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First published by Sheba Blake Publishing Corp. 2021

Sheba Blake Publishing Corp.

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First edition

Cover art by Sheba Blake
Editing by Sheba Blake

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy
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Caught By the Camera

"This is getting to be an amazing old world," said a young girl, still in her "teens," as she musingly leaned her chin on her hand.

"It has always been an amazing old world, Beth," said another girl who was sitting on the porch railing and swinging her feet in the air.

"True, Patsy," was the reply; "but the people are doing such peculiar things nowadays."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed a little man who occupied a reclining chair within hearing distance; "that is the way with you young folks—always confounding the world with its people."

"Don't the people make the world, Uncle John?" asked Patricia Doyle, looking at him quizzically.

"No, indeed; the world could get along very well without its people; but the people—"

"To be sure; they need the world," laughed Patsy, her blue eyes twinkling so that they glorified her plain, freckled face.

"Nevertheless," said Beth de Graf, soberly, "I think the people have struck a rapid pace these days and are growing bold and impudent. The law appears to

allow them too much liberty. After our experience of this morning I shall not be surprised at anything that happens—especially in this cranky state of California."

"To what experience do you allude, Beth?" asked Uncle John, sitting up straight and glancing from one to another of his two nieces. He was a genial looking, round-faced man, quite bald and inclined to be a trifle stout; yet his fifty-odd years sat lightly upon him.

"Why, we had quite an adventure this morning," said Patsy, laughing again at the recollection, and answering her uncle because Beth hesitated to. "For my part, I think it was fun, and harmless fun, at that; but Beth was scared out of a year's growth. I admit feeling a little creepy at the time, myself; but it was all a joke and really we ought not to mind it at all."

"Tell me all about it, my dear!" said Mr. Merrick, earnestly, for whatever affected his beloved nieces was of prime importance to him.

"We were taking our morning stroll along the streets," began Patsy, "when on turning a corner we came upon a crowd of people who seemed to be greatly excited. Most of them were workmen in flannel shirts, their sleeves rolled up, their hands grimy with toil. These stood before a brick building that seemed like a factory, while from its doors other crowds of workmen and some shopgirls were rushing into the street and several policemen were shaking their clubs and running here and there in a sort of panic. At first Beth and I stopped and hesitated to go on, but as the sidewalk seemed open and fairly free I pulled Beth along, thinking we might discover what the row was about. Just as we got opposite the building a big workman rushed at us and shouted: 'Go back—go back! The wall is falling.'

"Well, Uncle, you can imagine our dismay. We both screamed, for we thought our time had come, for sure. My legs were so weak that Beth had to

drag me away and her face was white as a sheet and full of terror. Somehow we managed to stagger into the street, where a dozen men caught us and hurried us away. I hardly thought we were in a safe place when the big workman cried: 'There, young ladies; that will do. Your expression was simply immense and if this doesn't turn out to be the best film of the year, I'll miss my guess! Your terror-stricken features will make a regular hit, for the terror wasn't assumed, you know. Thank you very much for happening along just then.'"

Patsy stopped her recital to laugh once more, with genuine merriment, but her cousin Beth seemed annoyed and Uncle John was frankly bewildered.

"But—what—what—was it all about?" he inquired.

"Why, they were taking a moving picture, that was all, and the workmen and shopgirls and policemen were all actors. There must have been a hundred of them, all told, and when we recovered from our scare I could hear the machine beside me clicking away as it took the picture."

"Did the wall fall?" asked Uncle John.

"Not just then. They first got the picture of the rush-out and the panic, and then they stopped the camera and moved the people to a safe distance away. We watched them set up some dummy figures of girls and workmen, closer in, and then in some way they toppled over the big brick wall. It fell into the street with a thundering crash, but only the dummies were buried under the debris."

Mr. Merrick drew a long breath.

"It's wonderful!" he exclaimed. "Why, it must have cost a lot of money to ruin such a building—and all for the sake of a picture!"

"That's what I said to the manager," replied Patsy; "but he told us the building was going to be pulled down, anyhow, and a better one built in its place; so he invented a picture story to fit the falling walls and it didn't cost

him so much as one might think. So you see, Uncle, we are in that picture—big as life and scared stiff—and I'd give a lot to see how we look when we're positively terror-stricken."

