Friend of Errand Boys

By JANE OSBORN

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When Alison Preston decided to [illegible] a job for the duration of the war [illegible] the daily paper [illegible] student jobs for girls [illegible] picture. The best girls for [illegible] that advertisement of Brown & Brown calling for messenger girls. The salary offered was not very tempting but the advertisement stated the work would be for the most part done in errands in the busy downtown business section.

Brown & Brown is a very large concern with branches in cities in various parts of the country and when you join their force of employees it is like enlisting in an army—you have to submit to considerable catechising concerning your previous experience, your parentage and your place of residence and all this is written down on a formidable large white card that is kept in a filing case for future reference.

"There is just one thing I'll have to ask you," said the young office manager who employed Alison Preston "and I will ask you to keep this confidential. I don't want every one to know that we are taking on girls for errands—one person in particular mustn't know. That is our vice president, Mr. Morgan Thorne. He's in the Chicago office now and—well, to make a long story short he began as a messenger himself and he's nuts about them. He makes a hobby of giving every messenger that is employed what he calls a chance."

"That means a lot of futilely advice, which would be all right if the boys had sense enough to profit by it. He has made up his mind that the future executives of the concern must be drawn as he was from the ranks of those who began at the bottom rung. So whenever we get a new messenger he takes no end of interest in him. He it was who installed this card system—wants to know all about the life history of every one that is taken into the concern. And now that he is off in Chicago he has left word to send on records of any new messengers. He wants to give them long-distance advice. So here is what I'm going to ask you," said the young clerk, coming back to his point after his long explanation. "You'll just let me put your name down here so that he won't know you're a girl. Alison, you said it is. May I put it down as Alec?"

"Why, certainly," faltered Alison. "Only, won't he find out?"

"He won't be back for months, and you say you can't stay later than the middle of September. You'll escape him completely. You see, we did our best to get boys, but we couldn't get any. He'll say we hadn't tried hard enough. And, by the way, don't say anything in that report about being in college. It might interest him too much and then he'd write to you and the cat would be out of the bag."

So Alison reported the next day for work and, provided with her pigskin wallet that swung easily over her left shoulder and rested on her right hip, she started out on the rounds of the day, carrying stocks and bonds about to various offices, reporting at the bank and back to the office of Brown & Brown. If she attracted any attention it was because she was so much better dressed for her work than the other girls who were beginning to take the places of messengers and errand boys in the downtown section. She wore neatly polished shoes that had served for country hikes the previous winter in college. Her suit was plain and of khaki—such as had been chosen by well-to-do college chums of hers who had "gone in" for motor messenger service in the vacation.

The coat collar was neatly topped by a man's soft pique collar and a dark blue four-in-hand tie and a banded sailor of brown completed the equipment.

Yes, of course, she grew tired with her many errands, but the fatigue was repaired by her healthy appetite and by the soundness of the sleep that always followed her days in the open.

The first letter to Alec Preston was practically like the letter almost always received by errand boys from the vice president, Morgan Thorne, when that young officer of the concern was not present to interview them personally. Mr. Thorne assured Alec of his interest and his hope that he was regarding his new position a stepping stone to higher things in the employ of the concern of Brown & Brown. He asked him some questions that he wanted him to answer frankly in a letter that Mr. Thorne assured him would be confidential.

"Did he smoke cigarettes? If so, did he smoke in business hours?

"Did he indulge in games of chance with other errand boys?

"What did he eat for luncheon? Did he go to night school? How did he spend his evenings? What time did he go to bed?"

There were many more questions in the same vein, and Alison answered them promptly assuring the kindly vice president that she smoked not at all and abstained from games of chance. She ate egg salad and milk for luncheon, went to bed early and spent her evenings at home. She did not add that those evenings were sometimes spent with her tired little [illegible] resting on the soft upholstery of a John Cheney in her own little bed [illegible] Polish authors that she [illegible]

The letter expressed approval [illegible] reading knowledge of that language. He hoped he had been kind to a boy he had not noticed a foreign language. It was [illegible] country, when his time for such [illegible] was limited that he had taken up Spanish. It was the great language of the future, etc., etc.

Alison really ought to have been more cautious, but the very evening after receiving the letter she wrote back a long and fluent letter in best Spanish explaining to Mr. Thorne that though she did not go to night school she had mastered Spanish the previous winter and spent much time reading it. She declined the prize however as she had studied it with our knowledge that such a prize existed.

Then came the letter that caused consternation. Mr. Thorne wrote offering Alec a position in the Chicago office as second correspondent in the Spanish department. They were getting lots of orders from South America, he explained and he really needed him. His wage would be more than doubled and his traveling expenses to Chicago would be paid.

Alison was at first confused and repentant. She felt that she ought not to have consented to the office manager's deception. But then she took a different attitude toward the matter. Financial conditions in the Preston family had not been all that they might have been for the past year and it had become apparent that another year at college would be impossible for Alison at the present time. She had about decided to spend the following autumn and winter working. And here was a chance to earn $25 a week. She wrote back to Mr. Thorne accepting the position, confessing at the same time her sex, did not wait for an answer but, packing her little traveling box and obtaining a rather reluctant consent from her parents, started forth to take her new job. She could live on $10 a week, she figured, especially if she continued to dress in uniform and the other $15 she could save to pay her next year's expenses in college.

The office manager in the New York office when he heard of the step she had taken, predicted a stormy reception for Alison. He felt that he knew just how Thorne would snub her. But the storm and the snub were not forthcoming. Thorne told her that at first he had not known there he chanced to see the New York paper that had the office manager's advertisement for girl messengers, and, beside he suspected from the egg salad luncheon and the bland writing that she was a girl. But it made no difference, he assured her. He was a thorough-going feminist, if that meant entire approval of giving girls an equal chance with boys when they proved themselves capable of grasping it. And this girl had proved herself more promising than any of the messenger boys that had ever drifted into the employ of the concern.

Then one day Thorne called Alison into his office and as she came toward him in her trim little khaki suit he held out both his hands and took hers into his.

Alison did not draw back, but stood looking down at their joined hands with a puzzled smile on her face.

"I want you here, Alec," he had already retained the first name by which he had thought of her—"I want you in the office, but more than all I want you in my heart. I want you to make a home for me. Is it so necessary to finish out that college course of yours?"

"There is always one and only one possible event that will make a college girl give up her course," said Alison.

"And that?"

"When the man in all the world she loves asks her to be his wife."

"Does that mean you have decided to finish?" asked Thorne relaxing his hold on Alison's hands. But he tightened it again when she told him that it didn't.

Fumigation on Mexican Border.

The latest disinfection project which has ever been undertaken in this country, and probably the largest in the world, was recently begun by the United States department of agriculture along the Mexican border. Five fumigation houses are to be erected at a cost approximately of $50,000 for the disinfection of freight cars, motor trucks and wagons entering the United States from Mexico loaded with products that might introduce insect enemies, especially the pink bollworm of cotton. The largest house will accommodate fifteen freight cars. Each house will be equipped with apparatus and plant for the generation and distribution of hydrocyanic-acid gas.

HAVOC CAUSED BY HAILSTORM

Account of Destruction in England in 1697 Seems Almost Incredible—Horses Felled at the Plow.

The greatest hailstorm that ever occurred in England was that of April 29, 1697, recorded by Edmund Halley the astronomer. The story seems almost incredible, yet it is told by a philosopher, the contemporary and friend of Isaac Newton and an accurate observer of natural phenomena. The [illegible] in a [illegible] from [illegible] upon Lancashire in a [illegible] the storm [illegible] the day of the [illegible] was [illegible] stones fell upon Lancashire in a [illegible] from