

A Washington's Birthday Invitation.

By ALICE LOUISE LEE.

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THE pen and ink class were working with their eyes on their model and their ears strained to catch the sound of footsteps in the hall. It was criticism day, and no one knew at what hour the "master" would appear; hence the unusual silence and application.

The sudden opening of the door created a stir which amused the newcomers—a tall young woman with a swinging, independent gait. "No, I'm not the master," she announced with a laugh, "but he's just around the corner, and Alden is with him."

The model gave a slight start, and her left hand moved involuntarily, while murmurs of "Oh, Ze!" "Good!" and "Wish he'd come every day!" arose, followed by a "Sh!"

A watchful silence ensued, broken by a grumble from the far corner. "Amy, your expression is wretched today."

"And there goes the curve of your left arm!" exclaimed another. Then, testily, "Amy, do sit still!"

The model, Amy Low, from the antique class, flushed faintly and resumed her first position. She sat sideways, her right arm supported by the carved chair back, her head resting on her hand, bringing a delicate profile into view.

"Girls, prepare to meet your doom. He cometh!" rumbled Zetella Brown in a sepulchral voice.

There were footsteps in the hall and the sound of voices, one high and querulous, the other low and distinct. The door opened, and the master entered, a short man with a Vandike beard, which he incessantly worried as he tossed his merciless criticisms right and left.

"If ever I saw a face of wood," he began at the first easel, "it's right here. How can you look at a face like that," pointing at Amy, "full of delicate curves and sensitive lines, and then produce such a thing as this—a face as set as that of an Egyptian mummy? Bah! Look at it, Alden."

After the master had taken himself and his querulous voice out of the room Mr. Alden lingered. His presence—quiet, grave and reassuring—was an inspiration to the class.

"I just wish he were our critic!" exclaimed a tearful girl near Amy.

"Huh!" muttered Ze, whose easel stood next. "Catch John Alden here as regular critic! Ever been in his studios? They're great!"

The tearful girl had never visited them, but Amy had. It was months ago, when she first came to the city, an ambitious, shy, painstaking worker in the antique class, where Alden had discovered her one day when he was making the rounds of the room with Van Horn. She retained a vivid recollection of that day. The two men had stopped behind her as she sat absorbed in a drawing of Caesar's bust.

"Great Caesar!" Van Horn had stormed. "He would never recognize himself if he should see his head on your paper."

She dropped her pencil with a start and turned to encounter not Van Horn's fretful gaze, but the kind, steady eyes of the greater artist. And



"IF EVER I SAW A FACE OF WOOD"—HE BEGAN.

when the master had mutilated her sketch and passed on, John Alden, the descendant of that other Alden of sterling character, remained and saved her from utter discouragement concerning her work.

Alden had followed this with other visits to the antique class, and then she had sat for him, a demure Martha Washington at her spindle in cap and kerchief. Amy caught her breath as she thought of those sittings, and now—

Her time was up, and she arose possessed of one idea—to escape from the room without encountering Alden, who persistently lingered near the entrance. With a feeling of thankfulness she saw Ze gathering up her work preparatory to leaving. Slipping over to her, she whispered, "Ze, come down the corridor with me, won't you?"

"Important?" returned Ze, with good natured carelessness, squinting at her work.

"Very," returned Amy in a panic as

she saw Alden drawing near. She ran her hand lightly under the arm of the taller girl, using her as a screen until they were safely past the artist, whose eyes followed the Martha of his favorite painting.

"Alden doesn't favor our room as often as he does the antique," began Ze, with affected nonchalance. "I wonder why." She gave Amy's hand a little squeeze. "I also wonder why he came today. Ahem!"

"Ze, please don't tease; my head aches so." Amy's voice ended in a choke.

Ze opened her eyes widely at the note of pain in the other's tone. She pursed her lips to whistle and then thought better of it as a girl emerged from the door of the life class and swooped down on Amy, exclaiming:

"Oh, such hair! What a shame to keep it done up properly. You ought to leave it out like this all the time." She turned Amy's face up and kissed it impulsively. "You're a dear, anyway." The little country girl had won a warm place in the hearts of the art students. "By the way, that invitation has arrived by this time, of course?"

