

Dorothy Perkins

By W. R. Gilbert.

DOROTHY ran across the lawn with feet as light as any that ever "left the daisies rosy," in the fond imagination of a lover.

Her heart was light as well as her feet, for a dear friend had gained the V.C., and he was coming home; and the home was next door, and she would see him, and might hope for a renewal of those happy times when he and she had been such splendid chums. It wouldn't be quite the same, of course, seeing that when they last saw each other, three years ago, she was a child, whereas now she had attained the sedate and serious age of eighteen. Still the meeting was sure to be delightful. Jack was such a good sport. He couldn't have altered much.

The lawn was in her father's garden at the back of the house. At the bottom of the garden there was a pergola formed of Dorothy Perkins roses. Jack Hilton had planted the trees for her in those days when the big lad from next door had been as much in the Dales' garden as in his own. It was so easy to leap the hedge of golden yews, and there was no one he liked so much as he liked Dorothy Dale. The roses had done splendidly in the three years, the first of which had been spent by Dorothy in travelling with her father. The last two had been spent by Jack at the front. The pergola was one mass of lovely pink, contrasting sweetly with the underlying green. It was a veritable fairy bower.

Scissors were in Dorothy's fingers, and she hovered above the roses like some dainty butterfly, uncertain where to settle. She wanted to send a spray of her name flowers to Jack by way of greeting, and naturally wanted to choose the most perfect. The choice was made at last, and she went back to the house, with shining eyes and a spray of roses in her hand. Soon they were nestling in a flat oblong box.

This done, she paused.

The roses were to be her greeting to Jack, on his arrival.

He would be home early in the evening; but she must not expect to see him until to-morrow.

Nothing could be better for her greeting than the roses; but should not a little note accompany them. "I am grown up now," she mused. "Should she write the little note or not? Did girls write notes to unmarried men?"

Motherless from infancy, her sole tutor had been her father—the very dearest father in the world, but too much absorbed in scientific experiments to know anything about the little ways of society. Dorothy was a girl brought up by a man, and with no intimate friend of her own sex.

She quickly settled the question. Yes, of course, she might write. Was not all the neighborhood, down to the very children, prepared to welcome its V.C. as soon as he should appear?

She seized a pen and wrote rapidly:—"Dear Jack,—Have you forgotten Dorothy Dale? And do you remember planting the rose trees for the pergola? I am sending you a spray, and I hope you will come and see the pergola for yourself. I shall look for you in the garden. And, oh Jack, I can't tell you how proud we are of you! Come as soon as you can.—Yours sincerely, Dorothy."

She tied up the box very neatly, with the letter inside, and sent it in next door.

Woodland Road expected its V.C. about six o'clock, and all the inhabitants were on the alert to welcome him. Eager faces lined all the windows.

"Oh, I do hope he will come before we have to start," thought Dorothy, when she was dressing for a party to which she had promised to go. To her delight the next moment the wheels of a taxi were heard coming down the street. It stopped at the house next door, and Dorothy saw a young man—nay, two young men—in khaki step out. She remembered that Miss Amy Hilton, Jack's aunt, had told her that Captain Merryweather was to accompany Jack, and spend a few days with them.

