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CHRISTOPHER AND COLUMBUS

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Christopher and Columbus

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CHAPTER I

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Their names were really Anna-Rose and Anna-Felicitas; but they decided, as they sat huddled together in a corner of the second-class deck of the American liner *St. Luke*, and watched the dirty water of the Mersey slipping past and the Liverpool landing-stage disappearing into mist, and felt that it was comfortless and cold, and knew they hadn't got a father or a mother, and remembered that they were aliens, and realized that in front of them lay a great deal of gray, uneasy, dreadfully wet sea, endless stretches of it, days and days of it, with waves on top of it to make them sick and submarines beneath it to kill them if they could, and knew that they hadn't the remotest idea, not the very remotest, what was before them when and if they did get across to the other side, and knew that they were refugees, castaways, derelicts, two wretched little Germans who were neither really Germans nor really English because they so unfortunately, so complicatedly were both—they decided, looking very calm and determined and sitting very close together beneath the rug their English aunt had given them to put round their miserable alien legs, that what they really were, were Christopher and Columbus, because they were setting out to discover a New World.

"It's very pleasant," said Anna-Rose. "It's very pleasant to go and discover America. All for ourselves."

It was Anna-Rosa who suggested their being Christopher and Columbus. She was the elder by twenty minutes. Both had had their seventeenth birthday—and what a birthday: no cake, no candles, no kisses and wreaths and home-made

poems; but then, as Anna-Felicitas pointed out, to comfort Anna-Rose who was taking it hard, you can't get blood out of an aunt—only a month before. Both were very German outside and very English inside. Both had fair hair, and the sorts of chins Germans have, and eyes the colour of the sky in August along the shores of the Baltic. Their noses were brief, and had been objected to in Germany, where, if you are a Junker's daughter, you are expected to show it in your nose. Anna-Rose had a tight little body, inclined to the round. Anna-Felicitas, in spite of being a twin, seemed to have made the most of her twenty extra minutes to grow more in; anyhow she was tall and thin, and she drooped; and having perhaps grown quicker made her eyes more dreamy, and her thoughts more slow. And both held their heads up with a great air of calm whenever anybody on the ship looked at them, as who should say serenely, "We're *thoroughly* happy, and having the time of our lives."

For worlds they wouldn't have admitted to each other that they were even aware of such a thing as being anxious or wanting to cry. Like other persons of English blood, they never were so cheerful nor pretended to be so much amused as when they were right down on the very bottom of their luck. Like other persons of German blood, they had the squashiest corners deep in their hearts, where they secretly clung to cakes and Christmas trees, and fought a tendency to celebrate every possible anniversary, both dead and alive.

The gulls, circling white against the gloomy sky over the rubbish that floated on the Mersey, made them feel extraordinarily forlorn. Empty boxes, bits of straw, orange-peel, a variety of dismal dirtiness lay about on the sullen water; England was slipping away, England, their mother's country, the country of their dreams ever since they could

remember—and the *St. Luke* with a loud screech had suddenly stopped.

Neither of them could help jumping a little at that and getting an inch closer together beneath the rug. Surely it wasn't a submarine already?

"We're Christopher and Columbus," said Anna-Rose quickly, changing as it were the unspoken conversation.

As the eldest she had a great sense of her responsibility toward her twin, and considered it one of her first duties to cheer and encourage her. Their mother had always cheered and encouraged them, and hadn't seemed to mind anything, however awful it was, that happened to her—such as, for instance, when the war began and they three, their father having died some years before, left their home up by the Baltic, just as there was the most heavenly weather going on, and the garden was a dream, and the blue Chinchilla cat had produced four perfect kittens that very day—all of whom had to be left to what Anna-Felicitas, whose thoughts if slow were picturesque once she had got them, called the tender mercies of a savage and licentious soldiery—and came by slow and difficult stages to England; or such as when their mother began catching cold and didn't seem at last ever able to leave off catching cold, and though she tried to pretend she didn't mind colds and that they didn't matter, it was plain that these colds did at last matter very much, for between them they killed her.

