

**BETTY WALES
& CO.**

A STORY FOR GIRLS

By
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**BETTY WALES
& CO.**



“WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?”

INTRODUCTION

MANY of the girls who will read this book have already made the acquaintance of Betty Wales, and know all about her adventures at Harding College, from her rollicking freshman days to the time when she was a “grave and reverend senior”—and was always being mistaken for a freshman, nevertheless. Mary Brooks graduated from Harding a year before Betty, and she always considered that this gave her the privilege of patronizing her friends in 19—, Betty’s class. Madeline joined 19— in its sophomore year, and Babbie Hildreth (she and her friends Babe and Bob were known collectively as the three B’s) was another of the shining lights of that famous class. She and Madeline and Betty planned the tea-room, though only in fun, during a trip abroad that came as a grand finale to their college days. You can read all about that in “Betty Wales, B. A.,” which also tells about Mary Brooks’s “impromptu” wedding. But you will have to go back to “Betty Wales, Senior,” to find out how Mary’s “little friends” discovered that she was interested in Professor Hinsdale. There are a lot of other things that you will want to know about Betty and her friends—if you like them—in “Betty Wales, Freshman,” “Betty Wales, Sophomore,” and “Betty Wales, Junior.”

MARGARET WARDE.

Betty Wales & Co.

CHAPTER I

UNPLEASANT DISCOVERIES

“THE very loveliest part of going abroad is coming home again!” laughed Betty Wales, trying to kiss her mother, hug the smallest sister, and rush into her father’s outstretched arms all at one and the same minute. Fortunately Will and Nan had had their turns at the station, and the smallest sister’s kitten had run away at the critical moment; otherwise matters would have been hopelessly complicated.

“I hope you’ll always feel just that way, dear,” said Mrs. Wales.

“We’re mighty glad to have you back, child,” added father, with a queer little catch in his merry voice.

“Have you got anything for me in your trunk, Betty?” demanded the smallest sister, who was a very practical young person.

“Lots of things, dear,” Betty assured her gaily, “and something for the kitten, even if she isn’t here to say ‘how do you do’ to me.”

“We’ll have dinner first,” mother insisted laughingly.

“And then we’ll all sit around in an expectant circle and watch Betty unpack,” added Nan.

"I've stopped being expectant since I've heard the news," put in Will. "She's brought back money. How's that, dad, for one of the Wales family?"

"Well, there weren't any emergencies," Betty explained earnestly. "So of course I could save my emergency fund."

"Seeing something that she wants in a store-window is Nan's definition of an emergency," declared Will.

"What's yours?" retorted Nan. "Besides, haven't I turned over a new leaf this month, and isn't it this very next week that I'm to begin earning my own bread and butter and jam?"

"What do you mean, Nan?" demanded Betty in amazement.

"Oh, your college course and your trip abroad have bankrupted father," laughed Nan; and then, seeing Betty's expression of genuine distress, "No, dear, only we are an expensive family and hopelessly extravagant, as Will says, and times are bad. Anyway I'm tired of rushing around, studying and traveling and amusing myself. So when two of the girls in my class, who have a school in Boston, offered me a job, I jumped at it. Don't you think I'm likely to make a stunning school-ma'am?"

"Of course," Betty assured her promptly. "You're so bright. But I thought you hated Boston, and you always said that Ethel was so silly to drudge at teaching when she didn't need to."

"But can't I change my mind?" asked Nan gaily.

"I suppose so." Betty looked in a puzzled way around the family group. "Only——"

“Only dinner is ready,” suggested mother again; and all through the meal the talk was about Betty’s voyage home, with its exciting storm, and her visit to Harding, with Georgia’s gargoyle party and Mary Brooks’s absurd methods of housekeeping as main features of interest. The minute dinner was over the smallest sister caught Betty around the waist, and whispered something in her ear.

“All right, dear,” Betty promised. “You shan’t have to wait another minute to see what I’ve brought you.” And they all, except Will and Mr. Wales, who preferred the library and the evening papers, adjourned to Betty’s room to help unpack.

“Such a mess!” she sighed, as she uncovered the top tray. “You see I took out some things on shipboard, and then Mary and Roberta and Bob and Georgia all wanted to see what we’d brought home, and of course I was in too much of a rush to put things back straight. Besides, it wasn’t worth while to be particular, when all my clothes need mending or pressing or something. Move back, little sister, so I can have room for the Katie pile. It’s going to be about all Katie pile, I’m afraid.”

“Is the Katie pile what you want Katie to fix in the sewing-room?” inquired the smallest sister. “Because we haven’t got Katie any more, so you’ll have to call it something else.”

“Haven’t got Katie any more!” Betty’s face wore an expression of blank amazement. “Has Katie left?”