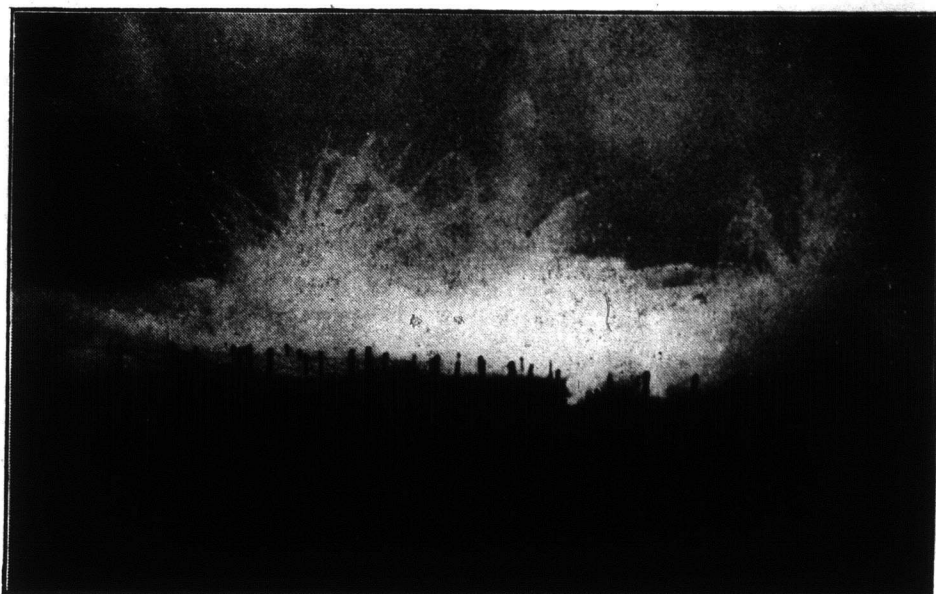
The two young men were of the same height, both had bronzed faces, and wavy brown hair. But Dorothy knew Jack in an instant—would have known him at

once, even without the arm in a sling, which told of a wound sustained in winning the V.C. He was just the same dear old Jack! Miss Amy Hilton appeared, and in a moment had folded him in her arms, he submitting with that half whimsical, half bashful fashion, which marks a thoroughly good fellow, on the occasions when his womenfolk justly think it is right to show how much they love him. Just the same dear old Jack! thought Dorothy. The next moment he disappeared. To herself she whispered: "He will be sure to come into the garden early to-morrow!"

Dorothy, at any rate, was out in the garden early enough the next morning. She couldn't have explained why she felt so inordinately happy. But Jack had won his V.C. and had come home. Absurd to lie in bed in a world where such things happen.

To the pergola she went, fresh and as sweet as any rose of them all. She stepped inside, when she heard voices from the next garden—one of the voices was Jack's.

How early they were up and out! She stood for a moment, undecided, as to whether she should make her presence known. She longed to speak to Jack—to have him leap the hedge and stand beside her, with the smile she knew so well. But she suddenly felt absurdly shy. Was she sure she wanted him to see her quite at once? Didn't she shrink a little from the meeting?



Wonderful night war photo taken on the Western front showing an incendiary grenade attack. The entire front is a splurge of bursting shells and explosions, turning the black night into day. This is a most unusual photo, but night attacks of this kind are extremely frequent. The barbed wire entanglements can be seen. Under a barrage of this sort the troops often advance to attack.

While she hesitated the two young men went on with their conversation, unconscious of a hearer.

"I tell you old chap, being a V.C. is a bit sickening," said Jack. "I swear I never thought that women could make such asses of themselves. Look at that letter. What is a fellow to do in the face of such an invitation? I ask you. That's what I got from the girl next door."

The girl next door! Dorothy felt something seize her by the throat, while her heart thumped violently. What girl? There could be but two next doors—their own and old Professor Phillips's. The professor and his wife lived quite alone, and they had no visitor. No; there was no girl there.

The girl next door! And he was showing Captain Merryweather her letter!

Jack's voice, angrily contemptuous, went on: "She sent me some flowers as well as the letter. They were here when I got in last night."

"And you had given her no encouragement when you lived here?" interposed Captain Merryweather's voice. "Excuse me asking such a question?"

"Encouragement? Heavens, no!" said Jack, more vexedly than ever. "Of course, I might be said to know her, I was always civil; but I never gave her a thought. Now, I ask you what is a fellow to do if girls are capable of coming on like that?"

"H'm! Quite a coming-on young lady. Hopes to see you in the garden! Well,

Jack, don't run away from your luck. Is she pretty?"

"Pretty! Great Scot! No!" growled Jack, disgustedly. "I always thought her abominably plain. Here, give me the letter!" And there followed the sound of tearing paper.

Dorothy stood still as a statue, her hands clenched, her lips parted, a look of misery in the eyes which had been so radiant a few minutes before.

Oh! how horrid men were! How horrid and hateful! This was how they talked together—how they thought about girls. Jack, who had always been such a good sport, so fair, and straight, and so clean minded, to show her letter to another man, to scoff at it, and to accuse her of being forward.

