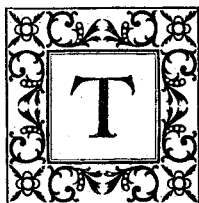


Difficult Navigation

BY HARRIET WELLES

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THE admiral's wife put down the last letter and glanced across the breakfast-table; her husband was deep in the newspaper account of Egyptian excavations; at her right her aviator-nephew frowned over the Associated Press despatches describing an airplane disaster. Mrs. Chisholm sighed; her men-folk were happily oblivious to the existence of the morning's mail, she decided; and looked again over the pile of requests and notifications.

Eleven of the envelopes held invitations to act as patroness on entertainments to be given for various charities in the near-by city, where the admiral's shore billet included the command of all the naval activities in the district; each invitation enclosed a half dozen tickets, with instructions for the mailing of checks: "If this keeps on I'll be hunting for the address of a poorhouse that has a southern exposure," grumbled Mrs. Chisholm half aloud.

The admiral looked up from his paper. "Just think, Mary, this tomb was right under Rameses's! If, when we visited the Valley of the Kings, I had dreamed of such a thing, I'd have been there yet, digging. . . . But they aren't certain that they've found Tutankhamen. . . ."

"He's lucky if he can dodge them," commented Mrs. Chisholm gloomily, piling up her letters.

Jim Langdon pushed over his coffee-cup and smiled affectionately at her. "Business seems to be flourishing with you, Aunt Mary! Among all those letters you must have *something* interesting!"

Mrs. Chisholm spread out several typewritten notifications from the Washington Headquarters of the Navy Relief Society. Jim read the nearest one aloud:

"To Mrs. Chisholm, President N.R.S. Auxiliary:

"Will you kindly let us have your recommendation on the case of Mrs. James Armstrong, 27 Douglass Street, supposed to be dependent widow of Gunner Frederick Armstrong, who died at the naval hospital on the 26th of April?"

He glanced at the similar notices. "You'll have a busy morning, Aunt Mary!"

"Yes. . . . And I wanted to work in the garden. If the sweet peas and the calendulas aren't picked they'll stop blossoming." She glanced at the address on the nearest slip. "It's very depressing to try to hearten the poor souls, and to find out if, by some miracle, they've saved enough to tide them over. I hate to pry into their affairs. . . . There are several local cases that aren't deaths, and I'll have one session of sharpening my wits!" She lifted her voice. "Henry! Give Tutankhamen a rest, and listen to me! . . . What do you think? . . . That gifted protégée of yours, Maggie Jenks, has written the Navy Relief to ask for help; she's put imagination and her best literary effort into her letter, for they quote that she 'has eight children, and rents are high'! When I think of the way I've looked out for her, I could shake her! . . . Of course she never dreamed that her request would be referred back to me. She probably expected that, after they'd read her wail, they'd send her a large check—as soon as they could see through their tears!"

"Why, Aunt Mary!" Jim Langdon laughed: "Who under the sun is Maggie Jenks? Seems to me I've heard the name before——"

"She belongs to Henry——"

The admiral interrupted. "She's the daughter of an old boatswain named Johnson, who was guide, philosopher, and

friend to a gang of us midshipmen when we were on our first cruise. Johnson was wonderfully kind to me when I nearly died from typhoid and homesickness off Rio—he never came back aboard ship from liberty without bringing me indigestible stuff to eat. . . . Johnson was old navy—and the most elaborately picturesque liar I’ve ever met. If his daughter, Mrs. Jenks, takes after him, I wouldn’t bother trying to circumvent her, Mary, you’ll be wasting your time!” The admiral chuckled. “I’ll never forget Johnson and the Duke of Edinburgh!”

Jim Langdon leaned forward. “*Tell us!*”

“Those were the good old days when the junior naval officer knew his place and stayed in it. . . . We midshipmen took the air aft with the warrant officers—instead of daring to pretend that we had a right to exist on the same earth with the captain. . . . Old Johnson enlivened his leisure moments by filling us up with miscellaneous misinformation on every subject from navigation to Who’s-who-in-all-the-countries-of-Asia-and-Europe!

“Toward the end of the cruise our ship visited England and dropped anchor near the Channel Fleet, which the Duke of Edinburgh commanded. Of course we lads wanted to see an admiral-duke; we indulged in a lot of conversation concerning him. . . . That was Johnson’s chance, and he rose to it! According to him the duke had been his most intimate friend during an American ship’s long sojourn at Malta; they had gone ashore together for long walks every afternoon. ‘Them’s some of my fam’ly’s old antique coats of arms’ Johnson quoted the duke as saying of some gadgets carved above doorways. ‘I didn’t know that any of our ships ever stayed long at Malta, Johnson,’ commented one of the midshipmen. ‘There’s lots *you* don’t know!’ parried Johnson witheringly, and went on to further and enlarged accounts of his intimacy with the duke.

“In some circuitous way, knowledge of Johnson’s yarns reached our captain and he, paying an official call upon the admiral of the Channel Fleet, enlivened a formal occasion by recounting Old Johnson’s boastings to us wide-eyed midshipmen. The Duke of Edinburgh was amused. . . .

