

CHAPTER XII

MOLLY SIZER'S PARTY

The people of Chazy County were very proud of the Millville Tribune, the only daily paper in that section of the state. It was really a very good newspaper, if small in size, and related the news of the day as promptly as the great New York journals did.

Arthur Weldon had not been very enthusiastic about the paper at any time, although he humored the girls by attending in a good-natured way to the advertising, hiring some of the country folk to get subscriptions, and keeping the books. He was a young man of considerable education who had inherited a large fortune, safely invested, and therefore had no need, through financial necessity, to interest himself in business of any sort. He allowed the girls to print his name as editor in chief, but he did no editorial work at all, amusing himself these delightful summer days by wandering in the woods, where he collected botanical specimens, or sitting with Uncle John on the lawn, where they read together or played chess. Both the men were glad the girls were happy in their work and enthusiastic over the success of their audacious venture. Beth was developing decided talent as a writer of editorials and her articles were even more thoughtful and dignified than were those of Patsy. The two girls found plenty to occupy them at the office, while Louise did the reportorial work and flitted through

Millville and down to Huntingdon each day in search of small items of local interest. She grew fond of this work, for it brought her close to the people and enabled her to study their characters and peculiarities. Her manner of approaching the simple country folk was so gracious and winning that they freely gave her any information they possessed, and chatted with her unreservedly.

Sometimes Louise would make her rounds alone, but often Arthur would join her for an afternoon drive to Huntingdon, and it greatly amused him to listen to his girl-wife's adroit manner of "pumping the natives."

About halfway to Huntingdon was the Sizer Farm, the largest and most important in that vicinity. Old Zeke Sizer had a large family--five boys and three girls--and they were noted as quite the most aggressive and disturbing element in the neighborhood. Old Zeke was rude and coarse and swore like a trooper, so his sons could not be expected to excel him in refinement. Bill Sizer, the eldest, was a hard drinker, and people who knew him asserted that he "never drew a sober breath." The other sons were all quarrelsome in disposition and many a free fight was indulged in among them whenever disputes arose. They were industrious farmers, though, and the three girls and their mother worked from morning till night, so the farm prospered and the Sizers were reputed to be "well-off."

Molly, the eldest girl, had attracted Louise, who declared she was pretty enough to arrest attention in any place. Indeed, this girl was a

"raving beauty" in her buxom, countrified way, and her good looks were the pride of the Sizer family and the admiration of the neighbors. The other two were bouncing, merry girls, rather coarse in manner, as might be expected from their environment; but Molly, perhaps fully conscious of her prettiness, assumed certain airs and graces and a regal deportment that brought even her big, brutal brothers to her feet in adoration.

The Sizers were among the first subscribers to the Millville Tribune and whenever Louise stopped at the farmhouse for news the family would crowd around her, ignoring all duties, and volunteer whatever information they possessed. For when they read their own gossip in the local column it gave them a sort of proprietary interest in the paper, and Bill had once thrashed a young clerk at Huntingdon for questioning the truth of an item the Sizers had contributed.

One day when Louise and Arthur stopped at the farm, Mollie ran out with an eager face to say that Friday was her birthday and the Sizers were to give a grand party to celebrate it.

"We want you to come over an' write it up, Mrs. Weldon," said the girl. "They're comin' from twenty mile around, fer the dance, an' we've got the orchestra from Malvern to play for us. Pop's goin' to spend a lot of money on refreshments an' it'll be the biggest blow-out Chazy County ever seen!"

"I think I can write up the party without being present, Mollie," suggested Louise.

"No; you come over. I read once, in a novel, how an editor come to a swell party an' writ about all the dresses an' things--said what everybody wore, you know. I'm goin' to have a new dress, an' if ever'thing's described right well we'll buy a lot of papers to send to folks we know in Connecticut."

"Well," said Louise, with a sigh, "I'll try to drive over for a little while. It is to be Saturday, you say?"

"Yes; the birthday's Friday and the dance Saturday night, rain or shine. An' you might bring the chief editor, your husband, an' try a dance with us. It wouldn't hurt our reputation any to have you folks mingle with us on this festive occasion," she added airily.

