

things hitherto invested with the mystery of night, stood revealed in their own nakedness of prosaic ugliness or their beauty. The tourists were in the midst of a houseless plain; there seemed no sign of life anywhere. Yet, surely—what were those moving specks? One speck was red.

The Old Girl shot nearer—the specks were human beings. Nearer still—they were women. Kit uttered an exclamation softly.

"Girls for sure!" he breathed. "I believe they're in some kind of trouble."

The red speck resolved itself into a young person in something red and summery and gay, her face white in startling contrast. She was crouching beside the road, nursing her foot. The other speck proved white all over.

The Old Girl came to an abrupt stop and both young men leaped out. "Is there any trouble?—is anyone hurt?" they chorused.

"Oh, dear, yes!" the White Speck cried. "I'm so thankful you've come—I mean somebody has! We're lost and we've broken our ankles, and I can't help it if we haven't been introduced!"

"Oh, Jess!" It was the little Red Speck quite cheerfully, though she winced with the pain of moving. "Oh, Jess, you're so much like yourself! I should know it was you said that if it was somebody else! I'm afraid"—turning to the strangers—"being lost has gone to her brain. It's gone to my ankle. We're awfully ashamed of ourselves—it's too silly to get lost in a place you've camped out in all summer! But it was the dark did it. We got turned 'round."

She made a wry face at a fresh twinge of pain. Kit noted the drawn look about her sweet mouth and his big sympathy sprang forthwith into action.

"I wish I'd chosen medicine!" he burst impulsively. "Can't I do something? Once I—I set a cat."

Her fresh laugh rang out irresistibly. "You mean a hen, Kit," laughed George Holland.

The young women had started out to walk across country from the railway station in the darkness of very early morning.

"We were so anxious to get home," explained one of them, rather pathetically. "We were so perfectly delighted when we found there was that early train! They couldn't scare us telling us we'd have to walk; but we didn't plan to get lost!"

"Or to step on rolling stones. That was such a mistake! When we wanted so much to get—and now it doesn't seem as if we'd ever—"

"There is room in the tonneau; we can easily stow the luggage," eagerly interrupted one of the strangers. "If you'll give us the pleasure of assisting—I'm George Holland; this is Kit—er, I would say Christopher—Dill. Where's your card, Kit? And I gave you mine, too, didn't I?"

"Yes; they're in my overcoat pocket," nodded Kit sweetly. "Can't think where I could have left that coat. I'll go back—"

"Shut up!" muttered George in his ear. Then aloud: "If you are equal to being jolted a little, Miss—"

"Warren—Margaret Warren. This is my chum, Jessica Hoyt—aren't you, Jess?"

"I was," sighed Jessica Hoyt, "in my other state. I don't feel enough acquainted with myself in this one to know my name. Here, poor darling, lean on me! Try not to let it kill you; if you shut your eyes maybe 'twon't hurt so much. We'll all shut our eyes if it will be any help—oh, you dear, is it killing you?"

"Yes," smiled splendidly the white lips; "but I'm r-ready to die."

They were presently all bestowed snugly in the Old Girl's lap, and the man at the wheel turned about for orders.

"Which way?" he asked. "Which way?—why, of course, which way! But how were they to know? As if they hadn't tried north, south, east and west."

"I haven't an idea!" sighed Margaret Warren. "Jess, why don't you say which way? You haven't sprained your ankle."

"Worse—I've sprained my weather-vane. It won't go round."

"We might cruise about a little till we hit something familiar, you know," suggested Kit, cheerfully. "Somebody could sing out when we hit."

So for an hour they cruised, taking the turns as they came to them and doubling on their tracks in an apparently wild manner—always on the look-out for familiar landmarks. It was the suffering little Red Speck who made the first discovery.

"Whoa!" she cried. "I mean, stop, please—there's a hen exactly like Mrs. Catherwood's. Look, will you, Jess!"

"Oh, my dear," laughed the other girl, "your poor ankle's gone to your brain. When you get to seeing biddy-ghosts—"

"I know that hen," stoutly. "She's an old caller of mine. You watch—she's got a funny little hitch when she walks. My old nurse used to walk like that. If you'll follow that hen—"

She turned to the man at the wheel.

"We'll follow that hen," he nodded. "This is great!" laughed Christopher Dill. "I've seen the Old Girl do no end of stunts, but I never saw her follow a hen!"

Te Old Girl did her best and in the end crept slowly to victory in tow of the little hitching hen. But there were exciting crises in between; when the hen crossed a field and they dodged about by devious ways to intercept her, when they lost sight of her altogether and found her again when hope was dead, when she doubled, retreated,

misled them. . . It was a queer chase. "Why! Why, here we are! This is home! ejaculated Jessica, suddenly.

"What did I tell you!" triumphed the other. "There's Mrs. Catherwood's, and that blessed biddy's hitching into the yard! I could hug that biddy!"

"I'd rather eat her," sighed Jessica; "I'm ravenous—oh, Mig, think of those tarts and pies we made."

"Jess, we'll treat!—if Georgy and Kit haven't eaten 'em all up. There's Georgy now! There's Kit!"

"And they look so prosperous, I know they've eaten 'em up," from Jessica.

