

Isn't it funny how the nicest men often choose the worst wives, and the nicest women the worst husbands? Their very niceness, I suppose, makes them blind and unsuspecting.

You know, the most interesting pursuit in the world is studying character. I believe I was meant to be a novelist; people fascinate me — until I know them thoroughly. Percy and the doctor form a most engaging contrast. You always know at any moment what that nice young man is thinking about; he is written like a primer in big type and one-syllable words. But the doctor! He might as well be written in Chinese so far as legibility goes. You have heard of people with a dual nature; well, Sandy possesses a triple one. Usually he's scientific and as hard as granite, but occasionally I suspect him of being quite a sentimental person underneath his official casing. For days at a time he will be patient and kind and helpful, and I begin to like him; then without any warning an untamed wild man swells up from the innermost depths, and — oh, dear! the creature's impossible.

I always suspect that sometime in the past he has suffered a terrible hurt, and that he is still brooding over the memory of it. All the time he is talking you have the uncomfortable feeling that in the far back corners of his mind he is thinking something else. But this may be merely my romantic interpretation of an uncommonly bad temper. In any case, he's baffling.



We have been waiting for a week for a fine windy afternoon, and this is it. My children are enjoying "kite-day," a leaf taken from Japan. All of the big-enough boys and most of the girls are spread over

"Knowltop" (that high, rocky sheep-pasture which joins us on the east) flying kites made by themselves.

I had a dreadful time coaxing the crusty old gentleman who owns the estate into granting permission. He does n't like orphans, he says, and if he once lets them get a start in his grounds, the place will be infested with them forever. You would think, to hear him talk, that orphans were a pernicious kind of beetle.

But after half an hour's persuasive talking on my part, he grudgingly made us free of his sheep-pasture for two hours, provided we did n't step foot into the cow-pasture over the lane, and came home promptly when our time was up. To insure the sanctity of his cow-pasture, Mr. Knowltop has sent his gardener and chauffeur and two grooms to patrol its boundaries while the flying is on. The children are still at it, and are having a wonderful adventure racing over that windy height and getting tangled up in one another's strings. When they come panting back they are to have a surprise in the shape of ginger cookies and lemonade.

These pitiful little youngsters with their old faces! It's a difficult task to make them young, but I believe I'm accomplishing it. And it really is fun to feel you're doing something positive for the good of the world. If I don't fight hard against it, you'll be accomplishing your purpose of turning me into a useful person. The social excitements of Worcester al-

most seem tame before the engrossing interest of 113 live, warm, wriggling little orphans.

Yours with love,

SALLIE.

P.S. I believe, to be accurate, that it's 107 children I possess this afternoon.

*Dear Judy:*

This being Sunday and a beautiful blossoming day, with a warm wind blowing, I sat at my window with the "Hygiene of the Nervous System" (Sandy's latest contribution to my mental needs) open in my lap, and my eyes on the prospect without. "Thank Heaven!" thought I, "that this institution was so commandingly placed that at least we can look out over the cast-iron wall which shuts us in."

I was feeling very cooped-up and imprisoned and like an orphan myself; so I decided that my own nervous system required fresh air and exercise and adventure. Straight before me ran that white ribbon of road that dips into the valley and up over the hills on the other side. Ever since I came I have longed to follow it to the top and find out what lies beyond those hills. Poor Judy! I dare say that very same longing enveloped your childhood. If any one of my little chicks ever stands by the window and looks across the valley to the hills and asks, "What's over there?" I shall telephone for a motor-car.

But to-day my chicks were all piously engaged with their little souls, I the only wanderer at heart. I changed my silken Sunday gown for homespun, planning meanwhile a means to get to the top of those hills.

Then I went to the telephone and brazenly called up 505.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. McGurk," said I, very sweet. "May I be speaking with Dr. MacRae?"

"Howld the wire," said she, very short.

"Afternoon, Doctor," said I to him. "Have ye, by chance, any dying patients who live on the top o' the hills beyant?"

"I have not, thank the Lord!"

"'T is a pity," said I, disappointed. "And what are ye afther doin' with yerself the day?"

"I am reading the 'Origin of Species.'"

"Shut it up; it's not fit for Sunday. And tell me now, is yer motor-car iled and ready to go?"

"It is at your disposal. Are you wanting me to take some orphans for a ride?"

