

## CHAPTER II

### THE ARRIVAL OF THE GIRL

A sweet-faced girl, very attractive but with a sad and anxious expression, descended from the Pullman and brightened as she found her friends standing with outstretched arms to greet her.

"Oh, Maud!" cried Patsy, usurping the first hug, "how glad I am to see you again!"

Beth looked in Maud Stanton's face and forbore to speak as she embraced her friend. Then Jones shook both hands of the new arrival and Uncle John kissed her with the same tenderness he showed his own nieces.

This reception seemed to cheer Maud Stanton immensely. She even smiled during the drive to Willing Square--a winning, gracious smile that would have caused her to be instantly recognized in almost any community of our vast country; for this beautiful young girl was a famous motion picture actress, possessing qualities that had endeared her to every patron of the better class photo-dramas.

At first she had been forced to adopt this occupation by the stern necessity of earning a livelihood, and under the careful guidance of her aunt--Mrs. Jane Montrose, a widow who had at one time been a favorite in

New York social circles--Maud and her sister Florence had applied themselves so intelligently to their art that their compensation had become liberal enough to enable them to save a modest competence.

One cause of surprise at Maud's sudden journey east was the fact that her services were in eager demand by the managers of the best producing companies on the Pacific Coast, where nearly all the American pictures are now made. Another cause for surprise was that she came alone, leaving her Aunt Jane and her sister Flo--usually her inseparable companion--in Los Angeles.

But they did not question her until the cosy home at Willing Square was reached, luncheon served and Maud installed in the "Guest Room." Then the three girls had "a good, long talk" and presently came trooping into the library to enlighten Uncle John and Ajo.

"Oh, Uncle! What do you think?" cried Patsy. "Maud is going to the war!"

"The war!" echoed Mr. Merrick in a bewildered voice. "What on earth can--"

"She is going to be a nurse," explained Beth, a soft glow of enthusiasm mantling her pretty face. "Isn't it splendid, Uncle!"

"H-m," said Uncle John, regarding the girl with wonder. "It is certainly a--a--surprising venture."

"But--see here, Maud--it's mighty dangerous," protested young Jones.

"It's a tremendous undertaking, and--what can one girl do in the midst of all those horrors?"

Maud seated herself quietly between them. Her face was grave and thoughtful.

"I have had to answer many such arguments before now, as you may suspect," she began in even tones, "but the fact that I am here, well on my journey, is proof that I have convinced my aunt, my sister and all my western friends that I am at least determined on my mission, whether it be wise or foolish. I do not think I shall incur danger by caring for the wounded; the Red Cross is highly respected everywhere, these days."

"The Red Cross?" quoth Uncle John.

"Yes; I shall wear the Red Cross," she continued. "You know that I am a trained nurse; it was part of my education before--before--"

"I had not known that until now," said Mr. Merrick, "but I am glad you have had that training. Beth began a course at the school here, but I took her away to Europe before she graduated. However, I wish more girls could be trained for nursing, as it is a more useful and admirable accomplishment than most of them now acquire."

"Fox-Trots and Bunny-Hugs, for instance," said Patricia with fine disdain.

"Patsy is a splendid nurse," declared Ajo, with a grateful look toward that chubby miss.

"But untrained," she answered laughingly. "It was just common sense that enabled me to cure your malady, Ajo. I couldn't bandage a cut or a bullet wound to save me."

"Fortunately," said Maud, "I have a diploma which will gain for me the endorsement of the American Red Cross Society. I am counting on that to enable me to get an appointment at the seat of war, where I can be of most use."

"Where will you go?" asked the boy. "To Germany, Austria, Russia, Belgium, or--"

"I shall go to France," she replied. "I speak French, but understand little of German, although once I studied the language."

"Are you fully resolved upon this course, Maud?" asked Mr. Merrick in a tone of regret.

"Fully decided, sir. I am going to Washington to-morrow, to get my credentials, and then I shall take the first steamer to Europe."

There was no use arguing with Maud Stanton when she assumed that tone. It was neither obstinate nor defiant, yet it conveyed a quiet resolve that was unanswerable.

For a time they sat in silence, musing on the many phases of this curious project; then Beth came to Mr. Merrick's side and asked pleadingly:

"May I go with her, Uncle?"

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, with a nervous jump. "You, Beth?"

"Yes, Uncle. I so long to be of help to those poor fellows who are being so cruelly sacrificed; and I know I can soothe much suffering, if I have the opportunity."

He stared at her, not knowing what to reply. This quaint little man was so erratic himself, in his sudden resolves and eccentric actions, that he could scarcely quarrel with his niece for imitating an example he had frequently set. Still, he was shrewd enough to comprehend the reckless daring of the proposition.

"Two unprotected girls in the midst of war and carnage, surrounded by foreigners, inspired to noble sacrifice through ignorance and inexperience, and hardly old enough to travel alone from Hoboken to

Brooklyn! Why, the thing's absurd," he said.

"Quite impractical," added Ajo, nodding wisely. "You're both too pretty, my dears, to undertake such an adventure. Why, the wounded men would all fall in love with their nurses and follow you back to America in a flock; and that might put a stop to the war for lack of men to fight it."