“I thought we could get on without her,” Mrs. Wales explained hastily. “I have so little to do, now that my girls are all grown

up. Dorothy is going to help me mend stockings this winter, aren't you, dear?"

The smallest sister nodded impressively. "I'll help you mend your Katie pile too, Betty. Katie has gone to the Elingwoods' to live, and she likes it, but she says it's not the same thing, and when times are better she'll be glad of it, because then she'll come right back here."

"You see it's this queer horrid panic, Betty," Nan explained. "Father hasn't actually lost much, I imagine; but business is bad, and so we're trying to economize."

"And you never told me!" Betty looked reproachfully at her mother.

Mrs. Wales laughed. "No, dear. Why should we? Anyway it's all come up lately, since we got back from the shore. Even now there's really nothing to tell, except that everybody is talking hard times and father's business is dull. I'm very sorry it happened this season, because I meant you to be very gay your first winter at home, and now we can't do much formal entertaining."

Betty's face clouded as she remembered a house-party she had planned for the "Merry Hearts." Luckily, she hadn't mentioned it; it was to have been a grand surprise to everybody. Then a horrible thought swept everything else out of her head.

"Oh, mother dear," she began, "perhaps I ought to teach too, like Nan. I don't believe I could, ever in the world, but I suppose every college girl ought to be able to, and I could try."

“Betty Wales,” mother ordered solemnly, “unpack your trunk just enough to satisfy Dorothy’s curiosity, and then go to bed. You’re worn out, and as nervous as a witch. Just because I’ve decided not to keep a seamstress in the house this winter, and Nan is tired of society and jumps at an excuse to do a little teaching, you decide that the family is on the way to the poorhouse.”

“It isn’t only that——” Betty stopped. She had started to say that father looked worried, and didn’t joke back at all when you teased him; but perhaps that only seemed so to-night because she was fatigued herself from too much gaiety at Harding.

So she hunted out six assorted neck-bows for the gray kitten, six hair ribbons from Paris for the kitten’s small mistress, a Dutch doll, and a long chain strung with tiny silver charms, each with a story of its own; and having assured the smallest sister that this was only a beginning of the treasures she might expect, Betty went to bed and dreamed that she had lost her emergency fund under the teacher’s desk in Nan’s schoolroom, and had to teach a class in senior “English Lit.” before she could get it back. But she couldn’t remember when Shakespeare was born, and the girls stood up on their desks and waved their handkerchiefs and screamed, and she waved too, because it was the Harvard-Cambridge boat race on the Thames. No, it was brother Will calling her to breakfast, and little Dorothy saying in a sepulchral whisper, “Oh, hush, Will! Mother said Betty was to sleep over.”

“Coming! Wouldn’t sleep over for anything!” Betty called back, making a rush for her bath.

It was such a jolly day. People kept dropping in to say welcome home, and to tease Nan about her "latest fad," as everybody called it. In the evening there was a regular party of Betty's and Will's friends on the big piazza, and before it was over Betty had promised to help at six "coming-out" teas, take part in one play, be on the committee to get up another, join a morning French class and a reading-club, and consider taking a cross-country ride every Saturday afternoon as long as the good weather lasted.

Up-stairs in her room she took down the rose-colored satin dress she had bought in Paris, and examined it approvingly. But one simply couldn't wear the same thing at six receptions. There was her graduating dress, of course, but styles had changed frightfully since spring. If only Katie were here to use her magic touch on the pink lace evening gown that Bob had stepped on at class-supper!

"I never can mend it myself!" sighed Betty. "I shall need another afternoon dress anyway, and a suit, and I did want a new riding habit. Mine is horribly rusty. I wonder how careful about money we've got to be. And I wonder if Will thought to bolt the piazza door."

She slipped on a kimono and crept softly down the stairs, a slim, golden-haired ghost in a trailing robe of silk and lace. Will hadn't locked the door. And there was a light in the library, though it was long after midnight.

"It's Nan, probably, reading up things to teach. I'll go in and bother her and make her come to bed."

But it wasn't Nan. It was father, poring over a big sheet of paper scrawled full of tiny figures. Betty closed the door after her, crept quietly across the room, and descended precipitately upon the arm of her father's chair.

"What in the world are you doing here all by yourself at this time of night, Father Wales?" she demanded gaily.

Mr. Wales looked up at her, still frowning absently, with a finger on his place among the figures. "Nothing, daughter; just looking over a contract that I wanted to do a little estimating on before to-morrow."

"But it's horribly late," objected Betty. "Think how sleepy you'll be in the morning."

Mr. Wales smiled faintly. "Shall I? Well, run along to bed, so you won't be sleepy too." And he was back at his figures again.

Betty watched him for a minute, dropped a kiss on his puckered forehead, and slipped softly away without a word.