"Just one who's sufferin' from a nervous system. She's taken a fixed idea that she must get to the top o' the hills."

"My car is a grand climber. In fifteen minutes —"

"Wait!" said I. "Bring with ye a frying-pan that's a decent size for two. There's nothing in my kitchen smaller than a cart-wheel. And ask Mrs. McGurk can ye stay out for supper."

So I packed in a basket a jar of bacon and some eggs and muffins and ginger cookies, with hot coffee in the thermos-bottle, and was waiting on the steps when Sandy chugged up with his automobile and frying-pan.

We really had a beautiful adventure, and he enjoyed

the sensation of running away exactly as much as I. Not once did I let him mention insanity. I made him look at the wide stretches of meadow and the lines of pollard willows backed by billowing hills, and sniff the air, and listen to the cawing crows and the tinkle of cow-bells and the gurgling of the river. And we talked — oh, about a million things far removed from our asylum. I made him throw away the idea that he is a scientist, and pretend to be a boy. You will scarcely credit the assertion, but he succeeded — more or less. He did pull off one or two really boyish pranks. Sandy is not yet out of his thirties, and, mercy! that is too early to be grown up.

We camped on a bluff overlooking our view, gathered some driftwood, built a fire, and cooked the *nicest* supper — a sprinkling of burnt stick in our fried eggs, but charcoal's healthy. Then, when Sandy had finished his pipe and "the sun was setting in its wonted west," we packed up and coasted back home.

He says it was the nicest afternoon he has had in years, and, poor deluded man of science, I actually believe it's true. His olive-green home is so uncomfortable and dreary and uninspiring that I don't wonder he drowns his troubles in books. Just as soon as I can find a nice comfortable house-mother to put in charge, I am going to plot for the dismissal of Maggie McGurk, though I foresee that she will be even harder than Sterry to pry from her moorings.

Please don't draw the conclusion that I am becoming

unduly interested in our bad-tempered doctor, for I'm not. It's just that he leads such a comfortless life that I sometimes long to pat him on the head and tell him to cheer up; the world's full of sunshine, and some of it's for him — just as I long to comfort my hundred and seven orphans; so much and no more.

I am sure that I had some real news to tell you, but it has completely gone out of my head. The rush of fresh air has made me sleepy. It's half-past nine, and I bid you good night.

S.

p.s. Gordon Hallock has evaporated into thin air. Not a word for three weeks; no candy or stuffed animals or tokimentoes of any description. What on earth do you suppose has become of that attentive young man?

July 13.

*Dearest Judy:*

Hark to the glad tidings!

This being the thirty-first day of Punch's month, I telephoned to his two patronesses, as nominated in the bond, to arrange for his return. I was met by an indignant refusal. Give up their sweet little volcano just as they are getting it trained not to belch forth fire? They are outraged that I can make such an ungrateful request. Punch has accepted their invitation to spend the summer.

The dressmaking is still going on; you should hear the machines whir and the tongues clatter in the sewing-room. Our most cowed, apathetic, spiritless little orphan cheers up and takes an interest in life when she hears that she is to possess three perfectly private dresses of her own, and each a different color, chosen by herself. And you should see how it encourages their sewing ability; even the little ten-year-olds are bursting into seamstresses. I wish I could devise an equally effective way to make them take an interest in cooking. But our kitchen is extremely uneducative; you know how hampering it is to one's enthusiasm to have to prepare a bushel of potatoes at once.

I think you've heard me mention the fact that I

should like to divide up my kiddies into ten nice little families, with a nice comfortable house-mother over each? If we just had ten picturesque cottages to put them in, with flowers in the front yard and rabbits and kittens and puppies and chickens in the back, we should be a perfectly presentable institution, and would n't be ashamed to have these charity experts come visiting us.

Thursday.

I started this letter three days ago, was interrupted to talk to a potential philanthropist (fifty tickets to the circus), and have not had time to pick up my pen since. Betsy has been in Philadelphia for three days, being a bridesmaid for a miserable cousin. I hope that no more of her family are thinking of getting married, for it's most upsetting to the J. G. H.

