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Title: Betty Wales, Senior

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Illustrator: Eva M. Nagel

Release date: March 14, 2007 [eBook #20821]

Most recently updated: January 1, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Roger Frank and the Online Distributed
Proofreading Team at <https://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BETTY WALES, SENIOR ***



THE STREAM OF GIRLS DESCENDED

BETTY WALES SENIOR

by

MARGARET WARDE

author of

BETTY WALES, FRESHMAN
BETTY WALES, SOPHOMORE
BETTY WALES, JUNIOR
BETTY WALES, B.A.
BETTY WALES & CO.
BETTY WALES ON THE CAMPUS
BETTY WALES DECIDES



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EVA M. NAGEL

THE PENN PUBLISHING
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1919

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Betty Wales, Senior

Introduction

For the information of those readers who have not followed Betty Wales through the first three years of her college career, as described in "Betty Wales, Freshman," "Betty Wales, Sophomore," and "Betty Wales, Junior," it should be explained that most of Betty's little circle began to be friends in their freshman year, when they lived off the campus at Mrs. Chapin's, and Mary Brooks, the only sophomore in the house, ruled them with an autocratic hand. Betty found Helen Adams a comical and sometimes a trying roommate. Rachel Morrison and Katherine Kittredge were also at Mrs. Chapin's, and Roberta Lewis, who adored Mary Brooks and was desperately afraid of every one else in the house, though Betty Wales guessed that shyness was at the bottom of Roberta's haughty manner. Eleanor Watson was the most prominent member of the group that year and part of the next. Betty admired her greatly but found her a very difficult person to win as a friend, though in the end she proved worthy of all the trouble she had cost.

At the beginning of sophomore year the Chapin House girls moved to the campus, and "the B's" and Madeline Ayres, who explained that she lived in "Bohemia, New York," joined the circle. In their junior year Betty and her friends organized the "Merry Hearts" society, and Georgia Ames, a freshman friend of Madeline's, amused and mystified the whole college until she was finally discovered to be merely one of Madeline's many delightful inventions. But the joke was on the "Merry Hearts" when a real Georgia Ames entered college. It was when they were juniors, too, that the "Merry Hearts" took a vacation trip to the Bahamas and incidentally manœuvred a romance for two of their faculty friends—which caused Mary Brooks to rename their society the Merry Match-makers.

And now if any one wishes to know what Betty Wales and her friends did after they left college, well—there's something about it in "Betty Wales, B.A.," "Betty Wales & Co.," "Betty Wales on the Campus," and "Betty Wales Decides."

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Betty Wales, Senior

CHAPTER I

"BACK TO THE COLLEGE AGAIN"

"Oh, Rachel Morrison, am I too late for the four-ten train?"

Betty Wales, pink-cheeked and breathless, her yellow curls flying under her dainty lingerie hat, and her crisp white skirts held high to escape the dust of the station platform, sank down beside Rachel on a steamer trunk that the Harding baggage-men had been too busy or too accommodating to move away, and began to fan herself vigorously with a very small and filmy handkerchief.

"No, you're not late, dearie," laughed Rachel, pulling Betty's hat straight, "or rather the train is late, too. Where have you been?"

Betty smiled reminiscently. "Everywhere, pretty nearly. You know that cunning little freshman that had lost her trunks——"

"All those that I've interviewed have lost their trunks," interpolated Rachel.

Betty waved a deprecating hand toward the mountain of baggage that was piled up further down the platform.

"Oh, of course, in that lovely mess. Who wouldn't? But this girl lost hers before she got here—in Chicago or Albany, or maybe it was Omaha. She lives in Los Angeles, so she might have lost them almost anywhere, you see."

"And of course she expected Prexy or the registrar to go back and look for them," added Rachel.

Betty laughed. "Not she. Besides she doesn't seem to care a bit. She seems to think it's a splendid chance to go to New York next week and buy new clothes. But what she wanted of me was to tell her where she could get some shirt waists—just enough to last until she's perfectly sure that the trunks are gone for good. I didn't want to stick around here from three to four, so I said I'd go and show her Evans's and that little new shirt waist place. Of course I pointed out all the objects of interest along the way, and when I mentioned Cuyler's, she insisted upon going in to have ices."

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"And how many does that make for you to-day?" demanded Rachel severely.

"Well," Betty defended herself, "I treated you once, and you treated me once, and then we met Christy Mason, and as you couldn't go back with her I had to. But I only had lemonade that time. And this child was so comical, and it was such a good idea."

"What was such a good idea?" inquired Rachel.

"Oh, didn't I tell you? Why, after we'd finished at Cuyler's, she asked me if there weren't any other places something like it, and she said she thought if we tried them all in a row we could tell which was best. But we couldn't," sighed Betty regretfully, "because of course things taste better when you're hungriest. But anyhow she wanted to keep on, because now she can give pointers to other freshmen, and make them think she is a sophomore."

"How about the shirt waists?"

"Oh, she had just got to that when I had to leave her." Betty rose, sighing, as a train whistled somewhere down the track. "Do you suppose Georgia Ames will be on this one?"

12

"Who can tell?" said Rachel. "There'll be somebody that we know anyway. Wasn't that first day queer and creepy?"

"Yes," agreed Betty, "when nobody got off but freshmen frightened to pieces about their exams. And that was only two days ago! It seems two weeks. I've always rather envied the Students' Aid Society seniors, because they have such a good chance to pick out the interesting freshmen, but I shan't any more."

"Not even after to-day?"

Betty frowned reflectively. "Well, of course to-day has been pretty grand—with all those ices, and Christy, and the freshmen all so cheerful and amusing. And then there's the eight-fifteen. Won't it be fun—to see the Clan get off that? Yes, I think I do envy myself. Can a person envy herself, Rachel?" She gave Rachel's arm a sudden squeeze. "Rachel," she went on very solemnly, "do you realize that we can't ever again in all our lives be Students' Aid Seniors, meeting poor little Harding freshmen?"

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Rachel hugged Betty sympathetically. "Yes, I do," she said. "Why at this time next year I shall be earning my own living 'out in the wide, wide world,' as the song says, miles from any of the Clan."

Betty looked across the net-work of tracks, to the hills that make a circle about Harding. "And miles from this dear old town," she added. "But we can write to each other, and make visits, and we can come back to class reunions. But that won't be the same."

Rachel looked at the pretty, yellow-haired child, and wondered if she realized how different her "wide, wide world" was likely to be from Katherine's or Helen Chase Adams's—or Rachel Morrison's. To some of the Clan Harding meant everything they had ever known in the way of culture and scholarly refinement, of happy leisure and congenial friendship. It was comforting somehow to find that girls like Betty and the B's, who had everything else, were just as fond of Harding and were going to be just as sorry to leave it. Rachel never envied anybody, but she liked to think that this life that was so precious to her meant much to all her friends. It made one feel surer that pretty clothes and plenty of spending-money and delightful summers at the seashore or in the mountains did not matter much, so long as the one big, beautiful fact of being a Harding girl was assured. All this flashed through Rachel's mind much more quickly than it can be written down. Aloud she said cheerfully, "Well, we have one whole year more of it."

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"I should rather think so," declared Betty emphatically, "and we mustn't waste a single minute of it. I wish it was evening. It seems as if I couldn't wait to see the other girls."

"Well, there's plenty to do just now," said Rachel briskly, as the four-ten halted, and the streams of girls, laden with traveling bags, suit-cases, golf-clubs, tennis-rackets, and queer-shaped bulky parcels that had obviously refused to go into any trunk, began to descend from it.

Rachel hurried forward at once, eager to find someone who needed help or directions or a friendly word of welcome. But Betty stood where she was, just out of the crowd, watching the old girls' excited meetings and the new girls' timid progresses, which were sure to be intercepted before long by some white-gowned, competent senior, anxious to miss no possible opportunity for helpfulness.

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Betty had done her part all day, and in addition had taken Rachel's place earlier in the afternoon, to give her a free hour for tutoring. She was tired now and hot, and she had

undoubtedly eaten too many ices; but she was also trying an experiment. Where she stood she could watch both platforms from which the girls were descending. Her quick glance shot from one to the other, scanning each figure as it emerged from the shadowy car and stopped for an instant, hesitating, on the platform. The train was nearly emptied of its Harding contingent when all at once Betty gave a little cry and darted forward to meet a girl who was making an unusually careful and prolonged inspection of the crowd below her. She was a slender, pretty girl, with yellow hair, which curled around her face. She carried a trim little hand-bag and a well-filled bag of golf-clubs.

"Can I help you in any way?" asked Betty, holding out a hand for the golf-bag. 16

The pretty freshman turned a puzzled face toward her, and surrendered the bag. "I don't know," she said doubtfully. "I'm to be a freshman at Harding. Father telegraphed the registrar to meet me. Could you point her out, please?"

"I knew it," laughed Betty, gleefully. Then she turned to the girl. "The registrar is up at the college answering fifty questions a minute, and I'm here to meet you. Give me your checks, and we'll find an expressman. Oh, yes, and where do you board?"

The pretty freshman answered her questions with an air of pleased bewilderment, and later, on the way up the hill, asked questions of her own, laughed shamefacedly over her misunderstanding about the registrar, was comforted when Betty had explained that it was not an original mistake, and invited her new friend to come and see her with that particular sort of eager shyness that is the greatest compliment one girl can pay to another.

"Dear old Dorothy," thought Betty, when she had deposited the freshman, considerably enlightened about college etiquette, at one of the pleasantest of the off-campus houses, and was speeding to the Belden for tea. "What a little goose she must have thought me! And what a dear she was! I wonder if this freshman will ever really care about me that way. I do mean to try to make her. Oh, what a lot of things seniors have to think about!" 17

But the only thing to think about that evening was the arrival of the eight-fifteen train, which would bring Eleanor, the B's, Nita Reese, Katherine Kittredge, Roberta Lewis, and Madeline Ayres, together with two-thirds of the rest of the senior class back to Harding. It was such fun to saunter down to the station in the warm twilight, to wait, relieved of all responsibilities concerning cabs, expressmen, and belated trunks, while the crowded train pulled in, and then to dash frantically about from one dear friend to another, stopping to shake hands with a sophomore here, and there to greet a junior, but being gladdest, of course, to welcome back the members of "the finest class." Betty and Rachel had arranged not to serve on the reception committee for freshmen that evening, and it was not long before the reunited "Merry Hearts" escaped from the pandemonium at the station to reassemble on the Belden House piazza for what Katherine called a "high old talk." 18

How the tongues wagged! Eleanor Watson had come straight from her father's luxurious camp in the Colorado mountains, where she and Jim had been having a house-party for some of their Denver friends.

"You girls must all come out next summer," she declared enthusiastically. "Father sent a special invitation to you, Betty, and he and—and—mother"—Eleanor struggled with the new name for the judge's young wife—"are coming on to commencement, and then of course you'll all meet them. Mother is so jolly—she knows just what girls like, and she enters into all the fun, just like one of us. Of course she is absurdly young," laughed Eleanor, as if the stepmother's youth had never been her most intolerable failing in her daughter's eyes.

Babbie had been abroad, on an automobile trip through France. She looked more elegant than ever in a chic little suit from Paris, with a toque to match, and heavy gloves that she had bought in London. 19

"I've got a pair for each of you in my trunk," she announced, "and here's hoping I didn't mix up the sizes."

"Sixes for me," cried Bob.

"Five and a-half," shrieked Babe.

"Six and a-half," announced Katherine, "and you ought to have brought me two pairs, because I wear mine out more than twice as fast as anybody else."

"What kind of a summer have you had, K?" asked Babe, who never wrote letters, and therefore seldom received any.

"Same old kind," answered Katherine cheerfully. "Mended twenty dozen stockings, got breakfast for seven hungry mouths every morning, played tennis with the boys and Polly, tutored all I could, sent out father's bills,—oh, being the oldest of eight is no snap, I can tell you, but," Katherine added with a chuckle, "it's lots of fun. Boys do like you so if you're rather decent to them."

"I just hate being an only child," declared Bob hotly. "What's the use of a place in the country unless there are children to wade in the brook, and chase the chickens and ride the horses? Next summer I'm going to have fresh-air children up there all summer, and you two"—indicating 20

the other B's—"have got to come and help save them from early deaths."

"All right," said Babe easily, "only I shall wade too."

"And you've got to wash them up before I can touch them," stipulated the fastidious Babbie. "Where have you been all summer, Rachel?"

"Right at home, helping in an office during the day and tutoring evenings. And I've saved enough so that I shan't have to worry one single bit about money this year," announced Rachel triumphantly.

"Good for old Rachel!" cried Madeline Ayres, who had spent the summer nursing her mother through a severe illness and looked worn and thin in consequence. "Then you're as glad to get back to the grind as I am. Betty here, with her summer on an island in Lake Michigan, and Eleanor, and these lucky B's with their childless farms, and their Parisian raiment, don't know what it's like to be back in the arms of one's friends."

"Don't we!" cried a protesting chorus.

"Don't you what?" called a voice out of the darkness, and the real Georgia Ames, cheerful and sunburned and self-possessed shook hands all around, and found a seat behind Madeline on the piazza railing.

"You were all so busy talking that you didn't see me at the train," she explained coolly. "A tall girl with glasses asked if there was anything she could do for me, and I said oh, no, that I'd been here before. Then she asked me my name, and when I said Georgia Ames, I thought she was going to faint."

"She took you for a ghost, my dear," said Madeline, patting her double's shoulder affectionately. "You must get used to being treated that way, you know. You're billed to make a sensation in spite of yourself."

"But we're going to make it up to you all we can," chirped Babbie.

"And you bet we can," added Bob decisively.

"Let's begin by escorting her home," suggested Babe. "There's just about time before ten."

"I saw Miss Stuart yesterday about her coming into the Belden," explained Betty, after they had left Georgia at her temporary off-campus boarding place. "She was awfully nice and amused about it all, and she thinks she can get her in right away, in Natalie Smith's place. Natalie's father has been elected senator, you know, and she's going to come out this winter in Washington."

"Fancy that now!" said Madeline resignedly. "There's certainly no accounting for tastes."

"I should think not," declared Katherine hotly. "If my father was elected President, I'd stay on and graduate with 19— just the same."

"Of course you would," agreed Babbie. "You can come out in Washington any time—or if you can't, it doesn't matter much. But there's only one 19—"

"And yet when we go we shan't be missed," said Katherine sadly. "The college will go on just the same."

"Oh, and I've found out the reason why," cried Betty eagerly. "It's because all college girls are alike. Miss Ferris said so once. She said if you waited long enough each girl you had known and liked would come back in the person of some younger one. But I never really believed it until today." And Betty related the story of her successful hunt for the freshman who was like herself.

Everybody laughed.

"But then," asserted Babbie loyally, "she's not so nice as you, Betty. She couldn't be. And I don't believe there are freshmen like all of us."

"Not in this one class," said Rachel. "But it's a nice idea, isn't it? When our little sisters or our daughters come to Harding they can have friends just as dear and jolly as the ones we have had."

"And they will be just as likely to be locked out if they linger on their own or their friends' doorsteps after ten," added Madeline pompously, whereat Eleanor, Katherine, Rachel and the B's rushed for their respective abiding places, and the Belden House contingent marched up-stairs singing

"Back to the college again,"

a parody of one of Kipling's "Barrack-Room Ballads" which Madeline Ayres had written one morning during a philosophy lecture that bored her, and which the whole college was singing a week later.

A SENIOR CLASS-MEETING

It was great fun exercising all the new senior privileges. One of the first and most exciting was occupying the front seats at morning chapel.

"Although," complained Betty Wales sadly, "you don't get much good out of that, if your name begins with a W. Of course I am glad there are so many of 19—, but they do take up a lot of room. Nobody could tell that Eleanor and I were seniors, unless they knew it beforehand."

"And then they wouldn't believe it about you," retorted Madeline, the tease.

Madeline, being an A, was one of the favored front row, who were near enough "to catch Prexy's littlest smiles," as Helen Adams put it, and who were the observed of all observers as they marched, two and two, down the middle aisle, just behind the faculty. Madeline, being tall and graceful and always perfectly self-possessed, looked very impressive, but little Helen Adams was dreadfully frightened and blushed to the roots of her smooth brown hair every morning.

"And yet I wouldn't give it up for anything," she confided to Betty. "I mean—I'll exchange with you any time, but I do just love to sit there, although I dread walking out so. It's just the same when I am talking to Miss Raymond or Miss Mills. I wish I weren't such a goose."

"You're a very dear little goose," Betty reassured her, wondering why in the world the clever Helen Adams was afraid of people, while she, who was only little Betty Wales, without much brains and with no big talent, felt perfectly at home with Dr. Hinsdale, Miss Raymond, and even the great "Prexy" himself.

"I suppose that is my talent," she decided at last,— "not being afraid, and just plunging right in. Well, I suppose I ought to be glad that I have anything."

Another senior privilege is the holding of the first class-meeting. Fresh indeed is the freshman class which neglects this order of precedence, and in deference to their childish impatience the seniors always hold their meeting as early in the term as possible. Of course 19—'s came on a lovely afternoon,—the first after an unusually long and violent "freshman rain."

"Coming, Madeline?" asked Betty, passing Madeline's single on her way out.

"Where?" inquired Madeline lazily from the depths of her Morris chair.

"To the class-meeting of course," explained Betty. "Now don't pretend you've forgotten and made another engagement. I just heard Georgia Ames telling you that she couldn't go walking because of an unexpected written lesson."

Madeline wriggled uneasily. "What's the use?" she objected. "It's too nice a day to waste indoors. There'll be nothing doing for us. We elected Rachel last year, and none of the rest of the crowd will do for class officers."

"What an idea!" said Betty loftily. "I'm thinking of nominating Babe for treasurer. Besides Rachel is going to wear a cap and gown—it's a new idea that the council thought of, for the senior president to wear one—and Christy and Alice Waite are going to make speeches about the candidates. And I think they're going to vote about our ten thousand dollars."

Madeline rose despondently. "All right then, for this once. By the way, whom are they going to have for toastmistress at class-supper? They elect her to-day, don't they?"

"I suppose so. I know the last year's class chose Laurie at their first meeting. But I haven't heard any one mentioned."

"Then I'm going to nominate Eleanor Watson," declared Madeline. "She's never had a thing from the class, and she's by far the best speaker we have except Emily Davis."

"And Emily will be class-day orator of course," added Betty. "Oh, Madeline, I'm so glad you thought of Eleanor. Won't it be splendid to have a 'Merry Heart' for toastmistress?"

Madeline nodded carelessly. She was thinking more about a letter from home, with news that her father and mother were to sail at once for Italy, than about matters of class policy. She loved the Italian sea and the warm southern sunshine; and the dear old "out-at-elbows" villa on the heights above Sorrento was the nearest thing she had known to a home. Father had told her to come along if she liked—ever since she could remember she had been allowed to make her own decisions. But then, as Babbie had said, there was only one 19—, and with plenty of "passed up" courses to her credit she could work as little as she pleased this year and never go to a class-meeting after to-day.

"Let's stop for the B's," she suggested, as they went out into the September sunshine. "Bob hates meetings as much as I do. I'm not going to be the only one to be disciplined."

Before they had reached the Westcott, the B's shouted to them from their hammocks in the apple-orchard, which they reluctantly abandoned to go to the meeting. Bob had just had an

exciting runaway—her annual spills were a source of great amusement to her friends and of greater terror to her dotting parents—and she was so eager to recount her adventures and display her bruises, that nothing more was said about Madeline’s plan for Eleanor.

The class-meeting was large and exciting. The election of a senior president is as thrilling an event at Harding as the coronation of a Czar of all the Russias to the world at large. It was a foregone conclusion that Marie Howard would be the unanimous choice of the class, but until the act was fairly consummated—and indeed until Marie had been dined at Cuyler’s and overwhelmed with violets to the satisfaction of her many friends—the excitement would not abate. There was a pleasant uncertainty about the other class officers. Six avowed candidates for the treasurership quarreled good naturedly over their respective qualifications for the position, each one in her secret soul intending to withdraw in favor of her dearest friend among the other five. In another corner of the room an agitated group discussed the best disposition of the ten thousand dollar fund.

“I don’t think we ought to dispose of it hastily,” Christy Mason was saying. “It’s a lot of money and we ought to consider very carefully before we decide.”

