

face the New Year. Toward twelve I suddenly realized that the hour was late and that I was very tired. I had begun getting ready for bed when I was startled by a banging on the front door. I stuck my head out of the window and demanded who was there.

"Tommy Kehoe," said a very shaky voice.

I went down and opened the door, and that lad, sixteen years old, tumbled in, dead drunk. Thank Heaven! Percy Witherspoon was within call, and not away off in the Indian camp. I roused him, and together we conveyed Thomas to our guest-room, the only decently isolated spot in the building. Then I telephoned for the doctor, who, I am afraid, had already had a long day. He came, and we put in a pretty terrible night. It developed afterward that the boy had brought along with his luggage a bottle of liniment belonging to his employer. It was made half of alcohol and half of witch-hazel; and Thomas had refreshed his journey with this!

He was in such shape that positively I did n't think we'd pull him through — and I hoped we would n't. If I were a physician, I'd let such cases gently slip away for the good of society; but you should have seen Sandy work! That terrible life-saving instinct of his was aroused, and he fought with every inch of energy he possessed.

I made black coffee, and helped all I could, but the details were pretty messy, and I left the two men to deal with him alone and went back to my room. But

I did n't attempt to go to bed; I was afraid they might be wanting me again. Toward four o'clock Sandy came to my library with word that the boy was asleep and that Percy had moved up a cot and would sleep in his room the rest of the night. Poor Sandy looked sort of ashen and haggard and done with life. As I looked at him, I thought about how desperately he worked to save others, and never saved himself, and about that dismal home of his, with never a touch of cheer, and the horrible tragedy in the background of his life. All the rancor I've been saving up seemed to vanish, and a wave of sympathy swept over me. I stretched my hand out to him; he stretched his out to me. And suddenly — I don't know — something electric happened. In another moment we were in each other's arms. He loosened my hands, and put me down in the big arm-chair. "My God! Sallie, do you think I'm made of iron?" he said and walked out. I went to sleep in the chair, and when I woke the sun was shining in my eyes and Jane was standing over me in amazed consternation.

This morning at eleven he came back, looked me coldly in the eye without so much as the flicker of an eyelash, and told me that Thomas was to have hot milk every two hours and that the spots in Maggie Peters's throat must be watched.

Here we are back on our old standing, and positively I don't know but what I dreamed that one minute in the night!

But it would be a piquant situation, would n't it, if Sandy and I should discover that we were falling in love with each other, he with a perfectly good wife in the insane asylum and I with an outraged fiancé in Washington? I don't know but what the wisest thing for me to do is to resign at once and take myself home, where I can placidly settle down to a few months of embroidering "S McB" on table-cloths, like any other respectable engaged girl.

I repeat very firmly that this letter is n't for Jervis's consumption. Tear it into little pieces and scatter them in the Caribbean.

S.

January 3.

*Dear Gordon:*

You are right to be annoyed. I know I'm not a satisfactory love-letter writer. I have only to glance at the published correspondence of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning to realize that the warmth of my style is not up to standard. But you know already — you have known a long time — that I am not a very emotional person. I suppose I might write a lot of such things as: "Every waking moment you are in my thoughts." "My dear boy, I only live when you are near." But it would n't be absolutely true. You don't fill all my thoughts; 107 orphans do that. And I really am quite comfortably alive whether you are here or not. I have to be natural. You surely don't want me to pretend more desolation than I feel. But I do love to see you, — you know that perfectly, — and I am disappointed when you can't come. I fully appreciate all your charming qualities, but, my dear boy, I *can't* be sentimental on paper. I am always thinking about the hotel chambermaid who reads the letters you casually leave on your bureau. You need n't expostulate that you carry them next your heart, for I know perfectly well that you don't.

Forgive me for that last letter if it hurt your feel-

ings. Since I came to this asylum I am extremely touchy on the subject of drink; you would be, too, if you had seen what I have seen. Several of my chicks are the sad result of alcoholic parents, and they are never going to have a fair chance all their lives. You can't look about a place like this without "aye keeping up a terrible thinking."

You are right, I am afraid, about it's being a woman's trick to make a great show of forgiving a man, and then never letting him hear the end of it. Well, Gordon, I positively don't know what the word "forgiving" means. It can't include "forgetting," for that is a physiological process, and does not result from an act of the will. We all have a collection of memories that we would happily lose, but somehow those are just the ones that insist upon sticking. If "forgiving" means promising never to speak of a thing again, I can doubtless manage that. But it is n't always the wisest way to shut an unpleasant memory inside you. It grows and grows, and runs all through you like a poison.