"Oh, no!" Amy tried to speak naturally. "I am not invited, Miss Hall. Just because I'm a Daughter of the Revolution doesn't make it necessary for Mr. Alden to include me."

"But I supposed that you"—Miss Hall stopped abruptly, but her expression said more. She gave Amy a curious backward glance as she passed on.

"Ze, I'm going home and sleep off my headache," exclaimed Amy hurriedly, dropping Ze's arm. She spoke cheerfully, but with averted gaze. "Good-by."

"Goodby," responded Ze, looking after her. To herself she said energetically, "If John Alden has been flirting with that child, I shall"—She stopped, not being able on the spur of the moment to think of a punishment severe enough. "But if eyes tell true tales his do whenever he looks at her. Still that matter is queer."

She referred to the informal dinner which Alden was giving to a few Daughters and Sons of the Revolution on the evening of Feb. 22 and to which Amy had received no invitation. "It has certainly been delayed. She will receive it tonight," thought Ze.

But the evening's mail brought no invitation, and the unconsciously pathetic look in Amy's eyes went straight to Ze's heart. After dinner she repaired to Amy's room and settled herself comfortably on the bed. "Now, my dear," she began, "being three inches taller, twenty-five pounds heavier and four years older than you, I intend to talk this matter over with you whether you want me to or not. I cannot believe that John Alden has slighted you."

Amy smiled faintly and laid Ruskin aside. "But, Ze, the fact remains that I am not invited."

"I tell you," obstinately, "that I believe you are. You are not only a Daughter of the Revolution, but you are the dearest girl I know, and John Alden—no, I won't be shut off—Alden thinks so, too, if I'm big enough and old enough and know enough to judge thoughts, and I surely can judge a few of his." Ze spoke with vigor and conviction.

Later, after she had tucked Amy into bed as tenderly as she would a child, she brushed her hair rapidly to an accompaniment of half indignant, half amused thoughts: "Believes she has been unwomanly and forward with him! The shy little thing! She couldn't do a forward thing if she tried. No, I believe the invitation has gone astray, and I do hope she gives him a chance to see her around the institute."

This hope was destroyed the very next day at the door of the antique room, where Ze and Amy encountered Alden. He removed his hat, with a bow in Ze's direction, but with his eyes on Amy's face, from which all warmth had fled.

"I have been looking at your work on Cicero's head, Miss Low," he began. "Will you allow me to add a few lines?"

Ze had not believed Amy's manner could be so formal and cold. "Thank you, but I have just thrown that sketch aside. I am beginning another."

The muscles about Alden's mouth tightened. With a quick movement he swung on his heel, bowed and walked away without a word.

"Oh, you little wretch!" breathed Ze, seizing Amy's shoulders in an impatient shake, but a glance at the girl's face caused her hands to drop. "If ever I'm in love," she confided to her easel a moment later, "may the saints preserve me from idleness. Here Alden has left in a white heat, and I wager we don't see him again in a good while!"

She was right. The days passed, and the mail brought no invitation or explanation, but still Ze steadily proclaimed, "I believe it's sent and has been lost."

"You know Mr. Alden will receive as George Washington at the dinner, and in his invitations he has assigned to each of us the character he wishes us to represent," volunteered Miss Hall the 21st of February as she showed Amy a photograph of Alden's Martha Washington picture which she had just secured. "You ought to have been invited, dear, as Martha."

Amy worked on steadily. "Some one else will make a better Lady Washington, no doubt," she replied quietly, but she told herself passionately that no one else had a right to be Martha Washington if certain involuntary words and actions on Alden's part meant anything. Then her head dropped in sudden shame that she had been so unwomanly wise as to misunderstand him.

Washington's birthday found the boarding house on Fifty-second street astir later than usual. Ze did not open her eyes until 10 o'clock, and then she opened them on Amy with an offering of bread and jam.