On the day when he returned our captain’s visit we midshipmen were lined up in the various menial positions where juniors belong; Old Johnson, at the gangway, piped the duke over the side.

“After he finished greeting our captain the admiral gave a little chuckle and lifted his voice. ‘I hear that you have a friend of mine aboard, captain; I’d be glad to see my old shipmate Boatswain Johnson!’ Our skipper grinned. ‘Certainly, sir,’ he said, and turned to Johnson. ‘The admiral wants to speak to you!’

“Poor Old Johnson was completely scuttled, he dropped his cap, his knees knocked together, he dropped his pipe; the perspiration came out on his forehead. Somehow he stepped forward. The duke shook hands with him. ‘I haven’t forgotten those nice walks we used to take together in Malta, Johnson! . . . Glad to see you again,’ he said; then turned away to go to the captain’s cabin.

“As soon as we were dismissed we midshipmen dashed aft to await Johnson, and have the laugh of our lives at his expense—but we didn’t know him. . . . Somewhere—between the time when he stood before the duke, a picture of guilty misery, and the time when he returned to us—he had recaptured his poise. As his head appeared—before we could say one word—he straightened, glared at us, thumped himself on the chest. ‘Didn’t I tell you the duke and me was friends? Now who’s a damned old liar?’ he roared.”

The admiral joined in the laughter, then sobered. “Poor Johnson! I went to see him just before he died, and after asking me to sort of keep an eye on his daughter, he commenced to rage over the consistency of hospital soup: ‘You could see bottom in fifteen fathom of it,’ he told me.”

Admiral Chisholm pushed back his chair. “I’d give Mrs. Jenks anything she asked for, Mary, she’ll get it in the end—if she takes after her father!”

“That’s the trouble with you, Henry, no matter how preposterous any one is, if they belong to the old navy, or enlist your sympathy, you’ll forgive them anything.” Mrs. Chisholm turned to her nephew. “Flying this morning, Jim?”

He nodded. "Battle practice. . . . Come out at ten, Aunt Mary, and I'll do a barrel roll right over this house. . . . Or perhaps a falling leaf would match the garden better? What's the matter with those seedlings I helped you transplant?"

Mrs. Chisholm groaned. "Snails—a million strong—and I haven't time to slaughter them! Living in California has ruined Browning's poems for me. 'The snail's on the thorn,'" she quoted scathingly; "I wish I had *our* snails so well trained!" She went to the door to wave her husband and her nephew off, pausing to smile rather wistfully as Jim Langdon's contagious laugh floated back. "Elizabeth would have hated to have him fly," she said half aloud. Elizabeth, her only sister, had died when Jim was born. Mrs. Chisholm had brought him up. "I adored Elizabeth—but I never knew what to expect of her. Jim's like her—that's why he went into aviation. . . . Yes?"

"The chaplain is in the library, ma'am."

Mrs. Chisholm turned back. From the library sofa a pleasant-faced officer—wearing a gold-embroidered cross upon the sleeve of his uniform—rose to greet her. The chaplain held a paper with a list of names and addresses, and a sheaf of bills for Mrs. Chisholm's approval.

"Navy Relief doesn't intend to let any sailor's wife enjoy herself at the hospital unless I'm a party to it," commented the admiral's wife, switching on the desk light. She went carefully over the itemized accounts; only one was questioned. "Does Mrs. Curran's husband get less than sixty dollars a month? . . . Is she eligible to have her whole bill paid? . . . I seem to remember that we discussed this case."

"They've had three babies in thirty-one months and it's taken them over a year to pay for the oldest child's funeral—"

"I remember—" Mrs. Chisholm initialled the bill, glanced at her list, switched off the desk light.

The chaplain bundled his papers together. "I went to see those people who wrote you about borrowing some money; the man's a coxswain, his pay is ninety-six dollars a month, they have five chil-

dren—and they've contracted to buy a combination gas-and-electric stove for one hundred and seventy-five dollars on the instalment plan—"

"*Lunatics!* . . . Of course you told them that we wouldn't encourage anything like that! The stove must go back! What did you say?"

"I didn't say anything. . . . The sailor's wife told me that she'd never before owned anything handsome and that, all the rest of her life, she was going to cook three meals a day—" The chaplain hesitated. "I thought it was a woman's place to speak severely to her."

Mrs. Chisholm sniffed. "Don't ever let yourself be decoyed into discussing anything so incriminatingly compromising as a cook-stove," she advised dryly, visualizing a tired figure eternally bent above the magnificence of that combination range. . . . They were standing in the outer doorway as she spoke; glancing up she saw overhead nine planes flying in echelon formation and, as she looked, they went simultaneously into a tail spin, straightened, resumed their original stations, winging across the sky. . . . Mrs. Chisholm could picture her nephew's amusement if he could have seen her consternation. "There must be a dreadful increase in heart-disease among aviators' relatives!"

"It's really not so dangerous as dodging automobiles," the chaplain assured her.