Oh dear! I really did n't mean to be saying all this. I try to be the cheerful, care-free (and somewhat light-headed) Sallie you like best; but I've come in touch with a great deal of *realness* during this last year, and I'm afraid I've grown into a very different person from the girl you fell in love with. I'm no longer a gay young thing playing with life. I know

it pretty thoroughly now, and that means that I can't be always laughing.

I know this is another beastly uncheerful letter,—as bad as the last, and maybe worse,—but if you knew what we've just been through! A boy—sixteen—of unspeakable heredity has nearly poisoned himself with a disgusting mixture of alcohol and witch-hazel. We have been working three days over him, and are just sure now that he is going to recuperate sufficiently to do it again! "It's a gude warld, but they're ill that's in 't."

Please excuse that Scotch—it slipped out. Please excuse everything.

SALLIE.

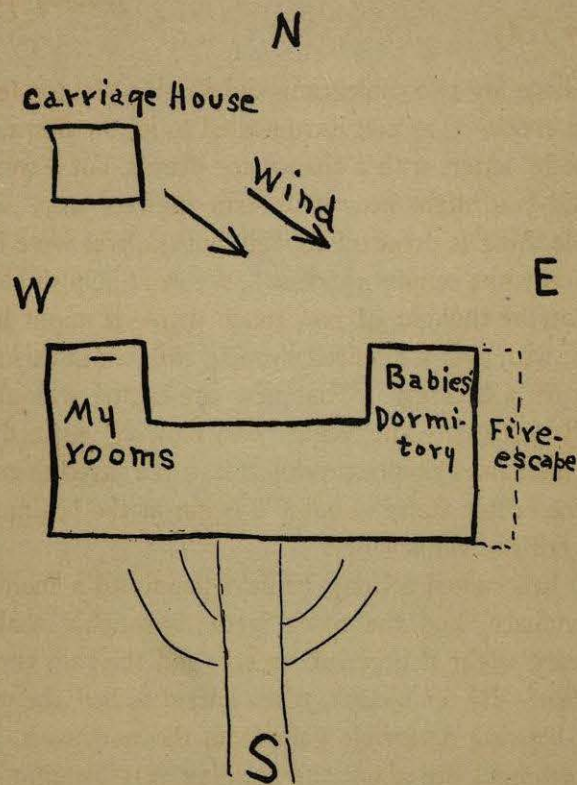
Dear Judy:

January 11.

I hope my two cablegrams did n't give you too terrible a shock. I would have waited to let the first news come by letter, with a chance for details, but I was so afraid you might hear it in some indirect way. The whole thing is dreadful enough, but no lives were lost, and only one serious accident. We can't help shuddering at the thought of how much worse it might have been, with over a hundred sleeping children in this fire-trap of a building. That new fire-escape was absolutely useless. The wind was blowing toward it, and the flames simply enveloped it. We saved them all by the center stairs — but I'll begin at the beginning, and tell the whole story.

It had rained all day Friday, thanks to a merciful Providence, and the roofs were thoroughly soaked. Toward night it began to freeze, and the rain turned to sleet. By ten o'clock, when I went to bed, the wind was blowing a terrible gale from the northwest, and everything loose about the building was banging and rattling. About two o'clock I suddenly started wide awake, with a bright light in my eyes. I jumped out of bed and ran to the window. The carriage-house was a mass of flames, and a shower of sparks was sweeping over our eastern wing. I ran to the bath-

room and leaned out of the window. I could see that the roof over the nursery was already blazing in half a dozen places.



Well, my dear, my heart just simply did n't beat for as much as a minute. I thought of those seventeen babies up under that roof, and I could n't swallow. I finally managed to get my shaking knees to work

again, and I dashed back to the hall, grabbing my automobile coat as I ran.

I drummed on Betsy's and Miss Matthews' and Miss Snaith's doors, just as Mr. Witherspoon, who had also been wakened by the light, came tumbling upstairs three steps at a time, struggling into an overcoat as he ran.

"Get all the children down to the dining-room, babies first," I gasped. "I'll turn in the alarm."

He dashed on up to the third floor while I ran to the telephone — and oh, I thought I'd never get Central! She was sound asleep.

"The John Grier Home is burning! Turn in the fire-alarm and rouse the village. Give me 505," I said.

In one second I had the doctor. Maybe I was n't glad to hear his cool, unexcited voice!

"We're on fire!" I cried. "Come quick, and bring all the men you can!"

"I'll be there in fifteen minutes. Fill the bath-tubs with water and put in blankets." And he hung up.

I dashed back to the hall. Betsy was ringing our fire-bell, and Percy had already routed out his Indian tribes in dormitories B and C.

