

# MATCHES

BY VIOLA I. PARADISE

## I

WEATHER is the villain of this story.

The early-morning March sun, careless and debonnair, shone through scattered clouds upon the packing of nine persons into the seven-passenger auto stage, and upon the loading of the stage's trailer with cases and miscellaneous articles for far-off ranchers and squatters and homesteaders, and with the furniture and boxes and trunks belonging to Frances Stead and Louise Elmhurst, the two women passengers, who were setting out on the adventure of taking up land in the Great West.

The stage had just begun its journey along the Bison Skull Trail when Little Willie, the six-foot driver, bethought himself of a commission.

'Lee Dodd, he give me a letter for you girls. Most forgot it.'

Without slackening the speed of the car, he extricated from a remote pocket a much crumpled note, the reading of which was achieved with difficulty in the lurching machine.

'Ladies,' ran the letter, 'I would n't of let You Ladies buy my Relinkishment even for \$150\$, only the Land agent Said you got some Capitle, enouf to go Home east Winters. This country aint no place for a Porr man or enybody specially Ladies after november But I fixed the Place clean for you and Dug some coal out a butte and Theres a pile of Sage brush ready that will keep fires for a while the Stove Draws good. I hauled a Barrel of water it is Froze

now. You Haf to melt it. I here some Ladies done pretty good Once on a homestead and I hope You will.

'Your Snerely [this was crossed out]  
Truley  
LEE DODD'

Dr. Calhoun, a tall, thin, clear-eyed young man, with a whimsical mouth, shared the back seat with the two young women. He studied their faces as they deciphered the missive. At once he liked them — especially Miss Stead. Miss Elmhurst, tall, dark, dreamy-eyed, was doubtless an 'interesting girl,' but a slight preoccupation, even as she read the letter, suggested a dominant far-away interest, excluding him. Miss Stead, in contrast, was so imminently present. He liked what he called to himself the 'good weather-beaten look of her face.' It expressed the vigor of her personality. Her deep blue eyes, her high color, her smooth light hair, her clear voice — clean-cut and quick, yet soft — engaged his fancy. He wanted to hear her speak again.

'Lee Dodd discouraging you?' he asked.

'You know him?' asked Frances.

'Next-door neighbor. That is, two miles from my place.'

'And now we're your neighbors.'

She looked at him, thinking it fortunate to meet so attractive a Westerner at the outset of their adventure. Perhaps, she warned herself, beating out the sudden spark of too glowing an interest, perhaps it was only his broad-

brimmed hat and his tan and his eyes and the way his ears set.

Meanwhile Louise was handing him the letter and asking, —

‘Is it as desolate as it sounds?’

It depended on the weather, the doctor replied. They should really have waited till the middle or end of April to begin their homesteading. March was tricky, a bad gamble. Lee Dodd’s shack was not built for cold weather. The doctor himself had a ‘soddy,’ but even so preferred the city through March. Still, plenty of families lived their winters in tar-paper shacks. With plenty of wood and coal and warm clothing, they could probably keep going.

He sized them up as game. Frances, obviously, was the hardier of the two. He knew, or imagined he knew, what she had looked like as a baby, and what, in the matronly years to come, she would look like. He hoped nothing would ever happen to spoil the serious, yet up-cornered mouth. She would be the rare old lady whose grandchildren would visit her, not as a duty, but from choice. And she would manage to keep ahead of them, the young scamps.

At this point in his reverie, the doctor caught himself. Why, the girl could n’t be much over twenty-two or twenty-three, and here he was, almost jealous of her grandchildren. Ridiculous! He grinned at his folly, but did not abate his interest.

Of the other passengers, two cowboys took turns sitting on each other’s lap in the front seat next to the driver. A cross-roads storekeeper and a sheepherder shared the two small folding seats in the tonneau with a nervous fat man, whose amplexes spanned the space between the two seats and abutted precariously upon their edges. As the car twisted and lurched in the frozen ruts of the trail, one side of the fat man would occasionally slip down and

get wedged between the seats. The first time this happened, it caused hilarious merriment. But, ‘God, this is no time to laugh!’ he exclaimed. ‘My wife may be dying!’ And despite the absurd irrelevance of this comment, the laughter ceased, for it was known that he had come a hundred miles to get a doctor.

Along the Bison Skull Trail the stage bumped and twisted its way, in and out, among buttes and bad lands. Dwellings were seldom to be seen. The great potent emptiness of the brown rolling country, patched here and there with drifts of old snow, dotted now and again with cattle and sheep grazing in the more sheltered places, had to the two women a stark and terrible grandeur. The end of March was at hand, but no hint of spring was in the land. The mottling of sunshine and cloud-shadows brought out subtle colorings, and relieved somewhat the threat of sombreness. ‘It’s the kind of country,’ thought Louise to herself, ‘that reaches out and gets hold of you, for all that it looks so hard and inhospitable and uncompromising. It throws a spell, and you belong to it.’

Partly to throw off this very spell, partly to make conversation, Frances remarked, —

‘This is going to be the kind of day that’s crisp and cold about the edges, and soft and warm in the middle.’