She thought it over. "I never was interested in aviation before. Until my husband was ordered to shore duty here, where there is a naval air station, my nephew hadn't lived with us since he went to Annapolis. . . ." She held out her hand. "I know you're busy—and I'll have to be starting if I'm to get all these visits in."

Mrs. Chisholm had an eventful morning. The first stops were at the homes of the widows of whose bereavements she had been notified. One needed temporary financial assistance from the Navy Relief Society; the second, having three children born in the State, was eligible for a mother's pension; the other two were returning to their own people.

The next address produced a Czechoslovakian woman with a strident voice and positive views concerning her sailor-

husband's country. Mrs. Chisholm let her talk herself into a rage of vituperation before she halted the tirade. "That will do. *Not another word!* . . . If you had married one of your own countrymen he wouldn't have *dreamed* of handing his wages over to you; neither would your shopkeepers have let you buy showy flimsy finery on the instalment plan."

The woman, being of the class which employs tears as a movie cowboy uses a gun, broke into loud wailing. Mrs. Chisholm was not impressed. "*In America* every seaport city has free libraries, night schools, and extension courses where you can study millinery and dress-making and learn to make *cheaply* the finery you covet. Why don't you avail yourself of your opportunities—instead of annoying every one?"

After that the admiral's wife visited a hospital and left layettes to be given to two young mothers whose husbands' pay—according to the chaplain's investigations—could not be stretched to cover baby clothes. She went next to a number forwarded to her by the physician at Neighborhood House—and found a seventeen-year-old mother and a dying child. The sailor-husband, aboard a destroyer in the harbor, drew fifty-four dollars a month, twenty-two of which went in rent for two cold dark rooms. A glance at the wailing baby and at the mother was all that was necessary to convince Mrs. Chisholm that an actual lack of nourishing food was the cause of the condition; a few quiet and kindly questions revealed the fact that delicatessen shopkeepers were the recipients of the tiny salary. The admiral's wife proceeded cautiously: "Had the baby been baptized? . . . No? . . . That was a pity! . . . A citizen of God's world should be enlisted in God's army. . . . And what about letting Doctor Bemis, the specialist on children's ailments, look the baby over? . . . And if"—she corrected herself hastily—"I mean *when*, the baby gets better, I want you to go up to the afternoon class at the high school and take the course in plain cooking."

Although Mrs. Chisholm's voice was cheerful her face was grave. "These pathetic improvident young people—and the criminally negligent mothers who,

having been too lazy to train their daughters, welcome the chance to be rid of them through early marriages—" she soliloquized. Whether from anticipation or from dread she had left the Jenks visit until last and, as she stopped in front of the house, the small yard seemed so turbulently full of the Jenkses offspring that Mrs. Chisholm glanced apprehensively at the picket fence to see if it bulged. Mrs. Jenks, attired in a flowery, canton-flannel kimona, sat in a rocking-chair on the porch. If the admiral had been present he would have recognized the interested cock of her head as an inherited mannerism—but Mrs. Jenks's voice was properly doleful. "You look more like Miss Elizabeth every day, ma'am! . . . I was thinkin' my father's old friends had forgotten me—or have you been ailin'—like meself?"

The admiral's wife refused this lead. "Maggie Johnson, *what do you mean* by writing to the Navy Relief Society for help—when you've had more done for you than any other ten people?"

Mrs. Jenks was visibly nonplussed. "Who's been a-lyin' about me?" she countered. "Wasn't it only last night I was a-runnin' through the cards an' the two of spades kept comin' up—an' didn't I say to Tim, 'Some one's a-makin' trouble for me'?" But her tone carried no conviction.

"If any one made one-fiftieth of the trouble for you that you unhesitatingly make for other people, you'd be too busy to be sitting in idleness on the porch at eleven-thirty in the morning!" Mrs. Chisholm's voice was wrathful. "You idle women, who are too indolent to train your children, are public nuisances! How can you expect your daughters to sew, or cook, or intelligently spend small earnings, when they never see their mother doing anything useful?"

"Sewin' makes me nervous."

"*It doesn't!* It isn't possible for a fat woman to be nervous!"

Mrs. Jenks was getting her breath. "The reason I'm a-settin' here is because I'm weak-like and all of a-tremble! Wasn't it less than ten minutes since that a girl was a-hangin' some window fixtures, an' not bein' able to find the hammer she up an' grabs a brass cartridge

her young man had give her, an' she hits the curtain bracket a wallop with it——"

The admiral's wife did not catch the gist of this account. "Well, what of it?" she inquired.

Mrs. Jenks arose to act out the calamity. "She hit the screw a wallop—an' it was one of those foot-high brass cartridges *an' good*: it blew her head off . . . an' she, with all her weddin' clothes ready to marry the lad what give her the cartridge!"

"How dreadful! What a terrible thing to have happen! Where did she live?"

Mrs. Jenks had resumed her chair. "A friend of mine, Miss Perkins, was a-tellin' me about it. . . . An' as for doin' for myself, Mis' Chisholm, ma'am, what can a woman do that's tied to a house with eight kids?" Her voice quavered with pathos. "That's the worst of doin' your duty raisin' a fam'ly! All the lively folks that rides in automobiles think you're lazy!"