Our first thought was not to stop the fire, but to get the children to a place of safety. We began in G, and went from crib to crib, snatching a baby and a blanket, and rushing them to the door, and handing them out to the Indians, who lugged them down-stairs. Both G and F were full of smoke, and the children so

dead asleep that we could n't rouse them to a walking state.

Many times during the next hour did I thank Providence — and Percy Witherspoon — for those vociferous fire-drills we have suffered weekly. The twenty-four oldest boys, under his direction, never lost their heads for a second. They divided into four tribes, and sprang to their posts like little soldiers. Two tribes helped in the work of clearing the dormitories and keeping the terrified children in order. One tribe worked the hose from the cupola tank until the firemen came, and the rest devoted themselves to salvage. They spread sheets on the floor, dumped the contents of lockers and bureau drawers into them, and bundled them down the stairs. All of the extra clothes were saved except those the children had actually been wearing the day before, and most of the staff's things. But clothes, bedding — everything belonging to G and F went. The rooms were too full of smoke to make it safe to enter after we had got out the last child.

By the time the doctor arrived with Luellen and two neighbors he had picked up, we were marching the last dormitory down to the kitchen, the most remote corner from the fire. The poor chicks were mainly bare-footed and wrapped in blankets; we told them to bring their clothes when we wakened them, but in their fright they thought only of getting out.

By this time the halls were so full of smoke we could scarcely breathe. It looked as though the whole build-

ing would go, though the wind was blowing away from my west wing.

Another automobile full of retainers from Knowltop came up almost immediately, and they all fell to fighting the fire. The regular fire department did n't come for ten minutes after that. You see, they have only horses, and we are three miles out, and the roads pretty bad. It was a dreadful night, cold and sleety, and such a wind blowing that you could scarcely stand up. The men climbed out on the roof, and worked in their stocking-feet to keep from slipping off. They beat out the sparks with wet blankets, and chopped, and squirted that tankful of water, and behaved like heroes.

The doctor meanwhile took charge of the children. Our first thought was to get them away to a place of safety, for if the whole building should go, we could n't march them out of doors into that awful wind, with only their night-clothes and blankets for protection. By this time several more automobiles full of men had come, and we requisitioned the cars.

Knowltop had providentially been opened for the week-end in order to entertain a house-party in honor of the old gentleman's sixty-seventh birthday. He was one of the first to arrive, and he put his entire place at our disposal. It was the nearest refuge, and we accepted it instantaneously. We bundled our twenty little tots into cars, and ran them down to the house. The guests, who were excitedly dressing

in order to come to the fire, received the chicks and tucked them away into their own beds. This pretty well filled up all the available house room, but Mr. Reimer (Mr. Knowltop's family name) has just built a big new stucco barn, with a garage hitched to it, all nicely heated, and ready for us.

After the babies were disposed of in the house, those helpful guests got to work and fixed the barn to receive the next older kiddies. They covered the floor with hay, and spread blankets and carriage robes over it, and bedded down thirty of the children in rows like little calves. Miss Matthews and a nurse went with them, administered hot milk all around, and within half an hour the tots were sleeping as peacefully as in their little cribs.

But meanwhile we at the house were having sensations. The doctor's first question upon arrival had been:

"You've counted the children? You know they're all here?"

"We've made certain that every dormitory was empty before we left it," I replied.

You see, they could n't be counted in that confusion; twenty or so of the boys were still in the dormitories, working under Percy Witherspoon to save clothing and furniture, and the older girls were sorting over bushels of shoes and trying to fit them to the little ones, who were running about underfoot and wailing dismally.

Well, after we had loaded and despatched about seven car-loads of children, the doctor suddenly called out:

“Where’s Allegra?”

There was a horrified silence. No one had seen her. And then Miss Snaith stood up and *shrieked*. Betsy took her by the shoulders, and shook her into coherence.

It seems that she had thought Allegra was coming down with a cough, and in order to get her out of the cold, had moved her crib from the fresh-air nursery into the store-room — and then forgotten it.

Well, my dear, you know where the store-room is! We simply stared at one another with white faces. By this time the whole east wing was gutted and the third-floor stairs in flames. There didn’t seem a chance that the child was still alive. The doctor was the first to move. He snatched up a wet blanket that was lying in a sippy pile on the floor of the hall and sprang for the stairs. We yelled to him to come back. It simply looked like suicide; but he kept on, and disappeared into the smoke. I dashed outside and shouted to the firemen on the roof. The store-room window was too little for a man to go through, and they had n’t opened it for fear of creating a draft.

