruning. Bob and Mr. Ferry are at that.

"Then we'll plough five acres of what we let go to hay last year, and plant it to corn, with half an acre of potatoes. The other five acres we'll let grow to hay. Next year we'll have alfalfa where we have corn this year. J.B. is daft on alfalfa, and I'm beginning to see why. The five acres of hay, with the corn, will be enough for the two cows, and we'll keep the pasture over beyond the orchard for them. Miss Janet says as long as she lives there she wants to see those cows--or other ones--come down the lane by the orchard at milking time--only she wishes there were more of them and a collie to drive them. Think I'll have to get a collie, to satisfy her, though Cowslip and Whitenose are at the bars regular as a clock, all by themselves.

"The seven acres where we had the buckwheat and afterward the potatoes last year are to be set with strawberries this May. I tell you, here's where the real serious business comes in. J.B. hasn't done a thing this winter but study the soil in that seven acres and figure out what kind of berries to plant. He's given a lot of thought to what sort of fertilizers to use, and I tell you if there's any such thing as improving soil, the soil in that strawberry land is going to be improved. Tons of stuff are going into it and it's going to be well mixed in, too. Then if cultivating and irrigating and all the rest of it can bring us big fruit, we'll get it. J.B.'s idea is the more we put in the more we'll get out, and the better quality. Of course it's lucky for us we have him to pay out the money for getting things going, but I believe Strawberry Acres will support itself some day and bring us in good returns.

"Anyhow, I must say I'm beginning to like the whole thing, though it's

hard work and plenty of it. Never was so hungry in my life. Joanna sets it up to us in good shape, but we'll be glad to see you back. House seems sort of empty, in spite of four fellows tumbling over each other in it.

"With love, your brother, ALEC.

"P. S. The old asparagus bed is trying so hard to show signs of life we've given it a good salting. The Ferrys' crocuses are up, grass all full of them--look mighty pretty."

This was certainly very satisfactory, when one considered that Alec had been in the beginning only second to Max in scoffing at the idea of living on a farm, not to mention working on one. More than any of the boys Alec had preferred life in the city, had been the one who cared most about his personal appearance, and had prided himself upon doing things in the urban way. For him to be willing to put on old clothes and rough boots, and soil his hands with manual labour, indicated a change of thought and ideals hardly to have been expected so soon. Sally put away the letter, rejoicing at these indications of growth, for growth it surely was, in his case. His work in the office where he had been employed had been work likely to lead no further, nor to promise any promotion to a position of greater honour. But on Strawberry Acres it seemed to Sally that, with Jarvis Burnside for a leader, Alec might develop qualities as yet only to be guessed at.

The most interesting part of Josephine's long letter, which reached Sally on the ninth, was, as is usually the case in feminine letters, toward its close. After every other subject had been touched upon, Sally's correspondent remarked:

"You may care to know that I have been much surprised of late to receive two calls, here at home, from Mr. Ferry. One was in March, but I didn't mention it, for I thought probably it was the first, last, and only one he would ever make, and I wouldn't crow about it. It was on one of mother's Thursdays, and of course a lot of other people were here. I was busy with the tea things, so couldn't give him much attention. He was very nice, and everybody seemed much interested to see him here. When he went away he came over and said to me that he should like to come again when we were not "At Home," only at home! Of course I said he might, and mother asked him specially, too. So just yesterday evening--it was Tuesday--he came again. Mother was out until just before he went. We had a delightful time in the library over a box of new books Jarvis had just had sent up--not farm books, this time. Mr. Ferry found something which specially pleased him, and read several pages to me--sitting on the edge of the library table--I mean that he was sitting on the edge of it--not!! I was most properly disposed in a chair--and congratulating myself that I had on a little new home frock of dull green with bands of blue and gold embroidery that had just come home--the most becoming thing Celeste has ever made me. I think he had a good time--anyhow, he stayed much longer than he need have done if he didn't--I meant that if he wasn't having a good time!--I don't seem to be able to write lucidly. We talked much of you, and of how good it would seem to have you back, and of the garden, and the coming summer. He wanted to know if mother and I were coming out to spend the season again, and I said yes. He asked if I didn't think we ought to be there by the latter part of April, so as to welcome you when you come the first of May. It seemed rather a good idea to me--what do you think of it? Mother has set the fifteenth, but I really do want to see the first spring things coming up. Jarvis brought home a great bunch of daffodils yesterday. I wanted to send them on to

you, but he thought they wouldn't last out the journey."

The thought of the daffodils made Sally long intensely for her garden. There was a long row of them at the farther end, and another clump at the edge of the lawn, with stray ones here and there through the grass which she had not been willing to have removed. She thought about them many times until the arrival of the next letter, on the eleventh, which was from Joanna, and which turned her thoughts into housewifely channels.

"Dear Miss," it began, in a cramped hand upon a large sheet of ruled paper. "I suppose you would like to know what has been done about the house cleaning. You wrote me to wate till you come, but I never like to wate later than March, and so I did what was nesessary myself, peice by peice, as I could find time. Mr. Max and Mr. Alec and Mr. Bob seemed to think the house didn't need cleaning, but Mr. Jarvis being used to my ways and his mothers said you would want it right. He spared me Jake Kelly to clean the rugs and peices of carpet, and I did the rest. I think there is no dirt in the house now. Fireplaces makes lots of dust but I should say the way they are enjoyed makes up for it. I have tryed to do as you wanted about the pillows and apples and good food and I don't think the young gentlemen are any liter in wate than when you went away.

"Hoping you will come home soon,

"Respectfully yours,

"JOANNA MARSHFIELD."

Nobody but a housekeeper, and a young one at that, could appreciate what a load of anxiety this letter lifted from Sally's mind. She wanted to have the house immaculately clean, but--the garden was waiting for her. Now she could give her undivided thought to plans for the box-bordered beds, blessing Joanna for a maid-servant of priceless value.

Mrs. Ferry's letter, arriving on the thirteenth, made Sally smile with the lilt of its lines:

"Come, Sally dear, the spring is here, the air is mild and warm; showers happen by, but cause no sigh, they're needed on the farm. The garden waits, and stirs, and shakes the sleep from out its eyes, and gently sets the violets to blooming in surprise. The grass grows green, a lark is seen, a robin calls "It's Spring!" And everywhere, in earth and air, rejoices everything. We want you near, we need you here to share each day's delights; so hasten home, come soon, dear, come, _we miss you so o' nights_!"