"I don't think—I *know*! What are you training your children to do? Instead of teaching the girls plain cooking and sewing, encouraging the boys to earn and save a little money by delivering papers, sprinkling lawns, or running errands, you let them scream the neighbors deaf—while you sit on the porch waiting for people to do for you!"

"Sure, you've been *real good*!" Mrs. Jenks executed one of her conversational flank movements with which, often before, she had routed her visitor. ("First she's against you; then she's all for you—until you can't tell *which* side she's talking on," Mrs. Chisholm was wont to complain to the admiral.) Mrs. Jenks went blithely forward: "As I was a-sayin' to Miss Perkins—the girl who's always askin' questions about you, an' the admiral, an' Miss Elizabeth's lad, Mr. Jim—"They're me father's old friends, an' they'd give me the fillin's out'n their teeth if I needed 'em"! Miss Perkins is a nice girl—but flighty. Her folks say she ain't never been the same since she got hurt in the head actin' in the movies up to Hollywood. I never seen any one who wanted to get their name in the newspaper like she does; she says that ev'ry one at Hollywood knows an' proves that

all you need to be famous is newspaper not'riety! . . . I was tellin' her you had a heart of gold——"

Mrs. Chisholm's voice was determined. "I'm commencing to realize that I've been doing you a real wrong in lettin' you drift this way. Your daughters will have a can-opener and a ticket to the movies for each of their doweries—like the forlorn girl with a starving baby, that I saw this morning—unless I stop this very day! . . . Don't appeal to me or to the society for help again, until you can show that you're trying to train your children to be responsible, useful, future citizens. Weeding gardens is just as healthful an out-of-door sport as tearing around the yard, shrieking?"

"What about the baby? Poor lamb—a-sleepin' so peaceful in his crib with nothin' to look forward to but learnin' to walk so's he can go to work——"

"You know perfectly well that I don't mean the baby—but Jimmy is fifteen, Maggie is thirteen, and Tim is eleven; lots of boys and girls earn money before they're as old as that." Mrs. Chisholm arose. "Don't let me hear from you again unless you've an honest reason for asking help." She might have spared herself anxiety concerning the young Jenkses being brought up in idleness; hardly had her automobile left the curb when Mrs. Jenks was issuing orders like a general: "Jimmy, the baby's frettin', take him up! Maggie, get a pan of onions an' potatoes an' boil 'em with the skins on!" She settled comfortably back in her chair. "Here comes the Perkins girl to ask questions about Mis' Chisholm——"

But if Mrs. Jenks was serene and cheerful, the admiral's wife was not; riding back toward the Naval Station she thought of the pathetic sick baby and pondered, for the thousandth time, over life's inequalities. To the Jenkses she gave a rueful sigh; they were of the "old navy" and indivisibly tied to her husband for life—to be scolded, warned, helped, disowned with exactly the same result: the admiral, remembering Old Johnson in the light of midshipman days and many far-flung cruises, would never see the boatswain's daughter run foul of her just reward. And no one was more cognizant of this comfortable fact than Maggie Jenks!

"I'd like to shake her!" murmured Mrs. Chisholm half aloud, under cover of the aviation station's siren announcing noon.

... Over her head the bombing, scouting, and battle planes were winging homeward toward the landing field and the mother ship; the air was vibrant with the roaring of their engines; from high above came the subdued humming of the practice squadron returning from manoeuvres to its base. . . .

The chauffeur was moved to voice his admiration: "Don't they do that echelon fine, ma'am? . . . *Oh, look—*"

Even as he spoke one of the planes wavered . . . veered . . . tilted drunkenly forward . . . and then, like some wounded erratic bird . . . commenced to descend . . . in strange, jerky darts . . . bow foremost. . . .

Mrs. Chisholm felt suddenly faint. "Will they land on the ground . . . or in the bay . . .?"

There was no need to answer. The plane, gaining momentum, pitched more swiftly downward . . . and came to the end of its last flight with a splintering crash . . . its nose driven deep into the earth by the force of its fall. . . .

For a few seconds there was a stupefied pause; men, at work in the repair shops, dropped their tools, stood transfixed; sailors rushed from the hangars and stopped, breathless; loaded motor lorries and cars came to a sharp halt; a detachment of aviation mechanics, marching toward the Fleet Air barracks, broke ranks to stand, staring. . . .

... And then the station came suddenly to life: the ambulance—always manned and equipped during flight hours—dashed from its parking place in front of the dispensary, hardly waiting for a signal from the doctor officer of the day, as he jumped for the running-board. Behind them, in the dispensary entrance, Mrs. Chisholm could see the sailor hospital orderlies running toward the store-room, wheeling out the stretchers. The senior doctor superintended a hasty clearing of an operating-room; gave a sharp command for the convalescent patients to sun themselves on the opposite side of the building, and followed the stretchers to the doorway. . . .

