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The Little Green Auto

It Brought Great Joy into the Lives of Two People

By ALICE E. ALLEN

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Why I first watched for that particular automobile I don't know—perhaps because it was dark green instead of red; perhaps because there was room in it for only two people.

Perhaps, though, the real reason why I watched the little green automobile was because of the man who drove it.

The hour after the green automobile passed our porch was the best one I had all day, because, you see, I was well and strong, like other people, and I rode away in the green automobile. Always I wore a pretty long coat—warm days it was soft and silky, and cold days it was soft and fury—and the prettiest hat and a pale blue veil with long ends, just like the other ladies in their autos. Really, though, after I once flew away round the corner and along the smooth, broad road beyond I never once thought again of what I wore, for there was the country. Sometimes the road wound between beautiful wind blown meadows of daisies and tall grasses; sometimes it lost itself in jungles of sweet, moist woods; sometimes it ran down hills and across bridges only to climb other hills with other sunny spaces, other patches of woodland and other hills beyond.

Of course I was too old to play such things. But if one hasn't walked a step in five years and never can walk again one has to imagine things sometimes.

Then came the day when Billy, the little boy next door, fell asleep in the middle of the road. I called and called, but I couldn't wake him, nor make his mother in the next house hear, nor any mother, nor any one. And then, just as I knew it would, the green automobile came flashing round the corner from the city.

I leaned out as far as I could. I waved my blue shawl. The man in the automobile must have been looking my way that time, for almost at once he stopped. I pointed to Billy. He jumped out of the car, picked Billy up just as carefully and laid him on the grass under the maple tree. Then he lifted his cap to me, and away he went in the little green auto.

Well, the very next day the green automobile ran so slowly past our house I almost thought it was going to stop. Billy was playing under the tree. The man in the auto called to him and handed him a large square package. Then he lifted his cap to me again, and away he went round the corner out into the country.

Billy came running to me.

"Mister said," said Billy, handing me the package, "he 'pects this for you."

"To me?"

"Yes, for the little gell on the porch, mister said. An' he guv me a dime."

I opened the package. There were two beautiful books bound in blue and full of colored pictures.

Three days later Billy brought me another package. In it was the loveliest doll, all in soft blue, with fragrant hair, blue eyes and golden brown curls.

"You must give it back," said mother. Her voice was so stern I scarcely knew it was mother's. Then I cried. It was bad enough to have no way of thanking the man in the automobile. I couldn't bear to hurt his feelings by giving back the doll. And by and by mother said, "Well, well, Kathie, never mind this time!"

Then one day, long before the usual time, when I was sitting in the sun, I heard an auto coming. Suppose I have it was the auto. I tried to move, but I couldn't. And Billy had gone home. The next thing I knew the man in the auto had stopped in front of our house.

"Hello, little bluebird!" he cried. "Fly down here and have a ride with me."

I shook my head.

"You're not a bluebird? Well, never mind. Run down, then, and take a nice ride with me. I like little girls."

"But I'm not a little girl at all," I cried. "I'm eighteen years old, and I'm older than mother."

The man in the automobile laughed. "Jump up and show me," he said.

"It's true," I said, "but I don't blame you 'cause I'm here."

What do you suppose happened? The man jumped straight out of his auto. He came up our narrow little walk. The next minute he was on our porch. He was over in Aunt Lilly's and Grandpa and talkin' like Pa thought. He almost shook the paper back of the vines. He looked down at me, very little and lame and ashamed there in my wheel chair.

Off came his cap.

"I'm so sorry," he said. For a minute he didn't say anything else, just stood looking down at me. Then he went on: "You just must forgive me somehow. I was rude, impertinent, stupid, everything I ought not to have been."

"You thought I was a little girl?" I said.

"I wasn't so far wrong though, was I? You're a growing little girl, aren't you, but grown up, too, in your wish to help people. Please, I want to be friends with you, Miss Lester. Have you?"

But before I could say another word mother came. She saw the man, the auto, my red face. Her eyes fairly blazed. What could I do?

