

Farrand's Last Role

By Elizabeth Jordan

"And—wait a moment, my dear—these are just the things!"

Seemingly the one thing more was in the untidy and overcrowded top desk drawer of the chairman of the Lest We Forget committee, for that lady was now urgently disemboweling the drawer in an obvious search for something. Mrs. Huntington, even her nearest friends conceded, "had no system" but they hastened to add that "her way with our poor boys was simply wonderful."

She now brought forth and casually dumped on the polished top of the desk an apple, three note books, a large shopping bag, two surplus paper weights, a calendar, an engagement pad, a brush broom, a small box of pens, a mass of unanswered letters held together by a brass clasp, a carton of peppermint filled chocolates, a check book, an ivory paper cutter, and a leather bound almanac dated two years back. Among this collection she excitedly fumbled, at first with pathetic hope, then with rising disappointment.

"Now, isn't that odd?" she asked the girl who, having risen to go, had paused at her words and was patiently waiting beside her. "I was positive my address book was in that drawer, yet I've taken everything out and it isn't there."

The girl made a suggestion.

"Possibly it was crowded back by the other things. May I try?"

She thrust a hand and arm into the far recesses of the drawer and removed them covered with dust; but both women disregarded this slight detail. Miss Belden had also drawn forth a small, red covered book which the chairman promptly grasped with the crow of an exultant baby.

"I knew it was there!" she boasted. "I always know exactly where my things are, though of course I can't invariably put my fingers on them the instant I want them. Goodby, dear. You're a heaven sent comfort to me. Most of the other girls seem to have lost all interest in our poor boys, now that the war is so far behind us. But I feel I have an army with banners when I think of you. The way you given your time and your vitality, not to speak of your money, is simply marvelous."

Florence Belden, who had busied herself at a stationary wash stand in the corner of her leader's office, turned and smiled affectionately, but rather guiltily, as she demurely dried her hands on the office towel. She was more touched by the older woman's tribute than she cared to show, but she felt she did not deserve it. She had done something, of course, but so much more she could have done had been forgotten or postponed. Even as Mrs. Huntington talked Florence had been planning to take advantage of that lady's absent mindedness, and escaped before the chairman remembered what she had meant to ask her to do. The other's praise killed that impulse. Probably, Florence gloomily reflected, it had also killed all her own afternoon plan.

"There was something else you had in mind for me," she recalled to her leader, "something that made you look up the address book. What was it?"

"Oh, of course!" Mrs. Huntington, who had dropped the book among the other evidences of a busy life, retrieved it again with some difficulty and hastily turned its pages.

"Let me see," she mused aloud as she did so. "I've forgotten his name, but I think it begins with F. Possibly I will recognize it if I see it. M-m-m. Fagan, Forest, French Feeney"—her lips moved almost noiselessly as she recited the long litany of names. Florence watched her with full understanding. She knew now the special service required of her. It was without doubt to take some discouraged, maimed young soldier under her special wing, to write to him, to visit him in the hospital, to arrange for outings and other entertainments if he proved physically up to them. She had done a great deal of such work and enjoyed it. Sometimes the boys were very interesting. She hoped this one, whose name began with F, would be likeable and responsive. Occasionally the poor youngsters who had suffered so much had passed the point where the attention of even a beauty and a belle, such as Florence Belden, appealed to them—but usually she won them over in the end.

Ah, here it is! Farrand—David Farrand. Twenty-seven. M-m-m. Mrs. Huntington flashed an eye down the Farrand record, to refresh her memory, then gave the result to her companion in a brisk summary.

"He has been in hospitals ever since the armistice, and I wouldn't dare to tell you how many opera-

tions he has had. Now, at last, he is getting better. In fact he is almost well, but he can't be made to realize it. He is still a little 'hipped.' I am sure you could help to brace him up. The point is—let me see—what was it that made me pick him out for you? Oh, yes. He is from your home town, but everybody seems to have forgotten him. He hasn't had a letter or a visitor for months."

Miss Belden's delicate eyebrows rose. Her "home town" was the great eastern city upon which she now looked out through the windows of Mrs. Huntington's office. She had almost forgotten the small western city of Weyo, where she had been born, where her father had made his millions, and from which he had moved to New York ten years ago, bringing his motherless daughter with him. Since then, though Florence had ignored Weyo, Henry Belden had seen to it that Weyo should not forget the Beldens. He had given it the Belden library in memory of his wife; the Belden hospital in memory of his father and mother; Belden park, in memory of himself. Once a year he drifted back for a few days of duck shooting in the region and a chat with his old friends.

be hermits, and—last, yet most important of all—they had a garden whose beauty was celebrated by the few who saw it. That garden had slept behind high brick walls, and to the childish imaginations of Weyo it took on infinite romance and mystery from the fact.

