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FONDO
PEREZ MALDONADO

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CARLOS PEREZ MALDONADO

MONTERREY, MEXICO.

"WHAT SHALL WE DO?"

—

This old familiar question has ever been uppermost in unoccupied minds since the days of our primal ancestors, and it failed to awaken any great amount of surprise or interest in me—the person to whom it was indirectly addressed—that dreary July morning.

The bright-eyed girl of sixteen who uttered it, sat gazing disconsolately from the window of the Prospect House upon a rain saddened landscape that meant death to tennis and picnics, and imprisonment for at least twenty-four hours.

"Dancing is tiresome, we don't care for cards, and the day will be so long!"

A doleful chorus of a dozen or more young voices echoing the refrain, I was at last moved to drop my book and draw near the forlorn group.

"Why don't you play something?" I casually asked.

The variety of expressions that greeted this rather trite suggestion was wonderfully amusing. One young Harvard student looked at me as though he

might be angry if he did not suppose I was joking: another, who was an aspirant for honors at Yale, regarded me with a look that plainly expressed benign sympathy for my aged imbecility; one young belle of eighteen giggled audibly; and only my first interrogator had the grace to respond: "Why, Auntie, the children play games in their parlor every day, but we aren't children!"

"Neither am I," I observed, "nor have I been for many years, but I can enjoy games, and moreover I do enjoy them frequently. So also do Judge B. and Senator S., with whom I have played them many an evening."

Oh, then the representatives of Yale and Harvard were all attention! Surely the footsteps of such well-known men as the Judge and Senator were worthy of being followed, even into the childish region of "round games," and Yale, forgetting his resentment, demanded: "What did you play?"

"Oh, 'Crambo' and 'Quotations' and 'Charades' when we were intellectually inclined; and 'Jack's Alive,' or 'Fly Feather' when we were not. I never shall forget playing the latter last summer, when the poor Senator nearly choked himself by swallowing the feather!" and I laughed aloud at the recollection.

I was plainly talking Greek to them all, but with a truly American thirst for information, they gath-

ered around me, all asking questions in a breath, until I held up my hands to entreat silence.

"Suppose," I said, "we illustrate the explanation by playing the games, that will be both amusing and instructive." And I began preparations for "Fly Feather" by demanding the necessary sheet of a maid who was passing the door.

Was I dreaming, or did stately Harvard actually roll on the floor in convulsions of mirth at the sight of a young theological student who, with cheeks like an apoplectic cherub, pursued the helpless feather so relentlessly that it sought refuge in the mouth of the fair player opposite him, unwarily indulging in a laugh? And could it have been Yale whose blackened countenance in "Jack's Alive" set the whole party in an uproar, himself the merriest of all?

Then we played "Gossip" as a sort of preparation for less frivolous games, and then—why, then the lunch bell rang, and nobody would believe it!

After lunch I introduced "Character Guessing," "Clumps," and "Illustrated Quotations," in all of which my young friends proved themselves fully equal to the Judge and the Senator in bright originality.

By evening our number had increased to fifty, and we played "Dumb Crambo" and "Charades," bringing to light much latent wit and ingenuity.

That was the beginning. I could fill a book telling of the "Auction parties," the "Speculation parties," the "Donkey parties," and the "Bean-bag parties" that followed in rapid succession, making our hotel notorious for its gayety and the sociability of its guests.

Rainy days never seemed endless now, when, with the parlor turned into a play-room, old and young entered together into the despised games, even the children being admitted upon common footing, when there was no call for intellectual effort.

New games were invented, old ones resurrected and revised, and none ever allowed to become tiresome from too frequent repetition.

And when the summer was over and the katydids and crickets sang of autumn, and the fields were gorgeous with golden-rod; when Yale and Harvard began to think of their studies, and sweet sixteen to groan over boarding-school; then we, the originators of all this gayety, had a reunion one night in my own little sanctum, when the dear young people put me to confusion by showering upon me their thanks for "the happiest summer we have ever spent."

"But, Auntie," said my girl, "you know such lots of games! Where did you ever learn them all?"

"Remember, my dear, that I am a sort of Bohe-

mian," I replied, "and in my many wanderings I have picked them up one at a time, always making it a point to remember any that seemed interesting, as I have ever found them useful."

"Why, then," said Yale, "don't you publish them all in a book for the benefit of such benighted individuals as we were when you took us in hand?"

"Oh, will you?" "Will you, please?" they all clamored; until, to satisfy them, I consented.

Then together they drew up a plan for my enterprise. It must be a small book, they said, to be conveniently carried around for frequent consultation; it must be cheap, to be within the reach of everybody; it must be confined exclusively to round games, as there were already enough books on theatricals and parlor magic; and above all, everything must be clearly and concisely expressed, that no one need squander precious time in sifting out each game from a dreary waste of words.

So, to my dear young friends who suggested it, I dedicate this book, trusting that the spirit of their approval and encouragement will help to win a place for it in an already over-crowded world.