



"Don't you think we may consider ourselves introduced by this rascal here?" he said.

# THE COLONEL'S "JOY"

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"WHAT am I to do, Joy; I want them all. Do you think it would be too great an extravagance to buy six hats all at once? How can one choose between so many absolutely lovely things; it is too much of an *embarras du choix*." The girl who spoke was possessed of a pretty face that almost any kind of headgear would suit; she had also a stock figure, and might have done well in a fashionable milliner's shop, or as a lay figure in a smart modiste's establishment. But as she was the elder daughter of Col. Holdsworth, and very much in society, no thought of earning a livelihood in either of these capacities entered her charming head.

Joy was drawing caricatures on the back of a theatre programme, and had barely given a glance at the six beautiful hats that adorned the round table in the girls' sitting room, so absorbed was she in her ridiculous talent that really was rather a clever one. However, she looked up now, with a preoccupied air, and remarked that six hats all at one go was decidedly a large order, adding:

"And, you know, you have spent all this quarter's dress money already."

"You are so unsympathetic, Joy. I believe you would be just as happy in a motor cap and sackcloth coat as in velvet and feathers," answered her sister, poising a picture hat on her waved tresses, and regarding herself with admiration in the long glass between the windows.

Joy made no reply; her pencil was at work again, and a whimsical smile twisted her pretty lips.

The loud bang of a door made her start and drop her pencil. "That's the dad come in. Viola, there's something the matter; he's worried a good deal these last days, and he doesn't sleep; he looks more tired in the morning than he does when he goes to bed. Last night I could hear him walking up and down his room—up and down, up and down—it bothered me dreadfully. I wish— Here he comes!"

The last words were spoken under her breath, and Joy looked at her father as he came into the room.

He was a tall man, with a military air about him, though he had left the service many years ago, and given himself up to making money on the stock exchange; had made it rapidly, succeeding in a marvelous manner, and with the extravagance of the spend-thrift living up to every penny of his income, enjoying life to the full, and generous to a fault.

At this moment he looked anxious and troubled, and Joy, who was observant, saw that he was pale and there was a nervous twitch of one eyelid.

"Halloa, dad, come and help me to choose a hat. I want them all, but—"

"You can't have one; put them away in their boxes, Viola; they must be sent back to the milliner's. Girls, I have come to tell you that I am ruined; it's my own fault; I risked too much; it was a tempting coup, and it has gone against me. I want you both to give me your help. I want my smash to be an honest one, and if we sell everything we possess I think we can face the creditors, and though we shall suffer, they won't. Are you going to stand by me?"

He spoke out with a force that appealed to Joy intensely, and as he asked the question that he might have put to a couple of men, rather than these young girls, he stretched out his hands, one to each.

Joy gripped the one offered to her, and her eyes flashed her willingness to do all that her father expected of her; but Viola, turning crimson, drew back with anger, astonishment and unbelief all struggling in her expression.

"It's not true—what do you mean, father?" she gasped.

"Exactly what I say. We have nothing of our own; even your pretty clothes must be sold, your jewelry, your pictures"—glancing at the walls adorned with artists' proofs—"your—your books"—his gaze passing to Joy's cherished library—"all must go, and I must start afresh—work as a clerk if needs be. Joy, little woman, will you face the fire?"

"You know that I will, dad, and—yes, I am proud of you, proud that you mean to let us suffer with you, that—that—"—her voice trembled, but grew strong under her self control—"that you have confidence and trust in your girls. Speak, Viola, say that you are ready too."

But the other girl turned on her sister with almost savage indignation. "But I'm not. I think father has behaved abominably; he had no right to bring this disgrace upon us. I hate poverty, and I don't intend to be poor. I mean to marry Mr. Lawson and get away from this as soon as possible."

"Lawson!" exclaimed her father.

"Mr. Lawson!" echoed Joy, and snatching at the clever little sketch that had pleased her so much, she tore it to bits.

"You don't know what you are saying, Viola; you can't marry a man whom you have treated with contempt—scorned one day, and half-encouraged the next; besides, he is not a gentleman; he is a cad!" cried Joy.