"He's just awfully worried," she reflected, as she went up-stairs. "Nan and mummy and Will don't realize how changed he is, because they've been here right along. Why, in these three months he's a different person!" She put the rose-colored satin dress carefully back in its cheese-cloth covering. "I wonder if we're really going to be poor. Why, this may be the first and the last Paris gown I shall ever have! I know one thing. I'm going to talk to father, and make him tell me just how poor we are now. You can go ahead so much better when you understand things."

But it was such a busy week, what with catching up the threads of the home life that had been dropped for so long, helping Nan off, and getting Dorothy started in school, that it slipped by without the talk that Betty had promised herself. On the evening of Nan's departure, however, her opportunity came. Will had an engagement, mother was tired, and Dorothy very sleepy; so only Mr. Wales and Betty went with Nan to her train.

It was a fine September evening, and Betty craftily suggested that they walk home. The down-town streets were too noisy for serious conversation, but out on the avenue Betty plunged in at once.

"Father, you're awfully worried. Please tell me why."

Mr. Wales threw back his head and laughed. "Goodness, Betty, but you come right to the point! Suppose I deny that 'awfully.'"

"You mean because it's slang?" asked Betty anxiously. "And isn't it a good thing to come right to the point?"

"Wouldn't that depend on the point, little girl? Suppose it was a point you had never expected to come to, and didn't want to come to,—what then?"

Betty's face wore its most intent expression. "But if you had come to it all the same, father——"

"Then you'd better get away again as fast as possible, and ask little girls not to bother their heads about you in the meantime." Father's tone was very brusque and final—the one he used when he meant "no" and was not going to change his mind, no matter how much you teased.

“All right, father.” Betty tried not to show that she felt hurt. “I won’t bother you again. Only I thought that if I understood perhaps I could help a little. I don’t think mother really knows how much we ought to try to save this winter, and I’m sure Nan and Will don’t. You’ve always been so generous and let us have just whatever we wanted. I want lots of things just now, but I can be happy without them.” Betty stopped suddenly, not quite sure where she had meant to come out.

There was a long pause. “Are you quite sure of that—quite sure you can be happy without them, little girl?” father asked at last.

“Perfectly sure, if I know I’m helping you out, daddy.”

“Well, then—— But I can’t have your mother worried, not any more than she is now at least.”

“Oh, but I won’t worry her!” Betty promised eagerly. “It will just be a secret between us two.”

Mr. Wales smiled at her eagerness. “Not a very agreeable secret, I’m afraid. Well, then, Betty, if you insist, here it is. My business has scarcely paid expenses for three months, and a big investment I made in June is going all wrong. By Christmas time I shall probably know where I stand. Until then I need every cent of ready money that I can get hold of, and the more things you can be happy without, the better. That’s all, I guess.”

“Th-thank you.” Betty felt as if she had suddenly been plunged up to her neck in a blinding fog that made all the old familiar landmarks of life look queer and far away. “It’s rather bad, isn’t it? But I’ll be very economical, and I’ll think up ways of making the others economical without their knowing it. And you can

have my emergency fund this very night. That's ready money. I meant to give it to you before, but——" There was no use explaining that Nan had said it was foolish to give the check back, when she would need all of it and more so soon for her fall wardrobe.

"Keep it and make it go as far as you can," father told her. "And don't think too much about these business troubles, or I shall be sorry I confided in you."

They were turning in at their own door. "No, you won't be sorry," Betty assured him proudly. "I won't let you be sorry. Goodness! I see one way to economize this very minute. Mother's got dozens of lights turned on that she doesn't need." And she flitted gaily ahead to begin her economy program. But before she had reached the door, she rushed back to whisper a last word in her father's ear.

"It's mean not to tell mother too, daddy. We could have so much more fun over it if we all knew."

"Fun over it!" repeated Mr. Wales slowly. "Fun over it!" Then he reached out and caught Betty in a big hug. "You're the right sort, little girl. You stand up and face life with a smile. Keep it up just as long as you can, child."

Betty considered, frowning in her earnestness. "I've always had the smiling kind of life so far, father, haven't I? But I've wished sometimes that I had to get things for myself, like Helen Adams and Rachel and K. You know I've told you about them, and about K.'s brother who wants to go to college, and she's going to help. I shan't mind a bit being rather poor—till Christmas,"

she added prudently. "Now I'll go and turn out the lights and see that Dorothy is all right, and you be telling mother."

But father shook his head. "Not to-night, anyway. You don't realize the meaning of all this yet, Betty. When you do, I'm afraid it will look very different to you."

"I won't let it," declared Betty eagerly. "I said I'd help, and I will. Just try me."

Betty went to bed with her pretty head in a whirl. This was what they called being "out in the wide, wide world." "The real business of life" that she had talked about so glibly with the B's and Roberta was going to begin at last.

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