The man smiled down at me. Then I knew that I hadn't anything to do about it. How he managed it I don't know, but in five minutes he had explained everything, and he sat on the steps, with mother near by in the little rocker. And they were talking together like old friends.

Next day it was past 4 o'clock and the little auto hadn't come. I was beginning to feel so disappointed. Then I saw a big red car with a top and room in it for four or five people come proudly around the corner from the city. On the back seat was a lady with a lovely gray veil. She looked my way and smiled.

The auto stopped in front of our house. Up the walk came the lady.

"You are Miss Kathleen Lester?" she said. She took both my hands. "I am Wright Eagleby's sister."

Then I remembered that Wright Eagleby was the man in the little green auto. And there he was in the big red auto lifting his cap and smiling in just the friendliest way.

"Put on some wraps, please, Kathleen," said Wright Eagleby's sister. "You and mother, too, are going to ride with us."

When I was ready Mr. Wright Eagleby picked me up in his arms and carried me down the walk and set me in the big red auto. And the next minute he and his sister and mother and I were all flying away around the curve.

After that there were many rides—the four of us, and sometimes Billy scrubbed till he shone. But one day, instead of the big red car, up to our house came the little green one. Somehow it looked like an old friend.

Mother kissed me. Then Mr. Wright Eagleby carried me out and put me in the car.

On and on we went till we came to streets that were crowded full of big motorcars and little ones, trolley cars and trucks and cabs and all sorts of vehicles. In one place there was such a jam we had to stop and wait.

In the midst of all the noise and hurry the man in the automobile put one big hand over both mine.

"You will walk again and be well some day," he said, "but just as you are now, little girl, I want to tell you something. I love you. Will you remember?"

All through those long weeks in the hospital when I was too sick and tired and discouraged and homesick to remember anything else, I thought of those words. When at last I was a little better Mr. Wright Eagleby came to see me often, with flowers and fruits.

"No more dolls," he laughed. "You are quite grown up now, Kathleen Mavourneen."

Sometimes his sister came and sometimes mother. And I had a lovely white capped nurse who took splendid care of me. And every other day almost the green car spent an hour or so with me. By and by it took me home. I could go home.

He told me something else too. But I begged him so hard not to tell any one else that he promised not to. And the name promised me.

The man in the auto and his sister took me home. He carried me up the walk and set me down in my old chair back of the vines.

Mother cried over me a little. Then she and Wright Eagleby's sister went into the house.

Mr. Wright Eagleby came close to me. He towered up over me, strong and big and handsome.

"Remember, little girl," he said.

I nodded. I could scarcely bear the pretty look in his eyes.

"Just as you are, I told you then, dear, and just as you are I want you. Tomorrow you and mother and Auntie and I will take a ride in the red auto. Do you remember a little church which stands all by itself in some evergreen trees across a bridge beyond a little village?"

Again I nodded.

"The clergyman is a friend of mine. I've told him about you, and he will be ready. Will you?"

"Not tomorrow," I said—"the day after if you wish."

He yielded. Then he and his sister went away.

Next day I sat behind the vines and waited. I wore my blue linen gown, the pretty silky coat Wright Eagleby's sister had given me on my birthday and a big, floppy hat, with a blue veil.

By and by I saw the little green auto coming. Then I did just what the dear surgeon and the nurse told me to do over and over again. I stood up on my two feet. I waved mother away. I crept across the path back of the vines. When the auto stopped in front of the house I stood quite still on the right of the path.

I threw a kiss to the red car. Then I did what the surgeon had told me I could—I walked straight down the walk toward the little green auto. Halfway the man met me.

"Oh!" I cried. "Don't wish me, please."

I walked, almost running, to Billy's house and back. I would have been walking yet with the joy of it had not the man caught me up and set me down in the auto.

"Why didn't you tell me, little girl?" he cried.

"Oh, Wright," I cried, "I was so afraid! It seemed too good to be true. I couldn't believe it would last. And if it hadn't I couldn't have borne it—for your sake, dear, for your sake!"

I'm quite certain the little green auto had a mind of its own. Nothing of me but a thought to go to mother's house. Then up it went, and down, and round, and round, and round