While there, she investigated a family who had applied for a child. Of course we have n't a proper investigating plant, but once in a while, when a family drops right into our arms, we do like to put the business through. As a usual thing, we work with the State Charities' Aid Association. They have a lot of trained agents traveling about the State, keeping in touch with families who are willing to take children, and with asylums that have them to give. Since they are willing to work for us, there is no slightest use in our going to the expense of peddling our own ba-

bies. And I do want to place out as many as are available, for I firmly believe that a private home is the best thing for the child, provided, of course, that we are very fussy about the character of the homes we choose. I don't require rich foster-parents, but I do require kind, loving, intelligent parents. This time I think Betsy has landed a gem of a family. The child is not yet delivered or the papers signed, and of course there is always danger that they may give a sudden flop, and splash back into the water.

Ask Jervis if he ever heard of J. F. Bretland of Philadelphia. He seems to move in financial circles. The first I ever heard of him was a letter addressed to the "Supt. John Grier Home, Dear Sir,"—a curt, typewritten, businesslike letter, from an *awfully* businesslike lawyer, saying that his wife had determined to adopt a baby girl of attractive appearance and good health between the ages of two and three years. The child must be an orphan of American stock, with unimpeachable heredity, and no relatives to interfere. Could I furnish one as required and oblige, yours truly, J. F. Bretland?

By way of reference he mentioned "Bradstreets." Did you ever hear of anything so funny? You would think he was opening a charge-account at a nursery, and inclosing an order from our seed catalogue.

We began our usual investigation by mailing a reference-blank to a clergyman in Germantown, where the J. F. B.'s reside.

Does he own any property?

Does he pay his bills?

Is he kind to animals?

Does he attend church?

Does he quarrel with his wife? And a dozen other impertinent questions.

We evidently picked a clergyman with a sense of humor. Instead of answering in laborious detail, he wrote up and down and across the sheet, "I wish they'd adopt me!"

This looked promising, so B. Kindred obligingly dashed out to Germantown as soon as the wedding breakfast was over. She is developing the most phenomenal detective instinct. In the course of a social call she can absorb from the chairs and tables a family's entire moral history.

She returned from Germantown bursting with enthusiastic details.

Mr. J. F. Bretland is a wealthy and influential citizen, cordially loved by his friends and deeply hated by his enemies (discharged employees, who do not hesitate to say that he is a *har-rd* man). He is a little shaky in his attendance at church, but his wife seems regular, and he gives money.

She is a charming, kindly, cultivated gentlewoman, just out of a sanatorium after a year of nervous prostration. The doctor says that what she needs is some strong interest in life, and advises adopting a child. She has always longed to do it, but her hard husband

has stubbornly refused. But finally, as always, it is the gentle, persistent wife who has triumphed, and hard husband has been forced to give in. Waiving his own natural preference for a boy, he wrote, as above, the usual request for a blue-eyed girl.

Mrs. Bretland, with the firm intention of taking a child, has been reading up for years, and there is no detail of infant dietetics that she does not know. She has a sunny nursery, with a southwestern exposure, all ready. And a closet full of surreptitiously gathered dolls! She has made the clothes for them herself,—she showed them to Betsy with the greatest pride,—so you can understand the necessity for a girl.

She has just heard of an excellent English trained nurse that she can secure, but she is n't sure but that it would be better to start with a French nurse, so that the child can learn the language before her vocal cords are set. Also, she was extremely interested when she heard that Betsy was a college woman. She could n't make up her mind whether to send the baby to college or not. What was Betsy's honest opinion? If the child were Betsy's own daughter, would Betsy send her to college?

All this would be funny if it weren't so pathetic; but really I can't get away from the picture of that poor lonely woman sewing those doll-clothes for the little unknown girl that she was n't sure she could have. She lost her own two babies years ago, or, rather, she never had them; they were never alive.

You can see what a good home it's going to be. There's lots of love waiting for the little mite, and that is better than all the wealth which, in this case, goes along.

But the problem now is to find the child, and that is n't easy; the J. F. Bretlands are so abominably explicit in their requirements. I have just the baby boy to give them; but with that closetful of dolls, he is impossible. Little Florence won't do—one tenacious parent living. I've a wide variety of foreigners with liquid brown eyes—won't do at all. Mrs. Bretland is a blonde, and daughter must resemble her. I have several sweet little mites with unspeakable heredity, but the Bretlands want six generations of church-attending grandparents, with a colonial governor at the top. Also I have a darling little curly-headed girl (and curls are getting rarer and rarer), but illegitimate. And that seems to be an unsurmountable barrier in the eyes of adopting parents, though, as a matter of fact, it makes no slightest difference in the child. However, she won't do; the Bretlands hold out sternly for a marriage-certificate.

