

# Lady Betty Across the Water

By G. N. & A. M. WILLIAMSON \* COPYRIGHT, 1906, BY McCLURE, PHILLIPS & CO.

## Chapter 13

DON'T know how long it was before the thought came to me that I would take Vivace and a handbag and run away to Sally, but anyway it was before it had occurred to me to sit down.

Sally said before she went away that I was to go to her if I felt like it, and Sally always means what she says. Now I felt like it so much that it seemed suddenly the only possible thing to do, so all I had to decide was the best way and the best time to do it.

As for the time, if I didn't escape before Mrs. Ess Kay and Potter formed a hollow square round me to pour their volleys into my heart in the morning, it was prophetic in my soul said I would never escape, but would suffer great confusion and ruin.

As for the way, it was more difficult to make up my mind, but the first thing was to see how much money I had in my exchequer, which happened to be a gold purse Sally had given me.

I hadn't spent much, and since coming over dear old Stan had sent me another fifteen pounds, which he wrote was part of one night's winnings at bridge—unusual for him, if it's true, as Vic thinks that he continually loses. Altogether I had nearly thirty pounds in hand, which seemed a lot, only I didn't know at all how much it would cost for Vivace and me to reach Sally in Chicago, and I couldn't tell until I had got irrevocably away from Mrs. Ess Kay and the Moorings.

By this time it was nearly 2 o'clock, and in a couple of hours it would be light. I must sneak out of the house with a dressing bag before any of the servants were stirring, and meanwhile I must pack up all my belongings except such things as Mrs. Ess Kay had given me—so that I could write and have my boxes sent on by and by.

As soon as I had realized that there wasn't a minute to throw away, the worse was over, for I didn't stop to grizzle. I finished getting out of my bridesmaid's dress in which I had

received that, as the Americans say, there was "nothing doing." Not a soul in sight, and there I was, very hot and hysterical, with Vivace and my dressing bag looking like an escaped burglar. I had been so nervous while I was packing that I'd been afraid of everything, even the soap in the soap dish, which had two great blinking bubbles at one end, like a pair of goblin eyes that watched me move, but I was much worse now, and I could have fallen on the neck of the first official porter I saw moving about the station after I had waited for perhaps a quarter of an hour. I don't know what he was, but when I appealed to him for news of a train for New York, instead of calling the police to give Vivace and me in charge as a dangerous pair, he scratched his head and said there was a milk train due presently if I was suitably anxious.

A milk train sounded innocent and suitable to a girl traveling alone, but even if it hadn't I should have been thankful to go in it. I couldn't buy a ticket, it appeared, in the ordinary way, but when the milk train came my man introduced me to another. Perhaps he was a milkman; anyway he seemed to have authority and he said as a favor Vivace and I could be taken. He was a nice person, and he talked a good deal after the train had given several false starts and at last had got off. I sat on my bag, as I had on the docks, in a bare, curious car, which really belonged to the milk, and sometimes when we bumped I should have fallen on the floor if it hadn't been for him. He told me all about himself, and wanted to be told all about me, but I thought, nice as he was, it would be safer not. He asked leading questions which it was hard to keep from answering unless I burled his feelings, but I think he somehow got the impression that I was going to see a sick relative, though I never explicitly said so.

I don't know what time I should have got to New York if I had had to travel all the way with the milk, for milk, it seems, objects to speed, but after we had jogged along for a couple of hours, we crawled into a station where a real train was ready to start. There were just five minutes to say farewell to my friend and buy a ticket, when, all flushed and panting, I found myself and Vivace and the bag in a car different from any I had seen yet. It had no nice easy chairs and plate glass mirrors and wire nettings in the windows, like the one in which I'd traveled to Newport, but there were two rows of seats, and when the train moved a cloud of coal smoke poured in through the door at the front end. Babies squaled, children whined and their faces grew black and damp with mingled dirt and heat while grown-up people scolded, but a dear old lady got into my seat before long, and just because I helped her with a handbag, she made me a present of a huge peach. I was thankful to have it, for by this time I was collapsing with hunger, having been up all night without anything to eat.

The peach made me think of Mr. Brett and the little basket he had sent me on the docks. Then this thought suggested another. He had said he would do anything for me that was in his power, and if he were still in New York it was in his power to help me a good deal. He could tell me how much it would cost to go to Chicago, and he could show me how to get there.

I really believe that at first I hadn't had a thought of seeing him, but once it had got into my head I welcomed it, begged it to sit down and make itself at home.

I could have clapped my hands with joy when I saw the Grand Central station and the delightful cafe au lait porters with their red caps. It looked as familiar and comforting as if I'd passed through a hundred times instead of once, and I had the nice feeling that now something pleasant was sure to happen, which one has when one first arrives in Paris.

Vivace brightened up, too, and he took me out, rather than to him. I was in such a hurry to get away, for fear Potter might have come after me by a quick train and be looking somewhere, that I flew along with my bag and Vivace without waiting for a porter. I followed other people out of the station, with the intention of finding a cab and driving to the club where Mr. Brett was employed; but, though there were dozens of hansom drawn up by the pavement, they had the air of being private ones. It did seem queer that so many people should have private hansom waiting for them at this particular hour (it was half past 12), but the drivers, with their tall shiny hats, smart coats and bright, clever faces, the glitter of the harness, the newness of the cab linings and appointments all forbade any other thought. I wandered wistfully along the line, wondering if there were no public conveyances of any kind at the Grand Central besides the trams, which were as appalling as a procession of African lions. When I came to the end I caught the eye of a well-groomed young man in a pale gray topcoat, looking down from his high seat at the back of a dark green hansom with great round port-

holes knocked in the sides, and it struck me that there was pity kindling in his glance. I snatched at the ray as if it had been that everlasting straw which always seems to be bobbing about when an author is drowning one of his characters.

