

The Custard Cup

By FLORENCE BINGHAM LIVINGSTON

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CHAPTER XXVI—Continued.

Lettie patted him more absently, more and more dreamily, her thoughts withdrawing into the seclusion of anxious meditation. She scarcely noticed when he left her, at the call of his own master. . . . But his brief sympathy had given her courage. She contemplated the shattered items of her ambitious plan. That was one trouble. She had been too ambitious, hoping to make many dollars.

Out of the chaos a new thought took shape, beckoned with promise, sent Lettie flying down the street again, back to The Custard Cup. She peeted through the driveway and into Number 47. With a flash of black curls she whirled into the bedroom, seized her invention from behind the sleeping-



Lettie Patted Him More Absently.

boy, and was off again, raring along through the driveway and up the street, raring, raring, balancing the long gills with prancing compensations.

"I gotta have that tree," she repeated over and over, half-sobbing still. "I gotta. I promised. Oh, Penzie, I'm gona."

She reached the Widewake office utterly breathless and frenzied by the forward struggle between hope and despair. Her curls whirled across her face as she dashed through the door, through the gate in the counter, past the astonished clerk, and brought up at the desk. The long pole wavered uncertainly above the head of Mr. Abbott, who dropped his pencil and jerked back in instinctive reaction.

"Here!" pointed Lettie through-dry lips. "Here 'is'! See—for yourself. You can have it—and the whole scheme—make as many as you want—for a dollar. Whole thing—a dollar!"

Mr. Abbott stared at the child in speechless amazement, his eyes unasily following the imminent gyrations of the long stick. Lettie, watching him with eagle gaze and seeing no signs of success, clutched desperately for further leverage. Perhaps apology! That was often what people required of her. Certainly if an apology or two would turn the scales, it was not a time for personal reserve.

"Excuse me—for getting mad," she gasped out. "I gotta beasty temper. To home I—I pound it out, but you—you didn't have anything to pound—quick 'nough. And excuse me for using your desk. If you'd had a gong, you know."

"Holy smoke!" interrupted Mr. Abbott, with some faint indications of plunging into another pocket of good nature. "Don't have heart failure or jim-jammies or anything—not in my office. Sit down, sister, and grab on to yourself. Let's see if we can find out what 'sylum you come out of."

With a humpy sigh Lettie flopped into a chair, and having collected a modest supply of breath, she launched into a demonstration of her model. At the end of the stick were two arcs of wire which closed upon the card. The arcs were held together by a wire loop, which could be released by two arms, also of wire, that ran down the handle within reach of the operator.

The contrivance was crudely made. The wires were far from even, and they were clamped to the long stick with carpet tacks; but as Lettie tri-umphantly and repeatedly pointed out, "it worked." Mr. Abbott himself worked it a number of times, not rapidly but with undeniable results. Lettie watched him in agonized suspense. He shook his head. "I don't see how it'll ever anything. It ought to be some machine where the steps are high, like—"

"Oh, no," said Lettie, "gong-voice just here."

"Point is—" He paused, thinking. "It's 'most Christmas," he began presently.

Lettie came out of her chair. "Cracky, ain't it?"

He looked at her keenly. "I got a boy that's crazy over machinery. Did you say a dollar?"

She nodded. "I—I'm sorry to—to ask so much," she stammered, now thoroughly humbled, "but I—I gotta have—"

He said nothing. But presently he drew out an old wallet with a pleasant bulge and extracted from it a green bill, which he slowly unfolded. It was a dollar bill. Lettie's wide eyes fastened on it with unwinking transfixion. It was the key to fairyland, the thing she had hoped for, worked for, fought for; but now that it lay before her, she was held in the awe of unreality. Her breath stopped; her body grew rigid except for the play of muscles in her throat; a mist swam before her eyes.

"Here you are, sister." He passed over the bill.

Lettie took it in a daze. She tried to speak. "The-a-ank—" Her voice bumped up and down; her thin chest heaved. In an agony of emotion she clutched the bill and stumbled out of the office. Never before had she owned a dollar; a tenth part of it was the largest sum that had ever come into her hands, and that had been immediately swallowed up by the Wopple-window debt.

"Oh, Penzie," she cried, as she burst into the kitchen, "I got it! I got it. Duhing, ain't you glad?"

"Depends on what you got, dear," returned Mrs. Penfield, grown cautious through such experiences.

Lettie held up her fanned fat, so tightly clenched that the bones showed white under the bloodless skin. Slowly, triumphantly, she opened it.