There remains just one child out of all these one hundred and seven that appears available. Our little Sophie's father and mother were killed in a railroad accident, and the only reason she was n't killed was because they had just left her in a hospital to get an abscess cut out of her throat. She comes from good common American stock, irreproachable and un-

interesting in every way. She's a washed-out, spiritless, whiney little thing. The doctor has been pouring her full of his favorite cod-liver oil and spinach, but he can't get any cheerfulness into her.

However, individual love and care does accomplish wonders in institution children, and she may bloom into something rare and beautiful after a few months' transplanting. So I yesterday wrote a glowing account of her immaculate family history to J. F. Bretland, offering to deliver her in Germantown.

This morning I received a telegram from J. F. B. Not at all! He does not purpose to buy any daughter sight unseen. He will come and inspect the child in person at three o'clock on Wednesday next.

Oh dear, if he shouldn't like her! We are now bending all our energies toward enhancing that child's beauty—like a pup bound for the dog show. Do you think it would be awfully immoral if I rouged her cheeks a suspicion? She is too young to pick up the habit.

Heavens! what a letter! A million pages written without a break. You can see where my heart is. I'm as excited over little Sophie's settling in life as though she were my own darling daughter.

Respectful regards to the president.

SAL. MCB.

*Dear Gordon:*

That was an obnoxious, beastly, low-down trick not to send me a cheering line for four weeks just because, in a period of abnormal stress, I once let you go for three. I had really begun to be worried for fear you'd tumbled into the Potomac. My chicks would miss you dreadfully; they love their Uncle Gordon. Please remember that you promised to send them a donkey.

Please also remember that I'm a busier person than you. It's a lot harder to run the John Grier Home than the House of Representatives. Besides, you have more efficient people to help.

This is n't a letter; it's an indignant remonstrance. I'll write to-morrow — or the next day.

S.

P.S. On reading your letter over again I am slightly mollified, but dinna think I believe a' your saft words. I ken weel ye only flatter when ye speak sae fair.



July 17.

*Dear Judy:*

I have a history to recount.

This, please remember, is Wednesday next. So at half-past two o'clock our little Sophie was bathed and brushed and clothed in fine linen, and put in charge of a trusty orphan, with anxious instructions to keep her clean.

At three-thirty to the minute — never have I known a human being so disconcertingly businesslike as J. F. Bretland — an automobile of expensive foreign design rolled up to the steps of this imposing chateau. A square-shouldered, square-jawed personage, with a chopped-off mustache and a manner that inclines one to hurry, presented himself three minutes later at my library door. He greeted me briskly as "Miss McKosh." I gently corrected him, and he changed to "Miss McKim." I indicated my most soothing arm-chair, and invited him to take some light refreshment after his journey. He accepted a glass of water (I admire a temperate parent), and evinced an impatient desire to be done with the business. So I rang the bell and ordered the little Sophie to be brought down.

"Hold on, Miss McGee!" said he to me. "I'd rather see her in her own environment. I will go with

you to the playroom or corral or wherever you keep your youngsters."

So I led him to the nursery, where thirteen or fourteen mites in gingham rompers were tumbling about on mattresses on the floor. Sophie, alone in the glory of feminine petticoats, was ensconced in the blue-ginghamed arms of a very bored orphan. She was squirming and fighting to get down, and her feminine petticoats were tightly wound about her neck. I took her in my arms, smoothed her clothes, wiped her nose, and invited her to look at the gentleman.

That child's whole future hung upon five minutes of sunniness, and instead of a single smile, she *whined!*

Mr. Bretland shook her hand in a very gingerly fashion and chirruped to her as you might to a pup. Sophie took not the slightest notice of him, but turned her back, and buried her face in my neck. He shrugged his shoulders, supposed that they could take her on trial. She might suit his wife; he himself did n't want one, anyway. And we turned to go out.

Then who should come toddling straight across his path but that little sunbeam Allegra! Exactly in front of him she staggered, threw her arms about like a windmill, and plumped down on all fours. He hopped aside with great agility to avoid stepping on her, and then picked her up and set her on her feet. She clasped her arms about his leg, and looked up at him with a gurgling laugh.

"Daddy! Frow baby up!"

He is the first man, barring the doctor, whom the child has seen for weeks, and evidently he resembles somewhat her almost forgotten father.