"Sweet little lady," the girl, thought affectionately, "to take the trouble to think it out in rhyme for me."

On the sixteenth of the month a rather interesting coincidence occurred; letters from Donald Ferry and from Jarvis Burnside arrived on that day. Sally studied the superscriptions with interest, wondering what the handwriting might have indicated to her of the character of the writers, had she known nothing of either. Opening the envelopes, she laid the sheets side by side.

Jarvis wrote a rather small but very black and regular hand, the result being serried rows marching like a regiment down the page, the hand of the man who is accustomed to do everything in an orderly and masterful

way, and who can no more allow his words to straggle over a sheet of paper than he can permit his books to stand upside down upon the shelf, or the affairs of his every-day life to fall into confusion. Ferry wrote a more dashing hand, the penmanship of the man whose ideas flow faster than his pen can put the words upon paper, and who cares less about the appearance of his page than for what can be fixed there before it shall escape him. This letter, therefore, appeared less easy to read than the other, and this may have been why Sally attacked it first:

"Dear Lady Of The Garden (it began whimsically):

"I am sure that no one has told you--and that no one will tell you unless I do--that the chickweed is looking exceedingly fresh and spring-like between the box-borders. Further--a patch of small white violets is to be discovered in the sunny spots beyond the sweet pea trellis. I have a bunch of them pinned on my coat at this moment, purloined by my own hand, and smelling like spring itself. The daffodils are gorgeous, and a small blue flower which gives forth a modest and unobtrusive odour all its own is to be found in clumps in several places.

"Alec tells me he has written you all about the progress of the early spring work, but you may possibly be still more interested in the human culture going on upon Strawberry Acres, in which he is bearing an important part. To-day he and Burnside, protected by blue jeans and looking highly disreputable, have been spraying the apple orchard. A disagreeable job it looks to be, from the standpoint of cleanliness, although a necessary one. But whenever I appeared, as an interested spectator on the scene, Alec was toiling away with the greatest good humour, which did not fail him when the apparatus suddenly stopped working properly, and had to be nursed and tended through at least the final third of the operation.

"I believe your brother Max is beginning to long to leave the bank and to begin his life upon the farm. In spite of his somewhat satirical comments upon the probable folly of Alec's having taken this step, I am confident he himself would like to try it. Another spring will see him burning his bridges, or I am no prophet.

"No one, Miss Sally, could be thrown, as your brothers are with such a fellow as Jarvis Burnside, without being stimulated to action. He is the most thoroughly alive recent college graduate I know of in any line of work. It's a refreshing sight to me, to see a man with all the instincts for a literary life, but handicapped by the necessity for taking care of his eyesight, throw himself with such ardour into labour which would have seemed the very last he would have been likely to care for. On my word, I don't know when I admire him most--when, in his careful dress he sits down to his books and journals in the evening, getting Alec to read aloud to him when he has reached the limit of safety for his own eyes, talking to the lad in a way to wake the boy up--as he is most certainly doing--or when I see him at such a job as he tackled to-day, putting into it the care and precision of your true scientist and experimenter with intent to get the full result of the best directed effort possible. Wherever you put him, he's a man worth knowing--and I'm glad I know him and have him for a friend."

"I like to hear one man praise another like that," commented Sally to herself, as having finished the letter, which recounted briefly what Mrs. Ferry and Janet were doing and conveyed messages from both, she turned back to re-read the whole. Then she took up Jarvis's letter, wondering if

he might chance to refer to Donald Ferry in as high terms as those in which he had himself been mentioned.

Jarvis had a crisp, clear style of composition all his own. The letter was not a long one, but it brought the writer vividly before his reader:

"DEAR SALLY:

"One of the apple-wood fires you like so well is blazing on the hearth. Across the table, in the lamplight, sits Alec absorbed in a column of experiences in strawberry culture contributed by experts from all parts of the country. You may not readily believe me, but in a quite upright position on the end of the couch, where the firelight illumines the page, Max is deep in a concise and practical treatise on the same subject. Bob stands on the hearth rug, drying out, after a run home from the Ferry cottage through a brisk shower. So you have us. Is it a satisfactory picture?

"According to Alec you have been told all our plans for the season, and Ferry said to-day that he meant soon to write you precisely what is happening in your garden. If he does you will have a masterpiece of a description, for he's a writer of distinction. He's everything else that's worth while as well, by the way--the finest ever. I never liked a man so well with so good reason. Other men say the same sort of thing of him, but I fancy I am getting to know and appreciate him better than most.

"Before I forget it--Joanna wishes me to state that she has spoken for a kitchen garden which shall contain parsley, summer-savoury, lettuces, radishes, and mint. With Bob's help she has even concocted a small hot-bed in which she will begin operations at once. These subjects having been disposed of, you may forgive me for becoming slightly personal.

"Do you know that you haven't answered my last letter? I had one sheet from you in January, one in early March, and a post-card a week ago. The post-card was very attractive, but it hardly took the place of a letter. Was it intended to do so?

"But you are coming home soon, and you must expect to answer these questions for me then. I assure you there are long arrears for you to make up with us all, in one way and another. Bob is counting the days till your return. Max has reached the limit of his patience. Alec declares this thing must never happen again. Joanna--but it would be a breach of confidence to reveal Joanna's feelings. "There's na luck about the hoose," she is confident, with its mistress away.

"As for me--do you care to know how I feel about your coming home? But I would rather tell you that than write it. You have kept me at arm's length all winter. Won't you just bend your rigid little elbow a trifle at the joint when you shake hands with me the first of May?

"As ever I am

"Yours, JARVIS."

It remained for Max to put the crowning touch to Sally's rather complicated thoughts about going home, with the following characteristic communication:

"DEAR SISTER: This thing is played out. I want you to understand that the first of May is the first of May, and you are to get here on it, not leave there that day--nor the day after. Bachelors' Hall is well enough in its way, but not for a lifetime. You'd better be on hand mighty soon and sudden if you want to keep J.B. to yourself. J.F's running you a close second, and she's liable to pass you in sight of the wire. Take a brother's advice. I don't suppose either of them has written you a word about the other--but if they haven't that's just as bad a sign as if they'd kept you in full knowledge of the way they get on--like a basket of chips. Come home--come home!