As a child Florence had dreamed of it by the hour—of what it held and of the old man and the boy who alone seemed privileged to enter it. The boy had become to her a sort of enchanted prince, held prisoner in the mysterious garden by a magic spell. Yes, indeed, she remembered young Farrand. He had been Weyo's most stimulating contribution to her youthful imagination. She remembered that while she was still at school her father had told her Professor Farrand was dead, that his grandson had gone to France and that she had been, even after the long interval, a little thrilled by this news of him.

She did not realize how long she had been silent and unhearing, but she caught the tail end of what evidently was the peroration of Mrs. Huntington's address.

"They say he is very unapproachable—wants to be left entirely alone. Of course, that isn't good for him. And as soon as I heard that he

The firm young jaw of Florence Belden set a little as she read the brief document. It seemed clear that Farrand was still as remote as in the past. Ten days had been wasted in the preliminary skirmishes. It seemed high time for more direct measures, if he really needed help in returning to the living world. The June afternoon was surprisingly hot, but she ordered her motor car and drove forth to make her first call on the recalcitrant young warrior. Her fighting blood was up. Whether Farrand knew it or not, he needed her—he needed her friendship and her help. She would have been less than intelligent if she had failed to realize how greatly, since the armistice, hundreds of other broken and heart-sick boys had benefited by both. The handicap principle must be released from his new prison. Surely she could help that good and necessary work along.

At the hospital she received the smiling welcome which always met her there, on every side. Her boys, she was told, were desperately homesick for her. They had not seen her for almost a fortnight—quite long enough, one of them pointed out, to undo all the good of her previous visits. Miss Bel-

"He really ought to be stirred up a bit," Miss Greeley suddenly conceded. "Dr. Brown was saying so only the other day, and talking about the need of a new influence to hasten his convalescence. Yet if I go and ask him to see you, I am sure he won't do it—and you are the one person who could help him, if any one could," she handsomely ended.

Florence dropped her pose of the beguiling child and became briskly businesslike, addressing the other from the secure pedestal of past success.

"Suppose you take me straight to him and leave me there?" she calmly submitted. "He can't do more than order me out, and I don't imagine he will do that. I won't stay more than a few moments this first time—just long enough to break the ice so I can come again. Where is he?"

While the head nurse pondered the suggestion, her mental processes being slow when directed outside of their usual orbit, Florence cheerfully drew her forward in what she hoped was the line of the young man's retreat.

"I suppose you have wheeled him outside somewhere?" she asked.

"Yes. We keep them all out as much as we can, of course, though it's really cooler inside in this unseasonable heat. Who would think it was only the first week in June? But he has a pet spot among some trees—I think we'll find him there—"

She had yielded and was briskly leading the way. The visitor followed her along the veranda and across a lawn toward a heavy clump of trees and shrubbery some distance away.

"There's a little open spot among those evergreens," Miss Greeley explained. "It is about the size of a small room, shaded on three sides, and in front there's a lovely view of the water. That's where Farrand sits most of the time. He has helped himself to the place and it has become an understood thing that others shall keep away. Sometimes we stretch out his chair and he lies there asleep for hours. Sometimes he sits up and looks out over the water. When we remember him we go and wheel him in. Once we forget him till supper time, he's a queer sort. He wouldn't call out or make any sign if we left him there all night. There won't be an extra chair, so we will take this camp stool for you."

Florence picked up the stool, whose position proved that some American fighter had languidly kicked it over as he left it, and carried it to the clump of trees. On the edge of these the head nurse halted and peered between the low-hanging branches.

"He's there," she whispered, "and he is sitting up in his chair. Go in quietly so you won't startle him."

Florence endeavored to go in quietly. Her foot broke a twig and the camp chair struck a branch and evoked a protesting hiss, but the silent figure in the wheel chair did not turn its head. Struck by a sudden suspicion, she passed the chair stealthily and then turned for a straight look at its occupant. It was as she had thought. Though the young man was sitting up he was sound asleep, his head relaxed against a cushion, one limp arm and hand hanging at his side, the other hand still clutching the end of a linen rug that had slipped from his knees.

Very quietly the visitor placed her stool several feet to the left and a little in front of the wheel chair. Then, sitting down, she deliberately studied the sleeping man. It was not quite fair to him, perhaps, but the impulse that prompted her was friendly, and already her interest in him was strong. Her first impression was that he was very tall, very pale and thin, yet good to look at. His hair was almost black. She remembered that. So were the long eyelashes that rested on his cheeks. She took in the general immaculateness of his appearance. He had the look of one freshly shaven, freshly tubbed, and freshly dressed. The sleeves and trousers of his uniform were neatly creased. The hospital shirt he wore, with its open, rolled back collar, was spotless. Aside from this and the soft slippers on his feet, he was ready for the critical inspection he was unconsciously undergoing. His hands were large, well shaped, colorless and painfully thin, with admirably cared for nails.