“Besides,” added Emily Davis flippantly, “as long as we delay our decision, we shall continue to be persons of importance in the eyes of the faculty. It’s comical to see how deferential they all are. I took dinner at the Burton Sunday, and afterward Miss Raymond invited a few of us into her room for coffee. She didn’t mention the money,—she’s too clever for that,—but she talked a lot about the constant need for new books in her department. ‘You can’t run an English department properly unless you can give your pupils access to the newest books’—that was the burden of her refrain. Marion Lustig was quite impressed. I think she means to propose endowing an English department library fund.”

“Dr. Hinsdale wants books for his department, and a lot of psychological journals—all about ghosts and mediums—that college professors look up about, you know,” Nita Reese ended somewhat vaguely.

“And Miss Kent is hoping we’ll give the whole sum to her to spend for another telescope,” added Babe, whose specialty, if one might dignify her unscholarly enthusiasms by that name, was astronomy.

“Every one of the faculty wants it for something,” said Christy.

“Naturally. They’re all human, aren’t they?” laughed Emily Davis, just as Rachel appeared in the doorway, looking very dignified and impressive in a cap and gown.

“Is the tassel right?” she whispered anxiously, as she passed a group of girls seated near the platform steps.

“No, put it the other side—unless you’re a Ph. D.,” returned Roberta Lewis in a sepulchral whisper. “Father has one. He lectures at Johns Hopkins,” she added, in answer to nudges from her neighbors and awestruck inquiries as to “how she knew.”

Then Rachel called the meeting to order. She thanked the class for the honor they had done her, and hoped she had not disappointed them.

“I’ve tried not to consider any clique or crowd,” she said—“not to think anything about the small groups in our class, but to find out what the whole big, glorious class of 19— wanted”—Rachel’s voice rang out proudly—“and then to carry out its wishes. I believe in public sentiment—in the big generous feeling that makes you willing to give up your own little plans because they are not big and fine enough to suit the whole class. I hope the elections to-day may be conducted in that spirit. We each want what we all want, I am sure. We know one another pretty well by this time, but perhaps it will help us in choosing the right persons for senior officers if some of the candidates’ friends make brief nominating speeches. It is now in order to nominate some one for the office of senior president.”

Christy was on her feet in an instant, nominating Marie Howard, in a graceful little speech that mentioned her tact and energy and class spirit, recalled some of the things she had done to make the class of 19— proud of her, and called attention to the fact that she had never had an important office before.

“And she wouldn’t be having one now if we hadn’t succeeded in throwing off the rule of a certain person named Eastman and her friends,” muttered Bob sotto voce.

Alice Waite seconded the nomination.

“I can’t make a real speech like Christy’s,” she stammered, blushing prettily, “but I want to call attention to Marie’s—I mean to Miss Howard’s sparkling sense of humor and strong personal magnetism. And—and—I am sure she’ll do splendidly,” ended little Alice, forgetting her set phrases and sitting down amidst a burst of amused applause.

Rachel called for other nominations but there were none, so Marie was elected unanimously, and with tremendous enthusiasm.

After she had assumed the cap and gown, taken the chair, and thanked her classmates, Barbara Gordon, one of Christy’s best friends, was made vice-president. Babe, to her infinite annoyance, found herself the victor in the treasurer’s contest, and Nita Reese was ensconced beside Marie

in the secretary's chair.

"And you said none of 'The Merry Hearts' would do for officers," Betty whispered reproachfully to Madeline.

"Well, will they think we are office-grabbers, if I put up Eleanor?" asked Madeline.

"Oh, no," declared Betty eagerly. "You see Babe's such a general favorite—she's counted into half a dozen crowds; and Nita is really a Hill girl, only she never would go to class-meetings when she was a freshman and so she was never identified with that set. You will propose Eleanor, won't you?"

"Honor bright," promised Madeline, and returned once more to the pages of a new magazine which she had insisted upon bringing, "in case things are too deadly slow."

"The next business," said Marie, consulting the notes that Rachel had handed her with the cap and gown, "the next business is to dispose of our ten thousand dollars."

Instantly a dozen girls were on their feet, clamoring for recognition. Marion Lustig urged the need of books for the English department. Clara Madison, who after two years of amazement at Harding College in general and hatred of the bed-making it involved in particular, had suddenly awakened to a tremendous enthusiasm for microscopic botany, made a funny little drawling speech about the needs of her pet department. Two or three of Miss Ferris's admirers declared that zoölogy was the most important subject in the college curriculum, and urged that the money should be used as a nest egg for endowing the chair occupied by that popular lady. The Spanish and Italian departments, being newly established, were suggested as particularly suitable objects for benevolence. Dr. Hinsdale's department, the history and the Greek departments were exploited. 19— was a versatile class; there was somebody to plead for every subject in the curriculum, and at least half a dozen prominent members of the faculty were declared by their special admirers to stand first in 19—'s affections.

"Though that has really nothing to do with it," said Jean Eastman testily, conscious that her plea for the modern language departments had fallen on deaf ears. "We're not giving presents to the faculty, but to the college. I like Miss Raymond as well as any one——"

"Oh, no, you don't," muttered Bob, who had caught Jean in the act of reading an English condition at the end of Junior year.

Jean heard, understood, and flashed back an acrimonious retort about Miss Ferris's partiality for Bob's work.

The newly elected president, whose tact had been extolled by Emily Davis, found it speedily put to the test. "Don't you think," she began, "that we ought to hear from the girl who had most to do with our getting this money? Before we act upon the motion to refer the matter to a committee who shall interview the president and the faculty and find out how the rest of the money is to be spent and where ours seems to be most needed, I want to ask Miss Betty Wales for an expression of her opinion."

Betty gave a little gasp. Parliamentary law was Hebrew to her, and speech-making a fearful and wonderful art, which she never essayed except in an emergency. But she recognized Marie's distress, and rose hesitatingly, to pour oil on the troubled waters if possible.

"I certainly think there ought to be a committee," she began slowly. "And I'm sure I know less than any one who has spoken about the needs of the different courses. I'm—well, I'm not a star in anything, you see. I agree with Jean that we ought not to make this a personal matter, and yet I am sure that the head of whatever department we give the money to will be pleased, and I don't see why we shouldn't consider that and choose somebody who has done a lot for 19—. But there are so many who have done a lot for us." Betty frowned a perplexed little frown. "I wish too," she went on very earnestly, "that we could do something that is like us. You know what I mean. We stand for fair play and a good time for everybody—that was why we had the dresses simple, you know." The frown vanished suddenly and Betty's fascinating little smile came into view instead. "I wonder—of course Prexy is always saying the college is poor, and the faculty are always talking about not having books enough, but I haven't noticed but that they find enough to keep us busy looking up references." ("Hear, hear!" chanted the B's.) "It seems to me that Harding College is good enough as it is," went on Betty, looking reproachfully at the disturbers. "The thing is to let as many girls as possible come here and enjoy it. Do you suppose the man who gave the money would be willing that we should use our share of it for scholarships? Four one hundred dollar scholarships would help four girls along splendidly. Of course that isn't a department exactly,—and perhaps it's a silly suggestion." Betty slipped into her seat beside Madeline, blushing furiously, and looking blankly amazed when her speech brought forth a round of vigorous applause, and, as soon as parliamentary order would permit, a motion that 19— should, with the consent of the unknown benefactor of the college, establish four annual scholarships.

"I name Miss Wales as chairman of the committee to interview the president," said Marie, beaming delightedly on her once more harmonious constituents. "The other two members of the committee I will appoint later. The next and last business of this meeting is to elect a toastmistress for our class-supper. She is always chosen early, you know, so that she can be thinking of toasts and getting material for them out of all the events of the year. Nominations

are now in order.”

“I nominate Eleanor Watson,” said Madeline promptly, reluctantly closing her magazine and getting to her feet. “I needn’t tell any of you how clever she is nor how well she speaks. Next to one or two persons whose duties at commencement time are obvious and likely to be arduous”—Madeline grinned at Emily Davis, who was sure to be class-orator, and Babe leaned forward to pat Marion Lustig, who was equally sure to be class-poet, on the shoulder—“next to these one or two geniuses, Eleanor is our wittiest member. Of course our class-supper will be the finest ever,—it can’t help being—but with Eleanor Watson at the head of the table, it will eclipse itself. To quote the great Dr. Hinsdale, do you get my point?”

40

Kate Denise seconded the nomination with a heartiness that made Eleanor flush with pleasure. Betty watched her happily, half afraid she would refuse the nomination, as she had refused the Dramatic Club’s election; but she only sat quite still, her great eyes shining like stars. She was thinking, though Betty could not know that, of little Helen Adams and her “one big day” when she was elected to the “Argus” board.

“I know just how she felt,” Eleanor considered swiftly. “It’s after you’ve been left out and snubbed and not wanted that things like this really count. Oh, I’m so glad they want me now.”

“Are there any other nominations?” asked Marie. There was a little silence, broken by a voice saying: “Let’s make it unanimous. Ballots take so long, and everybody wants her.”

Then a girl got up from the back row,—a girl to whom Katherine Kittredge had once given the title of “Harding’s champion blunderbuss.” She could no more help doing the wrong thing than she could help breathing. She had begun her freshman year by opening the door into Dr. Hinsdale’s recitation-room, while a popular senior course was in session. “I beg your pardon, but are you Miss Stuart?” she had asked, looking full at the amazed professor, and upon receiving a gasping denial she had withdrawn, famous, to reappear now and then during her course always in similar rôles. It happened that she had never heard of Eleanor Watson’s stolen story until a week before the class-meeting, when some one had told her the unvarnished facts, with no palliation and no reference to Eleanor’s subsequent change of heart or renunciation of one honor after another. Virtuous indignation and pained surprise struggled for expression upon her pasty, immobile face.

41

“Madam president,” she began, and waited formally for recognition.

“Oh, I say, it’s awfully late,” said somebody. “I’ve got five recitations to-morrow.”

42

This speech and the laugh that followed it put new vigor into the Champion’s purpose. “I hope I am not trespassing on any one’s time unduly,” she said, “by stating that—I dislike to say it here, but it has been forced upon me. I don’t think Miss Watson is the girl to hold 19—’s offices. Miss Wales said that we stood for fair play.” The Champion took her seat ponderously.

The room was very still. Marie sat, nonplused, staring at the Champion’s defiant figure. Madeline’s hands were clenched angrily. “I’d like to knock her down, the coward,” she muttered to Betty, who was looking straight ahead and did not seem to hear.

Hardly a minute had gone by, but more slowly than a minute ever went before, when Eleanor was on her feet. She had grown suddenly white, and her eyes had a hunted, strained look. “I quite agree with Miss Harrison,” she said in clear, ringing tones, her head held high. “I am not worthy of this honor. I withdraw my name, and I ask Miss Ayres, as a personal favor, to substitute some one’s else.”

43

Eleanor sat down, and Marie wet her lips nervously and looked at Madeline. “Please, Miss Ayres,” she begged.

“As a personal favor,” returned Madeline slowly, “because Eleanor Watson asks me, I substitute”—she paused—“Christy Mason’s name. I am sure that Miss Mason will allow it to be used, as a personal favor to every one concerned.”

“Indeed I—” began Christy impetuously. Then she met Eleanor’s beseeching eyes. “Very well,” she said, “but every one here except Miss Harrison knows that Miss Watson would be far better.”

It took only a minute to elect Christy and adjourn the ill-fated meeting.

“I thought she’d feel like hurrying home,” said Katherine sardonically, as the Champion, very red and militant, rushed past her toward the door.

Betty looked wistfully after the retreating figure. “I would rather have left college than had her say that. It doesn’t seem fair—after everything.”

“Serves me right, anyhow,” broke in Madeline despondently. “I was dreaming about castles in Italy instead of tackling the business in hand. If I had thought more I should have known that some freak would seize the opportunity to rake up old scores. Don’t feel so bad, Betty. It was my fault, and I’ll make it up to her somehow. Come and help me tell Christy that she’s a trump, and that I truly wanted her, next to Eleanor.”

44

When they had pushed their way through to Christy’s side, Eleanor, still white but smiling bravely, was shaking hands. “It was awfully good of you not to mind the little awkwardness,”

she was saying. "The girls always want you—you know that." She turned to find Betty standing beside her, looking as if her heart was broken.

"Why, Betty Wales," she laughed, "cheer up. You've made the speech of the day, and three of your best friends are waiting to be congratulated. Tell Christy how pleased you are that she's toastmistress and then come down town with me."

Once out of the crowded room Eleanor grew silent, and Betty, too hurt and angry to know what to offer in the way of comfort, left her to her own thoughts. They had crossed the campus and were half way down the hill when Eleanor spoke.

"Betty," she said, "please don't care so. If you are going to feel this way, I don't think I can bear it."

Betty stared at her in astonishment. "Why Eleanor, it's you that I care about. I can't bear to have you treated so."

Eleanor smiled sadly. "And can't you see—no, of course you can't, for you never did a mean or dishonorable thing in your life. If you had, you would know that the worst part of the disgrace, is that you have to share it with your friends. I don't mind for myself, because what Miss Harrison said is true."

"No, it's not," cried Betty hotly. "Not another girl in the whole class feels so."

"That," Eleanor went on, "is only because they are kind enough to be willing to forget. But to drag you in, and dear old Madeline, and all 'The Merry Hearts'! You'll be sorry you ever took me in."

"Nonsense!" cried Betty positively. "Everybody knows that you've changed—everybody, that is, except that hateful Miss Harrison, and some day perhaps she'll see it."

That evening Betty explained to Helen, who had never heard a word of the "Argus" matter, why Eleanor had not been made an editor.

"Do you think there were any others to-day who didn't want her?" she asked anxiously.

Helen hesitated. "Ye-es," she admitted finally. "I think that Miss Harrison has some friends who feel as she does. I heard them whispering together. And one girl spoke to me. But I am sure they were about the only ones. Most of the girls feel dreadfully about it."

"Of course no one who didn't would say anything to me," sighed Betty. "Oh, Helen, I am so disappointed."

"Well," returned Helen judicially, "it can't be helped now, and in a way it may be a good thing. Eleanor will feel now that everybody who counts for much in the class understands, and perhaps there will be something else to elect her for, before the year is out."

Betty shook her head. "No, it's the last chance. She wouldn't take anything after this, and anyway no one would dare to propose her, and risk having her insulted again."

"I guess we shan't any of us be tempted to do anything dishonest," said Helen primly. "Doesn't it seem to you as if the girls were getting more particular lately about saying whether they got their ideas from books and giving their authorities at the end of their papers?"

"Yes," said Betty, "it does, and I think it's a splendid thing. I went to a literary club meeting with Nan last Christmas and one of the papers was copied straight out of a book I'd just been reading, almost word for word. I told Nan and she laughed and said it was a very common way of doing. I think Harding girls will do a good deal if they help put a stop to that kind of thing. But that won't be much comfort to Eleanor."

When Helen had gone, Betty curled up on her couch to consider the day. "Mixed," she told the little green lizard, "part very nice and part perfectly horrid, like most days in this world, I suppose, even in your best beloved senior year. I wonder if Prexy will like the scholarship idea. I straightened out one snarl, and then I helped make a worse one. And I shall be in another if I don't set to work this very minute," ended Betty, reaching for her Stout's Psychology.

CHAPTER III

THE BELDEN HOUSE "INITIATION PARTY"

Lucile Merrifield, Betty's stately sophomore cousin, and Polly Eastman, Lucile's roommate and dearest friend, sat on Madeline Ayres's bed and munched Madeline's sweet chocolate complacently.

"Wish I had cousins in Paris that would send me 'eats' as good as this," sighed Polly.

"Isn't it just too delicious!" agreed Lucile. "I say, Madeline, I'm on the sophomore reception committee and there aren't half enough sophomores to go round among the freshmen. Won't you take somebody?"

"I? Hardly." Madeline shrugged her shoulders disdainfully. "Don't you know, child, that I detest girl-dances—any dances for that matter. Ask me to do something amusing."

"You ought to want to do something useful," said Polly reproachfully. "Think of all those poor little friendless freshmen!"

"What kind of a class is it this year?" inquired Madeline, lazily, breaking up more chocolate. "Any fun?"

"The chief thing I've noticed about them," said Lucile, "is that they're so horribly numerous."

"Fresh?" asked Madeline.

"Yes, indeed," declared Polly emphatically, "dreadfully fresh. But somehow,—I'm on the grind committee, you know,—and they don't do anything funny. They just do quantities and quantities of stupid, commonplace things, like mistaking the young faculty for freshmen and expecting Miss Raymond to help them look up their English references. I just wish they'd think of something original," ended Polly dolefully.

"Why don't you make up something?" asked Madeline.

Polly stared. "Oh, I don't think that would do at all. The grinds are supposed to be true, aren't they? They'd be sure to find out and then they'd always dislike us." Polly smiled luminously. "I've got a good many freshmen friends," she explained.

"Which means violet-bestowing crushes, I suppose," said Madeline severely. "You shouldn't encourage that sort of thing, Polly. You're too young."

"I'm not a bit younger than Lucile," Polly defended herself, "and they all worship her." Polly giggled. "Only instead of violets, they send her Gibson girls, with touching notes about her looking like one."

"Come now," said Lucile calmly. "That's quite enough. Let Madeline tell us how to get some good grinds."

Madeline considered, frowning. "Why if you won't make up," she said at last, "the only thing to do is to lay traps for them. Or no—I'll tell you what—let's give an initiation party."

"A what?" chorused her guests.

"Oh, you know—hazing, the men would call it; only of course we'll have nice little amusing stunts that couldn't frighten a fly. Is anything doing to-night?"

"In the house, you mean?" asked Lucile. "Not a thing. But if you want our room——"

"Of course we do," interposed Madeline calmly. "It's the only decent-sized one in the house. Go and straighten it up, and let this be a lesson to you to keep it in order hereafter. Polly, you invite the freshmen for nine o'clock. I'll get some more sophomores and seniors, and some costumes. Come back here to dress in half an hour."

"Goodness," said the stately Lucile, slipping out of her nest of pillows. "How you do rush things through, Madeline."

Madeline smiled reminiscently. "I suppose I do," she admitted. "Ever since I can remember, I've looked upon life as a big impromptu stunt. I got ready for a year abroad once in half an hour, and I gave the American ambassador to Italy what he said was the nicest party he'd ever been to on three hours' notice, one night when mother was ill and father went off sketching and forgot to come in until it was time to dress. Oh, it's just practice," said Madeline easily,—"practice and being of a naturally hopeful disposition. Run along now."

"I thought I'd better not tell them," Madeline confided to the genius of her room, when the sophomores were safely out of earshot, "that I haven't the faintest notion what to do with those freshmen after we get them there. Being experienced, I know that something will turn up; but they, being only sophomores, might worry. Now what the mischief"—Madeline pulled out drawer after drawer of her chiffonier—"can I have done with those masks?"

The masks turned up, after the Belden House "Merry Hearts" had searched wildly through all their possessions for them, over at the Westcott in Babbie Hildreth's chafing dish, where she had piled them neatly for safe-keeping the June before.

"Madeline said for you each to bring a sheet," explained Helen Adams, who had been deputed to summon the B's and Katherine. "They're to dress up in, I guess. She said we couldn't lend you the other ones of ours, because they might get dirty trailing around the floors, and we must have at least one apiece left for our beds."

The B's joined rapturously in the preparations for Madeline's mysterious party. Katherine could not be found, and Rachel and Eleanor were both engaged for the evening; but that was no matter, Madeline said. It ought to be mostly a Belden House affair, but a few outsiders would help mystify the freshmen.

Promptly at quarter to nine Polly, Lucile, and the rest of the Belden House contingent arrived, each bringing her sheet with her, and presently Madeline's room swarmed with hooded, ghostly figures.

"Is that you, Polly?" whispered Lucile to somebody standing near her.

"No, it's not," squeaked the figure, from behind its little black mask.

"Why, we shan't even know each other, after we get mixed up a little," giggled somebody else, as the procession lined up for a hasty dash through the halls.

"Now, don't forget that you've all got to help think up things for them to do," warned Madeline, "especially you sophomores."

"And don't forget to remember the things for grinds," added Polly Eastman lucidly. "That's what the party is for."

"If the freshmen find out that you had to get us to help you, you'll never hear the last of it," jeered Babe.