I can’t describe what happened in the next agonizing ten minutes. The third-floor stairs fell in with a crash and a burst of flame about five seconds after the doctor passed over them. We had given him up for lost when

a shout went up from the crowd on the lawn, and he appeared for an instant at one of those dormer-windows in the attic, and called for the firemen to put up a ladder. Then he disappeared, and it seemed to us that they’d never get that ladder in place; but they finally did, and two men went up. The opening of the window had created a draft, and they were almost overpowered by the volume of smoke that burst out at the top. After an eternity the doctor appeared again with a white bundle in his arms. He passed it out to the men, and then he staggered back and dropped out of sight!

I don’t know what happened for the next few minutes; I turned away and shut my eyes. Somehow or other they got him out and half-way down the ladder, and then they let him slip. You see, he was unconscious from all the smoke he’d swallowed, and the ladder was slippery with ice and terribly wobbly. Anyway, when I looked again he was lying in a heap on the ground, with the crowd all running, and somebody yelling to give him air. They thought at first he was dead. But Dr. Metcalf from the village examined him, and said his leg was broken, and two ribs, and that aside from that he seemed whole. He was still unconscious when they put him on two of the baby mattresses that had been thrown out of the windows and laid him in the wagon that brought the ladders and started him home.

And the rest of us, left behind, kept right on with

the work as though nothing had happened. The queer thing about a calamity like this is that there is so much to be done on every side that you don't have a moment to think, and you don't get any of your values straightened out until afterward. The doctor, without a moment's hesitation, had risked his life to save Allegra. It was the bravest thing I ever saw, and yet the whole business occupied only fifteen minutes out of that dreadful night. At the time, it was just an incident.

And he saved Allegra. She came out of that blanket with ruffled hair and a look of pleased surprise at the new game of peek-a-boo. She was smiling! The child's escape was little short of a miracle. The fire had started within three feet of her wall, but owing to the direction of the wind, it had worked away from her. If Miss Snaith had believed a little more in fresh air and had left the window open, the fire would have eaten back; but fortunately Miss Snaith does not believe in fresh air, and no such thing happened. If Allegra had gone, I never should have forgiven myself for not letting the Bretlands take her, and I know that Sandy would n't.

Despite all the loss, I can't be anything but happy when I think of the two horrible tragedies that have been averted; for seven minutes, while the doctor was penned in that blazing third floor, I lived through the agony of believing them both gone, and I start awake in the night trembling with horror.

But I'il try to tell you the rest. The firemen and

the volunteers — particularly the chauffeur and stablemen from Knowltop — worked all night in an absolute frenzy. Our newest negro cook, who is a heroine in her own right, went out and started the laundry fire and made up a boilerful of coffee. It was her own idea. The non-combatants served it to the firemen when they relieved one another for a few minutes' rest, and it helped.

We got the remainder of the children off to various hospitable houses, except the older boys, who worked all night as well as any one. It was absolutely inspiring to see the way this entire township turned out and helped. People who have n't appeared to know that the asylum existed came in the middle of the night and put their whole houses at our disposal. They took the children in, gave them hot baths and hot soup, and tucked them into bed. And so far as I can make out, not one of my one hundred and seven chicks is any the worse for hopping about on drenched floors in their bare feet, not even the whooping-cough cases.

It was broad daylight before the fire was sufficiently under control to let us know just what we had saved. I will report that my wing is entirely intact, though a little smoky, and the main corridor is pretty nearly all right up to the center staircase; after that everything is charred and drenched. The east wing is a blackened, roofless shell. Your hated Ward F, dear Judy, is gone forever. I wish that you could obliterate it from your mind as absolutely as it is obliterated from the



earth. Both in substance and in spirit the old John Grier is done for.

I must tell you something funny; I never saw so many funny things in my life as happened through that night. When everybody there was in extreme negligée, most of the men in pajamas and ulsters, and all of them without collars, the Hon. Cyrus Wykoff put in a tardy appearance, arrayed as for an afternoon tea. He wore a pearl scarf-pin and white spats! But he really was extremely helpful. He put his entire house at our disposal, and I turned over to him Miss Snaith in a state of hysterics, and her nerves so fully occupied him that he did n't get in our way the whole night through.

I can't write any more details now; I've never been so rushed in the whole of my life. I'll just assure you that there's no slightest reason for you to cut your trip short. Five trustees were on the spot early Saturday morning, and we are all working like mad to get affairs into some semblance of order. Our asylum at the present moment is scattered over the entire township; but don't be unduly anxious. We know where all the children are. None of them is permanently mislaid. I did n't know that perfect strangers could be so kind. My opinion of the human race has gone up.