Their mother had always been cheerful and full of hope. Now that she was dead, it was clearly Anna-Rose's duty, as the next eldest in the family, to carry on the tradition and discountenance too much drooping in Anna-Felicitas. Anna-Felicitas was staring much too thoughtfully at the deepening gloom of the late afternoon sky and the rubbish brooding on the face of the waters, and she had jumped rather

excessively when the *St. Luke* stopped so suddenly, just as if it were putting on the brake hard, and emitted that agonized whistle.

"We're Christopher and Columbus," said Anna-Rose quickly, "and we're going to discover America."

"Very well," said Anna-Felicitas. "I'll be Christopher."

"No. I'll be Christopher," said Anna-Rose.

"Very well," said Anna-Felicitas, who was the most amiable, acquiescent person in the world. "Then I suppose I'll have to be Columbus. But I think Christopher sounds prettier."

Both rolled their r's incurably. It was evidently in their blood, for nothing, no amount of teaching and admonishment, could get them out of it. Before they were able to talk at all, in those happy days when parents make astounding assertions to other parents about the intelligence and certain future brilliancy of their offspring, and the other parents, however much they may pity such self-deception, can't contradict, because after all it just possibly may be so, the most foolish people occasionally producing geniuses—in those happy days of undisturbed bright castle-building, the mother, who was English, of the two derelicts now huddled on the dank deck of the *St. Luke*, said to the father, who was German, "At any rate these two blessed little bundles of deliciousness"—she had one on each arm and was tickling their noses alternately with her eyelashes, and they were screaming for joy—"won't have to learn either German or English. They'll just *know* them."

"Perhaps," said the father, who was a cautious man.

"They're born bi-lingual," said the mother; and the twins wheezed and choked with laughter, for she was tickling

them beneath their chins, softly fluttering her eyelashes along the creases of fat she thought so adorable.

"Perhaps," said the father.

"It gives them a tremendous start," said the mother; and the twins squirmed in a dreadful ecstasy, for she had now got to their ears.

"Perhaps," said the father.

But what happened was that they didn't speak either language. Not, that is, as a native should. Their German bristled with mistakes. They spoke it with a foreign accent. It was copious, but incorrect. Almost the last thing their father, an accurate man, said to them as he lay dying, had to do with a misplaced dative. And when they talked English it rolled about uncontrollably on its r's, and had a great many long words in it got from Milton, and Dr. Johnson, and people like that, whom their mother had particularly loved, but as they talked far more to their mother than to their father, who was a man of much briefness in words though not in temper, they were better on the whole at English than German.

Their mother, who loved England more the longer she lived away from it—"As one does; and the same principle," Anna-Rose explained to Anna-Felicitas when they had lived some time with their aunt and uncle, "applies to relations, aunts' husbands, and the clergy,"—never tired of telling her children about it, and its poetry, and its spirit, and the greatness and glory of its points of view. They drank it all in and believed every word of it, for so did their mother; and as they grew up they flung themselves on all the English books they could lay hands upon, and they read with their mother and learned by heart most of the obviously beautiful things; and because she glowed with enthusiasm they

glowed too—Anna-Rose in a flare and a flash, Anna-Felicitas slow and steadily. They adored their mother. Whatever she loved they loved blindly. It was a pity she died. She died soon after the war began. They had been so happy, so *dreadfully* happy.…

"You can't be Christopher," said Anna-Rose, giving herself a shake, for here she was thinking of her mother, and it didn't do to think of one's mother, she found; at least, not when one is off to a new life and everything is all promise because it isn't anything else, and not if one's mother happened to have been so—well, so fearfully sweet. "You can't be Christopher, because, you see, I'm the eldest."

Anna-Felicitas didn't see what being the eldest had to do with it, but she only said, "Very well," in her soft voice, and expressed a hope that Anna-Rose would see her way not to call her Col for short. "I'm afraid you will, though," she added, "and then I shall feel so like Onkel Nicolas."

This was their German uncle, known during his life-time, which had abruptly left off when the twins were ten, as Onkel Col; a very ancient person, older by far even than their father, who had seemed so very old. But Onkel Col had been older than anybody at all, except the pictures of the *liebe Gott* in Blake's illustrations to the Book of Job. He came to a bad end. Neither their father nor their mother told them anything except that Onkel Col was dead; and their father put a black band round the left sleeve of his tweed country suit and was more good-tempered than ever, and their mother, when they questioned her, just said that poor Onkel Col had gone to heaven, and that in future they would speak of him as Onkel Nicolas, because it was more respectful.