‘You a warranted weather prophet?’ asked a cowboy.

‘I hear they guarantee weather prophets like the rest of the mail-order supplies in the East,’ said the storekeeper, who nursed a special grievance against the mail-order business.

The doctor explained: ‘It takes a brave man to prophesy March weather out in this country!’

Whereupon the fat man queried anxiously, ‘You don’t think the weather’ll delay us?’

To which a unanimous chorus of 'Hope not' gave him dubious comfort.

But soon the fickle sun was cringing before a fierce, threatening wind, and the temperature began to drop. The car's side-curtains were put up to keep out the gale. The isinglass patches in the curtains were opaque with dust and mud, and a neat circle, five inches in diameter, directly in front of the driver, was the only transparent part of the wind-shield. Deprived of the landscape the passengers' attention turned upon one another. A few questions were asked and answered. Conversation did not flourish, however. The fat man's anguish, the wringing of his hands, his impatience for more speed, his frequent appeals to the doctor for impossible assurances, sat heavily upon the spirits of the company. He seemed to resent the doctor's interest in the two women, as if that were delaying the car's progress.

The journey grew more and more uncomfortable. The trail, nowhere good, became rougher, more twisting, with sudden steep ascents and descents. The wind shook and buffeted the car. The temperature fell with malevolent persistence. The passengers shrank huddled into their wraps, stamped their feet, rubbed their hands, and made other vain attempts to get warm.

At noon, when they drew up at the Half-way House, the fat man wrung his hands anew. 'Good God!' he cried, 'this is no time to eat. Look at the weather! My wife —'

'Say!' exclaimed a hungry cowboy, 'your baby ain't the only kid ever born in this county! Can't you cut your groaning for a while?'

But the doctor interrupted curtly with 'Pull in your teeth, Teddy. You're not married.'

'Righto!' retorted the cowboy with good-nature. 'You ain't neither. I vote we let the girls decide.'

Dinner was foregone.

About three o'clock in the afternoon the stage wrenched itself out of the trail-ruts, and turned onto the rough trackless prairie.

'Your outfit's along here somewhere soon,' said a cowboy.

The fat man groaned anew at the delay which this stop meant. 'Will it take long to get their things off the trailer?' he asked, almost resentfully.

No, it would take only a few minutes. Presently the stage stopped. Everyone got out of the car and bent against the wind to the task of unloading furniture and trunks and boxes. The fat man, helpless and awkward in his very eagerness to be of help, almost wept at the delay. This was less than five minutes, but the consciousness of a sick woman forty miles beyond made it seem a long time.

'Don't bother to untie anything!' exclaimed Frances. 'We can do everything ourselves. Yes, we have tools, matches, everything. Yes, of course we can put up the beds!'

'I'm sorry,' said the fat man gratefully, as he climbed into the car. 'If it was n't for my wife —'

'Yes, yes, all right, hurry off!' Louise and Frances cried at the same time.

And with shouts of 'Good luck!' 'We'll come and see you soon,' and the like, the stage was off. Louise and Frances were alone with their property.

## II

It was too cold to stay outside long enough to get the first proper impression of the little tar-paper shack. That it was a tiny black speck in the vast boundless landscape; that no other dwelling was in sight; that the wooden strips holding the tar-paper in place were nailed on at neat intervals; that a small stovepipe stuck out of the curving roof at a rakish angle; these things

they took in at a glance, and called the place 'cunning.'

They hurried inside, and threw their arms about each other.

'O Fran! it is really true! We're here. I never entirely believed it, even on the way!'

'But let's light the fire before we do anything. I'm frozen brittle!' exclaimed Frances. 'Now let's see. The matches are in the box marked food. You open that, while I start on the bedding.'

'Here's the food-box,' replied Louise. 'Wow! these tools are cold.'

She pried open the lid of the box. The odor of tea and coffee, the sight of many small boxes and cans, were heartening.

'No matches here,' said Louise, blithely. 'Have another guess.'

'Oh, yes, they're there. You're probably looking for a small box. It's a big one — a year's supply. I saw him put it in myself.'

At last, 'Here it is.' Then, 'No, this is too heavy. It's soap.'

'Can't be,' replied Fran. 'The soap's in a box by itself.' Yet she left the case she was unpacking, and came over to inspect the box where the matches should have been.

'Why, we did n't order that kind of soap!' she exclaimed. 'Anyhow, how absurd to pack soap with food! It's a mistake. The matches *must* be in this box, for I told him to put them there, so that we could have a fire and food as soon as we got here. The box is the same size —'

Here Frances broke off, and caught a quick breath, disturbed at a sudden memory: for when she was ordering the groceries, a woman from a laundry had come hurrying into the store for some soap. And Frances, because her order was a long one and would take some time, had let the grocer wait on the other woman. What if the grocer had

sent the matches to the woman — Her heart gave a sudden turn, but her mind darted away from the fear.

'He must have packed the matches in another box,' she said. 'We'll have to open them all, till we come to them.'

