

Tom read and reread the note. He tried to picture the little girl, as he sat bolstered up in bed during the long afternoon. Of course, she was pretty—the nurse had told him that already—and probably her room was full of flowers and playthings. She could not be so very little, either, or they would have put her in the children's ward. He had visited the infants' department of the hospital with his sister. The hospital was famous for its children's wards. Charitable women had fitted them out, a girls' section in delicate blue, with blue enamel beds, and a boys' ward in pink. McAvoy remembered the tiny babies and young children, with their bandages, and the convalescents playing in a sand pile in the big sun room. Any, he guessed, must be older. Perhaps she was at the age when the glorious first light of young maidenhood starts to break over the child. In that case she must have long curls, gathered back with a ribbon. Or it might be that she wore her hair in a thick braid, as he remembered his sister doing.

Girls had never figured much in Tom's life. College had been filled with athletics and his studies. Since his graduation it had taken every minute and every ounce of energy to shoulder his way through the competition of the business world to a position where ultimate success appeared within reach. Now, in the quiet of the hospital, during the intervals between Tom's occasional visitors, he thought of the occupant of the adjoining room. Girls, whether little or big, were made for men to protect, and here was an opportunity for Tom to use his man's prerogative.

'Do you know, I would have been very lonely if that little girl hadn't thought so much of me! Tom confided to his night nurse. It's hard enough to be grown up and sit here, day after day, with only four walls to look at, but it must have been harder for her away from her playmates, and her mother not being able to be with her all the time.'

'Yes,' said the nurse. 'It has been hard for her, but she is glad to hear from you, and I'm sure it keeps her from being lonely.'

'Tell her that I will come on the first morning that I get a chance.'

'I'll tell her now,' and the nurse started for the door.

It was only a few steps to the next room, and she was there in less than a minute.

'Did he say he would come?' Amy queried.

'He was so pleased he could scarcely wait.'

'I love little boys. Tell me, what would he like when he gets here? I think children are so fascinating—don't you? And Tom has such a mature mind! I can tell it from his notes to me, so remarkable in a child. I know what I'll do. I will buy him a little engine with a track—some of these toys you wind up and it runs itself. Or would it be better to get a miniature electric railway that goes by batteries? What would you advise?'

But Amy was talking to an empty room. The nurse had found a sudden visitor in the bath. She was gone. Meanwhile Tom was writing a note, this time to the biggest department store in the city. It ordered the finest doll in stock to be sent to his room at the hospital.

'I can see her black eyes snap when I give it to her,' thought Tom. 'I wonder if she has an older sister?'

Never was a morning prettier than the one when the nurse decreed that Tom could see his friend next door. Spring was in the air, even in the city. It had crept in from the soft new grass in open fields miles away, and the pink faces of the wild flowers in the distant woods smiled brightly enough to throw their little beams over the brick skyscrapers and into the big city hospital. Spring was in Tom's eyes and in his heart. He would have to make the trip in a rolling chair: although he was fully dressed, the nurse said he could walk only a little.

'Children like bright colors best, don't they, nurse?' Amy argued, uncertain whether she should put on a boudoir gown of pale yellow or one of soft red silk with gilt chrysanthemums. 'Anyway, I look better in red.'

Her dark hair caught back in a loose knot, her fine

complexion rendered even more brilliant by a trace of hospital pallor and backed by a bowl of superb flowers, she might have been the spirit of spring blown in by a vagrant breeze. Her face was turned a little away from the light, and so she could not catch a full view of the swinging door that screened her from the main hall. A small mechanical engine, on its track, had been placed on the table near the bed.

The door swung open with a thud as the rubber-tired wheels of the rolling chair pushed against it. Tom, holding out the blondest and waxiest doll in the children's department of the city's best department store, was in the chair.

'See, Amy, what your neighbor has brought you,' his voice boomed out.

Amy turned. The wheeled chair was directly in front of her. The nurse had fled. Amy and Tom looked in each other's eyes with growing wonder.

'I beg pardon,' he stammered, 'but I wanted Amy McClure. Has she gone?' Tom was still holding out the absurd doll. Amy's finger pointed toward the table and the train of toy cars.

'I am Amy McClure,' she got out. 'Are you Tom McAvoy?'

'Yes, but—'

'I expected a little boy,' she said in.

'I—I thought you were a little girl, and that was why I brought this.' Tom's glance fell shamedly on the wax doll.

'I don't know what you will ever think,' said the girl, 'but they told me you were a lonely little boy, and that is why I wrote you to come.'

Tom's glance brightened as he watched the girl. He began to smile an infectious smile which turned into a laugh and drew responsive laughter from the girl.

'But now that I'm here, can't I stay?'

He read the answer in her eyes.

Among Sister Abner's treasured keepsakes is a wedding announcement, and at the bottom of the card is a quaintly drawn device, or monogram, which looks for all the world like a wax doll playing with a toy train of cars. *Bonnie Doon*.

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