"But why does mummy call him poor, when he's gone to heaven?" Anna-Felicitas asked Anna-Rose privately, in the recesses of the garden.

"First of all," said Anna-Rose, who, being the eldest, as she so often explained to her sister, naturally knew more about everything, "because the angels won't like him. Nobody *could* like Onkel Col. Even if they're angels. And though they're obliged to have him there because he was such a very good man, they won't talk to him much or notice him much when God isn't looking. And second of all, because you *are* poor when you get to heaven. Everybody is poor in heaven. Nobody takes their things with them, and all Onkel Col's money is still on earth. He couldn't even take his clothes with him."

"Then is he quite—did Onkel Col go there quite—"

Anna-Felicitas stopped. The word seemed too awful in connection with Onkel Col, that terrifying old gentleman who had roared at them from the folds of so many wonderful wadded garments whenever they were led in, trembling, to see him, for he had gout and was very terrible; and it seemed particularly awful when one thought of Onkel Col going to heaven, which was surely of all places the most *endimanché*.

"Of course," nodded Anna-Rose; but even she dropped her voice a little. She peeped about among the bushes a moment, then put her mouth close to Anna-Felicitas's ear, and whispered, "Stark."

They stared at one another for a space with awe and horror in their eyes.

"You see," then went on Anna-Rose rather quickly, hurrying away from the awful vision, "one knows one doesn't have clothes in heaven because they don't have the moth there. It says so in the Bible. And you can't have the moth without having anything for it to go into."

"Then they don't have to have naphthalin either," said Anna-Felicitas, "and don't all have to smell horrid in the autumn when they take their furs out."

"No. And thieves don't break in and steal either in heaven," continued Anna-Rose, "and the reason why is that there *isn't* anything to steal."

"There's angels," suggested Anna-Felicitas after a pause, for she didn't like to think there was nothing really valuable in heaven.

"Oh, nobody ever steals *them*," said Anna-Rose.

Anna-Felicitas's slow thoughts revolved round this new uncomfortable view of heaven. It seemed, if Anna-Rose were right, and she always was right for she said so herself, that heaven couldn't be such a safe place after all, nor such a kind place. Thieves could break in and steal if they wanted to. She had a proper horror of thieves. She was sure the night would certainly come when they would break into her father's *Schloss*, or, as her English nurse called it, her dear Papa's slosh; and she was worried that poor Onkel Col should be being snubbed up there, and without anything to put on, which would make being snubbed so much worse, for clothes did somehow comfort one.

She took her worries to the nursemaid, and choosing a moment when she knew Anna-Rose wished to be unnoticed, it being her hour for inconspicuously eating unripe apples at the bottom of the orchard, an exercise Anna-Felicitas only didn't indulge in because she had learned through affliction that her inside, fond and proud of it as she was, was yet not of that superior and blessed kind that suffers green apples gladly—she sought out the nursemaid, whose name, too, confusingly, was Anna, and led the conversation up to heaven and the possible conditions prevailing in it by asking

her to tell her, in strict confidence and as woman to woman, what she thought Onkel Col exactly looked like at that moment.

"Unrecognizable," said the nursemaid promptly.

"Unrecognizable?" echoed Anna-Felicitas.

And the nursemaid, after glancing over her shoulder to see if the governess were nowhere in sight, told Anna-Felicitas the true story of Onkel Col's end: which is so bad that it isn't fit to be put in any book except one with an appendix.

A stewardess passed just as Anna-Felicitas was asking Anna-Rose not to remind her of these grim portions of the past by calling her Col, a stewardess in such a very clean white cap that she looked both reliable and benevolent, while secretly she was neither.

"Can you please tell us why we're stopping?" Anna-Rose inquired of her politely, leaning forward to catch her attention as she hurried by.