"It will cost you just ten cents," remarked Beth, with a shrug; "that is, if the picture proves good enough to be displayed at one of those horrid little theatres."

"One?" said Uncle John. "One thousand little theatres, most likely, will show the picture, and perhaps millions of spectators will see you and Patsy running from the falling wall."

"Dear me!" wailed Patsy. "That's more fame than I bargained for. Do millions go to see motion pictures, Uncle?"

"I believe so. The making of these pictures is getting to be an enormous industry. I was introduced to Otis Werner, the other day, and he told me a good deal about it. Werner is with one of the big concerns here—the Continental, I think—and he's a very nice and gentlemanly fellow. I'll introduce you to him, some time, and he'll tell you all the wonders of the motion picture business."

"I haven't witnessed one of those atrocious exhibitions for months," announced Beth; "nor have I any desire to see one again."

"Not our own special picture?" asked Patsy reproachfully.

"They had no right to force us into their dreadful drama," protested Beth. "Motion pictures are dreadfully tiresome things—comedies and tragedies alike. They are wild and weird in conception, quite unreal and wholly impossible. Of course the scenic pictures, and those recording historical events, are well enough in their way, but I cannot understand how so many cheap little picture theatres thrive."

“They are the poor people’s solace and recreation,” declared Mr. Merrick. “The picture theatre has become the laboring man’s favorite resort. It costs him but five or ten cents and it’s the sort of show he can appreciate. I’m told the motion picture is considered the saloon’s worst enemy, for many a man is taking his wife and children to a picture theatre evenings instead of joining a gang of his fellows before the bar, as he formerly did.”

“That is the best argument in their favor I have ever heard,” admitted Beth, who was strong on temperance; “but I hope, Uncle, you are not defending the insolent methods of those picture-makers.”

“Not at all, my dear. I consider the trapping of innocent bystanders to be—eh—er—highly reprehensible, and perhaps worse. If I can discover what picture manager was guilty of the act, I shall—shall—”

“What, Uncle?”

“I shall hint that he owes you an apology,” he concluded, rather lamely.

Beth smiled scornfully.

“Meantime,” said she, “two very respectable girls, who are not actresses, will be exhibited before the critical eyes of millions of stupid workmen, reformed drunkards, sad-faced women and wiggling children—not in dignified attitudes, mind you, but scurrying from what they supposed was an imminent danger.”

“I hope it will do the poor things good to see us,” retorted Patsy. “To be strictly honest, Beth, we were not trapped at all; we were the victims of circumstances. When I remember how quick-witted and alert that manager was, to catch us unawares and so add to the value of his picture, I can quite forgive the fellow his audacity.”

“It wasn’t audacity so much as downright impudence!” persisted Beth.

"I quite agree with you," said Mr. Merrick. "Do you wish me to buy that film and prevent the picture's being shown?"

"Oh, no!" cried Patsy in protest. "I'm dying to see how we look. I wouldn't have that picture sidetracked for anything."

"And you, Beth?"

"Really, Uncle John, the thing is not worth worrying over," replied his niece. "I am naturally indignant at being drawn into such a thing against my will, but I doubt if anyone who knows us, or whose opinion we value, will ever visit a moving picture theatre or see this film. The common people will not recognize us, of course."

You must not think Beth de Graf was snobbish or aristocratic because of this speech, which her cousin Patsy promptly denounced as "snippy." Beth was really a lovable and sunny-tempered girl, very democratic in her tastes in spite of the fact that she was the possessor of an unusual fortune. She was out of sorts to-day, resentful of the fright she had endured that morning and in the mood to say harsh things.

Even Patricia Doyle had been indignant, at first; but Patsy's judgment was clearer than her cousin's and her nature more responsive. She quickly saw the humorous side of their adventure and could enjoy the recollection of her momentary fear.

These two girls were spending the winter months in the glorious climate of Southern California, chaperoned by their uncle and guardian, John Merrick. They had recently established themselves at a cosy hotel in Hollywood, which is a typical California village, yet a suburb of the great city of Los Angeles. A third niece, older and now married—Louise Merrick Weldon—lived on a ranch between Los Angeles and San Diego, which was one reason why Uncle John and his wards had located in this pleasant neighborhood.