"Your affec. brother,

"MAX."

CHAPTER XIX

ROUND THE CORNER

Joanna Marshfield, left alone in charge of the house at Strawberry Acres, on the evening of the twenty-ninth of April, stood in the front doorway, looking out into the rain. The air was mild but like a wet sponge in the feel of it against her cheek.

"I hope to goodness 'twill clear off before the folks come," said she to herself. "Here's Mrs. Burnside coming out most a month sooner than she wanted to and Miss Sally looking forward to seeing things well under way in that old garden she sets such store by. If May Day would just be nice and sunshiny for 'em all 'twould please me. Well, now--who can that be?"

A figure was approaching on the drive-way, carrying an umbrella and a tag, and walking rapidly. As it neared Joanna could see, in the light thrown out from the hallway and the front windows, that the figure wore skirts of dark blue. The next instant the umbrella was tilted back at a reckless angle, and a voice called guardedly out of the mist:

"O Joanna--is that you? Hush--don't answer out loud!"

"Miss Sally!" Joanna, amazed, crossed the porch to meet her young mistress. "Who'd ever have thought of seeing you to-night? Why--we wasn't expecting you till day after to-morrow. And where's Mr. Rudd?"

"Joanna dear!--don't speak so loud. I want to surprise them," came back the laughing whisper, and the next minute Sally's bag and umbrella were on the porch, and she was wringing both her housekeeper's plump hands in her own. "How do you do, Joanna! I'm so glad to see you again. Uncle Timothy stopped off for a week in Washington, and I couldn't wait, so came on alone. Is everybody well?"

"They're well enough, Miss Sally, but--you'll be pretty disappointed. You see they wasn't expecting you, so--"

"Oh, are they away? They can't be all away! Where are they?"

"Well, you see they was getting sort of restless, waiting for the first

of May, and Mr. Max took them into town to some show. It's too bad. They'd rather have seen you than any show, I reckon."

"But they'll be back to-night?"

"I expect they will--near eleven."

"Oh, well--I can wait." Sally drew a long breath. "I've waited months--I can stand it a few hours longer."

"It's a shame." Joanna picked up the bag and umbrella and led the way into the hall. "The Burnsides are coming the day after to-morrow." She pointed toward the open door into the west wing, the hall light shining in a short distance among the shadows and showing a room in order. "It's awful too bad they didn't get here to-day."

"Never mind--it's a great deal just to be at home again. How pleasant it all looks--and how fresh!"

Joanna led on into the long living-room where a light fire blazed on the hearth. "It's as fresh as I could make it," she admitted, "but there's some ways it can be made fresher that you'll see right away. Them red pillows--"

Evidently the pillows had been on Joanna's mind ever since she had been put in charge of them upon Sally's departure. Sally gave them one glance and burst into appreciative laughter.

"Pillow-fights, Joanna--and being sat on around the fire, and used for acrobatic performances--yes, I see. I'll re-cover them right away. I'd do it to-night while I wait if I had the stuff--if I could sit still long enough. I want to go all over the house--and if it wasn't raining I'd go out in the garden and through the pine grove and over into the orchard. Oh, here's a new picture of Alec, on the chimney-piece--why didn't he send it to me?"

"I could go over and let the Ferry people know you're here," suggested Joanna, watching Sally eye the small snap-shot likeness hungrily, so that it seemed a matter of charity to present some human creature to her gaze.

"No, no, thank you--I'd rather see my own family first. I can wait. I'll go up and get off these travelling things and unpack my bag--that will take up a little time," and Sally prepared to put her suggestion into action.

"Just let me go up first, Miss Sally," urged Joanna. "Not expecting you so soon the room's no linen in it--it won't look like home to you. I won't be ten minutes. It's too bad--Miss Josephine was going to have the house all trimmed up with flowers for you."

Seeing that to refuse to allow this would disappoint Joanna, Sally submitted and went out to the open front door again, to stand looking off into the wet night where a row of distant lights glimmering vaguely through the mist outlined the course of the trolley connecting Wybury with the city.

"Anyhow, I'm at home," she consoled herself. "I might be content with that, for an hour or two, but it does seem as if I could never wait. If I could only see my garden--"

She went to the end of the porch and tried to make out some sign that would indicate its presence, but the mist was too thick. Yet the light from the living-room windows shone directly down that way. "I believe if I were out there I could see something," she reflected. "I'm going to change my clothes--I might as well soak them a little more." She ran back into the hall, caught up her blue coat, and pulling it on flew out again and plunged off the porch into the darkness, the April rain, more mist than drops, falling on her fair curls. The grass was long and wet, but she cared for nothing now, and dashed on till she came to the first box-border, lying distinct in one of the shafts of light from the windows.

Hunting expectantly about she explored the whole garden, laughing softly to herself at the absurdity of the performance, for she was growing wetter every minute. She felt of the ground where she could not see it, exulting in the discovery of ranks of tulips, where she had planted their bulbs last fall, just breaking into bud.

"You dear things," she said, under her breath, "how enchanting of you to be out to welcome me home, when you had never met me before!--Over there's the sweet pea trellis--I wonder if Bob put the seeds in as I wrote him? Can I tell by the feel of the ground? Oh, the light falls there--I can see."

She was so absorbed in this entertaining exploration that she did not hear the distant closing of a door beyond the pine grove, nor the footsteps which presently came that way and paused, just beyond the orchard. Neither did she guess at the quiet approach of a tall figure through the mist, until it stood upon the edge of the garden. The first she knew of its presence was the sound of a familiar voice, speaking quietly so that it might not startle her, yet with a note of joy plainly perceptible through its control.

"Can I believe my eyes--or am I dreaming that I see you, Sally Lane?"

"Oh, Jarvis!" The cry was a startled one, in spite of his precaution. Then the blue figure flew toward the gray one in the shadow, both hands out, as Sally forgot everything except that here at last was one who seemed to belong to her own household.