The stewardess allowed her roving eye to alight for a moment on the two objects beneath the rug. Their chairs were close together, and the rug covered them both up to their chins. Over the top of it their heads appeared, exactly alike as far as she could see in the dusk; round heads, each with a blue knitted cap pulled well over its ears, and round eyes staring at her with what anybody except the stewardess would have recognized as a passionate desire for some sort of reassurance. They might have been seven instead of seventeen for all the stewardess could tell. They looked younger than anything she had yet seen sitting alone on a deck and asking questions. But she was an exasperated widow, who had never had children and wasn't to be touched by anything except a tip, besides despising, because she was herself a second-class stewardess, all

second-class passengers—"As one does," Anna-Rose explained later on to Anna-Felicitas, "and the same principle applies to Jews." So she said with an acidity completely at variance with the promise of her cap, "Ask the Captain," and disappeared.

The twins looked at each other. They knew very well that captains on ships were mighty beings who were not asked questions.

"She's trifling with us," murmured Anna-Felicitas.

"Yes," Anna-Rose was obliged to admit, though the thought was repugnant to her that they should look like people a stewardess would dare trifle with.

"Perhaps she thinks we're younger than we are," she said after a silence.

"Yes. She couldn't see how long our dresses are, because of the rug."

"No. And it's only that end of us that really shows we're grown up."

"Yes. She ought to have seen us six months ago."

Indeed she ought. Even the stewardess would have been surprised at the activities and complete appearance of the two pupæ now rolled motionless in the rug. For, six months ago, they had both been probationers in a children's hospital in Worcestershire, arrayed, even as the stewardess, in spotless caps, hurrying hither and thither with trays of food, sweeping and washing up, learning to make beds in a given time, and be deft, and quick, and never tired, and always punctual.

This place had been got them by the efforts and influence of their Aunt Alice, that aunt who had given them the rug on

their departure and who had omitted to celebrate their birthday. She was an amiable aunt, but she didn't understand about birthdays. It was the first one they had had since they were complete orphans, and so they were rather sensitive about it. But they hadn't cried, because since their mother's death they had done with crying. What could there ever again be in the world bad enough to cry about after that? And besides, just before she dropped away from them into the unconsciousness out of which she never came back, but instead just dropped a little further into death, she had opened her eyes unexpectedly and caught them sitting together in a row by her bed, two images of agony, with tears rolling down their swollen faces and their noses in a hopeless state, and after looking at them a moment as if she had slowly come up from some vast depth and distance and were gradually recognizing them, she had whispered with a flicker of the old encouraging smile that had comforted every hurt and bruise they had ever had, "*Don't cry*... little darlings, *don't* cry.... "

But on that first birthday after her death they had got more and more solemn as time passed, and breakfast was cleared away, and there were no sounds, prick up their ears as they might, of subdued preparations in the next room, no stealthy going up and down stairs to fetch the presents, and at last no hope at all of the final glorious flinging open of the door and the vision inside of two cakes all glittering with candles, each on a table covered with flowers and all the things one has most wanted.

Their aunt didn't know. How should she? England was a great and beloved country, but it didn't have proper birthdays.

"Every country has one drawback," Anna-Rose explained to Anna-Felicitas when the morning was finally over, in case she should by any chance be thinking badly of the dear

country that had produced their mother as well as Shakespeare, "and not knowing about birthdays is England's."

"There's Uncle Arthur," said Anna-Felicitas, whose honest mind groped continually after accuracy.

"Yes," Anna-Rose admitted after a pause. "Yes. There's Uncle Arthur."

CHAPTER II

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Uncle Arthur was the husband of Aunt Alice. He didn't like foreigners, and said so. He never had liked them and had always said so. It wasn't the war at all, it was the foreigners. But as the war went on, and these German nieces of his wife became more and more, as he told her, a blighted nuisance, so did he become more and more pointed, and said he didn't mind French foreigners, nor Russian foreigners; and a few weeks later, that it wasn't Italian foreigners either that he minded; and still later, that nor was it foreigners indigenous to the soil of countries called neutral. These things he said aloud at meals in a general way. To his wife when alone he said much more.

Anna-Rose, who was nothing if not intrepid, at first tried to soften his heart by offering to read aloud to him in the evenings when he came home weary from his daily avocations, which were golf. Her own suggestion instantly projected a touching picture on her impressionable imagination of youth, grateful for a roof over its head, in return alleviating the tedium of crabbed age by introducing its uncle, who from his remarks was evidently unacquainted with them, to the best productions of the great masters of English literature.