"Now Babe, we're their natural allies," protested Babbie. "Of course we always help them." 55

"Sh!" called a scout, sticking her head into the room. "Coast's clear. Make a rush for it."

The last ghost had just gotten safely into the room, when two freshmen, timid but much flattered by Polly's cordial invitation, knocked on the door.

"Come in," called Polly in her natural voice, and once unsuspectingly inside, they were pounced upon by the army of ghosts, and escorted to seats as far as possible from the door. The other guests luckily arrived in a body headed by Georgia Ames, who, having come into the house only the day before, was already an important personage in the eyes of her classmates. What girl wouldn't be who called Betty Wales by her first name, and wasn't one bit afraid to "talk back" to the clever Miss Ayres?

Georgia's attitude of amused tolerance therefore set the tone for the freshmen's behavior. "Don't you see that it's some sophomore joke?" she demanded. "Might as well let the poor creatures get as much fun out of us as they can, and then perhaps they'll give us something good to eat by and by." 56

"We'll give you something right away," squeaked a ghost. "Georgia Ames and Miss Ashton, stand forth. Now kneel down, shut your eyes and open your mouths."

"Don't do it. It will be some horrid, peppery mess," advised a sour-tempered freshman named Butts.

But Georgia and her companion stood bravely forth, to be rewarded by two delicious mouthfuls of Madeline's French chocolate. After this pleasant surprise, the freshmen, all but Miss Butts and one or two more, grew more cheerful and began to enter into the spirit of the occasion.

"Josephine Boyd, you are elected to scramble like an egg," announced a tall ghost.

Josephine's performance was so realistic that it evoked peals of laughter from ghosts and freshmen alike.

"We'll recommend you for a part in the next menagerie that the house or the college has," said the tall ghost, who seemed to be mistress of ceremonies. "The Dutton twins are now commanded to push matches across the floor with their noses. You'll find the matches on the table by the window. Somebody tie their hands behind them. Now start at the door and go straight across to Georgia Ames's chair. The one that wins the race must send Polly some flowers," added the tall ghost maliciously as the twins, blushing violently at this barefaced reference to their rivalry for Polly's affections, took their matches, and at Georgia's signaled "One, two, three, go!" began their race. 57

Pushing a match across a slippery floor with one's nose looked so easy and proved so difficult that both ghosts and freshmen, as they cheered on the eager contestants, longed to take part in the enticing sport. The fluffy-haired twin kept well ahead of her straight-haired sister, until, when her match was barely a foot from Georgia's chair it caught in a crack and broke in two.

"Oh, dear!" sighed the fluffy-haired twin forlornly, trying to single out her divinity from among the sheeted ghosts.

Her despair was too much for soft-hearted Polly. "Never mind," she said kindly "The race is hereby called off." 58

"And we can both send you flowers, can't we?" demanded the straight-haired twin, jumping up, flushed and panting from her exertions.

Every one waited eagerly to hear what the next stunt would be.

"This is for you, Miss Butts," announced the tall ghost, after a whispered colloquy with her companions, "and as you don't seem very happy to-night we've made it easy. Tell the name of your most particular crush. Now don't pretend you haven't any."

"I won't tell," muttered Miss Butts sullenly.

"Then you'll have to make up Lucile Merrifield's bed for two weeks as a penalty for disobeying our decrees. Now all the rest of you may tell your crushes' names. I will explain, as some of you look a little dazed about it, that your crush is the person you most deeply adore."

Some of the freshmen meekly accepted the penalty rather than divulge their secret affections, one declared that she hadn't a crush, one, remembering the legend of Georgia Ames, made up a sophomore's name and after she had been safely "passed" exulted over the simplicity of her victims. A few, including Georgia, calmly confessed their divinities' names and gloated over the effect their announcements had upon some of the ghosts.

59

When this entertainment was exhausted, the ghosts held another conference. "Carline Dodge, get under the bed and develop like a film," decreed the leader finally.

"Oh, not under mine," cried a tall, impressive-looking ghost plaintively. "My botany and zoölogy specimens are under it. She'd be sure to upset the jars."

"There!" said Georgia Ames complacently. "That makes six of you that we know. Polly Eastman and now Lucile have given themselves away. Babbie Hildreth crumpled all up when Carline Dodge called out her crush's name. If she's here, the other two that they call the B's are, and Madeline Ayres is directing the job. It's easy enough to guess who the rest of you are, so why not take off those hot things and be sociable?"

"Go on, Carline Dodge," ordered the tall ghost imperturbably.

"But I don't get the idea of the action," objected the serious-faced freshman, and looked amazed that everybody should laugh so uproariously.

60

"That's so funny that we'll let you off," said Madeline, when the mirth had subsided. "I foresee that you've invented a very useful phrase."

And sure enough Carline's reply was speedily incorporated into Harding's special vocabulary, and its author found herself unwittingly famous.

"Now," said Madeline cheerfully, "you may all chase smiles around the room for a while, and when I say 'wipe,' you are to wipe them off on a crack in the floor. Then we'll have a speech from one of you and you will be dismissed."

Most of the freshmen entered gaily into the "action" of chasing smiles, and caught a great many on their own and each other's faces. That frolic ended, Madeline called upon a quiet little girl who had hardly been seen to open her mouth since she reached Harding, to make a speech. To every one's surprise she rose demurely, without a word of objection or the least appearance of embarrassment, and delivered an original monologue supposed to be spoken by a freshman newly arrived and airing her impressions of the college. It hit everybody with its absurd humor, which no one enjoyed better, apparently, than the quiet little freshman herself.

61

"Encore! Encore! Give us another!" shouted the freshmen when she had finished; but their quiet little classmate only shook her head, and assuming once more the mincing, confidential tone she had been using in the monologue, remarked: "Do you know, there are some girls in our class that will forget their heads before long. Why, when they're being hazed, they forget it and think they're at a real party."

Everybody laughed again, and the tall ghost made the little freshman blush violently by saying, "You'll get a part in the house play, my child, and if you can write that monologue down I'll send an 'Argus' editor around after it."

The little freshman, whose name was Ruth Howard, pinched herself softly, when no one was looking, to make sure that she was awake. Like Mother Hubbard she felt a little doubtful of her identity, as she noticed the admiring glances cast upon her by even the haughtiest of the freshmen. She had been rather lonely during these first weeks, and it was very pleasant now to find that the things she could do were going to make a place for her in this big, busy college world.

62

"A hazing party isn't a half-bad idea, is it?" said Georgia Ames, reflectively. "It's got us all acquainted a lot faster than anything else would, I guess,—even if there wasn't any food."

"Considering that we've done everything else, you children might find the food——" began one of the ghosts, but a bell in the corridor interrupted her.

"Is that the twenty-minutes-to or the ten o'clock?" asked another ghost anxiously.

"Ten," said a freshman. "The other rang while we were chasing smiles."

"Then we're locked out," cried a small ghost tragically, and three sheeted figures rushed down the hall, tripping over their flowing robes and struggling with their masks as they ran.

"My light is on. Will they report it?" asked little Ruth Howard shyly of Georgia Ames.

63

"Mine will be reported all right before I've done with it," declared a ghost gloomily. "I've got to study for a physics review. I oughtn't to have come near this festive function."

"Same here."

"Come on, Carline. Don't you know the action of going home?"

"Jolly fun though, wasn't it?"

The initiation party dissolved noisily down the dusky corridors.

Next day the college rang with the report that hazing was now practiced at Harding. Strange accounts of the Belden House party were passed from group to group of excited freshmen who declared that they were "just scared to death" of the sophomores and wouldn't for the world be out alone after dark, and of amused upper-classmen who allowed for exaggerations and considered the whole episode in the light of a good joke. But a particularly susceptible Burton House freshman, who sat at Miss Stuart's table and burned to make a favorable impression upon that august lady, repeated the story to her at luncheon. Miss Stuart received it in silence, wondered what the truth of it was, and asked some of her friends about it that afternoon at a faculty meeting. Of course some of the wrong people heard about it and took it up officially, as a matter calculated to ruin the spirit of the college. The result was that Miss Ferris and Dr. Hinsdale were furnished with the names of some of the offenders and requested to interview them on the subject of their misdemeanors. Miss Ferris unerringly selected Madeline Ayres as the ring-leader of the affair and Betty Wales as the best person to make an appeal to, if any appeal was needed, and set an hour for them to come and see her.

64

Madeline, who never looked at bulletin-boards, did not get her note of summons, and Betty, who had taken hers as a friendly invitation to have tea with her friend, went over to the Hilton House alone and in the highest spirits. But Miss Ferris was not serving tea, and Dr. Hinsdale showed no intention of leaving them in peace to indulge in one of those long and delightful talks that Betty had so anticipated. Indeed it was he, with his coldest expression and his driest tone, who introduced the subject of the initiation party and demanded to know why Madeline Ayres had neglected Miss Ferris's summons. Betty had no trouble in explaining that to everybody's satisfaction, but she longed desperately for Madeline's support, as she listened to Dr. Hinsdale's stern arraignment of the innocent little gathering.

65

"It's not lady-like," he asserted. "It's aping the men. Hazing is a discredited practice anyhow. All decent colleges are dropping it. We certainly don't want it here, where the aim of the faculty has always been to encourage the friendliest relations between classes. The members of the entering class always find the college life difficult at first. It's quite unnecessary to add to their troubles."

Betty listened with growing horror. What dreadful thing had she unwittingly been a party to? And yet, after all, could it have been so very dreadful? If Dr. Hinsdale had been there, would he have felt this way about it? A smile wavered on Betty's lips at this thought. She looked at Miss Ferris, who smiled back at her.

66

"Say it, Betty," encouraged Miss Ferris, and Betty began, explaining how Madeline had happened to think of the hazing, relating the absurdities that she and the rest had devised, dwelling on Ruth Howard's clever impersonation and Josephine Boyd's effective egg-scrambling. Gradually Dr. Hinsdale's expression softened, and when she repeated Carline Dodge's absurd retort, he laughed like a boy.

"Do you think it was so very dreadful?" Betty inquired anxiously, whereupon her judges exchanged glances and laughed again.

"There's another thing," Betty began timidly after a moment. "I don't know as I should ever have thought of it myself, but it did certainly work that way." And Betty explained Georgia Ames's idea of the hazing-party as a promoter of good-fellowship. "It's awfully hard to get acquainted with freshmen, you see," she went on. "We have our own friends and we are all busy with our own affairs. But since that night we've been just as friendly. That one evening took the place of lots of calls and formal parties. We know now what the different ones can do. Of course," Betty admitted truthfully, "it didn't help Miss Butts any, unless it showed her that at Harding you've got to do your part, if you want a good time. She's certainly been a little more agreeable since. But Ruth Howard now—why it would have been ages—oh, I mean months," amended Betty blushing, "before we should have known about her, unless Madeline had called for that speech."

67

Again the judges exchanged amused glances, and Dr. Hinsdale cleared his throat. "Well, Miss Wales," he said, "you've made your point, I think. You've found the legitimate purpose for a legitimate and distinctly feminine kind of hazing. And now, if Miss Ferris will excuse me, I have an engagement at my rooms."

So Betty had her talk and her tea, after all, and went away loving Miss Ferris harder than ever. For Miss Ferris, by the mysterious process that brought all college news to her ken, had heard about Eleanor Watson and the Champion Blunderbuss, and she was looking out for Eleanor, who, she was sure from a number of little things she had noticed and pieced together, was now quite capable of looking out for herself. This confirmation of her own theory encouraged Betty vastly, and she was able to feel a little more charitable toward the Champion, who, as Miss Ferris had pointed out, was really the one most to be pitied.

68

CHAPTER IV

AN ADVENTUROUS MOUNTAIN DAY

"The 19— scholarships, providing aid to the approximate sum of one hundred dollars for each of four students, preferably members of an upper class"—thus the announcement was to appear formally in the college catalogue. The president and the donor had both heartily approved of Betty's scheme, and the scholarships were an accomplished fact. It had been the donor's pleasant suggestion that 19— should keep in perpetual touch with its gift to the college by appointing a committee to act with one from the faculty in disposing of the scholarships. Betty Wales was chairman, of course. 19— did not intend that she should forget her connection with those scholarships. Betty took her duties very seriously. She watched the girls at chapel, in the recitation halls, on the campus, noted those with shabby clothes and worried faces, found out their names and their boarding-places, and set tactful investigations on foot about their needs. The enormous number of her "speaking acquaintances" became a college joke.

70

"Bow, Betty," Katherine would whisper, whenever on their long country walks, they met a group of girls who looked as if they might belong to the college. And then, "Is it possible I've found somebody you don't know? Better look them up right away."

"It's splendid training for your memory," Betty declared, and it was, and splendid training besides in helpfulness and social service, though Betty did not put it so grandly. To her it was just trying to take Dorothy King's place, and not succeeding very well either.

In looking up strangers, Betty did not forget her friends. Nobody could be more deserving of help than Rachel Morrison. Her hard summer's work had worn on her and made the busy round of tutoring and study seem particularly irksome. But Rachel, while she was pleased to think that she had been the joint committee's first choice, refused the money.

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"I could only take it as a loan," she said, "and I don't want to have a debt hanging over my head next year. I'm not so tired now as I was when I first got back, and I can rest all next summer. Did I tell you that Babbie Hildreth's uncle has offered me a position in his school for next fall?"

Emily Davis, on the other hand, was very glad to accept a scholarship,— "As a loan of course," she stipulated. She had practically supported herself for the whole four years at Harding, and the strain and worry had begun to tell on her. A little easier time this year would mean better fitness for the necessarily hard year of teaching that was to follow, without the interval of rest that Rachel counted upon. Emily's mother was dead now, and her father made no effort to help his ambitious daughter. She might have had a place in the woolen mills, where he worked years before, he argued; since she had not taken it, she must look out for herself.

But with the serious side of life was mixed, for Betty and the rest, plenty of gaiety. 19— might not be greatly missed after they had gone out into the wide, wide world, but while they stayed at Harding everybody seemed bent on treating them royally.

72

"You know this is the last fall you'll have here," Polly Eastman would say, pleading with Betty to come for a drive. "There's no such beautiful autumn foliage near Cleveland."

Or, "You must come to our house dance," Babbie Hildreth would declare. "Just think how few Harding dances there are left for us to go to!"

Even the most commonplace events, such as reading aloud in the parlors after dinner, going down to Cuyler's for an ice, or canoeing in Paradise at sunset took on a new interest. Seniors who had felt themselves superior to the material joys of fudge-parties and scorned the crudities of amateur plays and "girl-dances," eagerly accepted invitations to either sort of festivity.

"And the moral of that, as our dear departed Mary Brooks would say," declared Katherine, "is: Blessings brighten as diplomas come on apace. Between trying not to miss any fun and doing my best to distinguish myself in the scholarly pursuits that my soul loves, I am well nigh distraught. Don't mind my Shakespearean English, please. I'm on the senior play committee, and I recite Shakespeare in my sleep."

73

Dearest of all festivities to the Harding girl is Mountain Day, and there were all sorts of schemes afoot among 19—'s members for making their last Mountain Day the best of the four they had enjoyed so much. Horseback riding was the prevailing fad at Harding that fall, and every girl who could sit in a saddle was making frantic efforts to get a horse for an all-day ride among the hills. Betty was a beginner, but she had been persuaded to join a large party that included Eleanor, Christy, Madeline, Nita, and the B's. They were going to take a man to look after the horses, and they had planned their ride so that the less experienced equestrians could have a long rest after luncheon, and taking a cross-cut through the woods, could join the others, who would leave the picnic-place earlier and make a long detour, so as to have their gallop out in peace.

It was a sunny, sultry Indian summer day,—a perfect day to ride, drive or walk, or just to sit outdoors in the sunshine, as Roberta Lewis announced her intention of doing. She helped the

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horseback riders to adjust their little packages of luncheon, and looked longingly after them, as they went cantering down the street, waving noisy farewells to their friends.

"I wish I weren't such a coward," she confided to Helen Adams, who was starting to join Rachel and Katherine for a long walk. "I love horses, but I should die of fright if I tried to ride one."

"Oh, they have a man with them," said Helen easily, "and it's a perfect day for a ride."

Roberta, who almost lived outdoors, and was weatherwise in consequence, looked critically at the western horizon. "I shouldn't be a bit surprised if it rained before night," she said. "You'd better decide to laze around in Paradise with me."

But Helen only laughed at Roberta's caution and went on, whereat Roberta Lewis was very nearly the only Harding girl who was not drenched to the skin before Mountain Day was over.

The riding-party galloped through the town and stopped at the edge of the meadows for consultation. 75

"Let's go by the bridge and come back by the ferry," suggested Madeline. "Then we shall have the prettiest part of the ride saved for sunset."

"And you'll have a better road both ways, miss," put in the groom practically.

So the party crossed the long toll-bridge, the horses stepping hesitatingly and curvetting a little at the swish of the noisy water, climbed the sunny hills beyond, and dipped down to a level stretch of wood, in the heart of which they chose a picnic-ground by the side of a merry little brook.

"We must have a fire," announced Bob, who had fallen behind the procession, and now came up at the trot, just as the others were dismounting.

"But we haven't anything to cook," objected Eleanor.

"Coffee," grinned Bob jubilantly. "I've got folding cups stuffed around under my sweater, and I stopped at that farmhouse back by the fork in the road to get a pail."

"And there are marshmallows to toast," added Babe. "That's what I've got in my sweater." 76

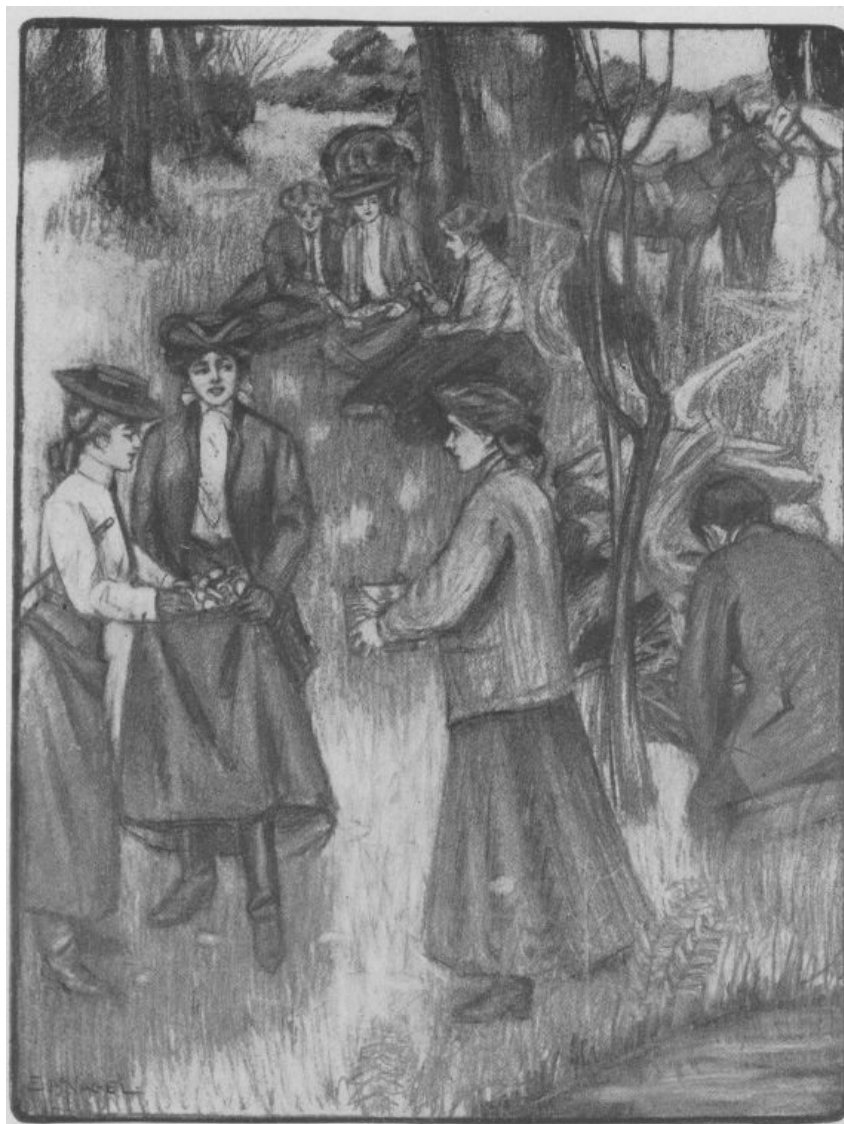
"I thought you two young ladies had grown awful stout on a sudden," chuckled the groom, beginning to pile up twigs under an overhanging ledge of rock.