"My dear girl! When did you come? Have we missed getting a message?" Jarvis, meeting her more than half way, held the small hands tight, stooping to try to see into her face.

"No, no--I didn't send any--I wanted to surprise you all. Uncle Tim decided to stop off in Washington for a week, and I couldn't bear to wait. He is perfectly well now, and said I might come on. So I came. I never dreamed that every one would be away."

"It's a confounded mischance," his lips said heartily, but his thoughts added--"_for everybody but me_." He went on quickly, "You mustn't stay out here. How long have you been out?" He touched her hair. "Why, it's soaking wet. Come in, child."

He kept firm hold of one hand and drew her with him in a rapid progress to the porch. The moment the light fell on her face he was expectantly studying it, and when he had her in the hall under the stronger rays he stood still and looked at her as if he wanted to make up for months of

deprivation. She turned a rosy red under his scrutiny, her cheeks looking like moist but vivid flowers, drops of rain sparkling in her hair and clinging even to her lashes.

"Come in by the fire and dry your hair," he commanded.

She shook her head and drew away her hand. "No, I'll run up and dry everything at once."

"You won't be all the evening about it?" he questioned, with suspicion, for her attitude suggested flight.

"How can I tell?" The old mischief looked out of her eyes.

He took a step toward her. "Come and get the first wet off by the fire," he urged.

But, laughing, she fled up the stairs.

"I didn't know he was such a distinguished-looking person," she was owning to herself as she ran along the upper hall. "Why, he's grown so much heavier and handsomer I'm actually afraid of him--it doesn't seem like the same Jarvis Burnside I've known so long. He's--he's--what Dorothy Chase would call stunning! I never supposed that farming would have that effect on anybody."

Then she rushed into her own room to find it in spotless order, with evidences of Joanna's recent presence in a brisk little fire burning in the small bedroom fireplace, the freshest of appointments everywhere, and a trimly bright lamp upon the old cherry dressing-table which had come from New Hampshire among Uncle Timothy's furniture.

"My trunk isn't here--what in the world shall I put on?" was her first anxiety. She opened the door of her closet, to find all her last summer's frocks newly "done up" and hanging there in inviting daintiness. She caught at the lilac muslin, now faded by many washings into a mere tint, but looking so like home and good times that it seemed the fitting thing to don, in the absence of her heavier dresses, even upon an April night.

A half-hour later, her hair crisply dried by the fire and curling blithely from its recent bath, herself sweet with the soap-and-water and clean-clothes freshness which is the only fragrance worth cultivating, Sally stole on tiptoe to the top of the stairs and peeped down. She beheld Jarvis pacing up and down the hall, and as she looked saw him take his watch out and scan its face as if he had an appointment to keep. She stood still, her pulses beating rather quickly. This was not exactly the sort of home-coming she had planned, this reception by one person. But it was nearly ten o'clock already, she had managed to consume so much time upstairs. Also, upon Joanna's return to her room to inquire if there were anything else she wanted, the young mistress of the house had imperatively commanded the presence in the living-room of the middle-aged housekeeper until such time as Max and the boys should arrive. Joanna, with her neat black dress and smooth hair, was certainly fitted in appearance for the duties of duenna, and Sally had felt no hesitation whatever in requiring her to assume that role.

So Joanna now waited in the living-room--rather reluctantly, it must be admitted, for it seemed to her that this was carrying chaperonage

unnecessarily far. But Jarvis was in the hall, and the door had been closed between. Sally did not realize this latter fact until she had almost reached the bottom of the stairs, where Jarvis, the moment that he had caught sight of her, had advanced to meet her. She looked at the door with a startled expression. It was ordinarily kept open, except in very cold weather.

"Yes, I know it's shut," said the young man at the foot of the stairs, with a smile. "Awful situation, isn't it? But you can escape back up the stairs--if you are quick. I warn you that you'll have to be very quick!"

"Will you give me sixty seconds' start?"

"Not I. You've had five months' start--that's enough. Now you are back--how well you are looking!"

She stood still, two steps above him. Even so, she had not much the advantage of him in height.

"So are you," she retorted. "But we don't need to stay out here to tell each other that. Let's--"

"Are you so eager to see Joanna again? She's looking very well also--for Joanna--but she can wait a minute or two to hear it."

"Joanna has been so good--she's cleaned the whole house for me. She--"

"I know. She's a treasure--but I haven't time to think about her now. All I can think of is that--I'm looking at you again! I told you in my last letter that I wanted to tell you how I felt about your coming home. Do you care to know?"

"Are you really glad?" Sally tried to ask it as she would have done a year ago, in the old friendly time when it was a matter of course that she and Jarvis should be glad to see each other.

"Am I? What do you think?"

"I should be very disappointed if you were not, of course. I want everybody to welcome me home--I've missed it so."

"But you still don't want the welcoming done--'two and two'? Sally, it's a long lane that has no turning. Am I never to come to one?"

"I'm not a very 'long Lane,'" expostulated the girl, laughter on her lips but her eyes shy.

"That may be. But though you have so many turnings it seems to me as if I had been kept a good while on the straight stretch. What if you should let me see just a little way round the corner? You know what I want to find there! You know how dearly I--love you!"

There was a moment's silence.

"Will you be contented to see a very little way?"

"I can't promise to be contented, but I'll agree to be patient, if I can get even a glimpse of where my lane may lead in the end."

Sally tried to look frankly at him, in the old way. It proved less easy than she would have supposed. His whole personality seemed to have grown so dominant, so compelling. She put out one hand. He grasped it eagerly, and would have drawn her down to where he stood, but she prevented this with a warning gesture.

"No, no--" she said quickly--"it's only round the corner you're to look! That only means--I'm willing to be very good friends--better than we have been, perhaps. I don't want to be--tied--by any promises. I want to be a girl yet--only not--perhaps--quite so little a girl as before. Meanwhile--you're not tied, either."

A short laugh interrupted her. "There's nothing on earth I should like so much!"

"There's such a lovely girl next door--I've heard--"

"What have you heard?"

Sally did not seem to be willing to tell.

"It makes no difference what you've heard. Ask her herself what we've talked of most. But, Sally--how long before I may see round another corner?"