... Across the field, over ridges, holes,

and hillocks sped the ambulance to where the great plane stood. It looked frail, useless and futile now—and its two occupants were very still; one, the observer, strangely twisted and crumpled, was already dead—his ribs through his heart. The other, the pilot, was lifted, breathing, into the ambulance. The doctor, glancing at the wrecked plane, clambered quickly in beside his unconscious charge, and spoke to his assistant: "He didn't have a prayer! Controls jammed—that's the cause of nine-tenths of the aviation crashes! . . ." He shook his head at the limp figure on the stretcher. "Now *why* do accidents *always* happen to the best fliers? *That's Jim Langdon!*" he said.

During the rest of her life Mrs. Chisholm will never voluntarily speak of the nightmare days which followed. Jim Langdon's life hung in the balance; a tense stillness settled over the commandant's house—broken only by the shrill importunities of the telephone bell, when friends and acquaintances voiced inquiries and messages of sympathy and encouragement. . . . Twice, from a grocery store near her home, Mrs. Jenks called up the admiral's quarters and gave the house-boy instructions to tell Mrs. Chisholm of her pity. "Knowing how the madam loved Miss Elizabeth's lad I couldn't feel any sorrier if it was one of my own! Tell her that Maggie Johnson says she's too good to have such a trouble!"

The admiral delivered the message. He was having a difficult time during those long days—while his wife heaped condemnation upon herself. "Elizabeth left Jim to me to love and take care of—and I let him go into aviation. If he dies, I'm responsible. I could have stopped him by *absolutely refusing* to allow him to take up flying, when you overruled me by siding with him!"

The admiral's decisive voice was gentle. "No, you couldn't have stopped him, Mary; flying was as the breath of life to Jim—he would hardly talk on any subject but aviation and its future; he conversationally eliminated forts, armies, navies, and battleships as useless junk. I've often heard him say that he'd rather be a penniless flier than a land-anchored multibillionaire."



From a drawing by Oscar F. Howard.

"What can a woman do that's tied to a house with eight kids?"—Page 725.

She would not listen. "Why do men have to go on inventing hideous, torturing, destructive things? . . . Wasn't the world miserable enough before—without adding airplanes and submarines?" She broke into breathless sobbing. "Elizabeth—and Jim. . . ."

And every afternoon Mrs. Chisholm went to the hospital to sit beside her nephew's bed and suffer anew as he stared at her with blank unrecognizing eyes . . . Jim . . . who, from the days of a diminutive birthday-cake ornamented by one pink candle, had never failed to smile a welcome to his adored Aunt Mary. . . . Outside, the meadow-larks sang to deaf ears during that interminable spring; snails feasted, unmolested, upon the plants in her neglected garden. . . .

But as the days went slowly past and Lieutenant Langdon lived, the doctors became more optimistic. True, he did not know any one—but later, when he was a little stronger, they would attempt to locate the pressure which was causing the trouble. The local newspapers, mentioning the physician's bulletins, commented that Lieutenant James Langdon could not speak, did not recognize his nearest relatives. . . .

Mrs. Chisholm commenced to hope. "We'll send for a great surgeon to help—when the doctors think that Jim can stand the added shock of an operation. . . . It may be just a little splinter of bone. Mrs. Barnard was telling me of her son's accident—and now he's perfectly well and strong. . . ." As the admiral did not answer she paused to question. "Henry, didn't you hear me? . . . What is the matter? . . . *Have the doctors discovered something that you're afraid to tell me?*"

"Not the doctors—the chaplain. . . ." The admiral lifted a silencing hand. "Mary, did Jim ever tell you that he was married?"

She could not believe that she had heard aright. "*Married!*"

He nodded. "The girl who claims to be his wife has a baby about five months old."

Mrs. Chisholm stared at her husband in speechless amazement.

"I've seen the young woman and the baby—she applied to the chaplain, who brought her to my office. She's exceed-

ingly nervous, due—I suppose—to the shock from hearing of Jim's accident. She went up to the hospital—but he didn't recognize her."

Mrs. Chisholm had found her voice. "It's an absolute falsehood! There isn't a word of truth in it! The woman is an impostor!" Her voice trembled. "Why should Jim want to keep his marriage from *me*? He'd know that I'd love any girl he married! As for his baby—! It's monstrous that you should even listen to such a story, Henry! . . . Turn the woman over to the police!"

"I wouldn't care to do that, Mary. The young woman seems to know a great deal about us, about Elizabeth's death, and Jim's father remarrying; and about Jim, and you, and me—things that only a person who knew our family well would be likely to know. And if she *is* Jim's wife, I wouldn't care to tell him that we'd failed her at a time like this."

"*It isn't true!*" Her voice faltered. "Did she show you her marriage certificate? . . . I suppose she wants money!"

He shook his head. "You're misjudging her. She says Jim didn't want to announce their marriage until he gets his promotion. From her rather disjointed account I gathered that he wanted her to study and improve herself."

"*Of course she's pretty!*"

"Not at all. . . . She's a forlorn looking girl with wild hair, and she's pathetically thin." The admiral hesitated. "Knowing Jim, I imagine that she appealed to his sympathies. She's theatrically inclined and, if she realized that Jim thought her misused or unhappy, she probably acted up to all the possibilities of the part—"

"Oh, stop!" Mrs. Chisholm's eyes were full of tears. "What did she come to you for? Money? . . . Who are her people? Where does she live? Why has she waited until now to let us know that she's Jim's wife?"