She nodded slowly and with approval. She had befriended many boys whose ears and necks and finger nails had once made her shudder. She had long since passed that stage of amateurishness. A suffering soldier, however unlovely his appearance, his manners, or even his nature. But she was subconsciously glad to find that this boy of her childish dreams still



"I have not lied to you," she heard him resume. "I never claimed to be Prof. Farrand's grandson"

Florence had never gone back—not that her memories of Weyo were unpleasant, but because the recent full and wonderful year in New York were sponging off the pale impression of her childish days. She had been a tremendous success in the east. She had developed in a way that made Henry Belden's eyes shine when he thought of it. She was as democratic as he was. She had hosts of friends in every circle of life. Incidentally, she ruled her father absolutely, and wholly without his knowledge.

She was not thinking of all this now. Her mind was busy with the name of Farrand. It rang in her memory like a distant but full-toned bell, vibrating pleasantly in the avenue of the years. Yes, indeed, she remembered a Farrand—two Farrands. The first had been a slight, stoop-shouldered, rather sweet-faced old man, a retired professor of chemistry, living on a peninsula in a small but charming house on the outskirts of Weyo. There had been a garden—it was rather strange how vividly all these details were returning to her; and the second Farrand was a grandson of the first. The boy had been away at school most of the year, but home in the summers with his grandfather. He had been all of 16 or 17, dark and large for his age.

To Florence, whose 15th birthday was yet to come, he seemed a young man, barely less remote than the heavenly bodies to which her teachers were urgently beginning to direct her attention. She had heard much of him; had been fascinated by passing glimpses of him; had even dreamed of him; but she had never met him.

In the summer time, when he was home, she was often absent, visiting schoolmates or traveling with her father. And at all times the Farrands kept to themselves. Heavens, how all the details were filling in! The old professor had lived alone save for a man servant; there had seemed no one belonging to him except his grandson; both appeared to

come from Weyo, your old home, I was sure you would take an interest in his case."

Florence banished her crowding memories.

"I will," she promised. "Dad will, too, I am sure. Perhaps, in the conditions, it would be well to make haste rather slowly. I will write him this afternoon and send him a basket in a few days. Then I'll motor out to the hospital in a week or two, after he has grown reconciled to seeing me."

"Floy, dear, you're such a comfort!"

Mrs. Huntington exhaled a breath of relief that almost blew from her desk the entire impressive collection upon it. Florence rescued the lighter articles, restored them to their owner, and left the office, her thoughts still busy with her new protegee. Strange that the breath of her one childish romance—for it really amounted to that—should come back into their life after a whole decade. The reflection intrigued her.

That afternoon she wrote David Farrand a charming note, incidentally mentioning that they had once been fellow citizens of Weyo. Almost immediately it became clear that the fact did not interest him. He ignored the charming note. She had been prepared for this, and after a few days she wrote again, sending him a large package of new books and magazines.

The gift brought a formal six-line response from one of the nurses. Mr. Farrand, it appeared, wished to thank Miss Belden for her interest. He was not able to read much at present, but later he hoped to be. Miss Belden sent another letter, with a basket of hothouse fruit, a box of cigars and the inevitable cigarettes. To this responsive offering the same nurse responded with a seven-line note of acknowledgement. Mr. Farrand, she explained, appreciated the pleasure the gifts had given his fellows patient at the hospital.

den looked up her special proteges, finding them singly in groups, some still in their beds, trussed up in elaborate apparatus, others stretched out in invalid chairs in reading rooms or on the long verandas circling the hospital, a few hobbling about the grounds. When she had chatted with and scattered her gifts among them she scattered out her now stanch friend, the head nurse, and expressed her wish to meet young Farrand. The austere Miss Greeley, who had recently humanized under the charm of the girl's face and manner and the real value of her work, reverted to her former aloof personality with a suddenness that amazed the caller.

"Farrand does not receive visitors," she briefly announced.

Florence gazed at her askance. Whatever the degree of her liking for outsiders, it was the patient who counted with Miss Greeley. If Farrand desired to escape visitors, here, clearly, was one who would protect him from them.

"I know—but don't you think you could persuade him to see me?" Miss Belden's voice held the cajoling notes of a child begging sweets from its nurse. "Mrs. Huntington thought you might. And you know," she reminded the other woman, "I've had some luck with boys who thought they didn't want to meet strangers. Besides, when it comes to that, Mr. Farrand and I are not really strangers. We are from the same western city, and I have known about him since I was a little girl."

"You have?" Miss Greeley was human again. "You are the only one who does know, then," she volunteered. "He is our mystery man. He never talks about himself or his home or his past experiences. All we know about him is his army record, which is fine (he has half a dozen decorations), and what is on his hospital charts." She stopped, obviously for a moment's reflection, while the head of the boys waited respectfully for the result of her meditations.