She hesitated. "I don't know. Not--this year, please."

"Not this year! Well--I certainly shall have to cultivate patience. But I will--if I must. When--?"

Her lips twitched a little. It was the girl he had known a long time who answered: "When the first strawberries go to market--from Strawberry Acres!"

"Shades of Job! A year from this June? And till then I must walk on neutral ground?"

It was harder to resist him--harder to put him off--than she had thought it would be. But she had made up her mind--and when Sally Lane did that she could not be easily swayed from her purpose.

"You've seen around the corner," she murmured. "You promised to be content with that."

"Not content--patient--if I can. I will be. Thank you for that much."

He reluctantly let her draw away her hand, and she came down the two steps, passed him, and led the way toward the living-room door. With her hand on the knob he stopped her.

"Sally--"

"Yes--"

"I can't help liking the look of the lane--beyond the corner!"

Laughing and blushing more brilliantly than before--which was rather superfluous--Sally threw open the door, regardless of the fact that Joanna, who possessed a pair of very good eyes, was awaiting her in the

room beyond. But there is such a thing as dazzling people's eyesight so that they cannot judge perfectly of what they see, and this effect Joanna's mistress immediately proceeded to produce. For the following hour, between raptures over being at home, tales of her Southern experiences--told so vividly that her listeners seemed to see them for themselves--eager questionings of the home stayers, there was small chance for anybody to put a finger upon exactly what Miss Sally Lane's inmost thoughts might be.

Then, quite unexpectedly, a quarter hour earlier than it had been supposed possible, the tramp of feet was heard upon the porch. Sally flew toward the hall--then flew back again, leaving the door closed, and standing still and breathless upon the hearth-rug, in the full light of the fire. Voices were heard in the hall, and the rattle of umbrellas in the rack.

"Plaguey poor play," Max was complaining. "Rather stay by the fire any night than poke to town to bore myself like that. I don't think--"

He flung open the door. Behind him Alec's voice was saying: "I'm as wet as a rat. You fellows had the big umbrella. The little one isn't big enough to--"

"Well, I'll be--" Max's exclamation cut his brother short. He stood still, staring. There was a flutter of lilac skirts, a low cry of joy, and Jarvis was looking on enviously at an illustration of the privileges that exist for brothers, who--stupid fellows--do not half appreciate them. A moment later Alec and Bob had come in for their share of sisterly greeting, and the three were standing round the returned traveller in a highly satisfied semi-circle, putting questions, making comments, and generally behaving as they might have been counted on to do.

"I hope you don't expect us to believe those piteous tales about your losing flesh and colour with homesickness," declared Max, his hand on his sister's shoulder, as he turned her full toward the firelight. "Jove, I never saw you look more like one of those pink peonies you think so much of, in your garden."

"I didn't write piteous tales!" His sister involuntarily accentuated the likeness he had suggested by growing pinker than before.

"It was Uncle Tim, then. He got worried about you, and wrote me so. He must have been off his base. You never looked healthier. But, see here, miss--you don't do this thing again--understand? We'll never keep house here another winter without you!"

* * * * *

Sally had come home on Saturday night. On Sunday morning the rain had ceased, and the sun was shining brilliantly. Before breakfast she was out in the garden. Spying her there as he looked out of his window, Max hastened his dressing and went out to join her.

"Looks fairly well in order, eh?" he questioned.

Sally remembered certain information sent her in one of Janet's letters. "Indeed it does. And you made it so. That pleases me more than I can tell you, Max."

"How do you know I did?"

"Guessed it from your expression--and a hint I had had. Didn't you rather enjoy doing it?"

"Much more than I should have expected," he was forced to admit under the scrutiny of her eyes.

"How I wish you could leave the bank and join the boys in the work out here. Don't you almost wish so yourself?" she demanded, thrusting her hand through his arm, as he paced along, his hands in his pockets. The old garden paths were quite wide enough for two, when they walked close together.

Max looked down at her. "To tell the truth, I'm beginning to wish so too."

This, from Max, was a great admission. Sally's eyes sparkled with pleasure. "Oh, can't you?" she cried.

"I don't see how I can, this year. To be sure, Jarve's paying all the expenses and taking all the responsibility these first two years, according to agreement, but I can't lie down on him. Of course it's all outgo and no income until we get the strawberries to bearing next year. Meanwhile the family has to be supported, and what timber we've thought best to sell won't do that, if all of us stop work. It's all right for Al and Bob to spend this season on the farm, for Jarve would have to hire somebody anyway, but it's different with me, and my salary is more than they could earn, both together, at their old jobs. No--I must grind away another year. But then--"

"Then you'll come?"

"Yes, and be glad to."

"I'm so delighted to hear you say that!"

"I need the change. I realize, at last, what a bear I've been these three years. I'm tired of being a bear. It's half nerves, I believe--but a fellow of my age ought not to know he has nerves. Besides--"

He paused, looking off through the pine grove to the gap in the hedge, through which a glimpse of the white cottage could be had. Sally waited. It was rarely that her elder brother became confidential, and this mood seemed more than ordinarily propitious for getting at his best thoughts. After a little he went on, in a firm tone, speaking after a fashion which made his sister feel for him a new respect.

"I may as well tell you that in a way I think I'm rather a different fellow from the one you left last November. I see things differently. It's his doing--" He nodded toward the cottage, and Sally understood. Also, she felt infinitely thankful to the influence which had brought about this change. "I've come to see," he went on more slowly, "what it means to have a definite purpose in life beyond merely making a living and having as much of a good time as you can manage to extract. I want to make a man of myself--the sort of man my Maker intended me to be."

"Ferry's doing it--Jarvis is doing it--even Alec and Bob put me to shame with the manliness they're developing. If Maxwell Lane can't

swing into line--"

"He can, dear--he will. He's swung already, when he can talk like this." His sister's hand squeezed his arm tight for a minute, in her happiness.

"It's not going to be a matter of talk, mind you," he said earnestly. "Don Ferry doesn't talk about his own life--he lives it. I want to do the same. But I felt as if I'd like you to know--that's all. What's that coming up in the corner there?"