'I move we have a cup of tea, first,' said Louise.

'Righto! I'll chop some ice from the frozen water-barrel, and we can melt —'

At that moment it flashed upon them both that fire was essential to tea. They laughed, Frances a bit hollowly. Louise, not realizing the terrible possibility *that there might not be any matches*, enjoyed the joke.

'It's like the Walrus and the Carpenter! "And this was very odd, because there were n't any matches." I'll have to write that to Jim. He's probably sizzling down there on his old Equator. Just think, Fran, what nice warm work building bridges over the Equator must be!'

Jim was the man Louise was to marry, after his engineering exploit was finished. And every experience was something to write to Jim. Frances sometimes thought that Louise lived entirely as a sort of preface, savoring life only as it could be passed on to Jim.

Although their feet and fingers ached with cold, and every breath was visible in the chill room, the exercise of unpacking warmed them a little. They worked with their outdoor wraps on. By half-past four it was beginning to get dark. Despite the cold, Louise seemed in high spirits.

"Adventure One — The Mislaid Match," she said. 'That would be a good title for a story. O Fran, why don't we write our adventures? We're going to have them wholesale. The ride out was almost an adventure, with the poor worried fat man, and all. I hope they got to his wife in time. "The Rigors of Ranching" would n't be a bad title. It would be awful to get sick out

here. I'm glad we're both husky, although it would be convenient for the present to have a delicate appetite. If we don't find the matches soon, I'll begin on raw food. You know we had no lunch.'

Frances was weighing the possibility of not finding the matches. Half an hour would bring darkness. The beds had not been put up yet. She did not wish to communicate her fear to Louise; but finally she suggested that it would not be a bad idea to begin on raw food, and get one bed ready before dark, on the chance that they might not find the matches till the next day.

The stiff frozen bread crumbled when they cut it. They opened a can of beans and of sardines, and found them both frozen solid.

'I knew it was cold, but I didn't realize it was *this* cold!' said Louise, as they broke the frozen food into small chunks. 'You suck a bean and a sardine till they melt; then you slip them between your chattering teeth, and the temperature does the rest. Quite a technique! This *is* an adventure!'

But despite their hunger, they could eat very little of the frozen food. They turned greedily, however, to some cakes of chocolate.

'What next?' asked Louise, when they had finished. 'We can't wash the dishes, because there's no water. Besides, it's too dark to do anything. I move we shiver to bed and get warm. Oh, I say, we can't even wash ourselves, or brush our teeth!'

'From furs to flannelette,' said Frances, attempting a joke. 'We'll need flannelette nightgowns. See, it's begun to snow!'

It was all but dark outside. A mad and furious wind raged, driving fine helpless snowflakes from the last vestiges of twilight into the blackness of night. It had the momentum of infinite distances, uncurbed. Amazing that the

little frame shack, with its single thickness of tar-paper, could withstand it!

'How terrifying this wind would be on the lonely moors of England, in a Hardy novel!' exclaimed Louise, as the two girls, quaking with cold, undressed.

Frances repressed an impulse to say that it was more terrifying here and now. She felt just the least impatience with Louise's habit of interpreting everything for its literary value, or for its interest to Jim. But she remembered that Louise did not know about the woman who had interrupted her order just when she was buying the matches; that Louise did not know that there might be no matches, and that the possibility of freezing to death was more than a literary contingency. And Louise must not know this till the last possible minute—some time to-morrow.

Undressing and slipping between the cold sheets was like a penance. But, having had time to put up only one bed, they had piled all their bedding on it, and they counted on this extra covering, and on the heat from their bodies, to get them warm.

It was too early to go to sleep. Waiting for warmth, they talked. They discussed the arrangement of the room. 'Let's get it all fixed up to-morrow, and take some pictures, and I'll send them to Jim with the first person who goes by. O Fran, I wish you had a Jim to be sending things to!'

'It is customary, I believe, to wait till after marriage before patronizing and pitying your old-maid friends,' laughed Frances. In her heart she was thinking, 'Poor Louise! She has so much to live for. And poor Jim! But we must keep laughing as long as we can, now.' Aloud she continued, 'The room is larger than I thought. What would you say were the dimensions?'

Louise guessed twenty-five by thirty. Frances laughed. 'Never: twenty-two by twenty-six, at the most.'

Louise said that rooms ought to come in figures divisible by five. They nonsensical on, waiting for warmth. Notwithstanding the number of covers, they were warm only where their bodies touched. Sharp cold draughts pried their way into the bed. They could not get warm. Frances finally found courage to get out onto the icy floor, snatch their coats, furs, and sweaters, and pile these on top of the bed. She scrambled back under the covers, quaking with cold. The extra covering apparently had no effect.

