

ESMERALDA

moment of writing the necessary letter, that something dreadful would result from it. But in due course I wrote Miss Esmeralda Sprunt of her aunt's generous offer, explaining, as that lady had desired me to, what a wonderful opportunity it would be for her—Miss Sprunt—to do her bit in war work.

After the shortest possible time the reply came, accepting in a somewhat stilted style. It was written on very strange note paper—lined note paper, headed Homestead Ranch, Flower City, California—in a firm, clear hand. My heart misgave me when I beheld that paper; it was of a sort that never comes into the hands of a secretary who is secretary to anybody who is anybody—if you know what I mean—except in the form of appeals for gratuities from persons one never sees; from the underworld, where the importance of good form is hardly understood properly. So it was amazing that a niece of my dear patroness should have made use of such epistolary furnishings. The letter was