They had a good laugh over this invitation when it was reported at Mr. Merrick's dinner table, and Patsy insisted that Louise must write up the party.

"It will be fun to give it a 'double head' and a big send-off," she said. "Write it up as if it were a real society event, dear, and exhaust your vocabulary on the gowns. You'll have to invent some Frenchy names to describe those, I guess, for they'll be wonders; and we'll wind up with a list of 'those present.'"

So on Saturday evening Arthur drove his wife over to the Sizer farm, and long before they reached there they heard the scraping of fiddles, mingled with shouts and boisterous laughter. It was a prohibition district, to be sure, but old Sizer had imported from somewhere outside the "dry zone" a quantity of liquors more remarkable for strength than quality, and with these the guests had been plied from the moment of their arrival. Most of them were wholly unused to such libations, so by the time Arthur and Louise arrived, the big living room of the farmhouse presented an appearance of wild revelry that was quite deplorable.

Molly welcomed them with wild enthusiasm and big Bill, her adoring brother, demanded in a loud voice if Arthur did not consider her the "Belle of Chazy County."

"They ain't a stunner in the state as kin hold a candle to our Molly," he added, and then with uncertain gait he left the "reporters" with the promise to "bring 'em a drink."

"Come, Louise," said Arthur, quietly, "let's get out of here."

He drew her to the door and as a dance was just starting they managed to escape without notice.

"What a disgraceful scene!" cried Louise, when they were on their way home; "and to think of such a shocking carousal being held in good old

Chazy County, where morals are usually irreproachable! I shall not mention the affair in the Tribune at all."

But Patsy, who had a managing editor's respect for news of any sort, combatted this determination and begged Louise to write up Molly Sizer's party without referring to its deplorable features.

"It isn't policy to offend the Sizers," she said, "for although they are coarse and common they have shown a friendly spirit toward the paper. Moreover, the enmity of such people--which would surely result from our ignoring the birthday party--would keep us in hot water."

So Louise, though reluctantly, wrote up the party and the manuscript was sent over to Miss Briggs Sunday afternoon, so it would get a place in Monday morning's Tribune.

Uncle John had the paper at breakfast on Monday, and he gave an amused laugh as his eye caught the report of the Sizer party.

"This is a good one on you, Louise," he exclaimed. "You say that Miss Molly, 'looking more lovely than ever in her handsome new gown, greeted her guests with a roughish smile.'"

"A what?" demanded Louise, horrified.

"A 'roughish' smile."

"Oh; that's a mistake," she said, glancing at the item. "What I said was a 'roguish' smile; but there's been a typographical error which Miss Briggs must have overlooked in reading the proof."

"Nevertheless," remarked Arthur, "the statement isn't far wrong. Everything was rough, including the smiles, as far as I noted that remarkable gathering."

"But--see here!" cried Patsy; "that's a dreadful mistake. That spoils all the nice things you said about the girl, Louise. I hope the Sizers won't notice it."

But the Sizers did, and were frantic with rage over what they deemed was a deliberate insult to Molly. Several young men who had come from distances to attend the birthday party had stayed over Sunday at the farmhouse, where the revelry still continued in a fitful way, due to vain attempts to relieve racking headaches by further libations. Monday morning found the dissipated crew still the guests of the Sizers, and when big Bill slowly spelled out the assertion made by the Tribune that his sister had "a roughish smile" loud cries of indignation arose. Molly first cried and then had hysterics and screamed vigorously; Bill swore vengeance on the Millville Tribune and all connected with it, while the guests gravely asserted it was "a low-down, measly trick" which the Sizers ought to resent. They all began drinking again, to calm their feelings, and after the midday dinner Bill Sizer grabbed a

huge cowhide whip and started to Millville to "lick the editor to a standstill." A wagonload of his guests accompanied him, and Molly pleaded with her brother not to hurt Mrs. Weldon.

"I won't; but I'll cowhide that fresh husband of hers," declared Bill.

"He's the editor--the paper says so--and he's the one I'm after!"