"Oh dear smuggler!" she exclaimed, chewing valiantly at the dry bread. "This is the nectar of the gods. Long live boarding houses! May they survive their bread crusts! Amy, I had an idea in the small hours of the night, and I thought to treasure it, as such ideas are few, but—Oh, yes! Go and bring your wastebasket to me."

Amy stared. "Ze, you are not yet awake, are you?"

"Very much awake and wanting to be obeyed. Go hence!" tragically. Amy obeyed with a laugh which did not conceal the hollows under her eyes. The basket proved to be full, containing a large number of unopened art circulars. Ze, plunging among these with awakened interest, suddenly uttered an exclamation.

"Eureka! I've found it! I've found it! I was right after all. Hurray!" Slipped among the leaves of a circular was a square envelope addressed to Miss Amy Low in a big flowing hand. With fingers which shook, Amy opened the missive. It contained a note besides the formal invitation, a note which brought the blood surging up on her temples and a tremulous smile to

her lips. "Ze, he asks me to be Martha," she almost whispered without looking up, "and wishes me to wear the costume I wore when I sat for the picture." There was something else in the note which Amy did not mention. "And so you shall!" cried Ze. "It's not too late."



"PARDON ME, MISS BROWN. I THOUGHT IT WAS VAN HORN."

Amy shook her head. "You forget, Ze, that it is noon now."

"That makes no difference!" cried the other, planning energetically. "You have made the mistake, and it is your duty to fix things up the best way you can. You owe it to John Alden."

Amy glanced again at the last few lines of the note and faltered. "If he should have selected another Martha by this time?"

"Huh!" exclaimed Ze unbelievably. "We'll leave that for him to settle. All I want of you is to do the decent thing, and that is, chaperoned by me—me," with laughing emphasis, "you are going instantly to his studio, explain the mistake and ask for the toga which make a Martha."

"Oh, Ze, I couldn't!" cried Amy, turning her burning face away.

Half an hour later Ze, the energetic, disappeared. When she came back it was to Amy's room, where she busied herself in the clothespress. "Here are your wraps," she gave her muffled voice, "and I've ordered a cab. It will be here in five minutes, so you better hustle!"

"Oh, Ze, how un—unwomanly," Amy whispered at the entrance to the Arlington, on the top floor of which were the studios.

Ze pressed her lips together and rang for the elevator. She was determined not to give Amy an opportunity to think. Up they flew to the top floor, where Amy paused in a sudden realization of what she was doing, but Ze hurried along to a certain door and gave it a hasty rap, her eyes turned back to where Amy stood like a startled wren ready for flight.

"Come in!" shouted a familiar voice. "You come out," muttered Ze indistinctly, giving a louder rap.

The door opened hastily and Alden appeared. "Why?" he began, and then with a change of voice continued: "Pardon me, Miss Brown. I thought it was Van Horn. Won't you?"

Ze interrupted him briskly, casting an apprehensive glance over her shoulder. "No, I thank you. I've brought Miss Low along, and I think if you will interview her you'll find there has been a mistake made that no one is to blame for." With this bald and direct statement she discreetly withdrew around a corner, having had the satisfaction of seeing the artist turn down the hall with a face as pale as Amy's own.

"What mistake, Miss Low?" he asked, stopping a little distance from her. Amy followed Ze's retreating figure with startled eyes. "Why—she found the invitation only this morning in a wastebasket—and—the girl pressed herself back against the wall, looking up timidly—she made me come to explain and—"

"Blessed be Miss Brown," said Alden, with a ring in his voice which carried the words to Ze.

"But if you have invited another Lady Washington?"

"I haven't," interrupted Alden. "There's just one Lady Washington for

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me—you have read my note—Amy—not only for the dinner tonight, but for all time. Will you come?"

"Yes," whispered Amy, but she escaped Alden's outstretched hands, blushing. "I must go find Ze," she said naively, hurrying down the hall. Alden laughed happily and followed. "All right. I want to find Miss Brown myself and ask for the honor of shaking hands with her."

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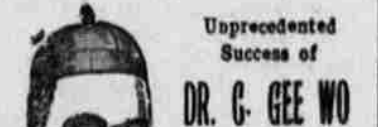
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