"She feels that if Jim dies it's only fair that we should acknowledge the baby. She's visiting some friends who live over on the edge of town—her people are in Pensacola; Jim met her while he was in training there. She never spoke of money. . . . I've seen her three times, and only after I couldn't help noticing

that she didn't look particularly prosperous, and told her that I knew you'd want to be sure the baby had everything it needed, could I persuade her to accept anything. You'd find it pathetic to hear her first inquiry: 'Has *he* recognized anyone yet?'"

"Is the baby cunning?" Mrs. Chisholm asked; then stiffened. "I don't believe that she's Jim's wife! I won't acknowledge her——"

The admiral's voice was grave. "Don't forget that she isn't asking anything but a square deal from us, Mary. She wouldn't come to our house or accept favors from us. She doesn't seem to want anything but the newspaper announcements that she's Jim's wife. . . . As for the baby—it looks so like every other baby that I feel as if I'd seen it before!"

Unintentionally, this last remark was the admiral's strongest plea in support of the young woman's claims. "The baby looks familiar, because it's like Jim," Mrs. Chisholm decided. With a little shiver of aversion she faced this new view-point—to find herself definitely hoping that, if the baby were Jim's, the girl who was its mother would be able to bring forward all the legal documents necessary to establish her claims. . . . If Jim did not get well . . . his aunt could not endure to have a single memory of him in which his eyes were not straight-glancing, his head held bravely erect. . . .

During all her busy years up to then, Mrs. Chisholm had never known more than a passing discouragement—but this was different. Looking back, life became in retrospect both futile and purposeless: little remote islands of happiness, suspense, and grief set in a vast and lonely sea. "I've accomplished less than nothing. . . . I've been satisfied just to drift. . . . It wouldn't matter if I'd never lived." She was suddenly and unaccountably tired mentally and physically. What was the use of all this elaborate profitless struggle?

Several incidents contributed to her disillusionment. The child specialist had put the frail baby on certified feeding; sufficient money was furnished his seventeen-year-old mother to pay, monthly, for what was prescribed. At first the

baby gained; then lapsed. The chaplain, investigating, speedily secured the information that, among some clothing donated to the young mother, there had been an Alice-blue hat in which she found herself so attractive that she had promptly spent the baby's milk money for a dress to match.

"I've ordered the bills sent to us, from now on," commented the chaplain. Mrs. Chisholm nodded listlessly. He went on: "That Czecho-Slovakian woman who was crazy for finery—you remember her?—well she found a way to achieve it through forming a partnership with a local bootlegger. She was arrested last week, and she's been retired from active service. . . . I feel so sorry for her husband: it will take him months to pay her bills—he's only a coxswain."

The admiral's wife did not answer. The chaplain, glancing at her, was struck with the look of utter discouragement in her face. "You mustn't feel like that, Mrs. Chisholm! After all, most of the cases we get are of people who aren't of average mentality. Think of the thousands of sailor families who live on their pay——"

"It's all so ugly and dreary and hopeless," she said.

Life will not stand still for calamities. Imperceptibly Mrs. Chisholm found herself engulfed in the old round of duties and responsibilities: a Japanese cruiser dropped anchor in the harbor and the ranking officers lunched at the commandant's house; the British naval attaché, arriving for a courtesy inspection of the district—and bringing personal letters of introduction to the Chisholms—was welcomed as a guest at the admiral's quarters for the week of his stay; an Italian gunboat, en route to the Orient, stopped to coal and to give her crew liberty; the captain dined at the commandant's—while the patrol officers, ashore, engaged in a lively evening of sorting out passionate differences of opinion between the visiting sailors and the native sons; the governor of a Mexican province, immediately adjacent to the border, came up to pay an official call—bringing his wife and all of her relatives with him. As none of them spoke English, an elaborate meal was

consumed to an accompaniment of signs and exclamations.

The telephone ceased to be a medium for conveying sympathy; the mail was full of demands and petitions again; the chaplain came to discuss cases, to hand in reports and suggestions. Several small navy children had to be entered in the Children's Home while their mothers were absent in tubercular camps; a sailor husband—aged nineteen—had a tiny baby left for him at the local Y. M. C. A. by a welfare officer from another city. "Tell him his wife's been sent to the hospital, and she gave his name as next of kin," was the message delivered with the baby. ("If you didn't want to cry you'd have to laugh!") Mrs. Chisholm commented to the chaplain when the baby had been rescued after three strenuously vocal hours in the Y.) A French war-bride was found in a rooming-house, coughing her life away—her husband cooked her breakfast before he went on duty; hurried home after working hours to cook her dinner—and was moved to a suitable place, given every care, and her idiosyncrasies overlooked—because the days of her discontent were so nearly over. The seventeen-year-old mother brought her baby—less frail now—for baptism, one Sunday after the chaplain's regular service.

And still Jim Langdon wandered through strange mazes of forgetfulness—and Mrs. Chisholm had seen his wife, and had taken a violent dislike to her.