"Do you think there is anybody who could drive me?" I inquired meekly.

"You bet, miss," said he. "I'm engaged myself or I'd be only too pleased, but you just speak to that other gentleman there," with an encouraging jerk of his sleek head toward the next vehicle. "He'll take you anywhere you want to go."

"Are you sure it isn't a private hansom?" I breathed up to him in a low, confidential voice, for the cab he had called was even finer than his, and Stan doesn't look as smart on his coach as a coaching parade day in the park as did the gentleman I was recommended to address.

"Sure pop," said my friend, grinning, but not in a way to hurt my feelings, so I thanked him, and we both bowed very politely, and the new man, who had heard after all, said that none of the hansom were private. Anybody might have them who could pay, but I needn't be afraid; he wouldn't charge me too much.

When he asked where I wanted to go, after all I hadn't the courage to mention the club. The only other place I could think of was the Waldorf-Astoria, where Potter had said any stranger who liked could walk in and sit down. I told the man to drive me there, so he did, and only charged me 30 cents, which he billed was a very special price. "We don't want you English young ladies to think bad of us," he explained, and I assured him there was no danger of that, if I could judge by my finger.

They wouldn't let me go into the Turkish room—which I remembered

he was to have kept me waiting. He had been at the club, but owing to a stupid mistake there had been some delay in his getting my letter.

I was even more pleased to see him than I had thought I was going to be. I felt as if I had known him all my life, and he looked so strong and handsome and dependable that I couldn't bear to take my eyes off his face lest I should wake up and find him gone—because I'd been dreaming him.

"I'll tell you all about everything if you'll sit down," I said, but instead of doing as I asked he inquired with

a queer, worried expression on his face whether I had had lunch.

"No; nor breakfast either," I replied quite gaily, but with a watery smile.

"Good heavens," said he, going as red as if I had accused him of snatching it from my lips. "Then you must have both together before you begin to 'all me anything.'"

"We might go out and have a sandwich somewhere," I suggested.

"There's nothing the matter with the Waldorf sandwiches," said I.

"Except that they're expensive," said I. "You must remember you and I aren't millionaires."

"I have been doing pretty well lately," said he. "I can almost call myself rich. Please have some lunch. I can afford it, and if you refuse I'll know it's because—"

I guessed what he might be going to say, so I stopped him.

"Nonsense!" I exclaimed. "But I've run away from Mrs. Stuyvesant Knox, and I don't want to be found. If she or her brother should have come to New York or if anybody else—"

"I've thought of that," said he quickly, "but we've no time to waste. You're starving. If you wouldn't mind my getting you a private dining room and sending you in some lunch—"

"But I want you to be with me," I insisted.

He evidently hesitated, but only for a minute. I don't think he's the sort of man to hesitate long about anything.

"Very well, that's what I'd like best, of course, if you don't mind," he said. "I'll go and see to everything, and be back before you can count sixty, if you do it slowly."

I didn't do it at all, but thought how thankful I was that he had come to me, for I was sure everything would go right now.

In two or three minutes he came back to take me into a charming little dining room, where there was no danger that Mrs. Ess Kay or Potter could pounce upon us, as it was for Mr. Brett and me alone. I shuddered to think what it must be costing, but his clothes were so exceedingly good I hoped he hadn't exaggerated about the luck that had come to him.

Naturally I couldn't tell the part of my story which concerned Potter Parker, but I said that Mrs. Ess Kay wanted me to do things which I didn't think it right to do, and I couldn't stay in her house even a day longer.

"I should like to go home," I went on, "but I can't yet, and the only other thing is to join Miss Woodburn in Chicago. You remember Miss Woodburn, don't you?"

He said he remembered her very well, and read in the newspapers that she had left Newport for Chicago and thought it was a wise idea of mine to join her.

"I'm glad you think that," said I, "for I want to start today, and I hope you'll tell me how to go, how much money it will be, how long it takes to get there and all about it."

He didn't answer for a minute, but sat looking very grave, staring at his brown hand on the white tablecloth, as if he'd never seen it before. Then he said:

"Curiously enough, I am going west this afternoon too. Would you object to my being in the same train? I wouldn't suggest such a thing, only, you see, as you're a stranger in the country I might be able to help you, a little."

"How splendid!" I exclaimed. "It seems almost too good to be true. You can't fancy what a relief it is to my mind."

He looked pleased at that and said I was very kind, though I should have thought it was the other way round.

"I'll get your ticket, then," he went on. "If you'll give me twenty-five dollars—five pounds, you know—I'll hand you back the change, but I'm afraid it won't be much."

"Change?" I echoed. "Why, I supposed it would be ever so much more than five pounds to get to Chicago, which is almost in central America, isn't it?"

"The people who live there think it's central," said Mr. Brett, "but they make the railroad men keep prices down so that dissatisfied New Yorkers can afford to go and live there. It isn't a bad journey, you'll find. I think it will interest you. You sleep and eat in the train, you know."

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I felt like a runaway elephant



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