But Uncle Arthur merely stared at her with a lacklustre eye when she proposed it, from his wide-legged position on the hearthrug, where he was moving money about in trouser-pockets of the best material. And later on she discovered that he had always supposed the "Faery Queen," and "Adonais," and "In Memoriam," names he had heard at

intervals during his life, for he was fifty and such things do sometimes get mentioned were well-known racehorses.

Uncle Arthur, like Onkel Col, was a very good man, and though he said things about foreigners he did stick to these unfortunate alien nieces longer than one would have supposed possible if one had overheard what he said to Aunt Alice in the seclusion of their bed. His ordered existence, shaken enough by the war, Heaven knew, was shaken in its innermost parts, in its very marrow, by the arrival of the two Germans. Other people round about had Belgians in their homes, and groaned; but who but he, the most immensely British of anybody, had Germans? And he couldn't groan, because they were, besides being motherless creatures, his own wife's flesh and blood. Not openly at least could he groan; but he could and did do it in bed. Why on earth that silly mother of theirs couldn't have stayed quietly on her Pomeranian sand-heap where she belonged, instead of coming gallivanting over to England, and then when she had got there not even decently staying alive and seeing to her children herself, he at frequent intervals told Aunt Alice in bed that he would like to know.

Aunt Alice, who after twenty years of life with Uncle Arthur was both silent and sleek (for he fed her well), sighed and said nothing. She herself was quietly going through very much on behalf of her nieces. Jessup didn't like handing dishes to Germans. The tradespeople twitted the cook with having to cook for them and were facetious about sausages and asked how one made sauerkraut. Her acquaintances told her they were very sorry for her, and said they supposed she knew what she was doing and that it was all right about spies, but really one heard such strange things, one never could possibly tell even with children; and regularly the local policeman bicycled over to see if the aliens, who were registered at the county-town police-

station, were still safe. And then they looked so very German, Aunt Alice felt. There was no mistaking them. And every time they opened their mouths there were all those r's rolling about. She hardly liked callers to find her nieces in her drawing-room at tea-time, they were so difficult to explain; yet they were too old to shut up in a nursery.

After three months of them, Uncle Arthur suggested sending them back to Germany; but their consternation had been so great and their entreaties to be kept where they were so desperate that he said no more about that. Besides, they told him that if they went back there they would be sure to be shot as spies, for over there nobody would believe they were German, just as over here nobody would believe they were English; and besides, this was in those days of the war when England was still regarding Germany as more mistaken than vicious, and was as full as ever of the tradition of great and elaborate indulgence and generosity toward a foe, and Uncle Arthur, whatever he might say, was not going to be behind his country in generosity.

Yet as time passed, and feeling tightened, and the hideous necklace of war grew more and more frightful with each fresh bead of horror strung upon it, Uncle Arthur, though still in principle remaining good, in practice found himself vindictive. He was saddled; that's what he was. Saddled with this monstrous unmerited burden. He, the most patriotic of Britons, looked at askance by his best friends, being given notice by his old servants, having particular attention paid his house at night by the police, getting anonymous letters about lights seen in his upper windows the nights; the Zeppelins came, which were the windows of the floor those blighted twins slept on, and all because he had married Aunt Alice.

At this period Aunt Alice went to bed with reluctance. It was not a place she had ever gone to very willingly since she

married Uncle Arthur, for he was the kind of husband who rebukes in bed; but now she was downright reluctant. It was painful to her to be told that she had brought this disturbance into Uncle Arthur's life by having let him marry her. Inquiring backwards into her recollections it appeared to her that she had had no say at all about being married, but that Uncle Arthur had told her she was going to be, and then that she had been. Which was what had indeed happened; for Aunt Alice was a round little woman even in those days, nicely though not obtrusively padded with agreeable fat at the corners, and her skin, just as now, had the moist delicacy that comes from eating a great many chickens. Also she suggested, just as now, most of the things most men want to come home to—slippers, and drawn curtains, and a blazing fire, and peace within one's borders, and even, as Anna-Rose pointed out privately to Anna-Felicitas after they had come across them for the first time, she suggested muffins; and so, being in these varied fashions succulent, she was doomed to make some good man happy. But she did find it real hard work.