"Don't be silly, Ajo," said Patsy, severely. "I've decided to go with Maud and Beth, and you know very well that the sight of my freckled face would certainly chill any romance that might arise."

"That's nonsense, Patsy!"

"Then you consider me beautiful, Uncle John?"

"I mean it's nonsense about your going with Maud and Beth. I won't allow it."

"Oh, Uncle! You know I can twine you around my little finger, if I choose. So don't, for goodness' sake, start a rumpus by trying to set your will against mine."

"Then side with me, dear. I'm quite right, I assure you."

"You're always right, Nunkie, dear," she cried, giving him a resounding

smack of a kiss on his chubby cheek as she sat on the arm of his chair, "but I'm going with the girls, just the same, and you may as well make up your mind to it."

Uncle John coughed. He left his chair and trotted up and down the room a moment. Then he carefully adjusted his spectacles, took a long look at Patsy's face, and heaved a deep sigh of resignation.

"Thank goodness, that's settled," said Patsy cheerfully.

Uncle John turned to the boy, saying dismally:

"I've done everything in my power for these girls, and now they defy me. They've declared a thousand times they love me, and yet they'd trot off to bandage a lot of unknown foreigners and leave me alone to worry my heart out."

"Why don't you go along?" asked Jones. "I'm going."

"You!"

"Of course. I've a suspicion our girls have the right instinct, sir--the tender, womanly instinct that makes us love them. At any rate, I'm going to stand by them. It strikes me as the noblest and grandest idea a girl ever conceived, and if anything could draw me closer to these three young ladies, who had me pretty well snared before, it is this very

proposition."

"I don't see why," muttered Uncle John, wavering.

"I'll tell you why, sir. For themselves, they have all the good things of life at their command. They could bask in luxury to the end of their days, if they so desired. Yet their wonderful womanly sympathy goes out to the helpless and suffering--the victims of the cruellest war the world has ever known--and they promptly propose to sacrifice their ease and brave whatever dangers may befall, that they may relieve to some extent the pain and agony of those wounded and dying fellow creatures."

"Foreigners," said Uncle John weakly.

"Human beings," said the boy.

Patsy marched over to Ajo and gave him a sturdy whack upon the back that nearly knocked him over.

"The spirit of John Paul Jones still goes marching on!" she cried. "My boy, you're the right stuff, and I'm glad I doctored you."

He smiled, looking from one to another of the three girls questioningly.

"Then I'm to go along?" he asked.



"We shall be grateful," answered Maud, after a moment's hesitation.

"This is all very sudden to me, for I had planned to go alone."

"That wouldn't do at all," asserted Uncle John briskly. "I'm astonished and--and grieved--that my nieces should want to go with you, but perhaps the trip will prove interesting. Tell me what steamer you want to catch, Maud, and I'll reserve rooms for our entire party."

"No," said Jones, "don't do it, sir."

"Why not?"

"There's the Arabella. Let's use her."

"To cross the ocean?"

"She has done that before. It will assist our enterprise, I'm sure, to have our own boat. These are troublous times on the high seas."

Patsy clapped her hands gleefully.

"That's it; a hospital ship!" she exclaimed.

They regarded her with various expressions: startled, doubtful, admiring, approving. Presently, with added thought on the matter, the approval became unanimous.

"It's an amazing suggestion," said Maud, her eyes sparkling.

"Think how greatly it will extend our usefulness," said Beth.

Uncle John was again trotting up and down the room, this time in a state of barely repressed excitement.

"The very thing!" he cried. "Clever, practical, and--eh--eh--tremendously interesting. Now, then, listen carefully--all of you! It's up to you, Jones, to accompany Maud on the night express to Washington. Get the Red Cross Society to back our scheme and supply us with proper credentials. The Arabella must be rated as a hospital ship and our party endorsed as a distinct private branch of the Red Cross--what they call a 'unit.' I'll give you a letter to our senator and he will look after our passports and all necessary papers. I--I helped elect him, you know. And while you're gone it shall be my business to fit the ship with all the supplies we shall need to promote our mission of mercy."

"I'll share the expense," proposed the boy.

"No, you won't. You've done enough in furnishing the ship and crew. I'll attend to the rest."

"And Beth and I will be Uncle John's assistants," said Patsy. "We shall

want heaps of lint and bandages, drugs and liniments and--"

"And, above all, a doctor," advised Ajo. "One of the mates on my yacht, Kelsey by name, is a half-way physician, having studied medicine in his youth and practiced it on the crew for the last dozen years; but what we really need on a hospital ship is a bang-up surgeon."

"This promises to become an expensive undertaking," remarked Maud, with a sigh. "Perhaps it will be better to let me go alone, as I originally expected to do. But, if we take along the hospital ship, do not be extravagant, Mr. Merrick, in equipping it. I feel that I have been the innocent cause of drawing you all into this venture and I do not want it to prove a hardship to my friends."

"All right, Maud," returned Uncle John, with a cheerful grin, "I'll try to economize, now that you've warned me."

Ajo smiled and Patsy Doyle laughed outright. They knew it would not inconvenience the little rich man, in the slightest degree, to fit out a dozen hospital ships.