After a few hours, Louise fell into a restless sleep. But Frances could not sleep. It was not only the cold that kept her awake. There was black panic and fear. And when at last she could shake a part of her mind free of panic, she began weighing the possibilities of freezing to death: wondering how long it took; wondering if the weather would change; wondering if anyone would happen by their shack; wondering if, by any mad chance, the stage would come out of its course, and go past their homestead on its way back to the city; wondering if, by striking two pieces of metal together, she could start a fire. Boy Scouts, she had heard, learned how to do that. It was not as if it were a wet cold. Perhaps, if she cut some tiny shavings, and chopped them fine —

Would the doctor stop on his way back to the city? She had liked the doctor.

She knew that she was in no way responsible for the accident. That had happened in spite of more than ordinary care. She had checked over all the supplies; the grocer had pointed to a package and had said, 'Matches.' Yet a feeling of responsibility troubled her. The idea of homesteading had been hers. She had suggested it to Louise as an interesting thing to do during Jim's absence. She had argued against the objections of Louise's family, and had

persuaded them that it was a safe and sane project. Somehow, now, she must pull Louise through.

The other stage passengers had said they would come to see them soon. How soon? She hoped the doctor would be the first to come.

She tried to recall all the stories she had read about Arctic explorations. She could remember no details, only general impressions that one could stay alive for days; that after the pain came a numbness, and then a torpor. The thing to do, if the feeling of numbness came, was to stay awake.

What would Louise say when she realized the situation? Louise was of a temperament always on the crest or in the trough of the wave. Most of the time, especially since her engagement, she had been on the crest. Frances felt it almost a mission to keep her on the crest. However black the outlook, she must see that Louise should cling fast to hope.

### III

When Louise awoke at daybreak, Frances had a plan. Louise should stay in bed while Frances opened the trunks and got out their warmest underwear. No need for two of them to fumble around in the cold room before they were dressed.

'By the way,' Louise interrupted, 'can't you do a little weather prophesying to-day? You were right about the edges, yesterday, but it certainly was not soft and warm in the middle.'

Frances lifted her head from the pillow to look out the window. 'Why, there's nothing but snow in the world. It's drifted up to our window-sill. If the sun comes out we'll have a great dazzle!'

'That's a safe prophesy,' laughed Louise. 'I could do almost as well myself. But keep your head down close to the pillow. A hurricane has just



intruded. I suppose I have feet, but I can hardly feel them.

They lay a while, shivering, yet savoring the few patches of warmth their bodies made; not daring to change their positions, for fear of contact with a cold part of the bed. Frances delayed the getting up as long as possible: every moment's delay was just one moment's more hope for Louise. For herself, too. After all, there might be matches. She had traveled far from the fierce fear that there might not be any, to the faint hope of the opposite. It was a hard downward traveling. At the bottom of the road stood despair, beckoning. Louise, luckily, had not yet passed even the first signpost of fear. Extremely uncomfortable, she was taking a perverse enjoyment in her discomfort: it would make such a good story.

Frances insisted that they each put on three suits of underwear, and three pairs of stockings; and Louise, though she thought the idea absurd, since they would surely find the matches presently, consented. That too would make a good tale to write to Jim. Frances then suggested that one of them look for the matches, while the other put things away and set the house in order. Things in their present disorder were so confusing that one could never be quite sure whether or not a box had been searched for the matches. Besides, — and this was sheer invention on Frances's part, — a neighbor might drop in at any moment.

So, after a breakfast of bread and butter and sweet chocolate, they set to work, Louise hunting for the matches, Frances putting things away, arranging their belongings, and frequently calling Louise from her task, to consult on the placing of some article, to help move something heavy, to hand Frances some tool as she stood perched on the convertible chair-step-ladder, hanging the attractive cretonne curtains. Chat-

ting gayly, she seized every possible pretext to prolong the hunt for the matches.

Lee Dodd had left the shack neat and clean. Save for the brightly polished stove, it had been empty. But in the course of her explorations Frances found on a high shelf a baby's shoe and a lady's pink garter. Here was food for speculation. (This will keep me talking quite a while, thought Frances to herself.) They had assumed Lee Dodd's bachelorhood. Was there then a Mrs. Lee Dodd? From his letter and from his singular replies, they tried to reconstruct the man and his possible family.

But in the midst of the discussion Louise stopped short.

'Fran!'

And Frances, though she knew what was coming, asked, 'What?'

'What if the grocer made a mistake? What if — O Fran — what if there are n't any matches?'

'Have you looked everywhere?'

'No; but what if —'

'Come on, don't be morbid. Time enough to consider that after we've done hunting.'

But a silence fell upon Louise, and for the first time she was frightened. She turned to her search, trying to conceal her panic.

'Want to change jobs?' asked Frances.

No, Louise preferred to do the unpacking and to keep on searching.

'I wonder if it can be much colder outside,' said Frances later, when for a few moments they left their tasks to take some calisthenic exercises. Their ears and faces as well as their hands and feet ached with the cold.

They opened the door. The snow, drifted half-way up to the knob, was frozen stiff. Frances got a shovel, planning to make a path, but the wind-packed snow was too hard to make the effort worth while. She stepped up on the snow, rather gingerly at first, expecting it to give way; but it bore her

weight. Suddenly she saw a thermometer. It registered twelve degrees below zero. The wind had fallen, and the out-of-doors seemed no colder than the house.

