

# VICTORY

BY HARRIET LUMMIS SMITH

**T**HE doctor smiled a little when she told him her name. And forthwith the innumerable freckles of the country girl were swallowed up in a flaming, angry blush.

"I reckoned you'd laugh," she said. "People do, when they hear it first." She added in the tone of one who explains without excusing, "I didn't name myself."

"It is not a bad name, as names go," replied the doctor, diplomatically. "But it is rather—well, rather heroic, for every-day use. It might startle a nervous patient." His humorous gaze challenged her till a sudden smile scattered her look of resentment. She perceived that the doctor was not laughing at her, but inviting her to laugh with him, a very different thing.

"Maybe 'twould," agreed Victory Gibbs. "Nervousness and foolishness are pretty much alike, to my way of thinking." She added doggedly, "What I want is a chance. And so that I get that, I don't care what you call me."

"Jane is a good name for common," observed

reckon. You can see I'm honest by looking at me. And of course the best way to find out what I can do is to set me to work."

The doctor was pleased by the answer. It was then that he made inquiries as to the applicant's name, with the result already chronicled. When Victory professed her willingness to become Jane, the doctor's mood was congratulatory, much to his wife's amazement.

"She's so big and clumsy," she said. "And her grammar is so bad. And she dresses preposterously."

"She'll learn," said the doctor, easily.

But even his optimism fell short of the reality. Victory Gibbs did learn. It was what she was there for. Every sense was alert. She watched the doctor's patients, and learned to come into a room without shuffling or stumbling. She listened to the doctor's wife, and her voice grew lower, and some of her uncouth idioms began to disappear. She read greedily in her leisure moments, and picked up a surprisingly varied amount of information. And while her education

was progressing, she neglected none of the duties of her position. The doctor exulted over his wife. Mrs. Haswell acknowledged that she had been mistaken.

"It's a comfort to have her in the house when you're late. She's so strong and fearless that one can't help having an absurd confidence in her. One feels that Jane would be equal to whatever happened."

After a year both the doctor and his wife looked on Victory as a fixture in the establishment. Her dress and manners had improved surprisingly and her freckles had diminished in proportion. She still studied with avidity, and the doctor had fallen into the way of selecting books from his library for her, and giving her an occasional bit of help in her struggles with elementary algebra. Sometimes he had an uncomfortable feeling that the girl's unusual abilities demanded something more on his part.

It was a complicated and fascinating problem that made Victory forgetful of the flight of time one stormy night in midwinter. The doctor had left home in the afternoon in the midst of a beating rain. Later he had telephoned that he should not be back for dinner. At eight o'clock the word came that he might be detained all night. By this time the rain had changed to a driving sleet, and as the trolley-cars made their belated way through the streets, the overhead wires blazed with a green light that illumined the sky like lightning flashes.

No patients came. Victory Gibbs bent happily over her work. She had the same pride in mastering an elusive problem that a fisherman feels in landing an especially wary trout. It was not till she had finished and given herself up to self-congratulation, that it occurred to her to look at the clock, and then she started guiltily.

"Quarter after one! Well, of all things!" She reflected that it was fortunate the doctor had not come home and found her thus defying the rules of hygiene, which he had laid down for her guidance.

"But I'm glad I got it, even if it did take time," thought Victory, smiling, and putting away her book. And at that moment the telephone-bell rang.

"Is that you, Jane?" It was the doctor's voice, with a note in it new to her ears. "I was afraid I couldn't get you, so many of the wires are down. I want you to wake John at once, and tell him to bring me some more ether as soon as it is possible to get it here. Tell him that he will have to take out one of the horses, for the street-cars haven't been running since ten o'clock."

Victory wrote down the address, and hurried to rouse John. At the sound of her vigorous rapping, the cook came to the head of the stairs. "Ain't no use, honey. John he ain't come home. Looks like he ain't comin'. Don't see why the doctor puts up with that triflin', no-account—" Victory did not wait to hear the rest. The feud between Sally and John was an old story, and Victory had other things to think about.

The doctor's wife was awakened by the

apparition of a tall figure beside her bed. It was Victory in coat and mittens. She explained in a half-dozen sentences, and Mrs. Haswell listened aghast as the wind drove the sleet against the window.

"But, Jane, how are you going to harness?" Victory laughed. "I was raised on a farm."

"But you can't drive yourself. You don't know the city."

"I've been studying the map in the doctor's office. I can find the place all right." Victory did not wait for further objections. But the doctor's wife lay listening to the storm, and she could not sleep.

Victory Gibbs did not consider herself a candidate for sympathy. In battling with the storm she felt the same exultant thrill that she experienced in mastering the complicated algebra problem. The wind stung her cheeks and hurled sleet and snow into her eyes, till she was forced to shield her face with her left arm. Old Charlie had his own opinion about being taken from his comfortable stable on such a night. He stopped protestingly time and again, and looked over his shoulder at his driver, as if in hopes that she might relent. "Pretty hard, isn't it, old fellow?" Victory agreed. "But we've got to get the doctor what he wants."

They plowed their way painfully through slush, through rows of dark and silent dwellings. And suddenly, with a crack like the report of a pistol, one of the weighted wires overhead broke and fell. Old Charlie shuddered and dropped to the street, limp and lifeless, and in the first panic of terror she had ever known, Victory leaped into the snow and fled to the sidewalk. Her knees trembled under her as she realized that if the drooping wire had swung backward instead of forward, she, not Charlie, would be lying dead. But even in that dreadful moment, when her self-possession vanished, one thought remained stronger than the impulse of self-preservation. The precious ether was safe, hugged to Victory's heart.

A policeman came hurrying toward her, an exasperated policeman, hardly to be distinguished from an animated snow man. "What are you doing out in this storm, girl? Have you gone crazy? Get home as fast as you can."

