

**Aunt Jane's Nieces in the Red Cross**

**By**

**Edith Van Dyne**

## FOREWORD

This is the story of how three brave American girls sacrificed the comforts and luxuries of home to go abroad and nurse the wounded soldiers of a foreign war.

I wish I might have depicted more gently the scenes in hospital and on battlefield, but it is well that my girl readers should realize something of the horrors of war, that they may unite with heart and soul in earnest appeal for universal, lasting Peace and the future abolition of all deadly strife.

Except to locate the scenes of my heroines' labors, no attempt has been made to describe technically or historically any phase of the great European war.

The character of Doctor Gys is not greatly exaggerated but had its counterpart in real life. As for the little Belgian who had no room for scruples in his active brain, his story was related to me by an American war correspondent who vouched for its truth. The other persona in the story are known to those who have followed their adventures in other books of the "Aunt Jane's Nieces" series.

EDITH VAN DYNE

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## CHAPTER I

### THE ARRIVAL OF THE BOY

"What's the news, Uncle?" asked Miss Patricia Doyle, as she entered the cosy breakfast room of a suite of apartments in Willing Square. Even as she spoke she pecked a little kiss on the forehead of the chubby man addressed as "Uncle"--none other, if you please, than the famous and eccentric multi-millionaire known in Wall Street as John Merrick--and sat down to pour the coffee.

There was energy in her method of doing this simple duty, an indication of suppressed vitality that conveyed the idea that here was a girl accustomed to action. And she fitted well into the homely scene: short and somewhat "squatty" of form, red-haired, freckle-faced and pug-nosed. Wholesome rather than beautiful was Patsy Doyle, but if you caught a glimpse of her dancing blue eyes you straightway forgot her lesser charms.

Quite different was the girl who entered the room a few minutes later. Hers was a dark olive complexion, face of exquisite contour, great brown eyes with a wealth of hair to match them and the flush of a rose in her rounded cheeks. The poise of her girlish figure was gracious and dignified as the bearing of a queen.

"Morning, Cousin Beth," said Patsy cheerily.

"Good morning, my dear," and then, with a trace of anxiety in her tone:

"What is the news, Uncle John?"

The little man had ignored Patsy's first question, but now he answered absently, his eyes still fixed upon the newspaper:

"Why, they're going to build another huge skyscraper on Broadway, at Eleventh, and I see the political pot is beginning to bubble all through the Bronx, although--"

"Stuff and nonsense, Uncle!" exclaimed Patsy. "Beth asked for news, not for gossip."

"The news of the war, Uncle John," added Beth, buttering her toast.

"Oh; the war, of course," he said, turning over the page of the morning paper. "It ought to be the Allies' day, for the Germans won yesterday. No--by cracky, Beth--the Germans triumph again; they've captured Maubeuge. What do you think of that?"

Patsy gave a little laugh.

"Not knowing where Maubeuge is," she remarked, "my only thought is that something is wrong with the London press bureau. Perhaps the cables got

crossed--or short circuited or something. They don't usually allow the Germans to win two days in succession."

"Don't interrupt, please," said Beth, earnestly. "This is too important a matter to be treated lightly. Read us the article, Uncle. I was afraid Maubeuge would be taken."

Patsy accepted her cousin's rebuke with her accustomed good nature. Indeed, she listened as intently as Beth to the thrilling account of the destruction of Maubeuge, and her blue eyes became quite as serious as the brown ones of her cousin when the tale of dead and wounded was recounted.

"Isn't it dreadful!" cried Beth, clasping her hands together impulsively.

"Yes," nodded her uncle, "the horror of it destroys the interest we naturally feel in any manly struggle for supremacy."

"This great war is no manly struggle," observed Patsy with a toss of her head. "It is merely wholesale murder by a band of selfish diplomats."

"Tut-tut!" warned Mr. Merrick; "we Americans are supposed to be neutral, my dear. We must not criticize."

"That does not prevent our sympathizing with the innocent sufferers,

however," said Beth quietly. "My heart goes out, Uncle, to those poor victims of the war's cruelty, the wounded and dying. I wish I could do something to help them!"

Uncle John moved uneasily in his chair. Then he laid down his paper and applied himself to his breakfast. But his usual merry expression had faded into one of thoughtfulness.

"The wounded haunt me by day and night," went on Beth. "There are thousands upon thousands of them, left to suffer terrible pain--perhaps to die--on the spot where they fell, and each one is dear to some poor woman who is ignorant of her loved one's fate and can do nothing but moan and pray at home."

"That's the hard part of it," said Patsy, her cousin. "I think the mothers and wives and sweethearts are as much to be pitied as the fallen soldiers. The men know what has happened, but the women don't. It isn't so bad when they're killed outright; the family gets a medal to indicate that their hero has died for his country. But the wounded are lost sight of and must suffer in silence, with no loving hands to soothe their agony."