The two girls walked a little way from their house, and looked about them. There was nothing between them and the horizon — nothing; not a tree, not a landmark; only a rolling whiteness, smooth, blank, unfeatured. It lay supine, frozen, helpless, under a gray crouching sky. Only a terrible stillness, a silence that muffled all hope.

Without speaking, they walked back to the house. Frances wished passionately for some way to spare Louise the fear and despair, wished for some word that would not sound like an empty reassurance to a frightened child. What was Louise thinking? What would she say when she knew?

The shack was as cold as outside, only it had a different smell. Not a particularly pleasant smell, yet, suggesting shelter, it was welcome. They closed the door and returned to their tasks.

At last everything had been searched, everything was in order. Except for a comment now and then as to where some object should be placed, there had been little conversation since their walk. At noon they stopped for food. Louise tried a joke.

‘Now for the groaning board!’ she said, and then suddenly she was weeping. ‘I’m so cold! so terribly, terribly cold! Except my feet: they’re burning hot, and pricking and itching, and I want to scream! Oh, Jim would be so worried if he knew!’

‘Scream, dear, scream. Let’s have the comfort of screaming, if we wish, and of saying what we are thinking.’

‘Your feet, too?’

‘Not yet.’

‘How long have you known — have you feared?’

‘Since yesterday.’ And Frances told

about the women who had interrupted her to order the soap.

‘O Fran, dear Fran! And you did n’t tell me. You — you wanted me to have hope, to cling to hope, as long as possible? You’re splendid! O Fran!’

There was relief in weeping. Even Frances, the strong, the steady, welcomed the dear relief of tears.

Then they faced the situation. What should be done? What were the chances?

There were two chances. Someone might come. Probably the doctor would come by. His homestead, he had said, was only a few miles away. Possibly he would stop at his homestead on his way back to the city. If so, — and possibly if not, — he might stop to see them. If not, someone else would surely come in time. It would be a matter of endurance until someone should come.

‘We’ll be awfully uncomfortable,’ said Frances. ‘But as long as we’re uncomfortable, we’re safe. The danger does n’t really set in until we begin to get numb. Then we have to keep each other awake. We have food enough to keep us alive a long time, even though it is frozen and unpalatable. Later, we’ll have to take turns sleeping, and while one of us sleeps, the other will have to rub her arms and legs, to keep them from freezing. This may not be the scientific way, but it may work.’

‘And the other chance?’ asked Louise.

‘Oh, it’s the faintest hope. We might try to make a fire from a spark. I have wanted to try all day, but it’s so suggestive of despair that I’ve kept putting it off. We might try striking two pieces of metal together, and make a spark. But it’s such a thin little shaving of a hope. Now if we were Indians, or if we had some flint and whatever goes with it, there might be a chance of success.’

Louise grasped eagerly at the straw, and became enthusiastic. Boy Scouts had done it, she had heard. Then surely



Frances, the clever competent Frances could do it. She helped make the preparations. She tore tissue paper into tiny shreds. She whittled to small bits pieces of dry sage-brush. She and Frances arranged these scraps in the dishpan, and with a somewhat awed feeling, got the poker and a screwdriver.

'We ought to have a chant, a fire-works' chant, to start the thing off,' said Louise. She had found laughter again. 'If Jim could only see us now!'

But soon the hope petered out. Occasionally a spark flew, and fell into the fuel, but the longed-for combustion did not occur. After an hour they gave it up.

Then Frances said, suddenly, 'We must rub your feet with snow or ice. I had forgotten. That's the thing to do for chilblains! We'll chop some of that frozen snow into small bits.'

Louise at first protested. Quaking with cold, the thought of cold snow on her feet and legs made her cringe. But anything was better than the fearful burning and itching.

She was surprised, when Frances applied the snow, to find that it felt like warm water on her feet. Blessed discovery! They rubbed their ears, their faces, their fingers, with the snow. It gave them a measure of easement.

That night they went to bed with all their clothes on, including woolen caps. They decided that it was safe for them both to risk sleeping that night. They ate as much supper as they could force themselves to swallow, trying frozen ham this time. And they went through all the physical exercises they could think of before retiring. Both beds were up now, but they slept together for the added warmth.

From the bed — it was still light — they surveyed the room.

'It is attractive!' exclaimed Louise, her eye running from the cheery cur-

tains, patterned with small yellow flowers and occasional diminutive blue-birds with red tufted heads, to the two comfortable willow chairs, with cushions of the same material. The unpainted deal table, with its brown desk-blotter, some writing materials, and a soft brown-shaded lamp, made a respectable library table.

'Some day,' said Frances, 'we'll paint that, and the desk chair, and the bookshelves a deep rich creamy color, to match the chiffonier and mirror. Shall we paint the dining-room table, too, or shall we leave it as it is?'