"I work for a doctor," Victory explained, "and I am taking him some ether. He's got to have it for a patient."

"I guess he'll have you for a patient by the time you get there," said the policeman, but with softened tones. He looked at old Charlie lying in the snow, and added, "That is, if you get there at all. It's a dangerous night. I hope you've got the sense to see that."

"Yes, I see that," Victory's teeth were chattering, although not with cold, but her determination did not waver. The policeman drew a long breath.

"The doctor's the owner of this rig, I s'pose. What's his address?" Victory waited till he had written it down, and hurried on.

In the years she had been in Doctor Haswell's employ Victory had made a conscientious effort to familiarize herself with her new home, so unlike the one she had left. But to-night she seemed not only in a strange city, but in a strange world. The unlighted houses, sheltering peaceful sleepers, gave her a sense of loneliness she would hardly have felt on the open prairie. There was something terrible in the thought of the nearness of humanity and the remoteness of help. As the wind buffeted her and whipped the stinging sleet into her face, her fascinated eyes sought the drooping wires, bending under their load. Sharp sounds reached her ears occasionally which chilled her as the storm had not the power to chill her, and again she saw old Charlie's shuddering fall, and her lagging steps quickened.

At the crossings she stepped again and again knee-deep into slush. Her wet garments clung about her, impeding her progress. Her limbs were numb with the cold. The package she was carrying seemed strangely heavy. She realized now with a faint return of her first triumph that she was no longer afraid. A curious listlessness had taken the place of her wide-eyed dread. The sight of the swaying wires stirred in her nothing more than faint curiosity as to how far they could droop and not break.

The sight of a house number, made distinct by a light that burned behind the glass, helped to drive away the curious oppression of her mind. "Twenty-seven hundred and thirteen," she said. She went on in a sort of chant, "Twenty-seven hundred and fifteen. Twenty-seven hundred and seventeen. You haven't got so far to go, Victory Gibbs. Don't you go to playing baby, and giving up before you're done. Twenty-seven hundred and twenty-seven."

In those last hard blocks she varied her tactics. Sometimes she used furious denunciation. "That's right, you lazy, heartless redhead! Sit down and rest, because you're tired, and here's this ether, and the doctor's waiting and wondering! It's the only chance you ever had to do something for him, and the last you'll get, like enough! It would serve you right if he turned you out-of-doors in the morning!"

When her poor, stumbling, exhausted self no longer responded to these taunts, Victory tried coaxing. "It's just a little way, honey. Think how the doctor'll stare when he sees you. It'll please him, honey, to think you've tramped



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the doctor, tentatively. It occurred to him that the colorless monosyllable was hardly appropriate to this big, awkward young creature, with her flame-colored hair and eager eyes. But Jane was a good name for a doctor's office, easily spoken, easily remembered, decorous, unobtrusive.

"Jane," repeated Victory Gibbs. "Well, I guess I can remember. If I don't always answer the first time, you'll know that it's because I ain't quite used to it yet."

As a matter of fact, Victory grew accustomed to her new appellation with surprising promptness; nor was this the only instance in which she displayed an aptitude for quick adaptation to novel experiences. She had come from a country farmhouse where one of the doctor's patients had spent the preceding summer, and had presented herself one morning at the doctor's door, so doggedly in earnest that she betrayed no embarrassment in stating her errand.

"I want to learn something," she explained, "and I want to do something. And that Mrs. Winslow who stayed at our place last summer said that doctors sometimes had girls to answer the bell and keep the office tidy, and that they had time enough in between for studying. There was a piece of an envelope on the table one morning," continued Victory, "that had your name printed in the corner. She put it to wamp up some pills. And when she used it into the waste-basket, I took it out and saved it."

"H'm!" said the doctor, and stroked his beard. There seemed a peculiar opportuneness in Victory's presenting herself that morning, since only the day before the doctor's office-girl had taken her departure. She was an elaborately dressed young person, whose social obligations, necessitating long conversations over the telephone with various "gentlemen friends," had rendered the routine of her daily duties extremely irksome.

"At least," thought the doctor, "there will be no trouble of that kind." He continued to stroke his beard and study Victory's face. "I suppose you have provided yourself with recommendations."

"What are they?"

"Why, letters from trustworthy people, giving assurances of your honesty, and telling what you can do."

Victory Gibbs stared. "You're joking, I

through all this snow, so's not to disappoint him."

A brightly lighted house, awake and alert in the dead of night, flashed upon Victory's vision. "It's got to be the one!" gasped Victory. She had long since lost count. "It's got to be the one, for I can't get a step farther!" She tottered up the walk and with numbed fingers groped for the bell. When the door was flung wide, she thrust out her arms blindly.

"Take it quick! I'm going to fall!" Then she drew a breath of deep satisfaction and dropped like a stone.

"Child! What does this mean?" It was

the doctor's voice beside her, and Victory roused herself, vaguely but blissfully conscious of light and warmth and shelter from the beating storm. Her tone as she replied was apologetic:

"Doctor, I'm not fainting. I wouldn't be that silly. But I'm so tired, I'm going to lie still before I go home—if you don't mind."

Doctor Haswell's patients were subsequently surprised to notice that he addressed as "Victory" the red-haired office girl whose name they had thought to be Jane. When some of them remarked that it was a queer name, the doctor replied tersely that it was a very good

name for this particular girl. To those in the number who were his friends, he added that he was afraid he would have to make up his mind to do without her, for Victory was going to school.

"She is certainly an unusual girl," said the doctor, with emphasis. "We shall hear from her yet."

It is perhaps too early to estimate the correctness of the doctor's prophecy. But in the list of graduates from a training-school for nurses, connected with a famous New York hospital, there occurred recently the rather unusual name of Victory Gibbs.

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