It grew plain to Aunt Alice after another month of them that Uncle Arthur would not much longer endure his nieces, and that even if he did she would not be able to endure Uncle Arthur. The thought was very dreadful to her that she was being forced to choose between two duties, and that she could not fulfil both. It came to this at last, that she must either stand by her nieces, her dead sister's fatherless children, and face all the difficulties and discomforts of such a standing by, go away with them, take care of them, till the war was over; or she must stand by Arthur.

She chose Arthur.

How could she, for nieces she had hardly seen, abandon her husband? Besides, he had scolded her so steadily during the whole of their married life that she was now unalterably

attached to him. Sometimes a wild thought did for a moment illuminate the soothing dusk of her mind, the thought of doing the heroic thing, leaving him for them, and helping and protecting the two poor aliens till happier days should return. If there were any good stuff in Arthur would he not recognize, however angry he might be, that she was doing at least a Christian thing? But this illumination would soon die out. Her comforts choked it. She was too well-fed. After twenty years of it, she no longer had the figure for lean and dangerous enterprises.

And having definitely chosen Arthur, she concentrated what she had of determination in finding an employment for her nieces that would remove them beyond the range of his growing wrath. She found it in a children's hospital as far away as Worcestershire, a hospital subscribed to very largely by Arthur, for being a good man he subscribed to hospitals. The matron objected, but Aunt Alice overrode the matron; and from January to April Uncle Arthur's house was pure from Germans.

Then they came back again.

It had been impossible to keep them. The nurses wouldn't work with them. The sick children had relapses when they discovered who it was who brought them their food, and cried for their mothers. It had been arranged between Aunt Alice and the matron that the unfortunate nationality of her nieces should not be mentioned. They were just to be Aunt Alice's nieces, the Miss Twinklers—("We will leave out the von," said Aunt Alice, full of unnatural cunning. "They have a von, you know, poor things—such a very labelling thing to have. But Twinkler without it might quite well be English. Who can possibly tell? It isn't as though they had had some shocking name like Bismarck.")

Nothing, however, availed against the damning evidence of the rolled r's. Combined with the silvery fair hair and the determined little mouths and chins, it was irresistible. Clearly they were foreigners, and equally clearly they were not Italians, or Russians, or French. Within a week the nurses spoke of them in private as Fritz and Franz. Within a fortnight a deputation of staff sisters went to the matron and asked, on patriotic grounds, for the removal of the Misses Twinkler. The matron, with the fear of Uncle Arthur in her heart, for he was altogether the biggest subscriber, sharply sent the deputation about its business; and being a matron of great competence and courage she would probably have continued to be able to force the new probationers upon the nurses if it had not been for the inability, which was conspicuous, of the younger Miss Twinkler to acquire efficiency.

In vain did Anna-Rose try to make up for Anna-Felicitas's shortcomings by a double zeal, a double willingness and cheerfulness. Anna-Felicitas was a born dreamer, a born bungler with her hands and feet. She not only never from first to last succeeded in filling the thirty hot-water bottles, which were her care, in thirty minutes, which was her duty, but every time she met a pail standing about she knocked against it and it fell over. Patients and nurses watched her approach with apprehension. Her ward was in a constant condition of flood.

"It's because she's thinking of something else," Anna-Rose tried eagerly to explain to the indignant sister-in-charge.

"Thinking of something else!" echoed the sister.

"She reads, you see, a lot—whenever she gets the chance she reads—"

"Reads!" echoed the sister.

"And then, you see, she gets thinking—"

"Thinking! Reading doesn't make *me* think."

"With much regret," wrote the matron to Aunt Alice, "I am obliged to dismiss your younger niece, Nurse Twinkler II. She has no vocation for nursing. On the other hand, your elder niece is shaping well and I shall be pleased to keep her on."

"But I can't stop on," Anna-Rose said to the matron when she announced these decisions to her. "I can't be separated from my sister. I'd like very much to know what would become of that poor child without me to look after her. You forget I'm the eldest."

The matron put down her pen—she was a woman who made many notes—and stared at Nurse Twinkler. Not in this fashion did her nurses speak to her. But Anna-Rose, having been brought up in a spot remote from everything except love and laughter, had all the fearlessness of ignorance; and in her extreme youth and smallness, with her eyes shining and her face heated she appeared to the matron rather like an indignant kitten.