The 'dining-room table' stood toward the back of the room near the stove, a strip of Russian peasant embroidery and two squat brass candlesticks, with orange candles, 'lending it tone between meals,' according to Louise. Hanging along the wall near the stove, bright new aluminum pots and pans added cheer to the room. A folding screen concealed the trunks and empty boxes. Two or three braided rugs, which Frances had rescued from her uncle's New England attic, lay on the rough unfinished floor. Yes, even in the fading light, it was attractive.

But it was cold, aching cold; and notwithstanding their talk of painting furniture, and getting some gayly colored prints for the walls, their hearts were chilled and preoccupied, Louise's with anxiety for Jim, and Frances's —

'Why,' thought Frances, 'why is that doctor always in my mind? Anyone could rescue us. Anyone with a match. A slim little piece of wood, tipped at one end with a speck of sulphur, would save our lives. It need not be the doctor.' Yet it was of the doctor that she thought most often.

Somehow the night was lived through. Frances, having lain awake the previous night, snatched bits of dream-troubled sleep. A fat man in a machine was trying to prevent one of the cowboys from

amputating her feet with the screw-driver. 'This is no time to be tending to chilblains!' the fat man was crying. 'My wife may be dying!' And the cowboy answered, — only he had the doctor's voice, 'Pull in your teeth, Fatty. Let the lady decide about her own feet.' 'I'm sorry to detain you,' Frances replied, 'but he *must* cut off my feet.'

'The craziest dream!' she exclaimed to Louise as she woke, and recounted it. 'And the most absurd part was that I actually wanted him to do it, and that the sensation was pleasurable. When he got through he handed the feet to the other cowboy, and told him to put them in the closet next to the dancing-slippers. Then he took my temperature, shouted, "Up to normal!" and they all rushed out. Then I woke up, and my feet are burning and itching like the deuce!'

Louise found no sleep that night. She stayed awake with her fear, and with a resolve 'to live up to Frances' to the end. Would rescue come? Poor Jim! she thought. And more often than she knew, she said it aloud.

The next day they tried an experiment. They walked in opposite directions from the house, as far as they could, having agreed not to go out of sight of the house or of each other. Possibly they could see some other dwelling. 'Which way does he live?' thought Frances, gazing around at the unanswering horizon. Nothing came of the undertaking. They returned exhausted, scarcely able to articulate, so stiff were their faces from the wind.

They tried to read, but could not hold a book in their hands. Moreover, their own thoughts seemed more important than anything they could find in books.

They took turns rubbing each other's feet with snow.

'Jim will be so worried!' exclaimed Louise for the hundredth time. 'He'll

think something terrible has happened.'

Frances was silent. To think that Louise did not realize that something terrible *was* happening! Frances almost wished she had a Jim on whom to project her worry!

They stayed in bed most of the next day. The cold seemed to come up from under the bed; so, with great difficulty, because of their stiffness and weakness, they lifted the mattresses to the floor. Yet this gave them no relief.

If only the doctor would come!

Soon they lost track of time. They did not know how many days they had been alone. They only knew that the sun had not shone, that the sky was lowering and gray, that sometimes it snowed, that the thermometer — now their only immediate interest — wavered between twenty and forty below, that the wind raged and fell and raged again.

They began to feel numb. Pain ceased. It was as if drowsiness were breathed down upon them.

'We must n't let ourselves sleep!' exclaimed Frances. 'We must not!'

Then a wonderful thing happened. The long deep silence was broken. A sound was heard outside.

A sheep, a weak staggering sheep bleated outside their door.

'Poor thing!' they exclaimed. 'Poor helpless beastie! Strayed from the fold, literally.'

And suddenly they were overwhelmed with tears of pity for the sheep. Once more their tears were like a gift.

They coaxed the sheep inside, and tried to feed it bread, but it was too weak to eat.

'But it's still warm!' exclaimed Louise, as she hugged the animal close. 'Come, get near it. Feel here, under the fur, Fran; it's warm!'

Then Frances had an idea. It was a fearsome thought, loathsome, but it might help.

'Could you help me do something terrible, Louise? Could you keep your nerve? It might keep us going a few days longer. Someone is bound to come soon. We — we must kill it, and drink its blood.'

'O Fran!'

Yet they did it. Louise, her face averted, held the helpless creature as Frances cut its throat. Crying, they drank the blood — all of it.

Then the desire for sleep was on them again, a terrible passion, a fierce hunger, a thing not to be withstood.

'Let's give up, Fran. Let's write our farewells and go to bed.'

Scarcely able to hold a pen, Louise wrote a few lines to Jim.

'My dearest, if I could only spare you this anguish! There was an accident: no matches were packed with our things. We are freezing to death. Here is my love, all of it. And my arms about you.'

Frances found she wanted to write to no one but the doctor. But that was too absurd a whim to be indulged. Instead, she wrote to Jim. Her letter was longer than Louise's. She told him how much Louise's love for him had saved her of anguish. She told, too, in some detail, of their experience: their fight against the weather; how they had killed the sheep and drunk its blood; how they had hoped for rescue. 'We thought a certain doctor, who had come out on the stage with us, might stop here on his way back, and we hoped, and then wished passionately for his coming.' Frances paused here. Should she allow herself the luxury of that impersonal statement?

