

Lady Betty Across the Water

By C. N. & A. M. WILLIAMSON

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I couldn't think what either of them meant, though at first I was afraid my man intended the other to understand that the five minutes would be devoted to knocking him down, or something else violent, as a punishment for impertinence to a defenseless foreigner. But my mind was almost instantly relieved, for the two men walked off together quite amicably and stood talking at a distance.

A moment later one of my boxes went by, looking very fat and friendly, on the shoulders of a porter who apparently had no head. I rushed out and seized it—not the head, but the box; so there was something encouraging, but I had two pieces of luggage to wait for still.

Most of the other "B's" were more fortunate about getting their things; nevertheless they seemed far from easy in their minds, and though they protested almost tearfully that they'd nothing whatever to declare, stern perusal in uniform stirred up their boxes as I used to do with the nursery pudding when all the plums had sunk to the bottom.

I was very tired and very hot, hotter than I'd supposed people could be, except in a Turkish bath, and I was beginning to be hungry, too, for I'd lunched principally on the statue of Liberty and skyscrapers, which were more filling than lasting as a meal.

I fanned myself with my handkerchief as well as I could and felt sure I was slowly getting appendicitis, because whenever Americans feel uncomfortable in any way it seems almost certain to turn eventually into that, probably on account of the climate. Would my other boxes never come? I thought. Most of the "B's" were going home. They had homes, lucky people, and if they liked they could presently have tea.

World without tea, Ah me!

When I was small and my nurse talked on Sundays about heaven and hell, making the one sound incredibly dull, the other incredibly painful, I used to think that I'd rather go to neither, but just be stuffed, like mother's Blenheim, Beau Brummel, whose soul I fancied had leave to stop in his body so long as moth and rust did not corrupt. He seemed rather out of things, though, poor dear, standing forever in the same position in a glass case, with one paw up begging for something which nobody gave, while the years dragged on, and I'd begun to feel as if I were falling into his state when I was roused from a stupor dream by the man of the steerage suddenly looming over me.

"I beg your pardon," said he, taking off his hat and speaking in a nice American voice, as nice for a man as Sally Woodburn's is for a woman. "Please don't suppose I mean to be rude or intrusive, but I wanted to tell you that I think you won't be annoyed again, and—just one thing more. May I thank you for your goodness on ship-board? It brightened what would otherwise have been a grim experience."

"Blind Mrs. Ess Kay to pronounce this man not a gentleman just because some strange circumstances had forced him to travel in the steerage? I did wish that, without his knowing it, I could have slipped into his pocket my 180."

"Oh, I did nothing," I answered. "It was the other people who did everything—the little that was done. It's I who have to thank you for taking that person away. He and the other who came just before were so rude."

"They didn't mean to be rude," he said. "They wanted you to tell them something which they could put into their papers, and they live by doing that kind of thing. I did the best I could with them, but I wish I could have saved you from being annoyed by the beginning. I hesitated at first for fear you might misunderstand and think me as bad as they were, but I wish I hadn't now."

"After what I saw you do at sea I couldn't possibly have misunderstood," I said.

"Thank you for saying that," he returned, "though for what I did then I don't deserve any praise. It was done on the impulse, and I'm used to salt water. As a child I lived close to it for a time in California and swimming came almost as natural as walking. But I'm not here to talk about myself. It was only to tell you how grateful I was for your kindness on the ship. I couldn't go without speaking of this, and there's something now I'd like to ask. You won't be offended?"

"If it's something you want to tell me, I know it isn't the sort of thing which could offend," I said, but I didn't say it as calmly as it looks when written. I stammered a little and got the words tangled up, and I felt my face growing hotter than ever.

"I thank you again. It's only this, if, while you're over on this side the water, there's ever any way in which a man—a man who'd be as respectful as your footman, and loyal as your friend—could possibly serve you, I wish you would let me be that man. I know it seems now as if such a thing couldn't happen, but nothing's quite impossible in this queer world, and—anyhow I shall always be ready. You could trust me?"

"I know that!" I couldn't resist breaking in.

"I'm employed for the present at a club in New York. If you'd send word to Jim Brett at the Manhattan club, there's nothing under the sun that Jim Brett wouldn't do for you, from finding a lost dog to taking a message across the world."