"And here are some perfectly elegant mushrooms," declared Madeline, who had been poking about among the fallen leaves. "We can use the pail for those first, and have the coffee with dessert."

All the girls had brought sandwiches, stuffed eggs, cakes, and fruit, so that, with the extras, the picnic was "truly elegant," as Babe put it. They sang songs while they waited for the coffee to boil, and toasted Babe's marshmallows, two at a time, on forked sticks, voting Babe a trump to have thought of them.

Then they lay on the green turf by the brook, talking softly to the babbling accompaniment of its music.

Finally Eleanor shivered and sat up. "Where is the sun?" she asked. "Oughtn't we to be starting?"



"HERE ARE SOME PERFECTLY ELEGANT MUSHROOMS"

The sky was not dark or threatening, only a bit gray and dull. The groom was to stay with the novices—Christy, Babe and Betty—who, as soon as the rest had mounted, raced down the road to get warm and also to return the pail that Bob had borrowed, to its owner. By the time they got back, after making a short call on the farmer's wife, the sun was struggling out again, but the next minute big drops began to patter down through the leaves. 77

The groom considered the situation. "I guess you'll jest have to wait and git wet. Miss Hildreth's horse is skittish on ferries. I wouldn't want'er on with you an' leave her to cross alone."

So they waited, keeping as dry as possible under a pine tree, until the time appointed for starting to the rendezvous. It was raining steadily now. Babe's horse objected to getting wet, and pulled on the reins sullenly. The sky was fairly black. Altogether it was an uncomfortable situation.

The road to the river was damp and slippery, and most of it was a steep down-grade. There was nothing to do but walk the horses, Babe's dancing sidewise in a fashion most upsetting to Betty's nerves. By the time they had reached the ferry, darkness seemed to have settled, and there were low growlings of thunder. Babe's horse reared, and she dismounted and stood at his head while they waited for the ferry to cross to them. 78

"I guess there's goin' to be a bad shower," volunteered the groom. "I guess we'd better wait over in that barn till it's over. Animals don't like lightning."

The ferry seemed to crawl across the river, but it arrived at last, and each girl led her horse on board. They were all frightened, but nobody showed the "white feather." Babe's cheeks were pale, though, as she patted her restive mount, and laughed bravely at Madeline's futile efforts to feed sugar to her tall "Black Beauty," who jerked his nose impatiently out of her reach each time she tried.

"Beauty must be awfully upset if he doesn't want sugar," said Babbie, who was standing next the groom. "He's the greed—" The next minute Betty found herself holding her own and the groom's horse, while he plunged after Babbie's, who was snorting and kicking right into the midst of everything. It had lightened, and between the lightning and the water Babbie's high-spirited mare was frantic, and was fast communicating her excitement to the others. 79

A minute later there was a tremendous jolt which set all the horses to jumping.

"I swan," said the apathetic ferryman who had paid no attention to the previous confusion. "We're aground."

The girls looked at one another through the gathering shadows.

"How are we going to get off?" asked the groom desperately.

The ferryman considered. "I dunno."

Babbie's horse plunged again.

"Can we wade to shore?" asked the groom, when something like order was restored.

"Easy. You see I knew the river was awful low, but I s'posed——"

"The only thing that I can think of," interrupted the groom, "is for us to leave you girls with the horses, while we get to shore. Then you send 'em off one by one, and we'll catch 'em. Miss Hildreth, you send yours first. No, Miss Wales, you send mine first, then Miss Hildreth's may follow better. I'm awfully sorry to make you young ladies so much trouble."

80

"Oh, it doesn't matter," said Babbie bravely, shaking the water out of her eyes. "Only—do hurry, please."

The "easy wading" proved to be through water up to a man's shoulders, and it lightened twice, with the usual consequences to Babbie's horse, before the groom signaled. His horse went off easily enough, but Babbie's balked and then reared, and Betty's lay down first and then kicked viciously, when she and Babbie between them had succeeded in getting him to stand up. Finally Madeline broke her crop in getting him over the side, and when Black Beauty had also been sent ashore the ferry lurched a little and floated.

"Do you suppose we shall ever get dry again?" asked Eleanor lightly, while they waited for the ferryman to come back to them.

Babbie touched her black coat gingerly. "Am I wet?" she whispered to Betty. "Of course I am, but I'd forgotten it." The reins had cut one of her hands through her heavy glove, but she had forgotten that too, as she shivered and clung to the railing that Black Beauty had splintered when he went over. All she could think of was the horror of riding that plunging, foam-flecked horse home.

81

The ferryman took them to his house, which was the nearest one to the landing; and while he and the groom rubbed down the horses, his wife and little daughter made more coffee for the girls and helped them wring out their dripping clothes.

Babe pretended to find vast enjoyment in watching the water trickle off her skirts and gaiters. Christy, who rode bare-headed, declared that she had gotten a beautiful shampoo free of charge. Even Babbie smiled faintly and called attention to the "mountain tarn" splashing about in the brim of her tri-corn hat.

"I tell ye, them girls air game," declared the ferryman watching them ride off as soon as the storm was over. "That little slim one on the bay mare is a corker. Her horse cut up somethin' awful. They all offered to change with her, but she said she guessed she could manage. Look at the way she sets an' pulls. She's got grit all right. I guess I'll have to make out to have you go to college, Annie."

82

Whereupon little Annie spent a rapturous evening dreaming of the time when she should be a Harding girl, and be able to say bright, funny things like Miss Ayres. She resolved to wear her hair like Miss Watson and to have a pleasant manner like Miss Wales, and above all to be "gritty" like Miss Hildreth. For the present evening the fiercest steed she could find to subdue was an arithmetic lesson. Annie hated arithmetic, but in the guise of a plunging bay mare, that it took grit to ride, she rather enjoyed forcing the difficult problems to come out right.

Meanwhile the riding party had reached the campus, a little later and a little wetter than most of their friends, and they were provided with hot baths and hot drinks, and put to bed, where they lay in sleepy comfort enjoying the feeling of being heroines.

Very soon after dinner Betty got tired of being a heroine, and when Georgia Ames appeared and announced that a lot of freshmen were making fudge in her room and wished Betty would come and have some and tell them all about her experiences, she looked anxiously at Helen Adams, who was the only person in the room just then.

83

"It's awfully good fudge—got marshmallows in it, and nuts," urged Georgia. "They want Miss Adams too."

"Can I come in a kimono?" asked Betty. "I'm too tired to dress."

"Of course. Only——" Georgia hesitated.

"There's a man in the parlor, calling on Polly Eastman. And the folding doors are stuck open. I wish my room wasn't down on that floor. You have to be so careful of your appearance."

Betty frowned. "I want awfully to come. Can't you two think of a way?"

"Why of course," cried Georgia gleefully, after a moment's consideration. "We'll hold a screen around you. The man will know that something queer is inside it, but he can't see what."

So the procession started, Helen and Georgia carrying the screen. At the top of the last flight, they adjusted it around Betty, and began slowly to make the descent. At the curve Georgia looked down into the hall and stopped, in consternation.

84

"They've moved out into the hall," she whispered. "No—this is Lucile Merrifield and another man. We've got to go right past them."

"Let's go back," whispered Betty.

"But they've seen us," objected Helen, "and you'd miss the fudge."

A moment later, three girls and a Japanese screen fell through Georgia's door into the midst of an amazed freshmen fudge party.

"Goodness," said Georgia, when she had recovered her breath. "Did you hear that horrid Lucile? 'A regular freshman trick'—that's what she said to her man. They blame everything on us."

"Well if this fudge is regular freshman fudge, it's the best I ever tasted," said little Helen Adams tactfully.

Later in the evening Betty trailed her red kimono into Helen's room. "Helen," she began, "did I have on my pearl pin when we started down-stairs to-night? I can't find it anywhere."

"I don't think you did," said Helen, thoughtfully, "but I'll go and see. You might have dropped it off when we all landed in a heap on the floor."

85

But the freshmen had not found the pin and diligent search of Georgia's room, as well as of the halls and stairways, failed to reveal it.

"Oh, well, I suppose it will turn up," said Betty easily. "I lost it once last year, and ages afterward I found it in my desk. I shan't worry yet awhile. I didn't have it on this morning, did I?"

This time Helen remembered positively. "No, you had on your lucky pin—the silver four-leaved clover that I like so much. I noticed particularly."

"All right then," said Betty. "I saw it last night, so it must be about somewhere. Some day when I'm not so lame from riding and so sleepy, I'll have a grand hunt for it."

CHAPTER V

THE RETURN OF MARY BROOKS

86

All through the fall Mary Brooks's "little friends" had been hoping for a visit from her, and begging her to come soon, before the fine weather was over. Now she was really and truly coming. Roberta had had the letter of course, by virtue of being Mary's most faithful satellite; but it was meant for them all.

"The conquering heroine is coming," Mary wrote. "She will arrive at four on Monday, and you'd better, some of you, meet the train, because there's going to be a spread along, and the turkey weighs a ton. Don't plan any doings for me. I've been to a dance or a dinner every night for two weeks and I'm already sick of being a busy bud, though I've only been one for a month—not to mention having had the gayest kind of a time all summer. So you see I'm coming to Harding to rest and recuperate, and to watch you children play at being seniors. I know how busy you are, and what a bore it is to have company, but I shall just take care of myself. Only get me a room at Rachel's little house around the corner, and I won't be a bit of trouble to anybody."

87

"Consider the touching modesty of that now!" exclaimed Katherine. "As if we weren't all pining for a sight of her. And can't you just taste the spread she'll bring?"

"We must make her have it the very night she gets here," said Betty practically. "There's a lot going on next week, and as soon as people find out that she's here they'll just pounce on her for all sorts of things."

"I hereby pounce upon her for our house dance," announced Babbie Hildreth hastily. "Isn't it jolly that it comes this week? I had a presentiment that I'd better save one of my invitations."

"You needn't have bothered," said Babe enviously. "I guess there'll always be room for Mary Brooks at a Westcott House dance—as long as 19— stays anyway."

"Don't quarrel, children," Madeline intervened. "Your dance is on Wednesday. Is there anything for Tuesday?"

88

"A psychology lecture," returned Helen Adams promptly.

"Cut it out," laughed Katherine. "Mary isn't coming up here to go to psychology lectures."

"But she does want to go to it," declared Roberta, suddenly waking up to the subject in hand. "I thought it was queer myself, but she speaks about it particularly in her letter. Let me see—oh, here it is, in the postscript. It's by a friend of Dr. Hinsdale, she says; and somebody must have written her about it and offered her a ticket, because she says she's already invited and so for us not to bother. Did you write her, Helen?"

"No," said Helen, "I didn't. The lecture wasn't announced until yesterday. There was a special meeting of the Philosophical Club to arrange about it."

"It's queer," mused Katherine. "Mary was always rather keen on psychology—"

"On the psychology of Dr. Hinsdale you mean," amended Madeline flippantly. "But that doesn't explain her inside information about this lecture. We'll ask her how she knew—that's the quickest way to find out. Now let's go on with our schedule. What's Thursday?"

89

"The French Club play," explained Roberta. "I think she'd like that, don't you?"

Madeline nodded. "Easily. It's going to be awfully clever this time. Then that leaves only Friday. Let's drive out to Smuggler's Notch in the afternoon and have supper at Mrs. Noble's."

"Oh, yes," agreed Betty. "That will make such a perfectly lovely end-up to the week. And of course we shall all want to take her to Cuyler's and Holmes's. May I have her for Tuesday breakfast? I haven't any class until eleven, so we can eat in peace."

"Then I'll take lunch on Tuesday," put in Katherine hastily, "because I am as poor as poverty at present, and a one o'clock luncheon preceded by a breakfast ending at eleven appeals to my lean pocketbook."

"I should like to take her driving that afternoon," put in Babbie.

"You may, if you'll take me to sit in the middle and do the driving," said Bob, "and let's all have dinner at Cuyler's that night—a grand affair, you know, ordered before hand, at a private table with a screen around it, and a big bunch of roses for a centre piece. Old girls like that sort of thing. It makes them feel important."

90

"With or without food?" demanded Madeline sarcastically, but no one paid any attention to her, in the excitement of bidding for the remaining divisions of Mary's week.

All the Chapin House girls and the three B's met her at the station and "ohed" and "ahed" in a fashion that would have been disconcerting to anybody who was unfamiliar with the easy manners of Harding girls, at the elegance of her new blue velvet suit and the long plumes that curled above her stylishly dressed hair, and at the general air of "worldly and bud-like wisdom," as Katherine called it, that pervaded her small person.

They had not finished admiring her when her trunk appeared.

"Will you look at that, girls!" cried Katherine, feigning to be quite overpowered by its huge size. "Mary Brooks, whatever do you expect to do with a trousseau like that in this simple little academic village?"

91

Mary only smiled placidly. "Don't be silly, K. Some of the spread is in there. Besides, I want to be comfortable while I'm here, and this autumn weather is so uncertain. Who's going to have first go at carrying the turkey?"

"I've got a runabout waiting," explained Babbie. "I'm going to drive him up. There'll be room for you too, Mary, and for some of the others."

The seat of a runabout can be made to hold four, on a pinch, and there is still standing-room for several other adaptable persons. The rest of the party walked, and the little house around the corner was soon the scene of a boisterous reunion.

Mary's conversation was as abundant and amusing as ever, and she did not show any signs of the weariness that her letter had made so much of.

"That's because I have acquired a society manner," she announced proudly. "I conceal my real emotions under a mask of sparkling gaiety."

92

"You can't conceal things from us that way," declared Katherine. "How under the sun did you hear about that psychology lecture?"

"Why, a man I know told me," explained Mary innocently. "He's also a friend of the lecturer. We were at dinner together one night last week, and he knew I was a Harding-ite, and happened to mention it. Any objections?"

"And you really want to go?" demanded Madeline.

"Of course," retorted Mary severely. "I always welcome every opportunity to improve my mind."

But to the elaborate plans that had been made for her entertainment Mary offered a vigorous protest. "My dears," she declared, "I should be worn to a frazzle if I did all that. Didn't I tell you

that I'd come up to rest? I'll have breakfast with anybody who can wait till I'm ready to get up, and we'll have one dinner all together. But it's really too cold to drive back from Smuggler's Notch after dark, and besides you know I never cared much for long drives. But we'll have the spread to-night, anyway, just as you planned, because it's going to be such a full week, and I wouldn't for the world have any of you miss anything on my account."

93

"And you don't care about the French play?" asked Roberta, who had moved heaven and earth to get her a good seat.

"No, dear," answered Mary sweetly. "My French is hopelessly rusty."

"Then I should think you'd go in for improving it," suggested Babe.

"There's not enough of it to improve," Mary retorted calmly.

"Well, you will go to our house-dance, won't you?" begged Babbie.

"Oh, you must," seconded Bob. "I've told piles of people you were coming."

"We shall die of disappointment if you don't," added Babe feelingly.

Mary laughed good-naturedly. "All right," she conceded, "I'll come. Only be sure to get me lots of dances with freshmen. Then I can amuse myself by making them think I'm one, also, and I shan't be bored."

94

On the way back to the campus the girls discussed Mary's amazing attitude toward the pleasures of college life.

"She must be awfully used up," said Roberta, solemnly. "Why, she used to be crazy about plays and dances and 'eats.'"

"No use in coming up at all," grumbled Katherine, "if she's only going to lie around and sleep."

"She doesn't look one bit tired," declared Betty, "and she seems glad to be back, only she doesn't want to do anything. It's certainly queer."

"She must be either sick or in love," said Madeline. "Nothing else will account for it."

"Then I think she's in love," declared little Helen Adams sedately. "She has a happy look in her eyes."

"Bosh!" jeered Bob. "Mary isn't the sentimental kind. I'll bet she feels different after the spread."

But though the spread was quite the grandest that had ever been seen at Harding, and though Mary seemed to enjoy it quite as heartily as her guests, who had conscientiously starved on campus fare for the week before it, it failed to arouse in her the proper enthusiasm for college functions.

95

On Tuesday "after partaking of a light but elegant noontide repast on me," as Katherine put it, Mary declared her intention of taking a nap, and went to her room. But half an hour later, when Babbie tiptoed up to ask if she really meant to waste a glorious afternoon sleeping, and to put the runabout at her service, the room was empty, and Mary turned up again barely in time for the grand dinner at Cuyler's.

"We were scared to death for fear you'd forgotten us," said Madeline, helping her off with her wraps. "Where have you been all this time?"

"Why, dressing," explained Mary, wearing her most innocent expression. "It takes ages to get into this gown, but it's my best, and I wanted to do honor to your very grand function."

"That dress was lying on your bed when I stopped for you exactly fifteen minutes ago," declared Bob triumphantly. "So you'll have to think of another likely tale."

Mary smiled her "beamish" smile.

96

"Well, I came just after you'd gone and isn't fourteen minutes to waste on dressing an age? If you mean where was I before that, why my nap wasn't a success, so I went walking, and it was so lovely that I couldn't bear to come in. These hills are perfectly fascinating after the city."

"You little fraud," cried Madeline. "You hate walking, and you can't see scenery——"

"As witness the nestle," put in Katherine.

"So please tell us who he is," finished Madeline calmly.

"The very idea of coming back to see us and then going off fussing with Winsted men!" Babe's tone was solemnly reproachful.

But Mary was equal to the situation. "I haven't seen a Winsted man since I came," she declared. "I was going to tell you who was with me this afternoon, but I shan't now, because you've all been so excessively mean and suspicious." A waitress appeared, and Mary's expression grew suddenly ecstatic. "Do I see creamed chicken?" she cried. "Girls, I dreamed about Cuyler's creamed chicken every night last week. I was so afraid you wouldn't have it!"

97

Her appreciation of the dinner was so delightfully whole-hearted that even Roberta forgave her everything, down to her absurd enthusiasm over a ponderous psychology lecture and the very dull reception that followed it. At the latter, to be sure, Mary acted exactly like her old self, for she sat in a corner and monopolized Dr. Hinsdale for half an hour by the clock, while her little friends, to quote Katherine Kittredge, "champed their bits" in their impatience to capture her and escape to more congenial regions.

The next night at the Westcott House dance Mary was again her gay and sportive self. If she was bored, she concealed it admirably, and that in spite of the fact that her little scheme of playing freshman seemed doomed to failure. Mary had walked out of chapel that morning with the front row, and, even without the enormous bunch of violets which none of her senior friends would confess to having sent her, she was not a figure to pass unnoticed. So most of the freshmen on her card recognized her at once, and the few who did not stoutly refused to be taken in by her innocent references to "our class."

98

She had the last dance but one with the sour-faced Miss Butts, who never recognized any one; but Mary did not know that, and being rather tired she swiftly waltzed her around the hall a few times and then suggested that they watch the dance out from the gallery.

"What class are you?" asked Miss Butts, when they were established there. "My card doesn't say."

"Doesn't it?" said Mary idly, watching the kaleidoscope of gay colors moving dizzily about beneath her. "Then suppose you guess."

Miss Butts considered ponderously. "You aren't a freshman," she said finally, "nor a sophomore."

"How are you so sure of that?" asked Mary. "I was just going to say—"

"You're a junior," announced Miss Butts, calmly disregarding the interruption.

Mary shook her head.

"Senior, then."

Mary shook her head again.

"I didn't think you looked old enough for that," said Miss Butts. "Then I was mistaken and you're a sophomore."

99

"No," said Mary firmly.

Miss Butts stared. "Freshman?"

"No," said Mary, who considered the befooling of Miss Butts beneath her. "I graduated last year."

"Oh, I don't believe that: I believe you're a freshman after all," declared Miss Butts. "You started to say you were a few minutes ago."

"No, I graduated last June," repeated Mary, a trifle sharply. "Here's Miss Hildreth coming for my next dance. You can ask her. I'm her guest this evening. Didn't I graduate last year, Babbie?"

Babbie stared uncomprehendingly for a moment. Then she remembered Mary's plan.