She let it stand. She could not have written the letter over again. She could scarcely finish it, as it was, for sleepiness, yet she goaded herself to the end. She left it open on the table, weighting it with a volume of Conrad. 'Rather fitting!' she thought. Then she wrote

on a large sheet of paper, 'We have no matches, and are freezing to death,' and nailed this to the outside of the door. She read the thermometer. It registered twenty below.

Every movement required tremendous effort, nightmare effort. Yet, coming back into the room, she looked around, walked back to the 'dining-room table,' and straightened the strip of Russian embroidery that had fallen awry. 'Now I guess we're ship-shape.'

Then, as she got into bed, she said to Louise, —

'Can you endure to take the cap off your head for a few minutes? If we pull our hair down over our faces it may keep our noses from freezing.'

'Kiss me,' said Louise sleepily; and Frances held her close. 'I love you, Fran, so much — next to Jim.'

'I love you, too. Funny how we don't say these things in life. I mean—'

'I know,' Louise replied drowsily. And then, 'If only Jim were here!'

Then, still in a close embrace, they yielded themselves to sleep.

#### IV

After ten weatherbound days in the 'soddie' of the grief-stricken fat man; after helping to dig through the snow and into the fire-thawed earth to make a grave for the fat man's wife and baby; after helping him put a rude fence about the lonely grave, — to keep the cattle from tramping over it, — the doctor started out on horseback for the town ironically named Sweetweather, the stage terminus. If the stage would risk the deep snow, now beginning to soften under the shy advances of the long-truant sun, he would stop to see how 'those girls' had weathered the blizzard and the bitter weather. They had been on his mind. Nothing could have happened to them, really. They were a healthy, capable sort, — espe-

cially Miss Stead, — and much better equipped for cold weather, doubtless, than many homesteaders. However, they were new to the country. Had they brought all that they needed?

At Sweetweather, where he spent the night, Little Willie was emphatic: the stage would not start till after the weather had 'set.' He tried to dissuade the doctor from going on ahead on horseback. 'Them girls is all right. And you don't need to go to your outfit. You were n't counting on getting to it for another week, anyhow. You can't trust this sun.'

Yet the doctor ventured on. The stage was to stop at 'the girls,' when it did go back to the city. The doctor would leave word with 'the girls' as to where he would wait for it.

The trip was far more laborious than he had expected. The horse plodded painfully through the snow. In one place a queer series of lumpy mounds attracted the doctor's attention. The horse shied. The doctor dismounted and scraped into the snow with his spur, which finally struck something hard. Further investigation proved it to be a sheep, frozen to death. A whole flock, it seemed, pressed close together, had frozen there.

'The spring should be coming, and there seems to be nothing but death in the land,' he said, and shook himself, as if to throw off the thought of death. 'I suppose I ought to be feeling gay, or pleased, or something, to be making a call; but there's only apprehension in my heart, and a great weariness.'

The light was falling, when of a sudden he spied the little black shack. He whistled: he had expected to see the smoke first, for the wind was coming from the direction of the house. And here was the shack, and no smoke. What could have happened? He spurred his horse. Soon he could see the white paper on the door. Perhaps they

had gone somewhere else, and the paper was merely a notice. Yet his heart sank.

There was hope, just a ghost of hope. Their hearts were still beating. He lighted a lamp, and placed it as far from the bed as possible. 'Lucky a doctor found them,' he said between his teeth, as he set to work. 'Some fool might have lighted a fire at once.'

With great difficulty he disentwined the two bodies and removed the clothing, being careful to avoid a sudden jerky movement. So frozen were their fingers and toes, that an awkward manipulation might easily break them off. He poured brandy down their throats. Then he brought in snow, and packed it about their arms and legs, and moving their hair, which had caked with ice from their frozen breath, he packed the soft snow on their faces. The rest of their bodies had escaped frost-bite.

But their limbs looked dead. Perhaps they could not be saved. Still, he remembered an account, in a medical journal, of a man who had been exposed four days, one of whose limbs had been apparently dead, but who, after seventy hours of careful treatment, had been able to walk about with nothing worse than a frost-bite on his heel. He remembered vividly the description of the treatment. The frozen leg had been bathed in ice-cold water for two hours, and then enveloped in furs. Then there had been friction with the feathery side of a birdskin; then with snow. The treatment had been continuous for twenty-four hours. The temperature of the room had been gradually raised, with lamps.

He looked about the room for some substitute for the birdskin, and for the first time saw the open letters on the table. The sheep incident fed his hopes: they had had something with real food-value. 'They're a plucky lot, and they

certainly used their heads!' he said aloud. He could use the sheep's skin. But before he turned to look for the sheep, his eye took in the next sentence of the letter: 'We thought a certain doctor, who had come out on the stage with us, might stop here on his way back, and we hoped and then wished passionately for his coming.' Perhaps, then, she had been drawn to him as he had to her? But, no, that was sheer fatuousness. Of course a doctor would be the person hoped for. Nevertheless, all the depression which had weighed him down since morning seemed to fall from him. He forgot, too, his weariness. He knew only that there was a hard fight ahead, and that against a million odds, with all his heart and all his science, he would fight it.