"He has loads of money; he can give me all these hats, all the clothes I want; he can take me out of the very thought of poverty. I'm not made to be poor; I couldn't struggle; I haven't it in me; we are different, you and I. I shall write and ask Mr. Lawson to come and see me this afternoon, before he hears of the crash. I intend him to propose to me, and I mean to accept him."

"He will have to see me first and hear the truth," said Col. Holdsworth, sternly.

Viola laughed, but there was no mirth in the laugh that jarred upon the ears of her father and sister, and abruptly she quitted the room.

Col. Holdsworth sank down on a chair near the table, pushing a costly hat away from him, and thrusting out his arms with a gesture of bitter despair.

"I might have known she would take it so, and yet—yet I thought that she, too, had some grit in her. Poor Viola!" Then, turning to the other girl, a mist came over his eyes, and a tremor in his voice.

"Joy, little girl, what can I say to you? You are the light in my darkness, the silver lining to the cloud, my—joy!"

His voice broke in a husky sob, and the girl's arms went round him, her wet cheek was pressed against his as she whispered, tenderly:

"Don't mind, daddy dear; we'll face the fire together."

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But this, alas! was denied them, for the colonel had a chance offered him to go to America, and, for the present at any rate, it was considered wiser to leave Joy behind with her Aunt Isabel, a maiden lady living at Brighton, who offered to give Joy a home in return for her services as a companion and amanuensis. Viola had chosen her own way, and was married quietly and quickly to Maurice Lawson, who never ceased to remind her of his generosity in taking compassion on her in her poverty-stricken state. She had

other suitors, but none so wealthy as the man who purchased his wife as he would have bought a valuable piece of furniture to adorn his establishment, a gorgeous mansion at Chislehurst. Perhaps hers was the hardest fate of the three.

The colonel had the excitement of a new life, and the struggle to mend his fallen fortunes, and Joy—dear, brave little Joy—did what her father thought best, and entered her new existence determined to make the best of it; but it was not easy this life with her Aunt Isabel—far from it, for Miss Holdsworth was exacting, selfish, and ceaselessly complaining, and after wearing out the nerves of her former lady companions, she was trying her best to do the same with her niece. And yet she valued her as she had valued none of her other companions, and was keen to keep her with her; indeed, so keen that she was determined nobody should make her acquaintance, for fear the girl should meet with a lover and get married, so when visitors called—and Miss Holdsworth enjoyed seeing people—Joy was told that she could go out for a walk.

Nothing loath, the girl would escape from her bondage and make a rush across the parade, with its smartly dressed strollers, to get to the sloping, shingly beach, and, nestling down in a nook of her favorite breakwater, would be almost happy with a book or scribbling with a pencil.

One day she had let her sketch book slip down beside her, and was gazing rather miserably across the gray expanse of sea, thinking of her father, and wondering how long it would be before he sent for her to come out to him as he had promised, when she suddenly became aware that a mischievous dog had got hold of the book and was worrying it in its teeth.

The waves were boisterous, and the tide coming in, but she did not think of the wetting to her feet as she ran after the wicked little terrier, who was making havoc of her drawings.

"You little beast!" she cried, and at the sound of her voice a man rose up from the other side of the breakwater, where he had been lying at full length, with his straw hat tipped over his nose, apparently asleep, and shouted peremptorily to the terrier to "Drop it!"

"I'm awfully sorry; I'm afraid he's done some damage," said the young man, ruefully, as he picked up the gnawed book and endeavored to smooth the puckered paper. "By Jove! how clever," he cried, impulsively, as his casual glance caught the boldness of the figures in one of the drawings; evidently portraits taken of people the girl had noticed on the parade.

"It doesn't matter," answered Joy, with the ripple of a laugh, then turned scarlet as the leaves fluttered over in the breeze, and behold! there was the portrait of the figure of the man himself stretched out upon the shingle, with the tip of his nose peeping from below the tilted hat.

"By Jove!" He looked at her, and their eyes met, hers half laughing but bashful; his full of interest and admiration at her talent. "What penalty is there for an artist who dares to take a portrait without permission?" he asked.

"The temptation was too much for me, but I am sorry; I will tear it up," she said, holding out her hand for the book with its telltale pages.

"It would be a pity to do that; supposing you pay the penalty by giving me my own portrait?" said the man, watching Joy's expressive face.