"Why, you naughty little freshman!" she cried reprovingly. "Have you been telling her that?"

Miss Butts looked dazedly from the amused and reproachful Babbie to Mary, whose expression was properly cowed and repentant.

"Are you really a freshman?" she asked. "Why, I don't believe you are. I—I don't know what to believe!"

Mary smiled at her radiantly. "Never mind," she said, "you'll know the truth some day. Next fall at about this time I'll invite you to dinner, and then you'll know all about me. Now good-bye."

100

Babbie regarded this speech as merely Mary's convenient little way of getting rid of the stupid Miss Butts, who for her part promptly forgot all about it. But Mary remembered, and she declared that the sight of Miss Butts's face on the occasion of that dinner-party, with all its rather remarkable accessories, was worth many evenings of boredom at "girl dances."

It was not until Friday, that Mary's "little friends" caught her red-handed, in an escapade that explained everything from the size of her trunk to the puzzling insouciance of her manner. They all, and particularly Roberta, had begun to feel a little hurt as the days went by and Mary indulged in many mysterious absences and made unconvincing excuses for refusing invitations that, as Katherine Kittredge said, were enough to turn the head of a crown-princess. Friday, the day that had been reserved for the expedition to Smuggler's Notch, dawned crisp and clear, and some girls who had had dinner at Mrs. Noble's farm the night before brought back glowing reports of the venison her brother had sent her from Maine, and the roaring log fire that she built for them in the fireplace of her new dining-room. So Roberta and Madeline hurried over before chapel to ask Mary to reconsider. But she was firm in her refusal. She had waked with a

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headache. Besides, she had letters to write and calls to make on her faculty friends and the people she knew in town.

The embassy returned, disconsolate, and reported its failure.

"It's just a shame," said Eleanor. "We've been saving that trip all the fall, so that Mary could go."

"Let's just go without her," suggested Katherine rebelliously. "There can't be many more nice days."

But Betty shook her head. "We don't want to hurt her feelings. She's a dear, even if she does act queerly this week. Besides, every one of us but Roberta and Madeline has that written lesson in English 10 to-morrow, and we ought to study. I'm scared to death over it."

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"So am I," agreed Katherine sadly. "I suppose we'd better wait."

"But we can go walking," said Madeline to Roberta, and Roberta, more hurt than any of the rest by her idol's strange conduct, silently assented.

They were scuffling gaily through the fallen leaves on an unfrequented road through the woods, when they heard a carriage coming swiftly up behind them and turned to see—of all persons—Mary Brooks, who hated driving, and Dr. Hinsdale. Mary was talking gaily and looked quite reconciled to her fate, and Dr. Hinsdale was leaving the horses very much to themselves in the pleasant absorption of watching Mary's face. Indeed so interested were the pair in each other that they almost passed the two astonished girls standing by the roadside, without recognizing them at all. But just as she whirled past, Mary saw them, and leaned back to wave her hand and smile her "beamish" smile at the unwitting discoverers of her secret.

It was dusk and nearly dinner time before Dr. Hinsdale drew his horses up in front of the house around the corner, but Mary's "little friends" gave up dressing, without a qualm, and even risked missing their soup to sit, lined up in an accusing row on her bed and her window-box, ready to greet her when she stumbled into her dark room and lit her gas.

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"Oh, girls! What a start you gave me!" she cried, suddenly perceiving her visitors. "I suppose you think I'm perfectly horrid," she went on hastily, "but truly I couldn't help it. When a faculty asks you to go driving, you can't tell him that you hate it—and I couldn't for the life of me scrape up a previous engagement."

"Speaking of engagements"—began Madeline provokingly.

"All's fair in love, Mary," Katherine broke in. "You're perfectly excusable. We all think so."

"Who said anything about love?" demanded Mary, stooping to brush an imaginary speck of dust from her skirt.

"Next time," advised Rachel laughingly, "you'd better take us into your confidence. You've given yourself a lot of unnecessary bother, and us quite a little worry, though we don't mind that now."

104

"Why didn't you tell us that he spent the summer at the same place that you did?" asked little Helen Adams.

Mary started. "Who told you that?" she demanded anxiously.

"Nobody but Lucile," explained Betty in soothing tones. "She visited there for a week, and this afternoon just by chance she happened to speak of seeing him. It fitted in beautifully, you see. She doesn't know you were there too, so it's all right."

Mary gave a relieved little sigh, and then, turning suddenly, fell upon the row of pitiless inquisitors, embracing as many as possible and smiling benignly at the rest. "Oh, girls, he's a dear," she said. "He's worth twenty of the gilded youths you meet out in society." She drew back hastily. "But we're only good friends," she declared. "He's been down a few times to spend Sunday—that was how I heard about the lecture—but he comes to see father as much as to see me—and—and you mustn't gossip."

"We won't," Katherine promised for them all. "You can trust us. We always seem to have a faculty romance or two on our hands. We're getting used to it."

105

"But it's not a romance," wailed Mary. "He took me walking and driving because mother asks him to dinner. We're nothing but jolly good friends."

"Nothing but jolly good friends—"

That was the last thing Mary said when, late the next afternoon, her "little friends" waved her off for home.

"Isn't she just about the last person you'd select for a professor's wife?" said Helen, as Mary's stylish little figure, poised on the rear platform of the train, swung out of sight around a curve.

"No, indeed she isn't," declared Roberta loyally. "She'll be a fine one. She's awfully clever, only she makes people think she isn't, because she knows how to put on her clothes."

"And it's one mission of the modern college girl," announced Madeline oracularly, "to show the people aforesaid that the two things can go together. Let's go to Smuggler's Notch Monday to celebrate."

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CHAPTER VI

HELEN ADAMS'S MISSION

The particular mission that Madeline had discovered for the modern college girl was one that Helen Chase Adams would never probably do much to fulfil. But Helen had a mission of her own—the mission of being queer. Sometimes she hated it, sometimes she laughed at it, always it seemed to her a very humble one, but she honestly tried to live up to its responsibilities and to make the most of the opportunities it offered.

The loneliness of Helen's freshman year had made an indelible impression on her. Even now that she was a prominent senior, an "Argus" editor, and a valued member of Dramatic Club, she never seemed to herself to "belong" to things as the other girls did. She was still an outsider. An unexplainable something held her aloof from the easy familiarities of the life around her, and made it inevitable that she should be, as she had been from the first, an observer rather than an actor in the drama of college life. And from her vantage point of observation she saw many strange things, and made her own little queer deductions and comments upon them.

107

On a certain gray and gloomy afternoon in November Helen sat alone in the "Argus" sanctum. She loved that sanctum—the big oak table strewn with books and magazines, the soft-toned oriental rugs, and the shimmering green curtains between which one could catch enchanting glimpses of Paradise River and the sunsets. She liked it as much as she hated her own bare little room, where the few pretty things that she had served only to call attention to the many that she hadn't. But to-day she was not thinking about the room or the view. It was "make-up" day for the sketch department—Helen's department of the "Argus." In half an hour she must submit her copy to Miss Raymond for approval—not that the exact hour of the day was specified, but if she waited until nearer dinner-time or until evening Miss Raymond was very likely to be at home, and Helen dreaded, while she enjoyed a personal interview with her divinity. Curiously enough she was more than ever afraid of Miss Raymond since she had been chosen editor of the "Argus." She was sure that Miss Raymond was responsible for her appointment, but she had never gotten up courage to thank her, and she was possessed by the fear that she was disappointing Miss Raymond in the performance of her official duties. So she preferred to find Miss Raymond's fascinating sitting-room vacant when she brought her copy, to drop it swiftly on the table nearest the door, and stopping only for one look at the enticing prospect of new books heaped on old mahogany, to flee precipitately like a thief in the night.

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The copy for this month was all ready. There was Ruth Howard's monologue, almost as funny to read as it had been in the telling, next, by way of contrast, a sad little story of neglected childhood by a junior who had never written anything good before, and a humorous essay on kittens by another junior that nobody had suspected of being literary. There was also a verse, or rather two verses; and it was these that caused the usually prompt and decisive Helen to hesitate and even to dawdle, wasting a precious afternoon in a futile attempt to square her conscience and still do as she pleased about those verses. One of them was Helen's own. It was good; Miss Raymond had said so with emphasis, and Helen wanted it to go into the "Argus." She had rather expected that Jane Drew would ask for it for the main department of the magazine; but she hadn't, and her copy had gone to Miss Raymond the day before. The other verses were also stamped with Miss Raymond's heartiest approval, and like the rest of the articles that Helen had collected, they were the work of a "nobody." Helen's vigorous unearthing of undiscovered talent was a joke with the "Argus" staff, and her own great pride. But to-day she was not in a benevolent mood. She had refused all through the fall to have anything of her own in the "Argus"; she did not believe in the editors printing their own work. But these verses were different; she loved them, she wanted people to see them and to know that they were hers.

109

She had thought of consulting Jane or Marion Lustig, who was editor-in-chief, but she knew beforehand what either of them would say. "Put in your own verse, silly child! Why didn't you say you'd like it used in the other department? We've got to blow our own horns if we want them blown. Use the others next time—or give them back."

110

But by next month there might be an embarrassment of good material, and as for giving them back, Jane could do it easily enough, but Helen, being queer, couldn't. For who knew how much getting into the "Argus" might mean to that unknown other girl? Helen had never so much as heard her name before, though she was a sophomore. She had a premonition that she was queer too, and lonely and unhappy. The verses were very sad, and somehow they sounded true.

"Perhaps she'll be an editor some day," Helen sighed. "Anyway I'll give her a chance."

She put on her coat and gathered up her manuscripts, first folding her own verses and pushing

them vindictively into the depths of her own particular drawer in the sanctum table.

When she reached the Davidson she noticed with relief that Miss Raymond's windows were dark. She was in time then. But when she knocked on the half-opened door she was taken aback to hear Miss Raymond's voice saying, "Come in," out of the shadows.

"Oh, excuse me!" began Helen in a frightened voice. "I've brought you the material for the sketch department. Please don't bother about a light. I mustn't stay."

But Miss Raymond went on lighting the lamp on her big table. As she stood for a moment full in the glare of it, Helen noticed that she looked worn and tired.

"I'm very sorry that I disturbed you," she said sadly. "You were resting."

Miss Raymond shook her head. "Not resting. Thinking. Do you like to think, Miss Adams?"

"Why—yes, I suppose so," answered Helen doubtfully. "Isn't that what college is supposed to teach us to do?"

"I shouldn't like to guarantee that it would in all cases," said Miss Raymond smilingly. "Has it taught you that?"

"Yes," said Helen. "I don't mean to be conceited, Miss Raymond, but I think it has."

"And you find it, as I do, rather a deadly delight," went on Miss Raymond, more to herself than to Helen. "And sometimes you wish you had never learned. When people tell you sad things, you wish you needn't go over and over them, trying to better them, trying to reason out the whys and wherefores of them, trying to live yourself into the places of the people who have to endure them. And when they don't tell you, you have to piece them out for yourself just the same." Miss Raymond came sharply back to the present and held out her hand for Helen's bundle of manuscript.

Helen gave it to her in puzzled silence, and watched her as she looked rapidly through it.

"Ruth Howard?" she questioned, when she reached the signature of the monologue. "Do I know her? Oh, a freshman, is she? She sounds very promising. Ellen Lacey—yes, I remember that story. Cora Wentworth—oh, I'm very glad you've got something of hers. She needs encouragement. Anne Carter—oh, Miss Adams, how did you know?"

"How did I know?" repeated Helen in bewilderment.

Miss Raymond looked at her keenly. "So you didn't know," she said. "It is a mere coincidence that you are going to print her verses."

"I don't know anything about her," Helen explained. "I heard you read the verses in your theme class last week. And at the close of the hour I asked you to let me have them and several other things. I used these first because I had all the prose I needed for this time."

"I see," said Miss Raymond. "Have you told her yet that you want them?"

"No," said Helen, guiltily. "I was going to write her a note as soon as I got home. I didn't suppose she would care."

"I presume you noticed that they are very remarkable."

Helen blushed, thinking how she had hesitated between these and her own production, which she was sure could not be considered at all "remarkable." "I—well, I went mostly by what you said. I don't believe I am a good judge of poetry—of verses, I mean."

"You needn't be afraid to call these verses poetry. But I don't blame you for not fully appreciating them. No girl ought to understand the tragedy of utter defeat, which is their theme."

Miss Raymond paused, and Helen wondered if she ought to go or stay.

"Miss Adams," Miss Raymond went on again presently, "the author of those verses was in my room just before you came. She wanted to return a book that I lent her early in the term, by way of answering some question that she had brought up in my sophomore English class. She says that the book and the word of appreciation that went with it are the only kindness for which she has to thank Harding college, and that I am the only person to whom she cares to say good-bye. I don't know why she should except me. I had quite forgotten her. I associated nothing whatever with the name on those verses until I looked at it again just now. I considered the tragic note in them merely as a literary triumph. I never thought of the girl behind the tragedy." She waited a moment. "She's going to leave college," she went on abruptly. "She says that a year and a half of it is a fair trial. I couldn't deny that. She says that she has made no friends, leaves without one regret or one happy memory. Miss Adams, would you be willing, instead of writing her a note, to tell her personally about this?"

"Why, certainly," said Helen, "if you think she'd like it better."

"Yes, I am sure she would. You won't find her at all hard to get on with. She has a dreadful scar on one cheek, from a cut or a burn, that gives her face a queer one-sided look. I suspect that may be at the bottom of her unhappiness."

On the way across the campus Helen had an inspiration, which led her a little out of her way, to the house where Jane Drew, the literary editor of the "Argus" lived.

"I'm so relieved that my department is all made up," she told Jane artfully, "that I feel like celebrating. Won't you meet me at Cuyler's for supper?"

Jane promised, a good deal surprised, for Helen was not in the habit of asking her to supper at Cuyler's; and Helen, after arranging to meet her guest down-town, hurried on to the address that Miss Raymond had given her, one of the most desirable of the off-campus houses. 116

Miss Carter was in, the maid said, and a moment later she appeared to speak for herself. She flushed with embarrassment when she saw Helen, and her dreadful, disfiguring scar showed all the more plainly on her reddened cheek.

"Oh, I supposed it was the woman with my washing," she said. "I don't have many calls. You must excuse this messy shirt waist. Please sit down."

"Won't you take me up to your room?" asked Helen, trying to think how Betty Wales would have put the other girl at her ease. "We can talk so much better there."

Miss Carter hesitated. "Why, certainly, if you prefer. It's in great confusion. I'm packing, or getting ready to pack, rather," and she led the way up-stairs to a big room that, even in its half-dismantled condition, looked singularly attractive and quite different somehow from the regulation college room.

"I have a dreadful confession to make," said Helen gaily, when they were seated. 117

"I've taken your verses for the 'Argus.' I've already sent them in to Miss Raymond, and now I've come to ask if you are willing. I do hope you are."

"Why certainly," said Miss Carter quietly. "You are perfectly welcome to them of course. You needn't have taken the trouble to come away up here to ask."

Then she relapsed into silence. Helen could not tell whether she was pleased or not. She had an uncomfortable feeling that she was being dismissed; but she did not go. Never in her life had she worked so hard to make conversation as she did in the next ten minutes. The "Argus," the new chapel rules, Miss Raymond and her theme classes, the sophomore elections,—none of them evoked a responsive chord in the strange girl who sat impassive, with no thought apparently of her social duties and responsibilities.

"She must think I don't know how to take a hint," reflected Helen, "but I don't care. I'm going to keep on trying."

Presently she noticed that from Miss Carter's window could be seen Mrs. Chapin's house and the windows of her and Betty's old room. 118

"That was where I lived when I first came to Harding," she began awkwardly, pointing them out. Then she looked at the girl opposite, read the misery in her big gray eyes, and opened her heart. Betty Wales, who had worked so hard to get at a little of the story of Helen's freshman year would have been amazed at the confidences she poured out so freely to this stranger. Indeed Helen was surprised herself at the ease with which she spoke and the dramatic quality that she managed to put into her brief account of the awkward, misfit, unhappy freshman.

Miss Carter listened at first apathetically, then with growing interest.

"Thank you," she said gravely, when Helen had finished. "I thought I was the only one who felt so."

"Oh, no, you aren't," said Helen brightly. "There are lots of others, I guess."

"No one with a thing like this," said the girl, with a swift, passionate gesture toward her scar.

"Don't," said Helen gently. "Please don't think about it. No one else does, I'm sure."

"I got it just before I came here," went on the girl, speaking almost fiercely. "It came in a horrible way, but it's horrible just of itself. I entered Harding because I thought the college life—the girls and the good times and the work—would help me to forget it—or to get used to being so ugly." 119

Helen considered a moment in silence. "I guess we're even more alike than I thought," she said at last. "We both expected college to do it all for us, while we—just sat. But I can tell you—do you play basket-ball? Anyhow you've seen it played. Well, you've got to keep your eye on the ball, and then you've got to jump—hard. Have you noticed that?"

Miss Carter laughed happily at Helen's whimsical comparison. "No," she said, "I've never been much interested in basket-ball. I'm afraid I've 'just sat' or jumped the wrong way."

Helen considered again, her small face wrinkled with the intensity of her thought. "You mean you've jumped away from the very things you were trying to get hold of," she said. "You've expected things to come to you. They won't. You've got to do your part. You've got to jump very often, and as if you meant it." 120

The girl nodded. "I see."

"You can do one thing right away," said Helen briskly, rising and buttoning her coat. "Do you know Jane Drew? Well, she's an awfully clever senior and an editor. She's going to have dinner with me at Cuyler's, and I'd like you to come too. You see one of the things you have jumped into already is being a star contributor to the 'Argus,' and we always want to meet our star contributors."

Miss Carter hesitated.

"Never mind your waist," Helen urged tactfully. "It looks perfectly fresh to me, but you can keep your coat on if you'd rather."

"All right, I'll come," said Miss Carter bravely.

And having yielded, she kept to the spirit, as well as the letter, of her promise. Jane, who was a very matter-of-fact young person, treated her with the same off-hand cordiality that she would have bestowed on any other chance acquaintance with interesting possibilities. The girls who stopped at the table to speak to Jane or Helen, smiled and nodded affably when they were introduced. Some of them stared a little, at the unusual combination of two prominent seniors and an obscure underclassman, but Miss Carter did not flinch. After dinner, when Jane had gone to speak to some friends at another table, she leaned forward toward her hostess. "I want to thank you," she said shyly, "for telling me about yourself and for bringing me here. Do you know, I was going to leave college, but I'm not now. I'm going to stay on—and try jumping," she ended quickly as Jane reappeared.

121

So Helen felt that her dinner had been a success, even though she should have to borrow largely from her next month's meagre allowance to pay for it.

On her way through the campus she met Miss Raymond, hurrying to meet an important engagement. But she stopped to inquire about Miss Carter.

"I knew you'd manage it," she said, when she had heard Helen's brief story of her adventures. "You're a person of resources. That's why we wanted you on the 'Argus' board."

122

Helen fairly danced the rest of the way to the Belden. "Perhaps I shan't be afraid of her next time," she thought. "I'd rather she'd say that than have sixty verses in the 'Argus.' Oh, what a selfish pig I was trying to be! I don't deserve to have it all come out so beautifully. And—oh, dear, I'm late for the meeting of the house play committee, and Betty said it was awfully important."

She found the committee in riotous and jubilant session in Madeline's room.

"Three cheers for Sara Crewe!" shrieked Polly Eastman, when Helen appeared.

"Goodness, I'm not Sara," gasped Helen.

"Oh, I mean the play, not the character," explained Polly impatiently. "It's going to be simply great. What do you suppose we've got now, Helen?"

"I don't know," said Helen, sitting down on the floor, since the bed and all the chairs were fully occupied.

"Well guess," commanded Polly, tossing her a cushion.

"A lot of Turkish-looking things for Mr. Carrisford's study."

123

"Nonsense! We can get those all right when the time comes."

"Josephine Boyd has learned her part."

"Then she's done a tall lot of work on it since last rehearsal," said Polly serenely. "I'm sure I hope she has, but this is something any amount nicer."

"Then I give up."

"Well, it's a monkey," cried Polly triumphantly, "a real live monkey that belongs to a hand-organ man in Boston. The Italian bootblack at the station knows him, and—did he promise fair and square to get them up here, Lucile?"

