



Golden Gate Gazette

By Carol Cox

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The pain resulting from a hornet sting may be relieved by plunging the affected part into cold water as long as may be tolerated. If stung numerous times all at once, a dose of salts is recommended.

Jennie Montgomery read the lines she had just penned and curled her lip. If someone had been stung by hornets, would they take time to look up a remedy in the Gazette? And could any information possibly be more boring for readers not so afflicted?

She laid down her pen then remembered the letter her employer had given her earlier. She sifted through the notes on her desk and fixed the elegant stationery with a baleful glare. The copperplate handwriting flowed gracefully across the page:

To remove spots of grease from a tablecloth, apply a hot iron to brown paper placed over the stain. You will find this a most efficacious remedy.

A brief line followed: "From the pen of Mrs. Sherman Widdesly."

Mrs. Widdesly had made it quite clear to Russell Madison, editor of the Golden Gate Gazette, that she expected full credit for her brilliant idea. And Mr. Madison had made it quite clear to Jennie that she would comply with Mrs. Widdesly's request.

Jennie harrumphed. "As if the woman ever lifted a finger to do a spot of cleaning in her life."

"Talking to yourself?" Amy Lattimer teased from her desk across the room.

Jennie felt herself flush . "I'm just aggravated. Mrs. Widdesly demands full credit for this idea, and I know full well she must have gotten it from her housekeeper. Mrs. Widdesly wouldn't know how to heat an iron, much less use one."

Amy chuckled. "You'd better not let Mr. Madison hear you talk like that about the wife of one of the Gazette's biggest advertisers."

"I know, I know." Jennie copied the spot removal tip under the hornet solution, dutifully adding Mrs. Widdesly's name. She blotted the paper then shoved it to one side of her desk.

When Amy talked Mr. Madison into hiring Jennie, Helen, and Penney, the idea of working for the Gazette had thrilled her. She imagined herself doing something productive and fulfilling her sense of adventure at the same time. Instead, she founded herself rooted at a desk, penning the dullest pieces imaginable. Hornet sting remedies, of all things! She wanted to more. So much more.

The outer door crashed open, and Gabe Neilson, one of the newsboys who hawked the Gazette on street corners throughout the city, came roaring down the center aisle. "Hey, everybody, have you heard? There's been an explosion in a warehouse down at one of the wharfs! Three killed, maybe more!" His feet pounded along the wood floor until he reached Mr. Madison's office. He burst through the door and banged it shut behind him.

Silence held the office in its grip for an instant; then the sound of chairs screeching across the floor filled the room as everyone converged on the windows.

"Can you see it from here?"

"Nah, too far away to see the wharfs."

"Look at the smoke. It's over in that area, all right."

Jennie stood on tiptoe and strained to see over the shoulders that blocked the window in front of her. Her heart pumped when she spotted the pillar of smoke, imagining what the scene must be like. Now that was a story! If only. . .

She shook her head. Don't get your hopes up. That isn't likely to happen. Sighing, she returned to her desk and resumed her perusal of her notes.

A shadow fell across the corner of Jennie's desk. She looked up to see Russell Madison standing over her, his ever-present cigar puffing like a chimney. Strands of silver hair stood on end like a porcupine's quills, making his agitation over the warehouse explosion evident.

"Miss Montgomery, you've hounded me for weeks telling me your talent is being wasted on household hints. Are you ready to get out and cover a story?"

At last! Jennie sprang to her feet.

"I'm on my way, sir." She settled her hat on her head and jammed the hatpin in place. "Do you know which warehouse the explosion was in? Never mind, I can follow the smoke and the crowds."

She flashed a triumphant smile at her friends and tried not to wince at Penney's wistful expression. She knew her friend longed to cover news stories every bit as much as she did.

Try not to be too disappointed, Penney. If I do a good job on this, there will be assignments aplenty for both of us.

Jennie gathered her parasol and a notebook and snatched up a handful of pencils. She could see it now: a story with her byline on the front page, above the fold.

Through the flurry of thoughts that vied for attention in her mind, she became aware that Mr. Madison was speaking.

Shouting, to be accurate. "Where do you think you're going?"

Jennie turned to face him. "Excuse me?" She looked at Mr. Madison with concern. His face had gone the color of a ripe tomato. The combination of red cheeks against his silver hair and beard brought a fleeting recollection of Clement Moore's St. Nicholas. Jennie took a closer look and shook her head, dispelling the fancy. This was no benevolent Santa Claus.

Russell Madison's teeth clamped his cigar in a viselike grip. Bits of ash flew from the tip and scattered around the room. He ripped the stogie from between his lips with his left hand and jabbed it in her direction.

"I asked you where you think you are going," he bellowed.

Jennie blinked. "To cover the explosion at the warehouse, of course."

Russell Madison snorted. A stream of smoke curled up from his noxious cigar, filling the air with a gray haze. "On a story of that magnitude? Hardly. I need someone who knows what he's doing to handle that one. I've sent word to Nick Edwards. He's on his way."

Mr. Madison shook the cigar like a schoolmarm waving her pointer at a dull student. "I want you to cover Vincent Collier's funeral. I'd scheduled Nick to follow that, but I have to pull him off, now that we have a real story to cover."

"But don't you think-"

"I think you can handle the funeral just fine." He assumed a kindly expression Jennie found more infuriating than his shouting. "Take some notes on the eulogy, who's attending, what the ladies are wearing, that kind of thing. Have my driver take you. You can just make it to the cemetery if you leave now."

He turned on his heel and headed back toward his office then slowed and called over his shoulder, "About four paragraphs ought to do it. Just enough to cover the basics."

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