"First I must catch my dog before I

can lose him," I answered, laughing. "But if I do, or—or there's anything else, I shan't forget."

"That's a true promise, then, and I have to thank you for the third time. Now, I'm not going to trouble you any longer. Goodby."

Without stopping to think who he was, or who I was, I held out my hand, and his good looking brown face grew red. He took the hand, pressed it hard once, dropped it abruptly, turned on his heel and walked away without looking back.

I was so interested in going over the conversation in my mind that I forgot to feel like Beau Brummel with one paw up in his glass case, and though I dare say ten minutes had passed, it hardly seemed two, when a wonderful little black image in the shape of a boy came sidling up to me, all rolling white eyes and red grin, like a nice Newfoundland puppy. He had some newspapers tucked under his arm, but in his hand was a small basket of peaches almost too beautiful to be real. But then, weren't they—and wasn't he—part of my dream?

He grinned so much more that I was afraid his round black face would break into two separate halves, and looking at me with his woolly head on one side, he thrust out the basket.

"Fur you, missy," said he, with a funny little accent, for all the world like Sally Woodburn's.

"They can't be for me. There must be a mistake," said I, wishing there were for the peaches did look delicious, and there were two rosebuds lying on top of the basket, one pink, the other white. "I don't know any one who could have sent them."

"The gent knows you, you bet, missy," replied the image. "He giv me a quarter and axed if I know'd my alphabet 'nuf to find letter 'B' an' tote dese yere to the prettiest young lady I'd ever seed. Most wite ladies dey looks all jes' alike to me, but you's different, missy, an' I reckon dese things must be fur you."

I had a horrible vision of this compliment proceeding from the Flashlight or the Evening Bat. "What was the gentleman like?" I asked.

"Like mos' any gent, missy, 'cept that he was powerful tall, an' I reckon if he keeps right on like he's doin' now he'll get mos' as brown as me some day."

Then I knew that I was safe in taking the present, so I did and gave the comical black image two or three little round white metal things I'd got from the purser when I changed some English money. I didn't know how much they were, and they looked ridiculously small, but he seemed pleased.

When he had run off I turned my attention to the peaches. They were so big that there was room only for four in the basket, and they seemed dreadfully pathetic considering from whom they had come.

That poor fellow must be almost penniless, or he wouldn't have been in the steerage, yet he had bought peaches for me and given a "quarter"—what a miser!—to his quaint black doll of a messenger. I could have cried. Nevertheless I ate two of the peaches and reluctantly presented the other two, which I couldn't possibly eat, to a gloomy "B" child sitting on a shawl strap.

As if for a reward of virtue, just as I had disposed of my leavings and stuck the roses into my belt, the last of the luggage arrived. There were two custom house men near to choose from, and as I've heard, in choosing between two evils it's better to choose the less. I smiled beseechingly at the smaller man, who had just crammed a pile of lace blouses into the box of a lady with nervous prostration.

Whether he was sated with cruelty, or whether he was naturally of an angelic disposition, I shall probably never know now, but the fact remains that, instead of turning out the fiend I'd been led to expect, he was one of the most considerate men I've ever met. He wouldn't even let me unlock my own boxes, but took the keys and opened them for me himself. (Didn't an excruciating braid the hair of some queen whose head he was going to chop off? I must look the incident up when I have time.) Anyway, I thought of it when the custom house man was being so polite, but the analogy didn't go any farther, for my head never came off at all, and two of the boxes remained unopened.

"You're English, aren't you?" he asked, and when I said yes, and that I was only on a short visit, he treated my belongings as if they were sacred. If he disturbed anything, he laid it back nicely, keeping up a running conversation as he went on. I told him that English women might bring home all the pretty clothes they liked from other countries, and that I considered it most ungentlemanly in such a chivalrous nation as America to deny ladies a few Paris dresses.

"Do you happen to know, miss, what's the income tax in your country?" he asked, tenderly putting back some yellow hairpins which had fallen out of a box of mine.

"Dear me, no," I exclaimed. "But I think it's sometimes more than a shilling in the pound. I've heard my brother say so, and as for the death duties, it's more than your life's worth to die."

"Ah!" said the nice man. "We haven't got any income tax on this side, and folks can die in peace whenever they please. I guess that kind of evens things up, don't it?"