"Fair and square," repeated Lucile promptly. "I said we'd give him five dollars and his fare up from Boston. It's well worth it. A cat would have been too absurd when everybody knows the story."

"I hope Sara won't mind carrying a live monkey across the stage," said Betty. "I should be dreadfully afraid it would bite."

"She ought to have thought of that when she took the part," said Madeline. "She can't flunk now."

124

"Let's hurry it through and have the organ-man play for a dance afterward," suggested the ingenious Georgia Ames. "He'd surely throw that in for the five dollars."

"Better have him play between the acts too," put in somebody else. "There's nothing like getting your money's worth."

"And we'll pay him all in pennies," added Polly gleefully. "We can take turns handing them out to the monkey. How many pennies will there be in five dollars and a fare from Boston, Lucile?"

Helen listened to their gay banter, wondering, as many thoughtful people have wondered before her, at the light-hearted abandon of these other girls. "It must be fun to be like that," she reflected, "but I don't believe I should want to change places with any of them. They only see their own little piece of things, and they don't even know it's little,—like the man who didn't know anything about the forest he was walking through, because he got so interested in the trees. My tree is just a scraggly, crooked little sapling that won't ever amount to much, but I can see the whole big forest, and hear it talk, and that makes up. I'm glad I'm one of the kind that college teaches to think," ended Helen happily.

125

A moment later she made an addendum. "Betty Wales is a kind by herself," she decided. "She doesn't exactly think, but she knows. And she's really responsible for to-day. I wish I could tell her about it."

CHAPTER VII

126

ROBERTA "ARRIVES"

It was dress rehearsal night for the Belden House play, and the hall in the Students' Building, where the big house-plays are performed was the scene of a tremendous bustle and excitement. The play was to be "Sara Crewe," or rather "The Little Princess," for that is the title of the regular stage version of Mrs. Burnett's story which the Belden House was giving by the special permission of the Princess herself. The pretty young actress who had "created" the part was a friend of Madeline's father, and Madeline, being on the committee to choose a play, declared that she was tired to death of seeing the girls do Sheridan and Goldsmith and the regulation sort of modern farce, and boldly wrote to the Princess for permission to act her play, because it seemed so exactly suited to the capabilities of college girls. The Princess had not only said yes, but she had declared that she should be very much interested in the success of the play, and when Madeline, writing to thank her, had suggested that the Belden House would be only too delighted if she came up to see their performance, she had accepted their invitation with enthusiasm. Of course the committee and the cast were exceedingly flattered, but they were also exceedingly frightened and nervous, and even the glorious promise of a live monkey, with a hand-organ man thrown in, did not wholly reassure them.

127

To-night everything seemed to be at sixes and sevens. Though most of the committee had toiled over it all the afternoon, the stage resembled pandemonium rather than the schoolroom of Miss Minchen's Select Seminary, which was to be the scene of the first act. The committee were tired and, to speak frankly, cross, with the exception of Madeline, who was provokingly cool and nonchalant, though she had worked harder than any one else. The cast were infected with that irresponsible hilarity that always attacks an amateur company at their last rehearsal. They danced about the stage, getting in the way of the committee, shrieking with laughter at their first glimpses of one another's costumes, and making flippant suggestions for all sorts of absurd and impossible improvements.

128

Meanwhile, regardless of the fact that the rehearsal ought to have begun half an hour before, the committee and Mr. Carrisford's three Hindu servants were holding a solemn conclave at the back of the stage. The chef-d'œuvre of their scenic effects was refusing to work; the bagdads that were to descend as if by Hindu magic and cover the bare walls of Sara's little attic bedroom when the good fairies, in the guise of the aforesaid servants, effected its transformation in the second act. There weren't enough of the draperies for one thing, and some of them wouldn't unroll quickly, while others threatened to tumble down on the servants' devoted heads.

"Well, we'll just have to let them go for to-night," said Nita Reese dejectedly at last. She was chairman of the committee. "To-morrow we'll fix them all up again, the way Madeline says is right, and you three must come over and do that part of the scene again. Is everybody ready?"

"Miss Amelia Minchen isn't," said Betty, "She just came in carrying her costume."

129

"Then go and help her hurry into it," commanded Nita peremptorily. "Madeline, will you fix Ram Dass's turban? He's untwisted it again of course. Georgie Ames, line up the Seminary girls and the Carmichael children, and see whether any of their skirts are too long. Take them down on the floor. Everybody off the stage, please, but the scene-shifters."

"Oh, Nita," cried Polly Eastman, who had just come in, rushing breathlessly up to the distracted chairman, "I'm so sorry to be late, but some people that I couldn't refuse asked me down-town to dinner. I ate and ran, really I did. And Nita, what do you think—"

"I'm much too tired to think," returned Nita, wearily. "What's happened now?"

"Why, nothing has actually happened, only I was at the station this afternoon, and I asked the

shoe-shine man about the monkey, and he hasn't heard, but he told the organ-man that the play began at half-past eight, and all the trains have been horribly late to-day, so if he should plan to get in on the eight-fifteen——"

"Have him telegraph that it begins at six," said Nita, firmly. "Go and see to it now."

130

"Why, I did tell him to," said Polly, sighing at the prospect of going out again. "Only he's so irresponsible that I think we ought to decide——"

"Go and stand over him while he telegraphs," said Nita with finality. "We can't understudy a monkey. Josephine Boyd, come here and go through your long speech. I want to be sure that you get it right. It didn't make sense the way you said it yesterday."

"Oh, Nita." It was Lucile Merrifield holding out a yellow envelope.

Nita clutched it frantically. "Perhaps she's not coming. Wouldn't I be relieved!"

"It's not a telegram," explained Lucile, gently, "only the proof of the programs that the printer has taken this opportune moment to send up. The boy says if you could look at it right off, why, he could wait and take it back. They want it the first thing in the morning."

"Give it to Helen Adams," said Nita, turning back to Josephine. "She can mark proof. Go on Josephine, I'm listening, and don't stop again for anybody."

131

Josephine, who was the father of the large and irrepressible Carmichael family, had just finished declaiming her longest speech with praiseworthy regard for its meaning, when somebody called out, "Ermengarde St. John isn't here yet."

Nita sank down in Miss Amelia Minchen's armchair with a little moan of despair. "Somebody go and get her," she said. "Betty Wales, you'd better go. You can dress people fastest."

It seemed to Betty, as she hurried down-stairs and over to the Belden, that she had toiled along the same route, laden with screens, rugs and couch-covers, at least a hundred times that afternoon. She was tired and exasperated at this final hitch, and she burst into the room of the fat freshman who had Ermengarde's part with scant ceremony. What was her amazement to find it quite empty.

"Oh, she can't have forgotten and gone off somewhere!" wailed Betty. "Why, every one was talking about the rehearsal at dinner time."

132

The cast and committee included so many members of the house that it was almost depopulated, and none of the few girls whom Betty could find knew anything about the missing Ermengarde.

"I must have passed her on the way here," Betty decided at last, and rushed down-stairs again. As she went by the matron's door she almost ran into that lady, hurrying out.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Kent," she said. "You haven't seen Ermengarde—that is, I mean Janet Kirk, have you?"

"No, not yet," said Mrs. Kent briskly. "I only heard about it five minutes ago. I'm just getting ready now to go up and take the poor child some things she's sent for."

"But she isn't in her room," said Betty, bewildered but certain that Mrs. Kent's apparent affection for the irresponsible Janet was very ill-bestowed.

"Of course not, my dear," returned Mrs. Kent, serenely. "She's at the infirmary with a badly sprained ankle. She'll have to keep off it for a month at least, the doctor says."



"OH, I BEG YOUR PARDON"

"Oh, Mrs. Kent!" wailed Betty. "And she's Ermengarde St. John in the house-play. What can we do?"

133

Mrs. Kent shook her head helplessly. "You'll have to do without Janet," she said. "That's certain. She was on her way home to dinner when she slipped on a piece of ice near the campus-gate. She lay there several minutes before any one saw her, and then luckily Dr. Trench came along and drove her straight to the infirmary. She fainted while they were bandaging her ankle."

"I'm very sorry," said Betty, her vision of a possible hasty recovery dispelled by the last sentence. After a moment's hesitation she decided not to go back to the Students' Building to consult Nita. It would be better to bring some one over from the house to read the part for to-night. It was important, but luckily it wasn't very long, and somebody would have to learn it in time for the play the next evening.

So she hurried up-stairs again and the first person she met was Roberta Lewis, marching down the corridor with a huge Greek dictionary under her arm.

"Put that book down, Roberta; and come over to the rehearsal," commanded Betty. "Ermengarde St. John has sprained her ankle, and gone to the infirmary and everybody's waiting."

134

"You mean that you want me to go and get her?" asked Roberta doubtfully. "Because I think it would take two people to help her walk, if she's very lame. She's awfully fat, you know."

"We want you to read Janet's part," explained Betty, "just for to-night, until the committee can find some one to take it." And she gave a little more explicit account of the state of affairs at the rehearsal.

"Yes, indeed, I'll be glad to," said Roberta readily. She was secretly delighted to be furnished with an excuse for seeing the dress rehearsal. She had longed with all her soul to be appointed a member of the play-committee, but of course the house-president had not put her on; she was the last person, so the president thought, who would be useful there. And Roberta could not screw her courage up to the point of trying for a place in the cast. So no one knew, since she had never told any one, that she thought acting the most interesting thing in the world and that she loved to act, in spite of the terrors of having an audience. But she had let slip her one chance—the offer of a part in Mary's famous melodrama away back in her freshman year—and

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she had never had another.

And now, because she was Roberta Lewis, proud and shy and dreadfully afraid of pushing in where she wasn't wanted, she did not think it necessary to mention to Betty that she had borrowed a copy of the play from little Ruth Howard, who was Sara, and that she had read it over until she knew almost every line of it by heart.

Of course the committee were thrown into a state bordering upon panic by the news of Janet's accident, but Madeline comfortingly reminded them that the worse the last rehearsal was, the better the play was sure to be; and there was certainly nothing to do now but go ahead.

So they began to rehearse at last, almost an hour late, and the first act went off with great spirit, in spite of the handicap of a strange Ermengarde, who had to read her part because she was ashamed to confess that she knew it already, and who was supposed not to be familiar with her "stage business." To be sure, she had not very much to do in this scene, but at the end everybody thanked her effusively and Ruth Howard declared that she never saw anybody who "caught on" so fast.

"You ought to take the part to-morrow night," she said.

"Oh, oh!" Roberta cautioned her, in alarm and embarrassment. "They're going to have Polly Eastman. I heard Nita say so. Besides, I wouldn't for anything."

Ermengarde's chance comes in the second act, where, half in pity and half in admiration for the queer little Sara Crewe, she comes up to make friends with her, and, finding to her horror that Sara is actually hungry, decides to bring her "spread" up to Sara's attic. There, later, the terrible Miss Minchen finds her select pupils gathered, and wrathfully puts an end to their merry-making.

At the opening of this scene the attic was supposed to be lighted by one small candle, and consequently the stage was very dim.

"I don't believe Roberta can manage with that light," whispered Nita to Betty who was standing with her in one of the wings.

"Don't let's change unless we have to," Betty whispered back. "You know we wanted to get the effect of Miss Minchen's curl papers and night-cap. Why, Nita, Roberta hasn't any book. She's saying her part right off."

"No!" Nita was incredulous. "Why, Betty Wales, she is, and she's doing it splendidly, fifty per cent, better than Janet did."

Sure enough Roberta, becoming engrossed in the play, had forgotten to conceal her unwarranted knowledge of it. She realized what she had done when a burst of applause greeted her exit, and actors and committee alike forgot the proprieties of a last rehearsal to make a united assault upon her.

"Roberta Lewis," cried Betty accusingly, "why didn't you tell me that you knew Ermengarde's part?"

"Oh, I don't know it," protested Roberta. "I only know snatches of it here and there. Polly can learn it in no time."

"She won't have the chance," said Nita decisively. "You must take it, Roberta. Why didn't you tell people that you could act like that?"

"I shall have stage-fright and spoil everything," declared Roberta forlornly.

"Nonsense," said Nita. "You'd be ashamed to do anything of the kind."

"Yes," agreed Roberta solemnly, "I should." Whereupon everybody laughed, and Nita hugged Roberta and assured her that there was no way out of it.

"Somebody go and get Janet's costume," she ordered, "and any one who has a spare minute can be fitting it over. We shall have to have an extra rehearsal to-morrow of the parts where Ermengarde comes in. Go on now, Sara. Use Lucile's muff for the monkey."

When at last act three was finished it was ten o'clock and Nita gave a sigh of utter exhaustion. "If Madeline's rule holds," she said, "this play ought to go like clockwork to-morrow."

And it did, despite the rather dubious tone of the chairman's prophecy. The Princess arrived duly just after luncheon, and everybody except the cast, who would do their share later, helped to entertain her. This was not difficult. She wasn't a college girl, she explained, and she had never known many of them. She just wanted to hear them talk, see their rooms, and if it wasn't too much trouble she should enjoy looking on at a game of—what was it they played so much at Harding? Basket-ball, somebody prompted. Yes, that was it. The sophomore teams which had just been chosen were proud to play a game for her, and they even suggested, fired by her responsive enthusiasm, that they should teach her to play too.

"I should love it," she said, "if somebody would lend me one of those becoming suits. But I mustn't." She sighed. "The newspapers would be sure to get hold of it. Besides they're giving a tea for me at the Belden. It begins in five minutes. Doesn't time just fly at Harding?"

The monkey also arrived in good season, whether thanks to or in spite of Polly's exertions was not clear, since his master spoke no English and not even Madeline could understand his Italian. The bagdads worked beautifully. The new Ermengarde was letter-perfect, and nobody but herself had any fear that she would be stage-struck, even though the Princess would be sitting in the very middle of the fourth row. Janet's name was still on the program, for Roberta had sternly insisted that it shouldn't be crossed out; and as neither of the two Ermengardes was very well known to the college in general, only a few people noticed the change. But the part made a hit.

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"Isn't she just like some little girl who used to go to school with you—that funny, stupid Ermengarde?" one girl would say to another. "They're all natural, but she's absolutely perfect."

"Sara's a dear," said the Princess, "but I want to talk to Ermengarde. Mayn't I go behind? We actor people always like to do that, you know."

So she was escorted behind the scenes, and it was the proudest moment of Roberta's life when the Princess, having asked particularly for her, said all sorts of nice things about her "real talent" and "artistic methods."

"That settles it, Roberta," said Betty, who was behind the scenes in her capacity of chief dressing-maid and first assistant to the make-up man. "You've got to try for senior dramatics."

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"Do you really think I could get a part?" asked Roberta coolly.

"I think you might," said Betty, amazed beyond words by Roberta's ready acquiescence. "You probably won't get anything big," she added cautiously. "There are such a lot of people in our class who can act. But the girls say that the only way to get a small part is to try for a big one. Don't you remember how Mary Brooks tried for the hero and the heroine and the villain and then was proud as a peacock to be a page and say two lines, and Dr. Brooks and her mother and two aunts and six cousins came to see her do it."

"Dear me," said Roberta in frightened tones, "do you suppose my father and my cousin will feel obliged to come?"

"I don't know," laughed Betty, "but I feel obliged to remind you that the third act of Sara Crewe is on and you belong out there where you can hear your cue."

"I hope Roberta won't be disappointed about getting a part in the senior play," Betty confided to Madeline, as they parted afterward in the Belden House hall. "She did awfully well to-night, but I think she takes it too seriously. She doesn't realize what tremendous competition there is for the parts in our plays, nor what lots of practice some of the girls have had."

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"Oh, I wouldn't worry," said Madeline easily. "If she doesn't get anything, she'll have to do without. She'll have plenty of company. She probably won't try when the time comes."

"Yes," said Betty, "she will, and she's so sensitive that she'll hate terribly to fail. So, as I started her on her mad career as an actress, I feel responsible."

"You always feel responsible for something," laughed Madeline. "While you're in the business why don't you remember that you're responsible for a nice little slice of to-night's performance. Miss Ferris says it's the best house-play she's seen."

"I know. Isn't it just splendid?" sighed Betty rapturously. "And isn't the Princess a dear? But Madeline, you haven't any idea how my feet ache."

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CHAPTER VIII

THE GREATEST TOY-SHOP ON EARTH

"No," said Betty, "I haven't found it, and now I'm almost sure I shan't, because Nita's lost hers."

"What has Nita lost?" asked Madeline from her nest of pillows. It was the evening after the play, and the Belden House felt justified in taking life easily. "She lost her head last night," chuckled Madeline, without waiting for Betty's answer. "Did you hear her imploring the organ-man in her most classic English not to let me take the monkey out in front to show to the President? As if I really would!"

"You've done just as crazy things in your time, dear," retorted Katherine Kittredge, who had come over to borrow one of Betty's notebooks and had found the atmosphere of elegant leisure that pervaded the room irresistible.

"Do you really think so?" asked Madeline amiably. "Well, before we go into that I want to know what else Nita has lost."

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"Why, a pin," explained Betty,—“that lovely one with the amethyst in the centre and the ring of little pearls in a quaint old setting. It used to be her great-grandmother’s. Mine wasn’t much to lose, and I felt sure until to-day that it would turn up, but it hasn’t, and now I’m afraid it was really stolen.”

"Have you looked all through that?" asked Madeline, pointing to the miscellaneous assortment of books, papers, dance-cards and bric-a-brac that littered Betty’s small desk to the point of positive inundation.

Betty assented with dignity. "And I haven’t had time since to put it back in the pigeon-holes. When Nita told me about her pin, I got worried about mine—mother gave it to me and I couldn’t bear to lose it for good—so I went through my desk and all my drawers and it was sweeping-day, so I asked Belden House Annie to look too. It’s not here."

"Is Nita sure hers was stolen?" asked Katherine.

Betty nodded. "As sure as she can be without actually seeing it taken. She left it on her cushion yesterday when she came down to luncheon, and when she got back from physics lab, it was gone."

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"What a shame!" said Madeline. "She ought to tell Mrs. Kent right away. I should strongly suspect the new table-girl."

"Oh, but she’s a cousin of Belden House Annie’s," explained Betty, "and I’m sure Annie would look after her. We all know that she’s as honest as the day herself, and all the other maids have been here for years and years."

"It’s queer," said Katherine, "if it was an outsider—a more or less professional thief, I mean—that he or she should come to this house twice, several weeks apart, and each time take so little. If it was a college girl now—"

"Oh, don’t, Katherine," begged Betty. "I can’t bear to think that any Harding girl would do such a thing. I’d ten times rather never know who it was than to find it was that way."

Just then the B’s appeared airily attired in kimonos concealed under rain-coats, and laden with a huge pan of marshmallow fudge, which they had made, they explained, in honor of Roberta’s successful début.

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"What are you all looking so solemn about?" demanded Bob, when Babbie had gone in search of Roberta.

Betty told her, and Babe and Bob exchanged glances.

"It’s not necessarily any one in this house who’s responsible, I guess," said Babe. "Babbie’s lost a valuable pin too, and Geraldine Burdett has lost a ring. Oh, about two weeks ago Gerry’s was taken, and Babbie’s before that. They’ve been keeping dark and trying to get up a clue, but they can’t. They’ll be all off when they hear about these other robberies."

"There was one awfully queer thing about Babbie’s thief," put in Bob. "Her little gold-linked purse was on the chiffonier right beside her pin and it wasn’t touched, though it was just stuffed with bills. That makes them afraid it was some girl who’s awfully fond of jewelry and can’t afford any."

"It isn’t right to leave our lovely things around so, is it?" said Betty seriously. "It’s just putting temptation in the way of poor girls."

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"Exactly," agreed Madeline. "We go off for hours, never locking up anything, leaving our money and other valuables in plain sight, and if we do miss anything we can’t be sure it’s stolen and we don’t have time to investigate for weeks after. It’s a positive invitation to dishonesty."

"But it’s such a nuisance to lock up," complained Babe, "and if I hide things I can’t ever find them again, so I might as well not bother."

"I haven’t any golden baubles," said Bob, "but I’m going to keep my money in ‘Love’s Labor Lost.’ You’ll find it there if you ever want to borrow."