"Lilies-of-the-valley--they're almost ready to bud." And Sally let him lead the conversation away from himself to talk about the garden, understanding that the little revelation was a great one for him to make, and that it had cost him a decided effort. But while she talked of the pruning of the roses and the prospects of the sweet peas, just sown, her heart was rejoicing over the growth in this "human garden," as Ferry had called it, so much dearer to her.

"Alec's to go away next winter for a course at an agricultural school," Max announced suddenly. "I've made up my mind to that. He shows more bent than any of us toward making a science of this thing. Odd, isn't it?--where you consider how set he was against even living here. I tell you Don Ferry's a great chap. He's done more for us than we can pay back. I'd like to keep him in the family. Janet too. See here--" he rose upright from having stooped over certain newly upspringing shoots, and favoured his sister with a sharp glance. "What's the matter with you and Don hitting it off? That would leave Jarve to Janet, and make a mighty nice combination of us--eh? Judging by appearances Don wouldn't object a bit.--I say--where are you going?"

"Didn't you hear the breakfast-bell?" Sally was walking away from him toward the house.

"No, I didn't. Neither did you."

But Sally continued to walk, regardless of the fact that both Alec and Bob had appeared round the corner of the house, coming toward her, hands in the pockets of their Sunday trousers, feet treading gingerly over the damp grass in their freshly-polished best shoes. On whatever part of Strawberry Acres Sally should be desecrated to-day, it might be safely prophesied that there her family would be likely to foregather.

CHAPTER XX

GREEN LEAVES

"So the great day has come at last! My word, but you've had the courage of your convictions! What a stretch of 'em!"

"Of convictions? Well, they're certainly embodied in those seven acres, whether there are any strawberries there or not. Don't you want to get over the fence and stroll up one of the rows? You may find a specimen or two of fruit worth setting your teeth into."

Neil Chase, correctly clad in light flannels, eyed the fence critically

before he clambered over it. "I can be trusted to tear myself if there's a twopenny splinter anywhere," said he. "Must admit it looks rather worth while over here, though. Hello--Dorothy's over already. Who's that assisting her? The Reverend Donald--in blue overalls! It's lucky Old Dutch can't see him now! I say, you've got a lot of pickers. Are they all members of the firm?"

Jarvis laughed as he followed Chase's glance up the rows. "You've struck us on our first day," he admitted. "We agreed to make it a special celebration among ourselves, since only a small part of the berries are ripe."

"The pink sun-bonnet covers an acquaintance, then," inferred Neil, watching it approach from a distance. "Hello--it's Sally!" and he pulled off his hat to wave it in response to a salutation from the pink sun-bonnet, whose removal had disclosed a fair head whose locks the June sunshine was turning into gold. "I suppose the blue one conceals Jo Burnside, the white one Miss Ferry, and so forth. I always said you people were no farmers--to dress for the part like stage strawberry-pickers," he added, as Sally came within hearing.

"Why not? Could any stage be set to equal this one?" inquired Sally Lane. "No, no--you can't shake hands with me--" She held up ten carmine-tipped fingers. "What could be more appropriate for picking strawberries than a pink gingham?"

"It's mighty becoming, anyhow," Neil offered tribute. "Jove, Sally, but farming certainly does agree with you. Talk of roses--Dorothy!" he called, "come here and look at these cheeks! Full in the sunlight, too. I'll wager yours couldn't stand such a test."

Sally promptly put on her sun-bonnet. "A strawberry patch is no place for flattery, Mr. Neil Chase," said she. "Come with me, Dorothy. I'll show you the biggest berry you ever saw in your life--and you may eat it, too."

Mrs. Chase gathered her white skirts about her, planted her white-shod feet recklessly in the wake of Sally's, and arrived in due time at the point where Sally had been picking. From nearby rows Josephine Burnside, Janet Ferry, and Constance Carew lifted heads to greet her.

"How awfully busy you all are!" cried Dorothy, consuming a fat berry with which Sally presented her. "Too busy to greet your friends!"

"This isn't a reception, it's a working affair," Janet replied gayly. "Guests may help themselves to refreshments, but mustn't expect the hostesses to stop picking."

"You have no trouble about getting the men at your entertainments, Sally," observed Dorothy, scanning the field. "They're all here, I see--even Max. Has he left the bank?"

"Yes, the first of May. This is our third season, you know--but the first one of bearing. Max is as enthusiastic as anybody, now. When you see him nearer you'll discover a great change in him. No more banks for him, if we can make anything like a success with the strawberries."

"How do you know that you will? You're such amateurs at it."

"We're not, if study of the subject amounts to anything," Sally asserted, with a little air of pride. "Between books and experiment stations, and Alec's course at an agricultural school last winter, and Jarvis's visits to practical strawberry-growers, it would be strange if our methods went all astray. But they're not going astray. Look at these berries you're eating!"

Down the rows Jarvis was pursuing much the same line of argument with Neil Chase. "It's not in reason, you know," the visitor objected, critically selecting choice specimens of fruit along the rows and eating them with evident relish, "it's not in reason for a lot of fellows like you, fresh from books and banks, to jump into this sort of thing and make it go without a hitch."

"Well, you have the evidence of your eyes before you," Jarvis returned with great good humour, from his knees among the vines where he was now picking busily again. "To be sure it hasn't gone without a hitch. Last season we had a long spring drought to fight--and fought it, too, with irrigation. This spring the shot-hole fungus attacked us, but we overcame it with spraying. Of course next year a killing frost may come along and finish the crop for the year--we can't fight that. Such a frost is to be reckoned with on an average of about once in five years. But on the other years we expect to make up. Don't you think we can get our prices for such berries as these? And will you tell me why brains, even amateur ones, can't solve such problems as we have to face? You lawyers tackle hard cases and win them, even while you're green--if you possess certain qualities to begin with. We may be conceited, but we have an idea we possess the qualities necessary to successful strawberry culture. As a game, it's certainly a mighty interesting one."

"The average farmer," Neil argued, "isn't a rich experimenter like you. He can't afford to put good gold into fertilizers and irrigating pumps. I should think these fellows all around you would hate you for having the advantage of them."