I didn't know what to answer, so I thanked him for his kindness, and we parted the best of friends.

Mrs. Ess Kay appeared so quickly afterward that it almost seemed as if

she must have been lying in wait. She was looking pale and shattered, and Louise, following close behind, was positively haggard. Only Sally had weathered the storm without being outwardly the worse for wear, but even she didn't look as good natured as usual.

"How have you got along, you poor, deserted darling?" affectionately in-



A little black image in the shape of a boy.

quired Mrs. Ess Kay, undismayed by a fixed gaze from Sally, which apparently signified reproach.

"It wasn't very bad, and I've quite enjoyed myself," I replied, forgetting some tedious moments in the light of others not tedious and hoping that the roses in my belt might pass unnoticed.

Fortunately they did, otherwise I should have been in a difficulty, for I should have hated to vulgarize the little episode by putting it into story form for Mrs. Ess Kay, and presumably roses have not been taught to grow wild on the New York docks, although they say Americans are so very luxurious in their tastes one would hardly be surprised at anything.

A beautiful electric carriage, bigger than a brougham, was waiting for us, and we left Louise, with a butler or some other manservant out of livery, to wrestle with the luggage and bring it in cabs (which they called "backs") up to Mrs. Ess Kay's house in New York, where I knew she meant to stop for a few days before going on to Newport.

The minute we drove away from the docks I began to notice dozens of things which made me tremendously conscious that I was in a foreign country. One would think, as so many of those people were English, or, anyway, British, before they were Americans that their buildings and everything else would be enough like to remind one of home. But each street we turned into showed me that this isn't at all true in New York. There are bits like Paris—at least you think so on a superficial glance—but nothing in the faintest degree like London.

Something in the air, too, made me feel excited, as it does in Paris. Sparks of electricity snapped in my veins, and I had a presentiment of interesting things that must surely happen.

I've always been very sensitive to smells, which can make me joyful or miserable, just as music does. Vic says I oughtn't to tell people this, as it signifies I'm still in close touch with brute creation. But I don't much mind if I am, for so many animals are nicer than we are—dogs and horses, for instance; and then one has to acknowledge, whether one likes or not, that a monkey is a kind of poor relation.

Each place I've ever visited has its own smell for me and even houses and people. I would know the smell of Battlemead Towers, if I were taken there by winding ways, with my eyes blindfolded. It's the smell of old oak and potpourri, and books and chintz, and autumn leaves and pine trees, mixed together. Mother smells like a tea rose and Vic like a wax doll.

London has a rich, heavy scent, which makes you feel as if you had a great deal of money and wanted to spend it, but not in a hurry. The smell of Paris makes you want to laugh and clap your hands and go to the theater. The smell of Rome makes you feel as if you wished to be very beautiful and move to the slow accompaniment of a magnificent church organ, with the vox humana stop drawn out. But New York—the smell of New York! How shall I describe the sensation it gave me, as Mrs. Ess Kay's electric carriage smoothly spun me up town?

The heavy feeling of homesickness which I had had on the ship for the last few days was gone, and instead I felt a wild sense of exhilaration, as if I'd come dashing home after a glorious run with the hounds and plunged into a cold bath with two bottles of eau de cologne poured into the water.

It was amazingly hot, but the breeze gave a hint of the sea, and every shop and house we passed seemed to keep spices stored away, for the breeze to blow over.

Even the old-fashioned houses, no higher than those in London, were so different from ours as possible, and it was extraordinary to see people—nicely dressed women and pretty girls—perched on the front steps under awnings without so much as a pocket handkerchief lawn between them and the street. Persons of that class at home would be far too shy to lounge about and be stared at not only by the neighbors, but by twenty strangers a minute, yet here they sat on rugs and read or did embroidery or swung back and forth in chairs that rocked like cradles, paying no more attention to the passers than if they had been flies.

By and by we came out of the quiet streets walled in with monotonous rows of red brick or brown stone houses into a scene of terror. It was a street, too, but what a street! I thought that I'd grown accustomed to motoring through traffic, for once Stan took me in his car all the way from Battlemead to Pall Mall, where he stood me a very jolly luncheon at the Carlton hotel, but that experience was nothing to this. I felt a little jumpy with Stan

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