"‘Much Ado about Nothing’ would be the most appropriate place for mine," laughed Katherine, "so I choose that. You probably won’t find any if you want to borrow."

"But seriously, girls, let’s all be more careful," advised Betty, "and let’s ask other people to be. Think how perfectly awful it is to make chances for girls to forget themselves. But I shan’t believe it’s a Harding girl," she added decisively. "It would be perfectly easy for any dishonest young woman to go through the houses without being questioned. Perhaps she got frightened and didn’t notice Babbie’s money on that account or didn’t have time to snatch up anything but the pin."

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Just then Babbie appeared, bringing Roberta and Rachel Morrison who had met them in the hall, and in the general attack upon the fudge pan more serious issues were forgotten.

It was now the busiest, gayest part of the long fall term. Flying fast on the heels of the house play came Thanksgiving Day.

"And just to think of it!" wailed Bob. "Only two days vacation this year, and Miss Stuart and the

president dropping the most awful hints about what will happen if you cut over. Nobody can go home. I hope the faculty will all eat too much and have horrible attacks of indigestion."

"Well, we may as well have as much fun as we can out of it," said Babbie philosophically. "I've written home for a spread; so we shan't die of hunger."

"Mrs. Kent says she's going to give us the best Thanksgiving dinner we ever ate," announced Betty cheerfully.

"I hope our matron will be seized with the same lofty ambition," said Katherine. "If she is, and if the skating holds, I shan't mind staying here."

"Weren't you going to stay anyway?" asked Helen Adams.

"Being a resident of the remote village of Kankakee, Illinois, and not having been urged to visit any of my Eastern friends, I was," admitted Katherine, solemnly, "but that doesn't make it any the nicer to have to work all day Saturday."

The skating did last, and the man at the rink, being taken in hand by the B's, sympathized heartily with their wrongs, and promised them a three days' ice carnival, which meant search-lights, bonfires and a big band on the ice every evening. There is nothing in the world more exhilarating than skating to good music. The rink was thronged with Harding girls and Winsted men, and the proprietor could not easily regard himself as a bona fide philanthropist.

The paper-chase, to get up an appetite on Thanksgiving morning, was Katherine Kittredge's idea and the basket-ball game in the afternoon between the Thanksgiving Dinners and the Training Tables was too fantastic to have originated with any one but Madeline Ayres.

Georgia Ames, dressed as a huge turkey gobbler, captained the Thanksgiving Dinners, who were gotten up as bunches of celery and mounds of cranberry jelly. The captain of the Training Table simulated a big bottle labeled "Pure Spring Water," and the members of her team were tastefully trimmed with slices of dry bread. Being somewhat less spectacular than their rivals, they were a little more agile and they won the game, which was so funny that it sent two of the faculty into hysterics.

"And that's almost as bad as indigestion," said Babe, who was a bunch of celery. At least she had been one until she came into collision with the water bottle and lost most of her trimmings.

It was really the Thanksgiving game that precipitated the plans for the senior entertainment for the library fund. The fire the year before had not only damaged the library considerably, but it had brought its shortcomings and the absurdly small number of its volumes, compared with the rapidly increasing number of the girls who used them, to the attention of the public. Somebody had offered fifty thousand dollars for a library fund provided the college raised an equal amount. The alumnae were trying to get the money, and because they had helped the undergraduates with their beloved Students' Building, they wanted the undergraduates to help them now.

On the very evening of the game Marie Howard, the senior president, caught Madeline on the way to Babbie's spread and laid the matter before her.

"The alums want us to subscribe to the fund," she explained, "and then they think each class ought to give an entertainment. Not a bit nervy, are they? Well, of course 19— has got to take the lead, and I've fairly racked my brains to think what we can do. Now it's no trouble to you to have lovely, comical ideas, and if you'll only help me out with this entertainment, I'll be your friend for life."

"Why don't you appoint a committee to take charge of it?" inquired Madeline, serenely.

Marie gave her a mournful look. "I suppose you think I haven't tried. The girls are all willing to help, but they insist upon having the idea to start with. I know you hate committees, Madeline, and I'm not asking you to be on one—"

"You'd better not," interpolated Madeline, darkly, remembering the drudgery she had submitted to to make the Belden House play a success.

"Just think up the idea," Marie went on, persuasively, "and I'll make a committee do the rest. I don't care what we have, so long as it's new and taking—the sort of thing that you always seem to have in your head. That's what we want. Plays and lectures are too commonplace."

"Marie," said Madeline, laughingly, "you talk as if ideas were cabbages and my head was a large garden. I can't produce ideas to order any more than the rest of you can. But if I should think of anything, I'll let you know."

"Thank you," said Marie, sweetly, and went back to her room, where she gave vent to some forcible remarks about the "exasperatingness" of clever people who won't let themselves be pinned down to anything.

It was Betty Wales who, dancing into Madeline's room the next afternoon, gave, not Madeline, but Eleanor Watson,—who had been having tea with Madeline and listening to her absurd version of Marie's request,—an inspiration.

"I wish it wasn't babyish to like toys," she sighed. "I've been down-town with Bob, and they've

opened a big toy-shop in the store next Cuyler's, just for the holidays, I suppose. Bob got a Teddy bear, and I bought this box of fascinating little Japanese tops for my baby sister. They're all like different kinds of fruit and you spin them like pennies, without a string. I just love toy-stores."

"So do I. So does everybody," said Madeline, oracularly, clearing a place on the polished tea-table and emptying out the miniature tops. "They renew your youth. Let's get all these things to spinning at once, Betty."

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"Why don't you have a toy-shop for your senior entertainment?" asked Eleanor, watching the two absorbed faces.

"How do you mean?" asked Madeline, absently, trying to make the purple plum she was manipulating stay upright longer than Betty's peach.

"Why, with live toys, something on the plan of the circus that you and Mary got up away back in sophomore year," explained Eleanor. "I should think you might work it up beautifully."

Madeline stared at her for a moment, her eyes half-closed. "Eleanor," she declared at last, "you're a genius. We could. I can fairly see my friends turning into toys. You and Betty and the rest of the class beauties are French dolls of course. Helen Adams would make a perfect jumping-jack—she naturally jerks along just like one."

"And Bob can be a jack-in-the-box," cried Betty eagerly, getting Madeline's idea.

"Or a monkey that climbs a rope," suggested Eleanor. "Don't you think Babe would pop out of a box better?"

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"And that fat Miss Austin will be just the thing for a top," put in Madeline. "We can ask five cents for a turn at making her spin." And Madeline twirled the purple plum vigorously, in joyous anticipation of taking a turn at Miss Austin.

"Then there could be a counter of stuffed animals," suggested Eleanor, "with Emily Davis to show them off."

"Easily," agreed Madeline, "and a Noah's ark, if we want it, and a Punch and Judy show. Oh, there's no end to the things we can have! Let's go over and tell Marie about it before dinner."

"You and Betty go," objected Eleanor. "I really haven't time."

"Nonsense," said Madeline firmly. "It's long after five now, and—Eleanor Watson, are you trying to crawl out of your responsibilities? It was you that thought of this affair, remember."

"Please don't try to drag me in," begged Eleanor. "I'll be a doll, if you like, or anything else that you can see me turning into. But Marie didn't ask me to suggest, and she might feel embarrassed and obliged to ask me to be on the committee, and—please don't try to drag me in, Madeline."

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Madeline looked at her keenly, for a moment. "Eleanor Watson," she began sternly, "you're thinking about last fall. Don't you know that that stupid girl didn't stand for anybody but her own stupid self?"

"She was in the right," said Eleanor simply.

"Not wholly," objected Madeline, "and if she was this isn't a parallel case. In making you toastmistress 19— was supposed to be doing you an honor. You're doing her a favor now, and a good big one."

"And if we tell Marie about the toy-shop, we shall tell her that you thought of it," put in Betty firmly.

"And we shall also say that you hate committee meetings as much as I do," put in Madeline artfully, "but that we are both willing to help in any way that we can with ideas and costumes."

Eleanor looked pleadingly from one to the other.

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"We won't give in," declared Betty, "so it's no use to make eyes at us like that."

"Either we suppress the whole idea and 19— goes begging for another, or it stands as yours," said Madeline in adamant tones.

"Well, then, of course," began Eleanor slowly at last.

"Of course," laughed Betty, jumping up to hug her. "I knew you'd see it sensibly in a minute. Come on, Madeline. We haven't any time to lose."

"Do you remember what she was like two years ago, Betty?" asked Madeline thoughtfully when Eleanor had left them, persisting that she really had an engagement before dinner.

"I even remember what she was like three years ago," laughed Betty happily.

"Fancy her giving up a chance like this then!" mused Madeline. "Fancy her contributing ideas to the public good and trying to escape taking the credit for them. Why, Betty, she's a different person."

"I'm so glad you're friends now," said Betty, squeezing Madeline's arm lovingly.

"That's so," Madeline reflected. "We weren't two years ago. I used to hate her wire-pulling so. And now I suppose I'm pulling wires for her myself. Well, I'm going to be careful not to pull any of them down on her head this time. I say, Betty, wouldn't the Blunderbuss make a superb jack-in-the-box? I'm sure everybody would appreciate the symbolic effect when she popped, and perhaps we could manage to smother her by mistake between times."

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The toy-shop took "like hot-cakes," to borrow Bob's pet comparison. Everybody told Madeline that it was just like her, and Madeline assured everybody gaily that she had always known she was misunderstood and that anyhow Eleanor Watson was responsible for the toy-shop. Having spent the better part of a day in spreading this information Madeline rushed off to New York on a vague and mysterious errand that had something to do with sub-letting the apartment on Washington Square.

"I remembered after I got down here," she wrote Betty a week later, "that I couldn't eat my solitary Christmas dinner in the flat if I let it. Besides my prospective tenants are bores, and bores never appreciate old furniture enough not to scratch it. But I'm staying on to oversee the fall cleaning, and we haven't had one for a good while, so it will take another week. I'm sorry not to be on hand for the toy-shop doings (don't you let them put it off, Betty, or I can never make up my work), but I send a dialogue—no, it's for four persons—on local issues for the Punch and Judy puppets. If they can't read it, tell them to cultivate their imaginations. I'll print the title, 'The Battle of the Classes,' to give them a starter."

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"Miss me a little,

"MADELINE.

"P. S. How are the wires working?"

If Eleanor suspected any hidden motive behind Madeline's sudden departure she had no way of confirming her theory, and when Betty escorted the entertainment committee, all of whom happened to be splendid workers but without a spark of originality among them, to Eleanor's room, and declaring sadly that she couldn't remember half the features of the toy-shop that they had discussed together, claimed Eleanor's half-promise of help, why there was nothing for Eleanor to do but redeem it. Nothing at least that the new Eleanor Watson cared to do. It was plain enough that the committee wanted her suggestions, and what other people might think of her motive for helping them really mattered very little in comparison with the success of 19—'s entertainment. Thus the new Eleanor Watson argued, and then she went to work.

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"The wires are all right so far," Betty wrote Madeline. "The girls are all lovely, and they'd better be. Eleanor has arranged the dearest play for the dolls, all about a mad old German doll-maker who has a shop full of automatons and practices magic to try to bring them to life. Some village girls come in and one changes clothes with a doll and he thinks he's succeeded. Eleanor saw it somewhere, but she had to change it all around."

"Alice Waite wanted the dolls to give Ibsen's 'Doll's House.' She didn't know what it was about of course, or who wrote it. She just went by the name. The other classes have got hold of the joke and got us to death."

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"You'd better come back and have some of the fun. Besides, nobody can think how to make a costume for the mock-turtle. It's Roberta, and it's going to dance with the gryphon for the animal counter's side-show. Eleanor thought of that too."

But Madeline telegraphed Roberta laconically: "Gray carpet paper shell, mark scales shoe-blackening, lace together sides," and continued to sojourn in Washington Square.

Late in the afternoon of the toy-shop's grand opening she appeared in the door of the gymnasium and stood there a moment staring at the curious spectacle within.

The curtain was just going down on the dolls' pantomime, and the audience was applauding and hurrying off to make the rounds of the other attractions before dinner time. In clarion tones that made themselves heard above the din Emily Davis was advertising an auction of her animals, beginning with "one perfectly good baa-lamb."

"Hear him baa," cried Emily, "and you'll forget that his legs are wobbly."

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"This way to the Punch and Judy," shouted Barbara Gordon hoarsely through a megaphone. "Give the children a season of refined and educating amusement. Libretto by our most talented satirist. Don't miss it."

"Hello, Madeline," cried Lucile Merrifield, spying the new arrival. "When did you get back? Come and see the puppets with me. They say your show is great."

"It all looks good to me," said Madeline, "but—is there a top to spin?"

Lucile laughed and nodded. "That fat Miss Austin has taken in two dollars already at five cents a spin. She says she used to love making cheeses, and that she hasn't had such a good time since she grew up."

"That's where I want to go first," said Madeline decisively; but on her way to the tops the doll

counter beguiled her.

"Betty Wales," she declared, "when you curl in your lips and stare straight ahead you look just like the only doll I ever wanted. I saw her in a window on Fifth Avenue, and the one time in my life that I ever cried was when daddy wouldn't buy her for me. Where's Eleanor?"

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"I don't know," said Betty happily. "She was here a minute ago playing for the dolls' pantomime. But she's all right. Everybody has been thanking her and praising the pantomime, and she's so pleased about it all. She told me that she had felt all this year as if everybody was pointing her out as a disgrace to the class and the college, and that she was beginning to think that her whole life was spoiled. And now—"

"Why, Madeline Ayres," cried Katherine Kittredge hurrying up to them, her hair disheveled and her hands very black indeed. "I'm awfully glad you've come. There's a class meeting to-morrow to decide on the senior play and I want—"

"You want tidying up," laughed Madeline. "What in the world have you been doing?"

"Being half of a woolly lamb," explained Katherine. "The other half couldn't come back this evening, so Emily has been selling us—or it, whichever you please—at auction. Now listen, Madeline. You don't know anything about this play business."

Madeline had heard Katherine's argument, spun Miss Austin, and seen the "Alice in Wonderland" animals dance before she found Eleanor, and by that time an interview with Jean Eastman had prepared her for the hurt look in Eleanor's eyes and the little quiver in her voice, as she welcomed Madeline back to Harding.

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Jean was one of the few seniors who had had no active part in the toy-shop. "So I'm patronizing everything regardless," she exclaimed, sauntering up to Madeline and holding out a bag of fudge. "It's a decided hit, isn't it? Polly says the other classes are in despair at the idea of getting up anything that will take half as well."

"It's certainly a lovely show," said Madeline, trying the fudge.

"And a big feather in Eleanor Watson's cap," added Jean carelessly. "She always was the cleverest thing. I'd a lot rather be chairman of the play committee, or even a member of it, for that matter, than toastmistress. I suppose you know that there's a class-meeting to-morrow."

"Have you said that to Eleanor?" asked Madeline coldly.

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"Oh, I gave her my congratulations on her prospects," said Jean with a shrug. "We're old friends, you know. We understand each other perfectly."

Madeline's eyes flashed. "It won't be the least use to tell you so," she said, "but lobbying for office is not the chief occupation of humanity as you seem to think. Neither Eleanor Watson nor any of her friends has thought anything about her being put on the play committee. I made the mistake once of supposing that our class as a whole was capable of appreciating the stand she's taken, and I shan't be likely to forget that I was wrong. But this affair was entirely her idea, and she deserves the credit for it."

"Oh, indeed," said Jean quickly. "I suppose you didn't send telegrams—"

But Madeline, her face white with anger was half way across the big hall.

Jean watched her tumultuous progress with a meaning smile. "Well, I've fixed that little game," she reflected. "If they did intend to put her up, they won't dare to now. They'll be afraid of seeing me do the Blunderbuss's act with variations. She'd have been elected fast enough, after this, and there isn't a girl in the class who could do half as well on that committee. But as for having her and that insufferable little Betty Wales on, when I shall be left off, I simply couldn't stand it."

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Madeline found Betty taking off her doll's dress by dim candle-light, which she hoped would escape the eagle eye of the night-watchman. "I've come to tell you that the wires are all down again," she began, and went on to tell the story of Jean's carefully timed insinuations.

"I almost believe that the Blunderbuss was the tool of the Hill crowd," she said angrily. "At any rate they used her while she served, and now they're ready to take a hand themselves."

Betty stared at her in solemn silence. "What an awful lot it costs to lose your reputation," she said sadly.

"And it costs a good deal to be everybody's guardian angel, doesn't it, dearie?" Madeline said affectionately. "I oughtn't to have bothered you, but I seem to have made a dreadful mess of things so far."

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"Oh, no, you haven't," Betty assured her. "Eleanor knows how queer Jean is, and what horrid things she says about people who won't follow her lead. None of that crowd would help about the toy-shop except Kate Denise, but every one else has been fine. And I know they haven't thought that Eleanor was trying to get anything out of them."

Madeline sighed mournfully. "In Bohemia people don't think that sort of thing," she said. "It complicates life so to have to consider it always. Good-night, Betty."

"Good-night," returned Betty cheerfully. "Don't forget that the senior 'Merry Hearts' have a tea-drinking to-morrow."

"I'm not likely to," laughed Madeline. "Every one of them that I've seen has mentioned it. They're all agog with curiosity."

"They'll be more so with joy, when I've told them the news," declared Betty, holding her candle high above her head to light Madeline through the hall.

"Dear me! I wish there could be a class without officers and committees and editors and commencement plays," she told the green lizard a little later. "Those things make such a lot of worry and hard feeling. But then I suppose it wouldn't be much of a class, if it wasn't worth worrying about. And anyway it's almost vacation."

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CHAPTER IX

A WEDDING AND A VISIT TO BOHEMIA

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Betty and Madeline went to their class meeting on the following afternoon very much as a trembling freshman goes to her first midyears, but nothing disastrous happened.

"I fancy that Jean has taken more than Eleanor and me into her confidence," Madeline whispered. Besides, the Blunderbuss was in her place, her placid but unyielding presence offering an effectual reminder to the girls who had been admiring Eleanor's executive ability and resourcefulness that it would be safer not to mention her name in connection with the play committee.

But before that was elected the preliminary committee, which, to quote Katherine Kittredge, had been hunting down the masterpieces of Willy Shakespeare ever since the middle of junior year, made its report. The members had not been able to agree unanimously on a play, so the chairman read the majority's opinion, in favor of "As You Like It," and then Katherine Kittredge explained the position of the minority, who wanted to be very ambitious indeed and try "The Merchant of Venice." There was a spirited debate between the two sets of partisans, after which, to Katherine's infinite satisfaction, 19— voted to give "The Merchant of Venice" at its commencement.

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Then the committee to manage the play was chosen, and Betty Wales was the only person who was much surprised when she was unanimously elected to the post of costume member.

"I on that committee!" she exclaimed in dismay. "Why, I don't know anything about Shakespeare."

"You will before you get through with this business," laughed Barbara Gordon, who had been made chairman. "The course begins to-morrow at two in my room. No cuts allowed."



"I DO CARE ABOUT HAVING FRIENDS LIKE YOU," SHE SAID.

Betty's pleasure in this unexpected honor was rather dampened by the fact that Jean Eastman had proposed her name, making it seem almost as if she were taking sides with Eleanor's enemies. But Madeline only laughed at what she called Jean's neat little scheme for getting the last word.

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"Ruth Ford was all ready to nominate you," she said, "but Jean dashed in ahead of her. She wanted to assure me that I hadn't silenced her for long."

So Betty gave herself up to the happy feeling of having shown herself worthy to be trusted with part of 19—'s most momentous undertaking.

"I must write Nan to-night," she said, "but I don't think I shall mention the costume part. She would think I was just as frivolous as ever, and Barbara says that all the committee are expected to help with things in general."

Whereupon she remembered her tea-drinking, and hurried home to find most of the guests already assembled, and Eleanor, who had not gone to the class meeting but who had heard all about it from the others, waiting on the stairs to congratulate her.

"I don't care half as much about being on the committee as I do about having friends like you to say they're glad," declared Betty, hugging Eleanor because there were a great many things that she didn't know how to say to her.

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"Yes, friends are what count," said Eleanor earnestly, "and Betty, I think I'm going to leave Harding with a good many. At least I've made some new ones this week."

And that was all the reference that was ever made to the way Eleanor's oldest friend at Harding had treated her.