"Very well," said the matron gravely, suppressing a smile. "One should always do what one considers one's first duty."

So the Twinklers went back to Uncle Arthur, and the matron was greatly relieved, for she certainly didn't want them, and Uncle Arthur said Damn.

"Arthur," gently reproved his wife.

"I say Damn and I mean Damn," said Uncle Arthur. "What the hell can we—"

"Arthur," said his wife.

"I say, what the hell can we do with a couple of Germans? If people wouldn't swallow them last winter are they going to swallow them any better now? God, what troubles a man lets himself in for when he marries!"

"I do beg you, Arthur, not to use those coarse words," said Aunt Alice, tears in her gentle eyes.

There followed a period of desperate exertion on the part of Aunt Alice. She answered advertisements and offered the twins as nursery governesses, as cheerful companions, as mothers' helps, even as orphans willing to be adopted. She relinquished every claim on salaries, she offered them for nothing, and at last she offered them accompanied by a bonus. "Their mother was English. They are quite English," wrote Aunt Alice innumerable times in innumerable letters. "I feel bound, however, to tell you that they once had a German father, but of course it was through no fault of their own," etc., etc. Aunt Alice's hand ached with writing letters; and any solution of the problem that might possibly have been arrived at came to nothing because Anna-Rose would not be separated from Anna-Felicitas, and if it was difficult to find anybody who would take on one German nobody at all could be found to take on two.

Meanwhile Uncle Arthur grew nightly more dreadful in bed. Aunt Alice was at her wits' end, and took to crying helplessly. The twins racked their brains to find a way out, quite as anxious to relieve Uncle Arthur of their presence as he was to be relieved. If only they could be independent, do something, work, go as housemaids—anything.

They concocted an anonymous-advertisement and secretly sent it to *The Times*, clubbing their pocket-money together to pay for it. The advertisement was:

> Energetic Sisters of belligerent ancestry but unimpeachable sympathies wish for any sort of work consistent with respectability. No objection to being demeaned.

Anna-Felicitas inquired what that last word meant for it was Anna-Rose's word, and Anna-Rose explained that it meant not minding things like being housemaids. "Which we don't," said Anna-Rose. "Upper and Under. I'll be Upper, of course, because I'm the eldest."

Anna-Felicitas suggested putting in what it meant then, for she regarded it with some doubt, but Anna-Rose, it being her word, liked it, and explained that it Put a whole sentence into a nut-shell, and wouldn't change it.

No one answered this advertisement except a society in London for helping alien enemies in distress.

"Charity," said Anna-Rose, turning up her nose.

"And fancy thinking *us* enemies," said Anna-Felicitas, "Us. While mummy—" Her eyes filled with tears. She kept them back, however, behind convenient long eye-lashes.

Then they saw an advertisement in the front page of *The Times* that they instantly answered without saying a word to Aunt Alice. The advertisement was:

> Slightly wounded Officer would be glad to find intelligent and
> interesting companion who can drive a 14 h.p. Humber. Emoluments
> by arrangement.

"We'll *tell* him we're intelligent and interesting," said Anna-Rose, eagerly.

"Yes—who knows if we wouldn't be really, if we were given a chance?" said Anna-Felicitas, quite flushed with excitement.

"And if he engages us we'll take him on in turns, so that the emoluments won't have to be doubled."

"Yes—because he mightn't like paying twice over."

"Yes—and while the preliminaries are being settled we could be learning to drive Uncle Arthur's car."

"Yes—except that it's a Daimler, and aren't they different?"

"Yes—but only about the same difference as there is between a man and a woman. A man and a woman are both human beings, you know. And Daimlers and Humbers are both cars."

"I see," said Anna-Felicitas; but she didn't.

They wrote an enthusiastic answer that very day.

The only thing they were in doubt about, they explained toward the end of the fourth sheet, when they had got to politenesses and were requesting the slightly wounded officer to allow them to express their sympathy with his wounds, was that they had not yet had an opportunity of driving a Humber car, but that this opportunity, of course, would be instantly provided by his engaging them. Also, would he kindly tell them if it was a male companion he desired to have, because if so it was very unfortunate, for neither of them were males, but quite the contrary.