To observe this trio—the simple, complacent little man and his two young nieces—no stranger would suspect them to be other than ordinary tourists, bent on escaping the severe Eastern winter; but in New York the name of John Merrick was spoken with awe in financial circles, where his many millions made him an important figure. He had practically retired from active business and his large investments were managed by his brother-in-law, Major Gregory Doyle, who was Miss Patsy's father and sole surviving parent. All of Mr. Merrick's present interest in life centered in his three nieces, and because Louise was happily married and had now an establishment of her own—including a rather new but very remarkable baby—Uncle John was drawn closer to the two younger nieces and devoted himself wholly to their welfare.

The girls had not been rich when their fairy godfather first found them. Indeed, each of them had been energetically earning, or preparing to earn, a livelihood. Now, when their uncle's generosity had made them wealthy, they almost regretted those former busy days of poverty, being obliged to discover new interests in life in order to keep themselves occupied and contented. All three were open-handed and open-hearted, sympathetic to the unfortunate and eager to assist those who needed money, as many a poor girl and worthy young fellow could testify. In all their charities they were strongly supported by Mr. Merrick, whose enormous income permitted him to indulge in many benevolences. None gave ostentatiously, for they were simple, kindly folk who gave for the pure joy of giving and begrudged all knowledge of their acts to anyone outside their own little circle.

There is no doubt that John Merrick was eccentric. It is generally conceded that a rich man may indulge in eccentricities, provided he maintains a useful position in society, and Mr. Merrick's peculiarities only served to render him the more interesting to those who knew him best. He did

astonishing things in a most matter-of-fact way and acted more on impulse than on calm reflection; so it is not to be wondered at that the queer little man's nieces had imbibed some of his queerness. Being by nature lively and aggressive young women, whose eager interest in life would not permit them to be idle, they encountered many interesting experiences.

They had just come from a long visit to Louise at the ranch and after conferring gravely together had decided to hide themselves in Hollywood, where they might spend a quiet and happy winter in wandering over the hills, in boating or bathing in the ocean or motoring over the hundreds of miles of splendid boulevards of this section.

Singularly enough, their choice of a retreat was also the choice of a score or more of motion picture makers, who had discovered Hollywood before them and were utilizing the brilliant sunshine and clear atmosphere in the production of their films, which were supplied to picture theatres throughout the United States and Europe. Appreciating the value of such a monster industry, the authorities permitted the cameras to be set up on the public streets or wherever there was an appropriate scene to serve for a background to the photo-plays. It was no unusual sight to see troops of cowboys and Indians racing through the pretty village or to find the cameraman busy before the imposing residence of a millionaire or the vine-covered bungalow of a more modest citizen. No one seemed to resent such action, for Californians admire the motion picture as enthusiastically as do the inhabitants of the Eastern states, so the girls' "adventure" was really a common incident.

Two

An Object Lesson

It was the following afternoon when Uncle John captured his casual acquaintance, Mr. Otis Werner, in the office of the hotel and dragged the motion picture man away to his rooms to be introduced to his nieces.

"Here, my dears, is Mr. Werner," he began, as he threw open the door of their apartment and escorted his companion in. "He is one of those picture makers, you'll remember, and—and—"

He paused abruptly, for Beth was staring at Mr. Werner with a frown on her usually placid features, while Patsy was giggling hysterically. Mr. Werner, a twinkle of amusement in his eye, bowed with exaggerated deference.

"Dear me!" said Uncle John. "Is—is anything wrong!"

"No; it's all right, Uncle," declared Patsy, striving to control a fresh convulsion of laughter. "Only—this is the same dreadful manager who dragged us into his picture yesterday."

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Werner; "I'm not a manager; I'm merely what is called in our profession a 'producer,' or a 'stage director.'"

"Well, you're the man, anyhow," asserted Patsy. "So what have you to say for yourself, sir?"

"If you were annoyed, I humbly apologize," he returned. "Perhaps I was unintentionally rude to frighten you in that way, but my excuse lies in our subservience to the demands of our art. We seldom hesitate at anything which tends to give our pictures the semblance of reality."

