At Home

GLADYS LITTLE

I ALONE

Outside, the rain pounded steadily on the roof of the house; the flashes of lightning darted boldly across the sky; at intervals, the thunder roared as a lion caught in the hunter's trap. Inside, the flickering light of the fireplace cast huge and distorted shadows upon the walls; the radio poured forth words made meaningless by the ever-returning thunder; the clock on the mantle above the fireplace ticked nervously.

That morning mother had said, "Your father and I are going to Aunt Mary's tonight, and we shall be late getting home. Will you be frightened by yourself?" I had laughed and replied haughtily, "Certainly not, I'm no baby."

Numerous thoughts kept running through my mind, each tumbling over the other. Why am I frightened? I'm not frightened! They will be home soon. It's childish to be frightened of sounds. I'm alone in the house! I'm alone in the house. Of course, I'm alone in the house.

The telephone rang, and I jumped as if I had been struck. The relief that followed the incident left me weak, but I managed a determined "hello." The cheerful voice of Margaret, who was famous for her lengthy telephone conversations, chirped gaily, and I responded with the expected "Yes's" and "No's". Margaret always bored me, but tonight, the sound of the human voice — any human voice — soothed me. When she finally ended the conversation with, "Well, s'long," I did not feel the relief I had previously felt when the click of the telephone receiver ended her talking.

I hurried back to my place before the fire, and continued to shudder at each new sound, both imaginary and actual. When the familiar sounds of a car stopping and a key turning in the lock brought to me the realization that my parents were returning, my fears left me, and the room seemed suddenly to glow with cheerfulness. The shadows no longer seemed ghostly; the radio no longer played jerkily; the clock ticked ever so methodically.

II WHEN COMPANY COMES

Outside it stormed; inside it stormed. Outside the rain poured down steadily, the wind blew mightily, the thunder clashed repeatedly. Inside the fire smoldered sleepily, the radio played softly, but the family rushed about frantically, and the noise of their hurry equalled that of the storm.

Only a few hours ago, we were a happy and contented family, but the telephone rang, and shortly thereafter began this rush, which increased with every passing minute. The order to race to the grocery which closed at six, (it was five minutes till six) and purchase a list of groceries was given me. I ran hastily for the closet, and a sun umbrella, snatched at the money mother had placed on the table, and scurried out the front door.

I reached the store one minute and one half before six, strangely clad in my dad's old slicker, and one heeled galosh (I was wearing saddle shoes). Through my multi-colored sun-umbrella the rain spattered incessantly. Mr. Hadwick, us-
ually a pleasant gentleman, scowled deeply, but patiently made up my order. At intervals Mr. Hadwick would glance at me inquiringly, and he finally asked, "Are you going to a masquerade party, Miss?" I was breathing heavily because of my dash to the store, so I briefly explained that I had been in a hurry when I left the house. My answer seemed to relieve him, for he began to total the cost of my purchases.

"That will be five dollars and fifty cents and sixty points," he declared.

Have you ever had one foot completely dry and the other soaking wet? Have you ever felt water trickling down your neck, and your hair plastered to your head? Have you ever been under these trying conditions, and then had another human being calmly ask you for sixty points which you last saw glaring at you from the dining room table? Well I have.

I was very thankful when Mr. Hadwick, upon discovering my predicament, offered to wait while I returned home for the necessary points. I learned later that his kindness was due mostly to the various colors I turned when he made that simple statement. When I returned the second time, he was in a very bad humor, so I paid him quickly, and struggled home with my load.

At 7:45 the doorbell rang, and Mr. and Mrs. Jones and their son Billy greeted us. The evening went beautifully until Mrs. Jones suggested that Bill and I run up to the corner drugstore and get her a toothbrush which she had neglected to bring. She added that she knew young people did not mind a bit of rain. Outside the storm continued; inside me the storm raged.

III WITH THE FAMILY

Outside it was evident that the fat little rainmakers in heaven were working over-zealously. The rain fell with a thud on the roof, and splashed noisily to the ground. Thunder sounded each time one of the expert archers pierced a brimming full cloud. Inside the logs in the fireplace burned brightly, casting dancing shadows upon the wall. From the radio the voice of the Hermit, who was in the middle of a mystery filled with ghosts and murders, hoarsely warned any listener with a weak heart to turn off his radio immediately. We sat there, as near to the fire as possible, thankful for a warm fire and shelter from the storm.

My main object was to find something to do, so I began an almost endless barrage of "may I" pleadings upon mother. A few were rather vehemently vetoed, some were granted reluctantly, and others were encouraged. I chose to make candy. Mother cautioned me that we must do without hot chocolate for a few weeks should I make fudge, but, very innocently, I ignored the fact that all would suffer from my folly, and started using the precious sugar. Mother and Dad seemed content to sit before the fire relaxing, as they called it, but sitting quietly was beyond me, and so I banged pots and pans, and generally caused great disorder in the kitchen.

When at last I had finished my disastrous undertaking, disastrous as far as the kitchen was concerned, the family breathed more freely, and even complimented my skill, while munching on the fudge contentedly. All admitted that giving up their hot chocolate for a while would not be unbearable, and the evening ended happily.

Outside the rain still fell; the wind still blew; the thunder still crashed. Inside the fire still blazed; the radio still played; the home was peaceful.