J. F. Bretland picked her up and tossed her in the air as handily as though it were a daily occurrence, while she ecstatically shrieked her delight. Then when he showed signs of lowering her, she grasped him by an ear and a nose, and drummed a tattoo on his stomach with both feet. No one could ever accuse Allegra of lacking vitality!

J. F. disentangled himself from her endearments, and emerged, ruffled as to hair, but with a firm-set jaw. He set her on her feet, but retained her little doubled-up fist.

"This is the kid for me," he said. "I don't believe I need look any further."

I explained that we could n't separate little Allegra from her brothers; but the more I objected, the stouter his jaw became. We went back to the library, and argued about it for half an hour.

He liked her heredity, he liked her looks, he liked her spirit, he liked *her*. If he was going to have a daughter foisted on him, he wanted one with some ginger. He'd be hanged if he'd take that other whimpering little thing. It was n't natural. But if I gave him Allegra, he would bring her up as his own child, and see that she was provided for for the rest of her life. Did I have any right to cut her out from all that just for a lot of sentimental nonsense? The family was

already broken up; the best I could do for them now was to provide for them individually.

"Take all three," said I, quite brazenly.

But, no, he could n't consider that; his wife was an invalid, and one child was all that she could manage.

Well, I was in a dreadful quandary. It seemed such a chance for the child, and yet it did seem so cruel to separate her from those two adoring little brothers. I knew that if the Bretlands adopted her legally, they would do their best to break all ties with the past, and the child was still so tiny she would forget her brothers as quickly as she had her father.

Then I thought about you, Judy, and of how bitter you have always been because, when that family wanted to adopt you, the asylum would n't let you go. You have always said that you might have had a home, too, like other children, but that Mrs. Lippett stole it away from you. Was I perhaps stealing little Allegra's home from her? With the two boys it would be different; they could be educated and turned out to shift for themselves. But to a girl a home like this would mean everything. Ever since baby Allegra came to us, she has seemed to me just such another child as baby Judy must have been. She has ability and spirit. We must somehow furnish her with opportunity. She, too, deserves her share of the world's beauty and good — as much as nature has fitted her to appreciate. And could any asylum ever give her that? I stood and

thought and thought while Mr. Bretland impatiently paced the floor.

"You have those boys down and let me talk to them," Mr. Bretland insisted. "If they have a spark of generosity, they'll be glad to let her go."

I sent for them, but my heart a solid lump of lead. They were still missing their father; it seemed merciless to snatch away that darling baby sister, too.

They came hand in hand, sturdy, fine little chaps, and stood solemnly at attention; with big, wondering eyes fixed on the strange gentleman.

"Come here, boys. I want to talk to you." He took each by a hand. "In the house I live in we have n't any little baby, so my wife and I decided to come here, where there are so many babies without fathers and mothers, and take one home to be ours. She will have a beautiful house to live in, and lots of toys to play with, and she will be happy all her life — much happier than she could ever be here. I know that you will be very glad to hear that I have chosen your little sister."

"And won't we ever see her any more?" asked Clifford.

"Oh, yes, sometimes."

Clifford looked from me to Mr. Bretland, and two big tears began rolling down his cheeks. He jerked his hand away and came and hurled himself into my arms.

"Don't let him have her! Please! Please! Send him away!"

"Take them all!" I begged.

But he's a hard man.

"I didn't come for an entire asylum," said he, shortly.

By this time Don was sobbing on the other side. And then who should inject himself into the hubbub but Dr. MacRae, with baby Allegra in his arms!

I introduced them, and explained. Mr. Bretland reached for the baby, and Sandy held her tight.

"Quite impossible," said Sandy, shortly. "Miss McBride will tell you that it's one of the rules of this institution never to separate a family."

"Miss McBride has already decided," said J. F. B., stiffly. "We have fully discussed the question."

"You must be mistaken," said Sandy, becoming his Scotchest, and turning to me. "You surely had no intention of performing any such cruelty as this?"

Here was the decision of Solomon all over again, with two of the stubbornest men that the good Lord ever made wresting poor little Allegra limb from limb.

I despatched the three chicks back to the nursery and returned to the fray. We argued loud and hotly, until finally J. F. B. echoed my own frequent query of the last five months: "Who is the head of this asylum, the superintendent or the visiting physician?"

I was furious with the doctor for placing me in such a position before that man, but I could n't quarrel with