"On the contrary, as a matter of fact all but one or two are our very good friends, and much interested in our schemes. They've given us a lot of valuable advice--not on strawberry culture, because that's not in their line, but in other ways. They enjoy our mistakes hugely--that's only human--but they don't do it in an ill-natured way. Last spring when we sowed clover-seed for millet and didn't recognize it till the crop appeared, it was worth it to see them laugh at the joke, particularly as we didn't mind laughing with them. But I can tell you where we're scoring the biggest success after all, _and the one that would pay if half our crops turned out failures_. You haven't been out here for a year, at least. Take a look at Max, Alec, and Bob, when you get close to them, and tell me if they look like the same chaps you used to know in town."

"You don't, yourself," admitted Chase, somewhat grudgingly. He, himself, was decidedly slender of limb much to his regret. Also, in spite of incessant motoring, his face was not that of unexceptionable health. "You look as rugged as a rock. Never thought you were cut out for an athlete, either, when you were in college."

"I rather think that siege with my eyes was the best thing that ever happened to me--though it didn't seem much like it at the time. Look at that berry." He held out a fine specimen. "That goes in Class A--specials, all right."

"How many classes do you have?" Neil inquired, making way with the specimen from Class A in one huge mouthful, and finding it so juicy he was forced to make prompt use of his handkerchief.

"Two, but we're going to draw a strict line. The big ones are to be big to the bottom of the basket--and no false bottoms. A reputation is what we're after--then the prices will take care of themselves."

Neil strolled down the row. He had information enough. He wanted to inspect the strawberry-pickers, one at a time. It was not every day that one could meet distinguished young clergymen, accomplished pianists, and singers of unusual promise, between rows of strawberry vines.

The Chases had not been invited to be present at this special celebration of the first day of the strawberry picking, but they unhesitatingly accepted the invitation to stay to luncheon offered them as the hour for that meal drew near. When the party left the field for the house it was discovered that Joanna, assisted by Mrs. Burnside and Mrs. Ferry, had moved the luncheon-table from the dining-room to the big porch.

"Well, of all the romantic, impractical farmers!" ejaculated Neil Chase, as he beheld this arrangement at close range, the table set with old blue-and-white china, a great bowl of Sally's old-fashioned pink roses in the centre. "Don't you know that fried salt-pork and potatoes, in the kitchen, in your shirt-sleeves, is your only consistent meal, in the work season?"

"If you will insist on our living up to your notion of the real thing, we can set a special table for you in the kitchen. I've no doubt we can borrow some pork somewhere. You can take off your coat and eat your noon meal there, if you like, sustained by your sense of what is fitting," offered Alec. "As for me, I'm going in to wash up, put on my coat, and eat about twelve square inches of the strawberry-shortcake Joanna's building for this table. There won't be any of that served in the kitchen, I warn you, Mr. Chase."

"Thank you, I'm not pointing out my course of action, but criticizing yours," retorted Neil, surveying with favour a vine-wreathed platter of broiled chicken, and eyeing hungrily a large salad-bowl filled with a compound which he knew by experience to be one of Joanna's choicest. "I say, to be consistent--"

But he found himself delivering his views to Mrs. Burnside alone, for the rest had trooped in to make themselves presentable.

"You people certainly do manage to get a lot of fun out of your farming," observed Dorothy Chase, as she watched Sally splashing her round arms in a vain effort to remove the tan. "We live just as far out from town as you do, but nothing could be more different than our way of living from yours."

"Well, if we depended on tennis, golf, and bridge for our fun we'd be just like you. As we like hayfields, strawberry-patches, and pine groves better--with tobogganing in winter--we continue to be different."

"I should say golf and tennis were just as healthy exercise as haying and picking strawberries."

"No doubt they are--but the company isn't so select," declared Sally

audaciously, towelling her wet face so briskly that it emerged looking more than ever like the roses to which Neil had that morning compared it.

"You impertinent girl! What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that Tom Westlake isn't to be spoken of in the same breath with Donald Ferry. Billy North is an idiot compared with Jarvis Burnside. There aren't two girls among all your society friends who can equal Janet and Constance, and--"

"And Sally Lane, as a hostess, is infinitely superior to Dorothy Chase!"

"Don't put words into my mouth." Sally came close and laid a warm pink palm on either of Dorothy's cheeks. "Sally Lane is such a bad hostess she says insulting things to her guests. Don't mind her. She's so excited and happy to-day over her strawberry acres she's not responsible for what she says. Come, let's hurry down."

"You people look more like a set of golfers at a summer hotel than you do like farmers," began Neil Chase, still harping on the theme which seemed to cause him so much unrest, as the party sat down.

Max opened his mouth for a retort. But, with one look at Donald Ferry, who sat across the table, he closed it again. He met an amused glance of comprehension. Then Ferry also opened his lips to speak. But before the words found breath Mr. Timothy Rudd rose to the occasion.

"Mr. Chase," said he, "since a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, let me suggest that you call us strawberry gardeners. Not that we object in the least to being called farmers, for we consider the title one of honour. But I am confident that you will then be able to reconcile our having luncheon on the front porch, our coming to the table with our coats and collars on, and our having strawberries to eat in spite of the fact that we raise them ourselves, with the indisputable truth that we make--or are attempting to make--our living off the soil. We profoundly respect the desire of a member of the legal profession for exactness, not only in the use of terms, but in the conformity of facts to those terms. I trust, however, that the compromise I suggest--"

But he got no further. A burst of appreciative laughter, in which Chase himself was forced to join, bore witness to the effectiveness with which the cynical critic had been politely answered. However it might be on after occasions, for to-day Chase became content to enjoy his broiled chicken and strawberry-shortcake without further comment on the inconsistency of their appearance upon the table at Strawberry Acres.

* * * * *

It was late in the afternoon. The Chases had reluctantly taken their departure, bearing with them gifts of strawberries and roses. In the strawberry-patch sunshine and silence reigned undisturbed, except by the light June breeze which rustled the leaves enough to show beneath them the fruit which by day-after-to-morrow would be ripe enough to pick. The first picking had been a small one, and had gone wholly to neighbours and friends and to consumption upon the home table. In two days more the gathering of the harvest would begin in earnest. It may not have been strictly business-like, this opening of the season by feasting and bestowal, but it had pleased the "Lady of the Garden" so to elect, and there had been no dissenting voice--not even that of her brother Max.