I have n't seen the doctor. They telegraphed to New York for a surgeon, who set his leg. The break was pretty bad, and will take time; they don't think

there are any internal injuries, though he is awfully battered up. As soon as we are allowed to see him I will send more detailed particulars. I really must stop if I am to catch to-morrow's steamer.

Good-by. Don't worry. There are a dozen silver linings to this cloud that I'll write about to-morrow.

SALLIE.

Good heavens! here comes an automobile with J. F. Bretland in it!

THE JOHN GRIER HOME,

January 14.

*Dear Judy:*

Listen to this! J. F. Bretland read about our fire in a New York paper (I will say that the metropolitan press made the most of details), and he posted up here in a twitter of anxiety. His first question as he tumbled across our blackened threshold was, "Is Allegra safe?"

"Yes," said I.

"Thank God!" he cried, and dropped into a chair. "This is no place for children," he said severely, "and I have come to take her home. I want the boys, too," he added hastily before I had a chance to speak. "My wife and I have talked it over, and we have decided that since we are going to the trouble of starting a nursery, we might as well run it for three as for one."

I led him up to my library, where our little family has been domiciled since the fire, and ten minutes later, when I was called down to confer with the trustees, I left J. F. Bretland with his new daughter on his knee and a son leaning against each arm, the proudest father in the United States.

So, you see, our fire has accomplished one thing:

those three children are settled for life. It is almost worth the loss.

But I don't believe I told you how the fire started. There are so many things I have n't told you that my arm aches at the thought of writing them all. Sterry, we have since discovered, was spending the week-end as our guest. After a bibulous evening passed at "Jack's Place," he returned to our carriage-house, climbed in through a window, lighted a candle, made himself comfortable, and dropped asleep. He must have forgotten to put out the candle; anyway, the fire happened, and Sterry just escaped with his life. He is now in the town hospital, bathed in sweet-oil, and painfully regretting his share in our troubles.

I am pleased to learn that our insurance was pretty adequate, so the money loss won't be so tremendous, after all. As for other kinds of loss, there are n't any! Actually, nothing but gain so far as I can make out, barring, of course, our poor smashed-up doctor. Everybody has been wonderful; I did n't know that so much charity and kindness existed in the human race. Did I ever say anything against trustees? I take it back. Four of them posted up from New York the morning after the fire, and all of the local people have been wonderful. Even the Hon. Cy has been so occupied in remarking the morals of the five orphans quartered upon him that he has n't caused any trouble at all.

The fire occurred early Saturday morning, and Sun-

day the ministers in all the churches called for volunteers to accept in their houses one or two children as guests for three weeks, until the asylum could get its plant into working order again.

It was inspiring to see the response. Every child was disposed of within half an hour. And consider what that means for the future: every one of those families is going to take a personal interest in this asylum from now on. Also, consider what it means for the children. They are finding out how a real family lives, and this is the first time that dozens of them have ever crossed the threshold of a private house.

As for more permanent plans to take us through the winter, listen to all this. The country club has a caddies' club-house which they don't use in winter and which they have politely put at our disposal. It joins our land on the back, and we are fitting it up for fourteen children, with Miss Matthews in charge. Our dining-room and kitchen still being intact, they will come here for meals and school, returning home at night all the better for half a mile walk. "The Pavilion on the Links" we are calling it.

Then that nice motherly Mrs. Wilson, next door to the doctor's,—she who has been so efficient with our little Loretta,—has agreed to take in five more at four dollars a week each. I am leaving with her some of the most promising older girls who have shown house-keeping instincts, and would like to learn cooking on a

decently small scale. Mrs. Wilson and her husband are such a wonderful couple, thrifty and industrious and simple and loving, I think it would do the girls good to observe them. A training class in wifedom!

I told you about the Knowltop people on the east of us, who took in forty-seven youngsters the night of the fire, and how their entire house-party turned themselves into emergency nurse-maids? We relieved them of thirty-six the next day, but they still have eleven. Did I ever call Mr. Knowltop a crusty old curmudgeon? I take it back. I beg his pardon. He's a sweet lamb. Now, in the time of our need, what do you think that blessed man has done? He has fitted up an empty tenant house on the estate for our babies, has himself engaged an English trained baby-nurse to take charge, and furnishes them with the superior milk from his own model dairy. He says he has been wondering for years what to do with that milk. He can't afford to sell it, because he loses four cents on every quart!

The twelve older girls from dormitory A I am putting into the farmer's new cottage; the poor Turnfelts, who had occupied it just two days, are being shoved on into the village. But they would n't be any good in looking after the children, and I need their room. Three or four of these girls have been returned from foster-homes as intractable, and they require pretty efficient supervision. So what do you think I've done? Telegraphed to Helen Brooks to chuck the