

baby, just big enough to crawl along the paths. Later she learned to walk there, and then the gardener had to follow her to see that she didn't pick all the flowers. I used to carry her around and hold her high up so she could pull the apples and pears off the trees. When she grew larger I gave her a horse and taught her to ride. She seemed like my very own little girl. But by and by she grew up and became a young lady, and—well, she went away from me, and I never had another little girl.'

He had begun the story to interest the child. He found, as he went on, that it still interested him.

'Did she go to heaven?' asked the little girl, softly.

'Oh, dear, no,' answered the doctor, with brisk cheerfulness.

'Then why didn't she keep on being your little girl always?' was the next leading question.

The doctor hesitated a moment. He was making the discovery that, after many years, old wounds can reopen and throb. No one had ever been brave enough to broach to him the subject of this single love affair, which he was now discussing, he told himself, like a garrulous old woman. He was anxious to direct the conversation into other channels, but there was a certain compelling demand in the brown eyes upturned to his.

But p'r'aps he'll have something waiting for me when I get to Cousin Gertie's,' she added, with sweet hopefulness.

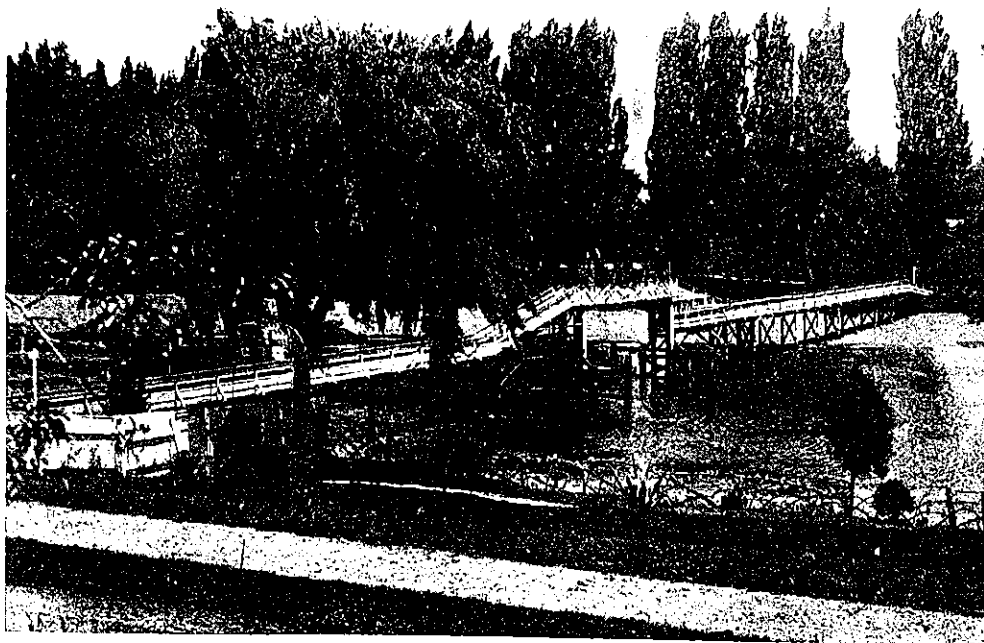
'Nana is always right,' said the doctor oracularly, 'and of course you must do exactly as she says. But I heard that Santa Claus was going to get on the train to-night at Buffalo, and I believe,' he added, slowly and impressively, 'that if he found a pair of small black stockings hanging from that section he'd fill them.'

Her eyes sparkled.

'Then I'll ask Nana,' she said. 'An' if she says I may hang them, I will. But one,' she added conscientiously, 'has a teeny, weeny hole in the toe. Do you think he would mind that?'

He reassured her on this point and turned to the nurse, who was now wide awake and absorbed in a novel. The car was brilliantly lighted, and the passengers were beginning to respond to the first dinner call.

'I beg your pardon,' he said. 'I've taken a great fancy to your little charge, and I want your help to carry out a plan of mine. I have suggested to Hope that she hang up her stockings to-night. I have every reason to believe that Santa Claus will get on this train at Buffalo. In fact,' he added, smiling, 'I mean to telegraph him.'



FOOTBRIDGE, GISBORNE.

'Well, you see,' he explained, 'other boys liked her, too. And when she became a young lady other men liked her. So finally one of them took her away from me.'

He uttered the last words wearily, and the sensitive atom at his side seemed to understand why. Her little hand slipped into his.

'Why didn't you ask her to please stay with you?' she persisted, pityingly.

'I did,' he told her. 'But, you see, she liked the other man better.'

'Oh-h-h.' The word came out long-drawn and breathless. I don't see how she possibly could.'

There was such sorrow for the victim and scorn for the offender in the tone that, combined with the none too subtle compliment, it was too much for Dr. Van Valkenberg's self-control. He threw back his gray head and burst into an almost boyish shout of laughter, which effectually cleared the atmosphere of sentimental memories. He suddenly realised, too, that he had not been giving the child the cheerful holiday evening he had intended.

'Where are you going to hang up your stockings to-night?' he asked. A shade fell over her sensitive face.

'I can't hang them up,' she answered soberly. 'Santa Claus doesn't travel on trains, Nanna says.'

The nurse hesitated a moment. He drew his card-case from his pocket and handed her one of the bits of pasteboard it contained.

'I have no evil designs,' he added carefully. 'If you are a New Yorker, you may possibly know who I am.'

The woman's face lit up as she read the name. She turned toward him impulsively, with a very pleasant smile.

'Indeed I do, doctor,' she said. 'Who does not? Dr. Abbey sent for you last week,' she added, 'for a consultation over the last case I had—this child's mother. But you were out of town. We were all so disappointed. It seems strange that we should meet you now.'

'Patient died?' asked the physician, with professional brevity.

'Yes, doctor.'

He rose from his seat.

'Now that you have my credentials,' he said cordially, 'I want you and Hope to dine with me. You will, won't you?'

The upholstered cheerfulness of the dining car found favor in the sight of Hope. She conducted herself, however, with her usual dignity, broken only occasionally as the prospective visit of Santa Claus crossed her mind. Her dinner, superintended by an