Everybody else, it may be presumed, had retired to rest and dress for the evening, which was always spent, when the weather was fair, upon the porch, when Sally, alone, slipped quietly out of the door at the back of the hall and betook herself over the grass, through the garden, to the path which led up the slope to the woods. The path wound past the orchard, past the strawberry field, and by the side of the pasture where Cowslip and Whiteface were already turning their faces toward the bars. Its appearance was an example of the fashion in which utility and sentiment were likely to find themselves mixed upon the farm called Strawberry Acres.

Along its borders ran a riot of vines, wild bushes, even of weeds, only such of the latter having been cut as were pests of the sort which scatter their seeds to the winds. Trim and workmanlike as was the clearing up of the ground just beyond the lane, on either side the lane itself was very nearly in a state of nature. It was, therefore, a picturesque roadway enough, and Sally walking along it bareheaded, clad still in the pink gingham of the morning, found it so to an unusual degree. Yet it must be admitted that it would have been an object ugly indeed which would have seemed devoid of all beauty to Sally Lane, on this, the sixteenth of June.

She kept on, straight up the winding lane, to the border of the woods. When she had reached the first trees, a fine group of oak and chestnut, lifting stately limbs, long uncut, far into the summer air, she turned and paused to look back. From this point she could see far, and the whole of her family's possessions lay before her, outspread in all the beauty of June at its bonniest. Impulsively she stretched out her arms.

"Sally Lane," she said softly to herself, with her eyes scanning it all, "if there's a happier girl than you in the world to-day, she must be entirely out of her senses with joy."

After a little she sat down, her back against a tree-trunk, her face toward the distant view.... Presently a big green oak leaf fluttered down past her eyes, and fell into her lap. "That's odd," she thought, and looked up. Nothing could be seen but the great limbs, rugged with years, of the oak beneath which she sat. She looked off again at the view. Another leaf came swirling down past her, lighting on the ground. "It's probably a squirrel," she explained to herself, concerning this phenomenon of falling leaves in June, and tried again to descry its source, without success. When, however, a shower of the green missiles came down together, she got to her feet, and walked around the tree.

"They had to come, thick as leaves in Vallombrosa," remarked a familiar voice from far above her, "before you would pay attention. I fired for at least ten minutes before you would so much as look up. Will you come up, or shall I come down?"

"I'd like to come up," Sally replied, smiling up into Jarvis's brown face, as she espied him, sitting astride a limb well up in the branching foliage. "But I don't think it's practical."

"Why be practical? Nobody is practical on Strawberry Acres, according to a certain brilliant but skeptical attorney from town. Your greatest aim has been to remain a girl as long as possible. Girls climb trees. _Ergo_ _--"

He began to descend. "Wait!" cried Sally, as he set foot on the lowest limb, a matter of ten feet above her head, and paused to look down at her. "Stay there, please--Do you really want me to come up?"

"Very much. It's entirely possible. Set your foot on that knob, reach up your arm, I'll let myself down far enough to get hold of your hand, and the next thing you know you'll be sitting beside me here."

"Then what will happen?"

"Then--we'll have a little talk I've been waiting for all day. I began to think I couldn't get it till evening fell, when the garden might help me out."

"I think the garden is a very nice place for conversation." Sally put both hands behind her back, looking up at him.

"Better than the limb of an oak tree? I admit it--for some sorts of conversation. Up here I should be forced to hold on with one arm. But there would be compensation in that, for with the other arm I should be forced to hold you on!"

His laughing eyes looked down at her. She shook her head. "If I came up the tree I should prove that I am still a girl. If I am still a girl--"

"Are you still a girl? Is that still your greatest desire?" He leaned forward, and the smile suddenly left his lips. His eyes searched hers.

The face she bravely lifted to him was a girl's for youthful beauty, but into it had come something very sweet and womanly, which at last gave him the leave he had waited so long for. "No--I think I've grown up." she said, quite clearly.

With an exclamation, the sinewy figure in the tree made short work of the ten feet to the ground, swinging itself off from the limb by both hands and dropping lightly down.

"I don't think I could have waited a day longer," said Jarvis Burnside. Then, with the sheltering trunk of the great oak shutting off all possible vision from the far distant house, he drew Sally Lane into his eager arms.

* * * * *

"Why so late?" Maxwell Lane looked up to ask, as his sister Sally came somewhat hurriedly in to dinner, when the rest of the household were half through.

"Please excuse my pink gingham," apologized Sally, as she dropped into her chair. She glanced from Mrs. Burnside in cool white to Josephine in crisp blue.

"Nothing could be more becoming," Josephine asserted, always ready to defend her friend.

"There's a strawberry stain on her right sleeve," Bob pointed out.

"Where's Jarve?" asked Alec.

"I saw him as I came in. He was on his way," replied Sally, lifting a glass of water to hide a pair of lips which wanted to laugh.

Jarvis appeared. He also was in the garb he had worn all day. The pair seemed oddly similar in the nonchalance they could not quite successfully carry through.

"Look here!" Alec scanned both faces. "You two have been up to something."

"I've been up a tree," Jarvis replied.

"Have you been up a tree too?" Alec questioned his sister.

"Not at all."

"Did you get him up one?"

Sally attempted to answer, but the merriment upon her lips would not be controlled. She gave way to it. Her eyes, in spite of themselves, met Jarvis's. He was laughing too. His face, red showing beneath the tan, was too radiant with his happiness for him to be able to help Sally with any further effort at concealment.

"Don't you think we may as well own up?" he questioned her.

"Own up!" cried Alec. "Do you people flatter yourselves there's anything for you to own up to, that we don't already know?"

"Good for you!" And Max rose up to shake Jarvis's hand.

"It's nothing new, but it's great!" roared Bob, and patted his sister's shoulder.

"My dear!" said Mrs. Burnside. She rose, and Sally ran to her. Josephine followed eagerly, pausing to embrace her brother on the way.

"I don't see," said Uncle Timothy, "but that I am the one to say the only fitting thing. Therefore I say it--from my heart." He seized Jarvis's hand. Sally turned from Josephine to put her arm about his neck.

"God bless you, my children," said Uncle Timothy.

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