"I'll never forgive him!" she cried. "Never, never."

The next moment the two young men had left the garden. Dorothy waited until they had disappeared, then she ran into the house, and eased her heart with tears.

Two hours later Dorothy watched from her bedroom window, her father, as he walked up and down the garden. He was grappling with some knotty problem; but his eyes beamed with delight as he saw two khaki-clad figures enter the garden gate, the leader of the two being the late V.C.

"Why, Jack, my dear boy!" Dorothy could hear through the window, and the next moment the two young men joined the professor on the lawn.

"Dorothy! Dorothy, my dear!" he called, looking toward the drawing-room

self, "but to say so, and to show my letter—Oh!"

After such meditations as these, Captain Merryweather always found the charming Miss Dorothy more charming than ever. Day after day that gallant officer spent most of his time in Professor Dale's garden, whilst poor Jack, his arm in a sling, looked on, grim and silent.

On the fifth day he went across to the Dale's by invitation to tea in the garden. He found Dorothy alone.

"Where is Captain Merryweather?" she asked, the moment greetings had been exchanged.

"Oh! hang Merryweather," muttered Jack through his teeth. "Hang" wasn't exactly the word he used, or Dorothy fancied so, but it wasn't worth enquiring into. He went on: "He has been detained in town, and will come across later. I suppose we can contrive to exist without him for ten minutes?"

"Oh, certainly," she replied, with chilly politeness. "It may be rather dull for you, perhaps, until my father comes. Would you like to look at the paper?"

"No! I prefer to look at you!"

So saying, he threw himself into an easy chair on the lawn and watched her, as she piled up dewy strawberries on a high dish. She became so intent upon her task, that one might have fallen into the mistake of fancying she had forgotten Jack's presence. His brow darkened, and quite suddenly he sprang up, and laying both hands on her shoulders compelled her to turn and look at him. He no longer needed a sling.

"I say, Dorothy, there is something I must know," he said, in a rather dogged tone. "Are you serious about Merryweather? Do you mean to marry him?" She drew herself away from him and looked a cold reproof.

"I am sure you will not expect me to answer such a question. You must be aware it is one you have no right to ask."

"Has friendship no rights at all, then?" he demanded hotly. "You'd have told me anything—yes, just anything I liked to ask you three years ago."

"Perhaps so. But we have changed since then. I am not the same person in your eyes, and it is not to be supposed that you are exactly the same in mine."

"Dorothy, why do you speak in that cold-blooded way? And why should we alter? What have I done?"

"That is rather an absurd question, isn't it?"

"Absurd in what way?"

"Because it seems to imply that I have some right to be interested in anything you may do—or leave undone. I suppose it is scarcely necessary to tell you I have no such interest."

She looked him full in the eyes as she spoke. He flushed a deep red, and his lips met in a rigid line.

"That will do! You've made it quite plain. I'm much obliged to you. I might possibly have made an ass of myself, if you hadn't stopped me. I'll go back, and tell Merryweather you are waiting for him. Please make my excuses to your father. I don't think I shall trouble you again."

He was gone, walking across the lawn with his head erect, his shoulders squared, but with hand clenched as it hung by his side. Dorothy watched him disappear, and then sat down, with a loudly beating heart. All was over now!

But in five minutes she saw him returning. Yes, it was he, and not Captain Merryweather, as she had first thought. It was he, and he carried in his hand, a small white oblong box. She flushed from chin to brow, for she recognized that box as the one she had sent him. He had kept it then. But why? And why was he bringing it back to her? What did it mean?

She rose up to meet him at the entrance of the pergola, and she saw, in a moment, that something of the rigidity had gone from his face. In his honest blue eyes there was perplexity and regret, but a look of hope as well.

"Look here, Dorothy, I've just found this," he cried. "They put all the things in a muddle in my room the day I came home, and I never saw it till now, when I was going to pack up. It was awfully good of you to send me that sweet little note, and the roses. But I don't know what you've thought of me for not thanking you sooner. I say Dorothy," seeing

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