But not to the baby—the baby was different! . . . True, it didn't look at all like Jim . . . and yet there was something about it hauntingly familiar. Mrs. Chisholm was increasingly perplexed about that resemblance. "Henry, is it because we've never had any babies of our own, that all of them look alike to us?"

The admiral nodded. "Probably." He hesitated. "Mary, I think it's time we talked over making some provision for Jim's wife. He's never made her an allotment—I know, I asked the paymaster. And now that Jim can't draw his pay, she must need money. I've sent my aide twice to the house of the friends she's visiting—but evidently they're working people because they're never at home."

He moved restlessly. "Jim's wife told me to-day that she was going away to get work. . . . She feels that we are treating her unfairly in not letting her make her marriage public. She has talked to two newspaper men in town—and they called me up to verify the report." The admiral paused again. "I asked them, as a personal favor, not to publish anything until after the surgeon gives his opinion concerning Jim."

"It's good of them to consider our wishes." Apathetically she added: "Nothing seems to matter much any more. I'm too tired to care."

"That's the aftermath of a nervous shock."

"Perhaps." She hesitated. "Henry, that girl isn't *fit* to take care of a baby: she all but holds it upside down!" Mrs. Chisholm's voice was tense. "Why shouldn't we keep Jim's child? She'd have to board it among strangers if she took a position—and I don't want strangers to have it!"

"Suggest that to her."

"I have!"

"I hope that you were kind, Mary."

Mrs. Chisholm avoided his eyes. "It wasn't a case for kindness on *my* part! She was like a fury. 'No one shall separate me from my child!' she screamed."

"There's nothing unnatural about mother-love, Mary."

"*I don't like her!* . . . First she mauls the baby around, calls it 'lover,' talks about 'thrilling at the touch of its hands,' says it's all that's left in life for her (and all the time I have a feeling that she's watching me out of the corner of her eye to see how I'm taking it); and next thing she's letting the baby fall and hurt itself badly; it will have a big bruise over its eye from the way it struck its head yesterday. . . . I told her she wasn't *fit* to handle a baby!"

The admiral kept a wise silence.

"She was angry!" commented his wife. "Of course she isn't a gentlewoman—that's very apparent when she loses her temper—but I was sorry afterward that I'd been severe with her (the poor baby had cried itself to sleep) and I tried to make amend by telling her that the specialist comes to-morrow. 'Just think! Next week at this time Jim may be able

to recognize us!' I said. She wouldn't even answer!"

The admiral made no comment.

Mrs. Chisholm pretended to ignore him. "It makes me *ill* to see a helpless baby mistreated."

There was silence.

"Especially if it is Jim's baby," she said.

"If you feel that way about it, why don't you have a straight-forward talk with her—ask her to bring out her proofs, and get this mean business on a reasonable footing?" The admiral was in earnest. "Do you know, Mary, your attitude in this matter is very perplexing to me! Usually you're so kind, so just—but not where this unfortunate girl is concerned. I can't get your view-point! . . . Unless she has known Jim, where could she have learned the things about his mother, about you, that she repeats?" His voice was grave. "I'm increasingly sorry for that young woman, Mary; there's something definitely wrong with her. . . . I only hope that, for your future peace of mind, she isn't going to have a mental collapse over Jim and over our treatment of her when she asked for recognition."

Never before during their married life had her husband spoken so to her. Mrs. Chisholm's voice was as serious as his. "The surgeon arrives at ten? . . . I'll go out to see . . . her . . . and be back at the hospital by the time the doctors have finished the consultation. . . ."

Very early the next morning the commanding officer at the naval hospital telephoned Admiral Chisholm; the admiral's face was very sober as he hung up the receiver and stood for a moment, pondering. "Perhaps I'd better let her go to see Jim's wife; it will save her a couple of hours of useless anxiety," he muttered; and went out to the dining-room. After breakfast he hurried Mrs. Chisholm off, emphasizing the need for her to be back at the hospital by ten-thirty.

She gave the address to the chauffeur. "Elm Street. I don't know where that is—I never heard of the street before."

He consulted a map of the city. "It's out near the Jenks. Elm Street is only three blocks long."

Arrived at the number, no one answered the door-bell. A passing post-

man volunteered the information that the folks who lived there owned, and ran, a grocery—and left home early.

"Haven't they a visitor—a young woman with a baby?"

The postman thought not.

Mrs. Chisholm went back to the car. "Go to Mrs. Jenks," she directed, adding to herself: "If there's one woman who will know everything about each person in the neighborhood, it will be Maggie Johnson! Besides, I haven't heard a word from her in weeks. . . . They must have found an oil-well in their back yard—this is the longest she's ever gone without wailing for help."

Mrs. Jenks' greeting was sincere and sympathetic. "My heart ached for you, ma'am! Rememberin' Miss Elizabeth, wasn't I knowin' how hard you'd take Mr. Jim's accident? . . . You're lookin' thin an' peaked! . . . Come in whilst I brew you a cup of tea."