He must do more than save the lives of the two girls. He must save for them their arms and legs and ears and noses; he must fight against the coming of Arctic fever, pneumonia, gangrene, erysipelas, and against other fearful possibilities.

He worked all night, watching anxiously for signs of returning consciousness. Toward morning Louise's eyelids flickered. Then there really was hope! He had said it over and over to himself, but only now did he really believe it. His spirit was upborne. Now if only Frances would give some sign.

Hours passed, yet Frances gave no sign. He worked on, ceaselessly. Louise woke and slept and woke and slept. Once she spoke.

'Frances?'

'She'll come round all right,' he answered; and he willed it with all his might. His will was a flame, searing him, goading him on. It was a thing more than mere will. It was — could it be — love?

At night the miracle happened. Frances's eyes, half-open, heavy, uncomprehending, were idly upon him.

He stopped, and caught his breath. The eyes opened wider, and — as if her mind as well as her vision were gathered into focus — they felt out toward him with question and with understanding.

An ecstasy of thanksgiving gushed up in his heart, flooding him. The joy was almost pain. He turned his head away. Then he pulled himself together, and went on with his work.

Three sunny, thawing days passed before the sound of the chugging stage fell upon their welcoming ears. The doctor was still at work, never having stopped to sleep. It had been a long but a victorious fight. Complete recovery, though not yet achieved, was assured.

He had never once been conscious of exhaustion; but when Little Willie came into the room, an ally from the outside world, Dr. Calhoun said only, 'Get some woman,' sank into a chair, and was at once asleep.

Frances and Louise explained, — they had long since regained speech, — and Little Willie started off at once for a neighbor.

'I'm glad he does n't snore,' said Frances, absently. 'Does Jim?'

'Why, what a question!' She stopped a gasping moment; then, 'O Fran!'

'What utter nonsense! What do you mean? How absurd! Why, I hardly know the man! Besides —' She broke off. Then, with apparent irrelevance, 'O Louise, I do wish you had your Jim here.'

Louise paused a moment. Then she retorted, 'It is customary, I believe, to wait till after marriage, and it is only decent to wait till after engagement, before patronizing and pitying one's old-maid friends!'

Her eyes and her voice and her laugh were sunny with understanding. Here was a tale, oh, what a tale, to write to Jim!



## ON DUTY. I

BY HARRIET SMITH

*Thursday, September 18, 1919.* — There are wild rumors in the bazaars to-day, among the Christians, not from the Moslems, that 50,000 Turkish troops are marching on Urfa, that the Americans are preparing to move their Orphanage to Aleppo, that the British are going also, and that all Christians are to be wiped out. The British are only a small band here, — the 51st Sikhs, about 600, — but the defense of Urfa has long been planned in case of emergency, and the machine-guns placed. Major Burrows inspected the Orphanage and industrial plant to-day. I do not know if it has any significance, but I suspect that it has.

*Friday, September 19.* — Wild times to-day. We were at breakfast at the new house, when in came rushing Lucia Mairik and Manush Mairik from the Orphanage, with excited tales of an impending massacre. Then, too, there were rumors of this army — said by some to be Bolsheviki — moving on from Diarbekr; and others, that quantities of rifles had been recently brought to the city; so that among the Armenians there was great unrest. Whatever happened, there was terror in the bazaars, among Turks and Christians. Both fled, in most cases even failing to take the time to close their shops — each afraid of the other and both afraid of the Arabs and the Kurds. The Armenian shops were looted, the Moslem shops untouched, we heard later. Elmas said that the news came to them by a boy who goes to the market with Alexandre, our buyer. Well, it has

blown over, but I am a bit sorry I did not plan to stay at the Orphanage to-night just to reassure the older folk. It is a terrible thing for these people to walk always under the shadow of an impending massacre, to feel always the knife at their throats and rifle at their heads. They say, 'Must we always feel this dread?'

*Friday night, September 26.* — I did not write yesterday, but they had another panic in the bazaars and again the Armenians ran for protection to the Americans — not in so great numbers, however, or in such dire terror, I think. There are various rumors about how it starts. Some say a man on horseback, with blood splashed over his face, comes dashing through the bazaars crying that the Christians are massacring the Moslems, so naturally the Moslems quit their booths and run, as do also the Armenians.

*October 10* [?], 1919. — You could never guess whom we drew to-day for a fellow worker, here in Urfa, so I shall tell you. With Mr. Clements came Mrs. Mansfield, wife of *the* Richard Mansfield. I hope you have not forgotten the great American actor. They have both been working in Beirut, but the work has mostly closed down there, and the committee is withdrawing most of its workers. Earlier, Mrs. M. was in France, Paris, and Lille. They came up on the British lorries this morning, having remained on the train all night at Telebiad.

*Thursday, October 23.* — It is openly acknowledged now that the British are