"Now we can have the tree and the party and fun—and everything, can't we?" she shouted. "Gosh, I thought I'd never pull it off."

"Lettie, dear," sighed Mrs. Penfield, "we got to do something 'bout your language."

Lettie grinned. "Not 'New Christmas, have we?"

"I expect we wouldn't have time 'New Christmas," smiled Mrs. Penfield, "but we got to get at it by New Year's."

Lettie reverted to matters of more moment. "And now, Penzie, you'd do what you promised and show me how to buy a big, big Christmas? We got money 'nough now, haven't we?"

"Oh, plenty. All we got to do is to plan, and we'll get right at it."

CHAPTER XXVII

Dimes, Limited.

"The reason some folks have to have so much money," explained Mrs. Penfield, "is they don't know how to plan. Land, they'd be sprind to know how little money they could live on if they'd only mix their brains with it."

It was admitted at Number 47 that funds were ample for the project in hand, but the young Miss Penfield was dismayed to find her capital diminished from one dollar to eighty cents, the intervening twenty being required to liquidate the final payment on the Wopple window. It seemed that one could not face a holiday in the right attitude if one were in debt, and Lettie could not be spared to earn further money before the festive day. However, Crink brought in five cents, returns from an errand, and Thud jubilantly contributed one penny, gross proceeds from two hours of chicken-fending from the Chatterbox garden. Total, eighty-six cents!

Mrs. Penfield knew a place in the country where a tree could be had for nothing. But it would take two car-fares and return; also Crink and the family hatchet. Twenty cents was segregated for the enterprise.

The next morning an important expedition set forth from The Custard Cup. Mrs. Penfield went along as guide, but the motive force was Lettie, who bore the badge of authority in a small purse containing sixty-six cents in negotiable form. She was easily the happiest child in the whole city. Her feet pressed the rainbow-path of Promise; her fingers held the wand of Possibility; her starved life was suddenly illumined with the light of joy, dazzling by contrast, scarcely to be believed, permeating her being with a feeling of unreality.

The Penfields had a long walk, but the morning was beautiful, bright and crisp, with a bracing quality that emphasized the cheerful spirit of the season. There had been rain a few days before, washing the haze from the hills, giving greener life to lawns and trees. The streets were bustling with activity. Expressmen and delivery boys were busier than usual, running up steps and flying doorbells with an honorable appearance of haste; people were hurrying in every direction, carrying packages of delightful variety.

Mrs. Penfield guided Lettie to a store that catered to shoppers whose incomes were ambitious and whose resources were small. Road held high, Lettie peered but way through the crowd that thronged the store. The first tree she saw was one tree.

She said nothing. But presently she drew out an old wallet with a pleasant bulge and extracted from it a green bill, which he slowly unfolded. It was a dollar bill. Lettie's wide eyes fastened on it with unwinking transfixion. It was the key to fairyland, the thing she had hoped for, worked for, fought for; but now that it lay before her, she was held in the awe of unreality. Her breath stopped; her body grew rigid except for the play of muscles in her throat; a mist swam before her eyes.

"Here you are, sister." He passed over the bill.

ings. But she blinked in bewilderment at the array before her. And a dime was the limit, the absolute limit for this department. Lettie set her teeth and eliminated systematically until she reached the most for the least, which gave her three yards of thin silver tinsel for ten cents.

Candles? Most emphatically! A Christmas tree without candles is an evening sky without stars. For the affluent, candles were provided in boxes, at ten cents per; but others might be had at the rate of six for five cents. Six were so had by Lettie, who then turned her mental batteries upon the subject of holders, essential to safety of branch and limb. But candle-holders were ten cents. They came in sets of twelve clamped to a card, and you were obliged to take the entire lot or go without.

Lettie stood before the display so long that impatient shoppers disputed the space she occupied, so absorbed that the interrogations of floor-walkers failed to penetrate her consciousness. Her heart pounded in a panic. How could she do what couldn't be done? She looked around. A woman stood beside her, engaged in mental work on candle-holders. With the intuition of wide experience, Lettie appraised her instantly.

"Landy gracious!" she cried. "Ain't it a fright the way they jump, 'em?"

The woman looked up. "Ain't it?" she agreed. "And the six-for-five-candles are longer's them in boxes, 'em."

"I gotta scheme," said Lettie. "What say if we go sneaks on a card?"

"I'd be glad to."

Therupon tickets were posted, and a card was purchased and divided, to the infinite satisfaction of everybody concerned.