"My dears!" pleaded Uncle John, plaintively, "why do you insist upon flavoring our breakfast with these horrors? I--I--there! take it away; I can't eat."

The conversation halted abruptly. The girls were likewise unnerved by the mental pictures evolved by their remarks and it was now too late to restore cheerfulness to the morning meal. They sat in pensive silence for a while and were glad when Mr. Merrick pushed back his chair and rose from the table.

As Beth and Patsy followed their uncle into the cosy library where he was accustomed to smoke his morning cigar, the little man remarked:

"Let's see; this is the seventh of September."

"Quite right, Uncle," said Patsy.

"Isn't this the day Maud Stanton is due to arrive?"

"No," replied Beth; "she will come to-morrow morning. It's a good four days' trip from California to New York, you know."

"I wonder why she is coming here at this time of year," said Patsy reflectively, "and I wonder if her Aunt Jane or her sister Flo are with her."

"She did not mention them in her telegram," answered Beth. "All she said was to expect her Wednesday morning. It seems quite mysterious, that telegram, for I had no idea Maud thought of coming East."



"Well, we will know all about it when she arrives," observed Uncle John.

"I will be glad to see Maud again, for she is one of my especial favorites."

"She's a very dear girl!" exclaimed Patsy, with emphasis. "It will be simply glorious to--"

The doorbell rang sharply. There was a moment's questioning pause, for it was too early for visitors. The pattering feet of the little maid, Mary, approached the door and next moment a boyish voice demanded:

"Is Mr. Merrick at home, or the young ladies, or--"

"Why, it's Ajo!" shouted Patsy, springing to her feet and making a dive for the hallway.

"Jones?" said Mr. Merrick, looking incredulous.

"It must be," declared Beth, for now Patsy's voice was blended with that of the boy in a rapid interchange of question and answer. Then in she came, dragging him joyously by the arm.

"This is certainly a surprise!" said Mr. Merrick, shaking the tall, slender youth by the hand with evident pleasure.

"When did you get to town?" asked Beth, greeting the boy cordially.

"And why didn't you let us know you were on the way from far-off Los Angeles?"

"Well," said Jones, seating himself facing them and softly rubbing his lean hands together to indicate his satisfaction at this warm reception, "it's a long, long story and I may as well tell it methodically or you'll never appreciate the adventurous spirit that led me again to New York--the one place I heartily detest."

"Oh, Ajo!" protested Patsy. "Is this the way to retain the friendship of New Yorkers?"

"Isn't honesty appreciated here?" he wanted to know.

"Go ahead with your story," said Uncle John. "We left you some months ago at the harbor of Los Angeles, wondering what you were going to do with that big ship of yours that lay anchored in the Pacific. If I remember aright, you were considering whether you dared board it to return to that mysterious island home of yours at--at--"

"Sangoa," said Patsy.

"Thank you for giving me a starting-point," returned the boy, with a smile. "You may remember that when I landed in your country from Sangoa I was a miserable invalid. The voyage had ruined my stomach and wrecked my constitution. I crossed the continent to New York and consulted the

best specialists--and they nearly put an end to me. I returned to the Pacific coast to die as near home as possible, and--and there I met you."

"And Patsy saved your life," added Beth.

"She did. First, however, Maud Stanton saved me from drowning. Then Patsy Doyle doctored me and made me well and strong. And now--"

"And now you look like a modern Hercules," asserted Patsy, gazing with some pride at the bronzed cheeks and clear eyes of the former invalid and ignoring his slight proportions. "Whatever have you been doing with yourself since then?"

"Taking a sea voyage," he affirmed.

"Really?"

"An absolute fact. For months I dared not board the Arabella, my sea yacht, for fear of a return of my old malady; but after you deserted me and came to this--this artificial, dreary, bewildering--"

"Never mind insulting my birthplace, sir!"

"Oh! were you born here, Patsy? Then I'll give the town credit. So, after you deserted me at Los Angeles--"

"You still had Mrs. Montrose and her nieces, Maud and Flo Stanton."

"I know, and I love them all. But they became so tremendously busy that I scarcely saw them, and finally I began to feel lonely. Those Stanton girls are chock full of business energy and they hadn't the time to devote to me that you people did. So I stood on the shore and looked at the Arabella until I mustered up courage to go aboard. Surviving that, I made Captain Carg steam slowly along the coast for a few miles. Nothing dreadful happened. So I made a day's voyage, and still ate my three squares a day. That was encouraging."

"I knew all the time it wasn't the voyage that wrecked your stomach," said Patsy confidently.

"What was it, then?"

"Ptomaine poisoning, or something like that."

"Well, anyhow, I found I could stand ocean travel again, so I determined on a voyage. The Panama Canal was just opened and I passed through it, came up the Atlantic coast, and--the Arabella is at this moment safely anchored in the North River!"

"And how do you feel?" inquired Uncle John.