"*Art*, did you say, Mr. Werner?" It was Beth who asked this and there was a bit of a sneer in her tone.

"It is really art—art of the highest character," he replied warmly. "Do you question it, Miss—Miss—"

"Miss de Graf. I suppose, to be fair, I must admit that the photography is art; but the subjects of your pictures, I have observed, are far from artistic. Such a picture, for instance, as you made yesterday can have little value to anyone."

"Little value! Why, Miss de Graf, you astonish me," he exclaimed. "I consider that picture of the falling wall one of my greatest triumphs—and I've been making pictures for years. Aside from its realism, its emotional nature —'thrills,' we call it—this picture conveys a vivid lesson that ought to prove of great benefit to humanity."

Beth was looking at him curiously now. Patsy was serious and very attentive. As Uncle John asked his visitor to be seated his voice betrayed the interest he felt in the conversation.

"Of course we saw only a bit of the picture," said Patsy Doyle. "What was it all about, Mr. Werner?"

"We try," said he, slowly and impressively, as if in love with his theme, "to give to our pictures an educational value, as well as to render them entertaining. Some of them contain a high moral lesson; others, a warning; many, an incentive to live purer and nobler lives. All of our plots are conceived with far more thought than you may suppose. Underlying many of our

romances and tragedies are moral injunctions which are involuntarily absorbed by the observers, yet of so subtle a nature that they are not suspected. We cannot preach except by suggestion, for people go to our picture shows to be amused. If we hurled righteousness at them they would soon desert us, and we would be obliged to close up shop."

"I must confess that this is, to me, a most novel presentation of the subject," said Beth, more graciously. "Personally, I care little for your pictures; but I can understand how travel scenes and scientific or educational subjects might be of real benefit to the people."

"I can't understand anyone's being indifferent to the charm of motion pictures," he responded, somewhat reproachfully.

"Why, at first they struck me as wonderful," said the girl. "They were such a novel invention that I went to see them from pure curiosity. But, afterward, the subjects presented in the pictures bored me. The drama pictures were cheap and common, the comedy scenes worse; so I kept away from the picture theatres."

"Educational pictures," said Mr. Werner, musingly, "have proved a failure, as I hinted, except when liberally interspersed with scenes of action and human interest. The only financial failures among the host of motion picture theatres, so far as I have observed, are those that have attempted to run travel scenes and educational films exclusively. There are so few people with your—eh—culture and—and—elevated tastes, you see, when compared with the masses."

"But tell us about *our* picture," pleaded Patsy. "What lesson can that falling wall possibly convey?"

"I'll be glad to explain that," he eagerly replied, "for I am quite proud of it, I assure you. There are many buildings throughout our larger cities that were

erected as cheaply as possible and without a single thought for the safety of their tenants. So many disasters have resulted from this that of late years building inspectors have been appointed in every locality to insist on proper materials and mechanical efficiency in the erection of all classes of buildings. These inspectors, however, cannot tear the old buildings down to see if they are safe, and paint and plaster cover a multitude of sins of unscrupulous builders. Usually the landlord or owner knows well the condition of his property and in many cases refuses to put it into such shape as to insure the safety of his tenants. Greed, false economy and heartless indifference to the welfare of others are unfortunately too prevalent among the wealthy class. No ordinary argument could induce owners to expend money in strengthening or rebuilding their income-producing properties. But I get after them in my picture with a prod that ought to rouse them to action.

"The picture opens with a scene in the interior of a factory. Men, girls and boys are employed. The foreman observes a warning crack in the wall and calls the proprietor's attention to it. In this case the manufacturer is the owner of the building, but he refuses to make repairs. His argument is that the wall has stood for many years and so is likely to stand for many more; it would be a waste of money to repair the old shell. Next day the foreman shows him that the crack has spread and extended along the wall in an alarming manner but still the owner will not act. The workmen counsel together seriously. They dare not desert their jobs, for they must have money to live. They send a petition to the owner, who becomes angry and swears he won't be driven to a useless expense by his own employees. In the next scene the manufacturer's daughter—his only child—having heard that the building was unsafe, comes to her father's office to plead with him to change his mind and make the needed repairs. Although he loves this daughter next to his money he resents her