The Penfield plan allowed another dime for candy, but it was no easy matter to divide upon the variety. Invidious had to be considered, as well as bulk. Fortunately, the lower the price, the higher the color, so the latter quality took care of itself. Lettie, peering up and down before the long counter of heaped-up candies, came to rest before "plain mixed" and "nutmeg mixed." Unhappily they represented the best values. The nutmeg would yield greater numbers, but plain mixed would surely melt less rapidly and therefore give longer entertainment to the consumer. Ultimately Lettie's money was on plain mixed.

The other purchases required little selection and were speedily made. They consisted of a tablet of plain, good paper for one dime; two packages of envelopes, for another; a spool of white thread, five cents; and a stick of pink-and-white candy, one cent. The latter would help decorate the tree and also serve as a gift for Thud.

During all these transactions Mrs. Penfield had been surveying an attentive bit of background, but in the following few minutes she was called upon to



"I Gotta Scheme," Said Lettie.

take an active stand. It proved to be no simple matter to get Miss Lettie out of the store. So engrossed had she been in the purchases on her tentative list that she had scarcely cast a comprehending glance at other commodities; but now that her responsibility was over and her cash exhausted, she turned a fascinated eye upon tables and counters of alluring articles.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Important Points Neglected.

BOY SCOUTS

(Conducted by National Council of the Boy Scouts of America.)

SEASCOUTING TO THE FORE

That vigorous and picturesque branch of the boy scout program known as seascouting and designed in the interests of the older boy is to be opened up to all boy scout troops, no matter where they are located, according to the plan of the recent seascout conference.

Where the salty sea is not available, at least those features of the seascout program that can be carried out on land will be, such as navigation, astronomy, ship construction, signaling, wireless, sail-making, boat drill, sounding, map reading, charting, etc.

The objects of seascouting are identical with those of land scouting, with greater emphasis on nautical training. Because seascout training has proved of incalculable benefit to the older boy, the conference recommended in the interests of greater progress, that the formation of troops be simplified, and be made similar to that of land troops; also, that certain requirements be made for advancement in the first three ranks, as in land scouting, and that other advanced work be optional, as in the case of the Merit badge work of the land scout.

A seascout reserve is also recommended, the program of which is to be made available to all existing troops. This work of the reserve will develop more experts in water safety, thereby providing safety-first leadership in camps, and will make possible community life-saving work.

The blue and tan uniform is to be done away with, according to plans of the conference, and the regular blue uniform is to be adopted. A special dress uniform for shore leave is also recommended.

All the conference fifty of the seventy-seven registered ships were represented.

In the seafaring world are many prominent supporters of the character-building work of seascouting.

Admiral William S. Benson, U. S. N., who is one of these strong advocates of the work, has said: "The seascout training included in the boy scout program emphasizes the highest ideals and traditions of the sea, and by teaching the necessity of seafaring for such services as unselfishness, self-discipline, team work and endurance, makes for good of purpose and character."

To James A. Wilbur, chief seascout, much of the success of this vital branch of the scout movement is due.

BOY SCOUT MAP SKETCHING



Scouting's method of "learning by doing" illustrated in map making, one of the many aids scouting affords a boy in teaching him how to observe the out-of-doors and how to successfully blaze or follow the trail.

LOVES SCOUTS AND ARCHERY

Among the favorite hobbies of Douglas Fairbanks are boy scouts and archery. The noted screen star became an archery enthusiast through his practice in the sport preparatory to his taking the part of the famous outlaw bowman in "Robin Hood," in the recent motion picture of that name. "As a lover of boy scouts and a lover of the bow and arrow," says Fairbanks, "I am glad archery has a place in the scout curriculum. It develops strong muscles, concentration, steady nerves, and so aids scouting's wonderful work of character construction and citizenship training."

SCOUT SAVES GRANDFATHER

Saving his grandfather's life is the proud achievement of Scout Theodore Harridge, Jr. The scout was standing near the pier at the family summer home in Connecticut, when he saw his grandfather suddenly fall from the edge of the pier into very deep water. The lad at once jumped in, secured the struggling man with a long length of rope, swimming through and using a buoy, and landed in the water with the old man, and brought him safely to shore.

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Never judge a merchant's cash receipts by the number of lady shoppers in his store.

Good advice is well enough in its way, but a hungry man can't make a meal of it.

Like Poison. "I hate that chap," quoth the lovable girl, as she rubbed cold cream on her lips.—Washington Sun Dodger.

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