"Glorious--magnificent! The trip has sealed my recovery for good."

"But why didn't you go home, to your Island of Sangoa?" asked Beth.

He looked at her reproachfully.

"You were not there, Beth; nor was Patsy, or Uncle John. On the other hand, there is no one in Sangoa who cares a rap whether I come home or not. I'm the last of the Joneses of Sangoa, and while it is still my island and the entire population is in my employ, the life there flows on just as smoothly without me as if I were present."

"But don't they need the ship--the Arabella?" questioned Beth.

"Not now. I sent a cargo of supplies by Captain Carg when he made his last voyage to the island, and there will not be enough pearls found in the fisheries for four or five months to come to warrant my shipping them to market. Even then, they would keep. So I'm a free lance at present and I had an idea that if I once managed to get the boat around here you folks might find a use for it."

"In what way?" inquired Patsy, with interest.

"We might all make a trip to Barbadoes, Bermuda and Cuba. Brazil is said to be an interesting country. I'd prefer Europe, were it not for the war."

"Oh, Ajo, isn't this war terrible?"

"No other word expresses it. Yet it all seems like a fairy tale to me, for I've never been in any other country than the United States since I made my first voyage here from Sangoa--the island where my eyes first opened to the world."

"It isn't a fairy tale," said Beth with a shudder. "It's more like a horrible nightmare."

"I can't bear to read about it any more," he returned, musingly. "In fact, I've only been able to catch rumors of the progress of the war in the various ports at which I've touched, and I came right here from my ship. But I've no sympathy with either side. The whole thing annoys me, somehow--the utter uselessness and folly of it all."

"Maubeuge has fallen," said Beth, and went on to give him the latest tidings. Finding that the war was the absorbing topic in this little household, the boy developed new interest in it and the morning passed quickly away.

Jones stayed to lunch and then Mr. Merrick's automobile took them all to the river to visit the beautiful yacht Arabella, which was already, they found, attracting a good deal of attention in the harbor, where beautiful yachts are no rarity.

The Arabella was intended by her builders for deep sea transit and as Patsy admiringly declared, "looked like a baby liner." While she was yacht-built in all her lines and fittings, she was far from being merely a pleasure craft, but had been designed by the elder Jones, the boy's father, to afford communication between the Island of Sangoa, in the lower South Seas, and the continent of America.

Sangoa is noted for its remarkable pearl fisheries, which were now owned and controlled entirely by this youth; but his father, an experienced man of affairs, had so thoroughly established the business of production and sale that little remained for his only son and heir to do, more than to invest the profits that steadily accrued and to care for the great fortune left him. Whether he was doing this wisely or not no one--not even his closest friends--could tell. But he was frank and friendly about everything else.

They went aboard the Arabella and were received by that grim and grizzled old salt, Captain Carg, with the same wooden indifference he always exhibited. But Patsy detected a slight twinkle in the shrewd gray eyes that made her feel they were welcome. Carg, a seaman of vast experience, was wholly devoted to his young master. Indeed, the girls suspected that young Jones was a veritable autocrat in his island, as well as aboard his ship. Everyone of the Sangoans seemed to accept his dictation, however imperative it might be, as a matter of course, and the gray old captain--who had seen much of the world--was not the least

subservient to his young master.

On the other hand, Jones was a gentle and considerate autocrat, unconsciously imitating his lately deceased father in his kindly interest in the welfare of all his dependents. These had formerly been free-born Americans, for when the Island of Sangoa was purchased it had no inhabitants.

This fortunate--or perhaps unfortunate--youth had never been blessed with a given name, more than the simple initial "A." The failure of his mother and father to agree upon a baptismal name for their only child had resulted in a deadlock; and, as the family claimed a direct descent from the famous John Paul Jones, the proud father declared that to be "a Jones" was sufficient honor for any boy; hence he should be known merely as "A. Jones." The mother called her child by the usual endearing pet names until her death, after which the islanders dubbed the master's son--then toddling around in his first trousers--"Ajo," and the name had stuck to him ever since for want of a better one.

With the Bohemian indifference to household routine so characteristic of New Yorkers, the party decided to dine at a down-town restaurant before returning to Willing Square, and it was during this entertainment that young Jones first learned of the expected arrival of Maud Stanton on the following morning. But he was no wiser than the others as to what mission could have brought the girl to New York so suddenly that a telegram was required to announce her coming.



"You see, I left Los Angeles weeks ago," the boy explained, "and at that time Mrs. Montrose and her nieces were busy as bees and much too occupied to pay attention to a drone like me. There was no hint then of their coming East, but of course many things may have happened in the meantime."

The young fellow was so congenial a companion and the girls were so well aware of his loneliness, through lack of acquaintances, that they carried him home with them to spend the evening. When he finally left them, at a late hour, it was with the promise to be at the station next morning to meet Maud Stanton on her arrival.