They got no answer to this for three weeks, and had given up all hope and come to the depressing conclusion that they must have betrayed their want of intelligence and interestingness right away, when one day a letter came from General Headquarters in France, addressed *To Both the Miss Twinklers*, and it was a long letter, pages long, from the

slightly wounded officer, telling them he had been patched up again and sent back to the front, and their answer to his advertisement had been forwarded to him there, and that he had had heaps of other answers to it, and that the one he had liked best of all was theirs; and that some day he hoped when he was back again, and able to drive himself, to show them how glorious motoring was, if their mother would bring them—quick motoring in his racing car, sixty miles an hour motoring, flashing through the wonders of the New Forest, where he lived. And then there was a long bit about what the New Forest must be looking like just then, all quiet in the spring sunshine, with lovely dappled bits of shade underneath the big beeches, and the heather just coming alive, and all the winding solitary roads so full of peace, so empty of noise.

"Write to me, you two children," said the letter at the end. "You've no idea what it's like getting letters from home out here. Write and tell me what you do and what the garden is like these fine afternoons. The lilacs must be nearly done, but I'm sure there's the smell of them still about, and I'm sure you have a beautiful green close-cut lawn, and tea is brought out on to it, and there's no sound, no sort of sound, except birds, and you two laughing, and I daresay a jolly dog barking somewhere just for fun and not because he's angry."

The letter was signed (Captain) John Desmond, and there was a scrawl in the corner at the end: "It's for jolly little English kids like you that we're fighting, God bless you. Write to me again soon."

"English kids like us!"

They looked at each other. They had not mentioned their belligerent ancestry in their letter. They felt uncomfortable, and as if Captain Desmond were fighting for them, as it

were, under false pretences. They also wondered why he should conclude they were kids.

They wrote to him again, explaining that they were not exactly what could be described as English, but on the other hand neither were they exactly what could be described as German. "We would be very glad indeed if we were really *something*," they added.

But after their letter had been gone only a few days they saw in the list of casualties in *The Times* that Captain John Desmond had been killed.

And then one day the real solution was revealed, and it was revealed to Uncle Arthur as he sat in his library on a wet Sunday morning considering his troubles in detail.

Like most great ideas it sprang full-fledged into being—obvious, unquestionable, splendidly simple—out of a trifle. For, chancing to raise his heavy and disgusted eyes to the bookshelves in front of him, they rested on one particular book, and on the back of this book stood out in big gilt letters the word

AMERICA

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There were other words on its back, but this one alone stood out, and it had all the effect of a revelation.

There. That was it. Of course. That was the way out. Why the devil hadn't Alice thought of *that*? He knew some Americans; he didn't like them, but he knew them; and he would write to them, or Alice would write to them, and tell them the twins were coming. He would give the twins £200—damn it, nobody could say that wasn't handsome,

especially in war-time, and for a couple of girls who had no earthly sort of claim on him, whatever Alice might choose to think they had on her. Yet it was such a confounded mixed-up situation that he wasn't at all sure he wouldn't come under the Defence of the Realm Act, by giving them money, as aiding the enemy. Well, he would risk that. He would risk anything to be rid of them. Ship 'em off, that was the thing to do. They would fall on their feet right enough over there. America still swallowed Germans without making a face.

Uncle Arthur reflected for a moment with extreme disgust on the insensibility of the American palate. "Lost their chance, that's what *they've* done," he said to himself—for this was 1916, and America had not yet made her magnificent entry into the war—as he had already said to himself a hundred times. "Lost their chance of coming in on the side of civilization, and helping sweep the world up tidy of barbarism. Shoulder to shoulder with us, that's where *they* ought to have been. English-speaking races—duty to the world—" He then damned the Americans; but was suddenly interrupted by perceiving that if they had been shoulder to shoulder with him and England he wouldn't have been able to send them his wife's German nieces to take care of. There was, he conceded, that advantage resulting from their attitude. He could not, however, concede any others.

At luncheon he was very nearly gay. It was terrible to see Uncle Arthur very nearly gay, and both his wife and the twins were most uncomfortable. "I wonder what's the matter now," sighed Aunt Alice to herself, as she nervously crumbled her toast.

It could mean nothing good, Arthur in such spirits on a wet Sunday, when he hadn't been able to get his golf and the cook had overdone the joint.