Insensibly Mrs. Chisholm relaxed under the warmth of her kindness. Old friends might have their failings—but they had their advantages, too. "It's been ghastly—and it isn't over. . . . Thank you, but I don't care for tea so early in the morning—"

Mrs. Jenks put on the kettle. "You're too tired to know what's good for you. . . . As I was sayin' to a friend of mine—she's awful interested in the admiral, an' Mr. Jim, an' you—they're *kind* folks—"

"I'm not so kind as you think! . . . By the way, do you know a young woman, with a small baby, who is visiting at 26 Elm Street?"

"I know the folks at 26—but their daughter ain't married. She's the girl I was tellin' you about: the one that got hurt bein' rescued from a sinkin' ship in the movies."

Mrs. Chisholm looked at her paper. "It certainly says 26, and Elm Street is only three blocks long. Don't you know of any young woman, with a baby, who's been visiting there for over twelve weeks?"

"You've got the wrong street! . . . No stranger *could* stay on Elm Street that long—an' me not know it!" Mrs. Jenks bustled to the china-closet and ostentatiously took down an ornate tea-set.

The admiral's wife knew what was ex-

pected of her. "*Of course* I want tea—if I can have it out of anything so beautiful! . . . What handsome china! . . . How have you been getting on? . . . Are the children well? . . . And I must see the baby before I go."

Mrs. Jenks sobered. "I took your advice about puttin' one of the childer to a light job, ma'am—up to two days ago it worked grand. I was honestly thankful to you for suggestin' it—but I ain't so grateful now!" She opened a door and peered into a darkened room. "He's still sleepin'. Come in quiet an' you won't wake him."

The admiral's wife tiptoed after her.

Maggie Jenks lowered her voice to a sibilant whisper. "I've been rentin' him out to Miss Perkins for a movie act. . . . She's had him eight afternoons, at five dollars each—but I won't rent him again—money or no money! She ain't right in the head herself—from some movie accident—an' just look at the bruise on his temple that she brought the poor lamb back with, two days ago—"

Mrs. Chisholm's eyes had become accustomed to the half-light; bending above the crib she stared in aghast unbelief at the Jenks baby and its bruised forehead. "*No wonder* I thought I recognized that child! '*Movie act*!' . . . Do you know what that girl has *really* been hiring him for?"

Her voice was so tense that Mrs. Jenks shrank back, whimpering. "She said it was an act that'd get her lots of newspaper notice . . . an' you told me I ought to be makin' the childer earn some money! Miss Perkins is the girl I told you about—the one that's always askin' questions about Mr. Jim, an' the admiral, an' you—"

Admiral Chisholm had walked several miles up and down the hospital corridor; the atmosphere around him was electric. As Mrs. Chisholm came through the doorway she overheard him boomingly waylaying a scurrying junior medical officer. "*Where's Doctor Thompson?*"

The young doctor was of the new navy of amalgamated line and staff; he answered primly: "The executive officer is operating, sir."

The admiral glared at him. "Oh, he is, is he? . . . Damn lucky for the patient that it isn't the navigator—" He caught sight of his wife. "The specialist came on the early train instead of at ten—and he decided to operate right away. . . . *That was hours ago, Mary—*"

If Mrs. Chisholm had ever questioned his affection for Jim the sight of his face at that moment put all such thoughts permanently to rout. She laid a comforting hand on his arm, fought down her own fears in trying to divert his attention. "I've just come from investigating the case of that young woman who claimed to be Jim's wife. . . . You were right, Henry, she's mentally unbalanced; she had some wild idea of getting newspaper notoriety which would help her in the movies! . . . And the reason you and I thought that there was something familiar about her baby is because we knew him! . . . Don't you remember when you were godfather for the last Jenks baby?"

Admiral Chisholm stared at her. What are you talking about? What has that wild-eyed girl to do with the Jenks baby?"

"Mrs. Jenks rented him to her—she feels just dreadfully to think of the trouble she's innocently made. . . . But it was really my fault. I tried to give Maggie Johnson some good advice—"

His tone was scathing: "Didn't I tell you not to trifle with Old Johnson's daughter? If she took after her father at all, she'd be able, in ten seconds, to make good advice look like reckless rhetoric—"

He broke off sharply. A nurse was hurrying toward them down the corridor; her eyes were shining. "Lieutenant Langdon's commencing to come out from under the anæsthetic—they sent me to tell you! . . . He's just stopped mumbling about his plane to ask clearly: 'Aunt Mary?' . . . Doesn't that mean you, Mrs. Chisholm?"



Green Garden

BY DOROTHY CARUSO

DECORATION BY S. WENDELL MITCHELL

I KNOW one who made a garden.
Not a blossom, only greens!
Cabbages and cauliflowers,
Peas and carrots, beets and beans.
How she loved each wee tomato,
Gave each pod such tender care.
Lavished all her sweet affection
On the things she planted there!

Wearing nothing soft or pretty,
Only overalls, and shirt;
Rosy cheeked, so small and solemn,
Busy digging in the dirt.
Earnestly she worked for hours.
"Only greens!" The little elf
Doesn't know the sweetest flower
In the garden is herself!