The two young men had exchanged startled glances as the motor rounded a corner suddenly and brought them in sight of the house they had fled from a few hours previously. Then had come the "Mig," the "Georgy" and the "Kit," till nothing more was needed to make the dénouement more tragic and convincing. This, then, was whither that beastly little hen had led them! Thus was their downfall to be celebrated; thus they were to be confronted with their ignominy!

"Georgy, Kit, you dears! Is it you! Have you come? Did you find our notices and the jam and things Oh, Georgy, wait, I'm mortally wounded! Don't touch me!—This is Mr.—Holland, and this is Mr. Hill—"

"Dill," corrected, Kit, softly. "They've saved our lives—"

By George, Dillie, how are you!"

What! You, Campbell? Not you?"

"The very same, old man? Well, if this isn't—Kit, do you hear, this is my old chum in the Academy at home! This is my wife, Dillie. We're on our wedding trip. Well, if this isn't great!"

Explanations and introductions trod upon each other's heels. There were merriment and laughter enough to set the echoes a-ringing. In the midst of it all came hitching back Mrs. Catherwood's hen.

"It's such fun being a chaperone!" the little bride confided to her husband that night when the summer "camp" had settled down to quiet and rest. "I guess it paid to marry you, Georgy; I couldn't have been a chaperone if I hadn't, could I? Makes me feel so dignified and old and grandmotherly!"

"And me grandfatherly."

"You! Georgy, you're not in it. I'm chaperoning you, too! But, Georgy—"

"What say?"

"Of course I don't know yet, but I'm not sure but what I've found the Best Man in the World for Mig."

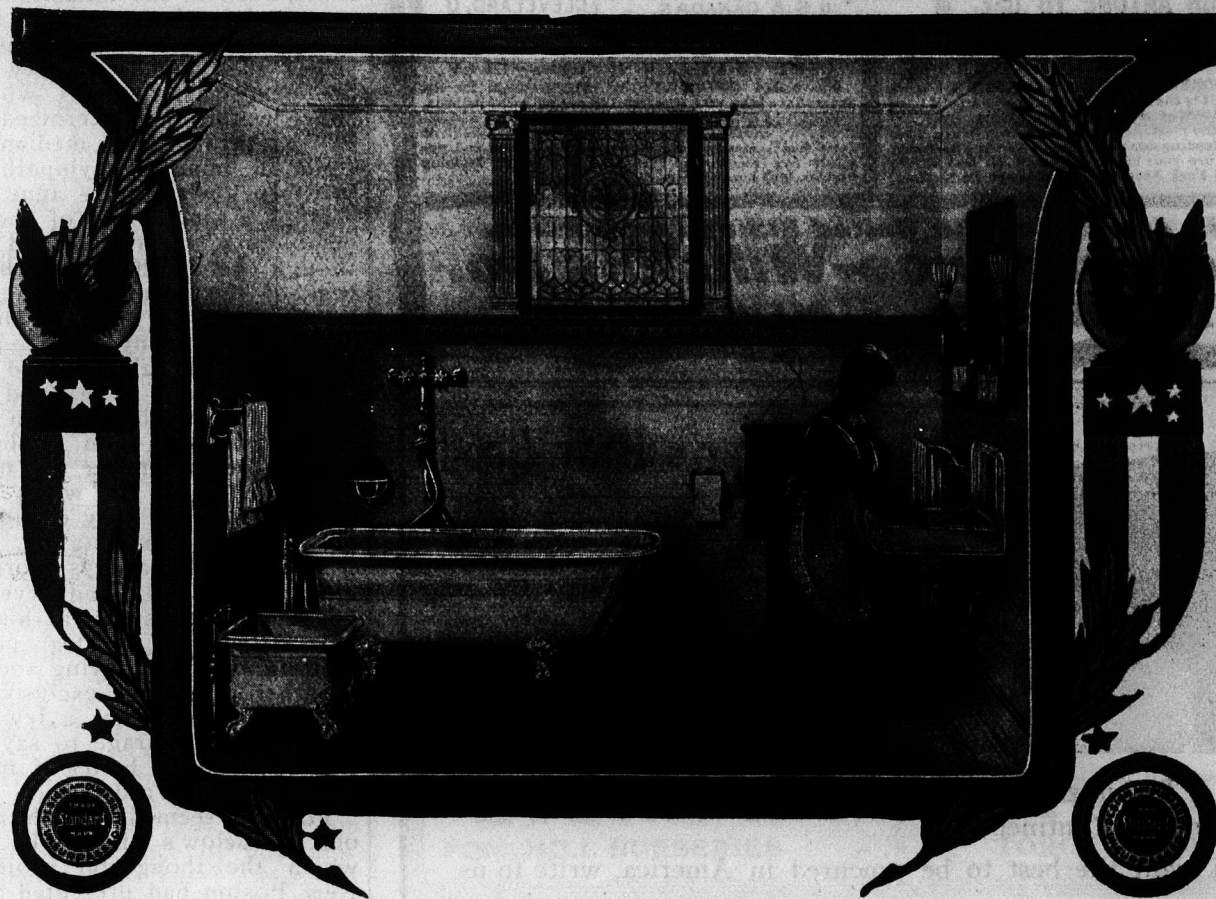
"You found—hear her!"

"The only trouble is, there are two of 'em, Georgy. I can't make up my mind which one—"

"Might leave it to Mig."

"Mercy, why so I might!" laughed the little bride. "Georgy, what a smart boy you are!"

So, as in the end turned out to be wise, the matter was left to Mig—and Jessica.



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