"Well," said Betty, when everybody had congratulated her and Rachel, whose appointment on all 19—'s important committees had come to be a foregone conclusion, "I hope Nita and Rachel and K. won't be sorry they came. You three aren't so much mixed up in it as the rest of us, but I thought I'd ask you anyway."

"Do you mean that I can't have my usual three slices of lemon?" demanded Katherine indignantly.

"Hush, material-minded one," admonished Nita. "There's more than tea and lemon in this. There's a great secret. Of course we shall be interested in it. Fire away, Betty."

"And everybody stop watching the kettle," commanded Babbie, who had taken it in charge, "and then perhaps it will begin to boil." 173

"What I wanted to tell you," began Betty, impressively, "is that Miss Hale is going to be married this vacation."

"Good for Miss Hale!" cried Bob, throwing up a pillow. "Did her sister get well?"

"Yes," said Betty. "She was dreadfully ill all summer, and then she had to go away for a change. Ethel wanted to wait until she was perfectly strong, because she had looked forward so to being maid-of-honor."

"I think we ought to send Miss Hale a present," said Babe, decisively. "Madame President, please instruct the secretary— Why, we haven't any president now," ended Babe in dismay.

"Let's elect Betty," suggested Nita.

"She's too young for such a responsible position," objected Bob. "It's only the dramatics committee that takes infants."

"And besides, her hair curls," added Madeline, reaching out to pull one of the offending ringlets. "Curly-haired people don't deserve to be elected to offices."

"Let's have Babe," suggested Rachel. 174

"She's older than her name, her hair has always been straight—"

"Except once," put in Katherine, and everybody shrieked with laughter at the recollection of Babe's one disastrous experience with a marcelle wave.

"And then she looked like a wild woman of Borneo," went on Rachel, "so it shouldn't count against her. Furthermore this society was organized to give her a chance."

"All right," agreed Nita. "I withdraw my nomination. Babe, you're elected. Instruct the secretary to cast a unanimous ballot for yourself."

"Very well," said Babe with much dignity. "Please do it, Madeline, and then I appoint you and Betty and Eleanor to choose a present for Miss Hale. I was just going to say, when I interrupted myself to remark upon the extraordinary absence of a presiding officer"—Babe coughed and dropped her presidential manner abruptly—"I was going to say that I'm all for a stuffed turtle, like those we got in Nassau. I think a ripping big one would be the very thing."

"Babe!" said Babbie scornfully. "Imagine how a turtle would look among her wedding presents." 175

"I think it would look stunning," persisted Babe, "and it would be so appropriate from us."

"Don't be dictatorial, Babe," advised Rachel. "It isn't seemly in a president. Perhaps your committee can think of something appropriate that won't be quite so startling as a turtle. When is the wedding, Betty?"

"The thirty-first of December at half-past eight," explained Betty.

"New Year's eve—what a nice, poetical time," interposed Babbie, thoughtfully. "I think that if I ever marry—"

"Hush, Babbie," commanded Nita. "You probably never will. Do let Betty finish her story."

"Well, it's to be a very small wedding," went on Betty, hastily, "with no cards, but announcements, but Ethel wrote me herself and she wants us all—the Nassau ones, I mean—and Mary Brooks, to come."

"Jolly for Miss Hale!" cried Bob, tossing up two pillows this time.

"How perfectly dear of her!" said Babbie. 176

"The biggest turtle we can get won't be a bit too good for her," declared Babe.

"But where could we stay over night?" asked Helen, the practical-minded.

"You don't give me a chance to tell you the whole of anything," complained Betty, sadly. "We're invited guests—specially invited, I mean, and it's all arranged where we are to stay. Ethel is going to have her sister and four bridesmaids to walk with her, and she wants us girls to hold a laurel rope along the line of march of the wedding-party, as they go through the rooms."

"Jolly," began Babe, but she was promptly suppressed by Madeline, who tumbled her flat on her back and held her down with a pillow while she ordered Betty to proceed.

"I'll read you what else she says," went on Betty, triumphantly producing Miss Hale's letter. "She says, 'There won't be many people to get in the way of the procession, but the aisle effect will be pretty, and besides I want my match-makers to have a part in the grand dénouement of all their efforts. Will you ask the others and write Mary Brooks, whose address I don't know. My uncle's big house next door to us will have room for you all, and you must come in time for my' 177

bridesmaids' luncheon and a little dance, both on the thirtieth.' Now isn't that splendid?"

"Perfectly splendid," echoed her auditors.

"Why, we shall be almost bridesmaids," said Roberta Lewis in awestruck tones. "Does Mary know?"

Betty nodded. "She hasn't had time to answer yet, but she can certainly go, as she lives so near Ethel."

"The only difficulty about our going," said Babe, "is what to do with the few days between the wedding and the opening of college."

"And that's easily settled," said Madeline promptly. "Miss Hale lives just out of New York, doesn't she? Well, you are all to come and stay in the flat with me. Hasn't it just been beautifully cleaned? And aren't you all longing for a glimpse of Bohemia?"

That was the climax of the tea drinking. The Merry Match-Makers spent the evening writing home to their parents for permission to go to the wedding and considering momentous problems of dress. For Roberta's best evening-gown was lavender and Babbie's was pink, and the question was how to distribute Betty, Babe and Helen in white, Bob in blue, Eleanor in her favorite yellow, Madeline in ecru, and Mary in any one of a bewildering number of possible toilettes, so as to justify Ethel's hope that the aisle would be ornamental as well as useful. 178

How the days flew after that! For besides the wedding there were the luncheon and the dance to anticipate and plan for, as well as the unknown joys of Bohemia, New York, not to mention the regular excitement of going home, the fun of tucking Christmas presents into the corners of half-packed trunks, and the terrors of the written lesson that some inhuman member of the faculty always saves for the crowded last week of the term.

On the afternoon of the twenty-ninth the Merry Match-Makers met in New York. Babbie had sent a sad little note to Miss Hale and a tearful one to Betty to say that her mother, who was a good deal of an invalid, had "looked pretty blue over my running off early, and so of course I won't leave her;" and Helen Adams had decided that considering all the extra expenses of senior year she couldn't afford the trip to New York. So there were only seven "almost bridesmaids," as Roberta called them, or "posts," which was Bob's name for them, to fall upon one another as if they had been separated for years, instead of a week, say thank you for the presents that were each "just what I wanted," and exclaim excitedly over Betty's new suit, Mary's fur coat, and the sole-leather kit-bag that Santa Claus had brought Roberta. 179

"It's queer," said Bob. "I feel as if I'd had one whole vacation already, and ought to be unpacking and digging on psychology 6 and history 10. Whereas in reality I'm just beginning on another whole vacation. It's like having two Thanksgiving dinners in one year."

"Not quite like that, I hope," laughed Eleanor, as they started off to inspect the wedding present, a beautiful pair of tall silver candlesticks. Madeline had ransacked New York to find them, and every one but Babe, who clung to her turtle as far superior to any "musty old antiques," thought them just odd and distinctive enough to please Ethel's fastidious taste. And after that there was barely time to catch the train they had arranged to take out to Ethel's home. 180

Interest in the bride and in their own part of the wedding ceremony had caused the "Merry Hearts" to forget Dr. Eaton, and they had never once considered that of course his college chum, John Alison, would leave the railroad he was building in Arizona and come east to be Dr. Eaton's best man. And it was Mr. John Alison who had "finished" Georgia Ames. He inquired for her at once and so did his brother Tom, who was an usher, and who explained that he had been invited to keep John in order, and to intercede for him with the "posts."

"And in return for my services as peacemaker," he said solemnly, "I expect to be treated with special consideration by everybody." Subsequent events seemed to show that the special consideration referred to meant a chance to see as much as possible of Betty Wales. 181

Even more surprising to three of the posts was the presence of Mr. Richard Blake in the wedding-party—Richard Blake, editor of "The Quiver," and one-time lecturer at Harding on the tendencies of modern drama. 182

Eleanor's face was a study when she recognized him, but before Miss Hale could begin any introductions Madeline greeted him enthusiastically and got him into a corner, where they exchanged low-toned confidences for a moment.

"I'm particularly glad to meet you again, Miss Watson," he said in a tone of unmistakable sincerity, when he was presented. "We had a jolly dinner together once, didn't we?"

"Dick's such an old dear," Madeline whispered to Betty half an hour later. "He confided to me just now that the first evening he saw Eleanor he thought her the most fascinating girl he had ever met, and then he hastened to assure me that that had absolutely nothing to do with his deciding to keep dark about her story. I don't doubt him for a moment—Dick perfectly detests cheating. But he can't make me believe that he's being nice to her now just on my account."

There were plenty of other men at the wedding. "We're the only girls in the whole family," Charlotte, Ethel's younger sister explained, "and we have thirty own cousins, most of them 182

grown-up.”

“Was that one of the thirty that you were sitting on the stairs with at the dance?” inquired Mary Brooks sweetly.

Charlotte blushed and Bob flew to her rescue. “We all know why Mary isn’t monopolizing any one,” she said. “Are you taking notes for future use, Mary?”

Mary shrugged her shoulders loftily. “I scorn to answer such nonsense,” she retorted. “I’m going to be an old maid and make matches for all my friends.”

“We’ll come and be posts for you any time after commencement,” Babe assured her amiably. “Did you know, girls, that Mary can’t stay over with Madeline because her mother is giving a New Year’s dinner-party. Who do you suppose will be there?”

The wedding festivities were over at last. “It was all perfectly scrumptious,” Babe wrote Babbie enthusiastically, “and I’m bringing you a little white satin slipper like those we had filled with puffed rice for luncheon favors, and a lovely pin that Miss Hale wants you to have just as if you had come. The nicest thing of all is that vacation isn’t over yet. Is it two weeks or two years since I saw you?”

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And next came Bohemia. Before they had quite reached Washington Square Madeline tumbled her guests hastily off their car.

“I forgot to tell Mrs. McLean when to expect us,” she explained. “She is our cook. So we’ll hunt her up now and we might as well buy the luncheon as we go along.”

So first they found Mrs. McLean, a placid old Scotch woman who was not at all surprised when Madeline announced that she was giving a house-party for five and had forgotten to mention it sooner. She had a delicious Scotch burr and an irresistible way of standing in the dining-room door and saying, “Come awa’, my dears,” when she had served a meal. Like everything else connected with the Ayres establishment, she was always there when you wanted her; between times she disappeared mysteriously, leaving the kitchen quite clear for Madeline and her guests, and always turning up in time to wash the fudge-pan or the chafing-dishes.

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From Mrs. McLean’s they went down a dirty, narrow street, stopping at a number of funny, foreign-looking fruit and grocery shops, where they bought whatever anybody wanted.

“Though it doesn’t matter what you have to eat,” said Roberta later, pouring cream into her coffee from an adorable little Spanish jug, “as long as you have it on this lovely old china.”

They had their coffee in the studio, sitting around the open fire, and while they were drinking it people began to drop in—Mr. Blake, who roomed just across the Square, a pretty, pale girl, who was evidently an artist because every one congratulated her on having some things “on the line” somewhere, three newspaper men from the flat above, who being on a morning daily had just gotten up and stopped in to say “Happy New Year” on their way down to Park Row, and a jolly little woman whom the others called Mrs. Bob.

“She’s promised to chaperon us,” Madeline explained to her guests. “She lives down-stairs, so we can’t go in or out without falling into her terrible clutches.”

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Mrs. Bob, who was in a corner playing with the little black kitten that seemed to belong with the house, like Mrs. McLean, stopped long enough to ask if they had heard about the theatre party. They had not, so Mr. Blake explained that by a sudden change of bill at one of the theatres Mr. Sothern and Miss Marlowe were to give “The Merchant of Venice” that evening.

“And I understand from Miss Watson that you people are particularly interested in that play,” he added, “so I’ve corraled some tickets and Mrs. Bob and a bunch of men.”

“And the Carletons will have an early dinner,” put in Mrs. Bob. “Oh, I forgot. You don’t know about that either. Mrs. Carleton won’t be back from the country until four o’clock, so she asked me to give you the invitation to have New Year’s dinner with them.”

“But did she know there were six of us?” asked Betty anxiously, whereupon everybody laughed and Mrs. Bob assured her that Mrs. Carleton had mentioned seven to her, and hadn’t seemed in the least worried.

That was the way things went all through their visit. Mrs. Bob took them shopping, with frequent intermissions for cakes and tea at queer little tea-rooms, with alluring names like “The London Muffin Room,” or the “Yellow Tea-Pot.” Her husband escorted them to the east-side brass-shops, assuring them solemnly that it wasn’t everybody he showed his best finds to, and mourning when their rapturous enthusiasm prevented his getting them a real bargain. The newspaper men gave a “breakfast-luncheon” for them—breakfast for themselves, and luncheon for their guests—which was so successful that it was continued that same evening by a visit to a Russian puppet-show and supper in a Chinese restaurant. The pretty artist sold one of her pictures and invited them to help her celebrate, just as if they were old friends, who knew how hard she had struggled and how often she hadn’t had money enough to buy herself bread and butter, to say nothing of offering jam—in the shape of oysters on the half-shell and lobster Newburg—to other people.

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It was all so gay and light-hearted and unexpected—the way things happened in Bohemia.

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Nobody hurried or worried, though everybody worked hard. It was just as Madeline had told them, only more so. The girls said a sorrowful good-bye to Mrs. Bob, Mrs. McLean and the little black kitten and journeyed back to Harding sure that there never had been and never would be another such vacation for them.

"How can there be?" said Bob dejectedly. "At Easter we shall all have to get clothes, and after that we shan't know a vacation from mid-year week."

"Which delightful function begins in exactly fourteen days," said Katherine Kittredge. "Is there anybody here present whose notes on Hegel have the appearance of making sense?"

19— took its senior midyears gaily and quite as a matter of course, lectured its underclass friends on the evils of cramming, and kept up its spirits by going coasting with Billy Henderson, Professor Henderson's ten-year-old son, who had admired college girls ever since he found that Bob Parker could beat him at steering a double-runner. Between times they bought up the town's supply of "The Merchant of Venice,"—"not to learn any part, you know, but because we're interested in our play," each purchaser explained to her friends.

For there is no use in proclaiming your aspirations to be a Portia or a Shylock until you are sure that your dramatic talent is going to be appreciated. Of course there were exceptions to this rule, but the girl who said at a campus dinner-table, "If I am Portia, who is there tall enough for Bassanio?" became a college proverb in favor of keeping your hopes to yourself, and everybody was secretly delighted when she decided that she "really didn't care" to be in the mob.

CHAPTER X

TRYING FOR PARTS

"Teddie Wilson has gone and got herself conditioned in psych.," announced Bob Parker, bouncing unceremoniously through Betty's half-open door.

"Oh, Bob!" Betty's tone was fairly tragic. "Does that mean that she can't try for a part in the play?"

Bob nodded. "Cast-iron rule. And she'd have made a perfect Gobbo, young or old, and a stunning Gratiano. Well, her being out of it will give K. a better chance."

"But I'm sure Katherine wouldn't want her chance to come this way," said Betty sadly. "Besides—oh, Bob, have you looked at the bulletin-board this afternoon?"

"Babe did," said Bob with a grin, "so you needn't worry yet, my child. Ted says she ought to have expected it, because she'd cut a lot and let things go awfully,—depended on the—faculty—knowing—us—well—enough by—this—time—to—pass—over—any small—deficiencies, and all that sort of talk. And this just shows, she says, how well they do know her. She's awfully plucky about it, but she cares. I didn't suppose Ted had it in her to care so about anything," declared Bob solemnly. "But of course it's a lot to lose—the star comedy part that was going to be handed out to her by her admiring little classmates, who think that nobody can act like Teddie. I wish I was as sure of a part in the mob."

"What are you going to try for, Bob?" asked Betty sympathetically.

Bob blushed. "Oh, I don't know," she said, with a fine assumption of indifference. "Everybody says that you ought to begin at the top and then the grateful committee won't forget to throw you a crumb when they get to passing out the 'supers.'" Bob paused and her air of unconcern dropped from her like a mask. "I say, Betty, I do want my family to be proud of me for once. Promise you won't laugh if I come up for Bassanio."

"Of course I won't," said Betty indignantly. "I'm sure you'll make love beautifully. Do you know who's going to try for Shylock?"

"Only Jean Eastman," said Bob, "and Christy and Emily are thinking of it. I came up from downtown with Jean just now. She thinks she's got a sure thing, though of course she isn't goose enough to say so. If Kate Denise gets Portia, as everybody seems to think she will, it will be quite like freshman year, with the Hill crowd on top all around. I think Jean has been aiming for that, and I also think—you don't mind if I say it, Betty?"

"I haven't the least idea what you're going to say," laughed Betty, "but I don't believe I shall mind."

"Well," said Bob earnestly, "I think Jean's counting on you to help her with her Shylock deal."

"I help her!" said Betty in bewilderment. "How could I?"

"What a little innocent you are, Betty Wales," declared Bob. "Have you forgotten that you are on

the all-powerful play-committee, and that you five and Miss Kingston, head of the elocution department, practically decide upon the cast?"

"Oh!" said Betty slowly. "But I can't see why Jean should expect me to push her, of all people."

"She'll remind you why," said Bob, "or perhaps she expects me to do it for her. Can't you honestly think of anything that she might make a handle of?"

Betty considered, struggling to recall her recent meetings with Jean. "She has been extra-cordial lately," she said, "but she hasn't done anything in particular—oh, Bob, I know what you mean. She expects me to help her because she nominated me for the committee."

Bob nodded. "As if fifty other people wouldn't have done it if she hadn't. I may be wrong, Betty, but she had a lot to say all the way up from Cuyler's about how glad she was that you were on the committee, how she felt you were the only one for the place and was glad the girls agreed with her, how hard she had talked you up beforehand, and so on,—all about her great and momentous efforts in your behalf. I told her that Miss Ferris said once that you had a perfect command of the art of dress and that every one knew you planned the costumes for the Belden play and for the Dramatic Club's masque last spring, also that Barbara Gordon particularly wanted you on if she was chairman, so I didn't see that you needed any great amount of talking up. But she laughed her horrid, sarcastic little laugh and said she guessed I hadn't had much experience with class politics."

Betty's eyes flashed angrily. "And in return for what she did, she expects me to work for her, no matter whether or not I think she would make the best Shylock. Is that what you mean, Bob?"

"Yes, but perhaps I was mistaken," said Bob soothingly, "and any way I doubt if she ever says anything to you directly. She'll just drop judicious hints in the ears of your worldly friends, who can be trusted to appreciate the debt of gratitude you owe her."

"Bob." Betty stared at her hard for a moment. "You don't think—oh, of course you don't! The parts in the play ought to go to the ones who can do them best and the committee ought not to think of anybody or anything but that."

"And I know at least one committee woman who won't think of anybody or anything but that," declared Bob loyally. "I only thought I'd tell you about Jean so that, if she should say anything, you would be ready for her. Now I must go and study Bassanio," and Bob departed murmuring,

"What find I here?
Fair Portia's counterfeit?"

in tones so amorous that Belden House Annie, who was sweeping on the stairs, dropped her dust-pan with a clatter, declaring that she was "jist overcome, that she was!"

"Which was the only compliment my acting of Bassanio ever got," Bob told her sadly afterward.

Betty was still hot with indignation over Bob's disclosures when Roberta Lewis knocked on the door. Roberta was wrapped up in a fuzzy red bath-robe, a brown sweater and a pink crêpe shawl, and she looked the picture of shivering dejection.

"What in the world is the matter?" demanded Betty, emptying her history notebooks out of the easy-chair and tucking Roberta in with a green and yellow afghan, which completed the variegated color scheme to perfection.

"Please don't bother about me," said Roberta forlornly. "I'm going back in a minute. I've lost my wedding-pin—Miss Hale's wedding-pin—well, you know what I mean,—and caught a perfectly dreadful cold."

"You don't think that your pin was stolen?" asked Betty quickly. There had been no robberies in the college since Christmas, and the girls were beginning to hope that the mysterious thief had been discouraged by their greater care in locking up their valuables, and had gone off in search of more lucrative territory.

"Yes, I do think so," said Roberta. "I almost know it. You see I hadn't been wearing my pin. I only took it out to show Polly Eastman, because she hadn't happened to see one. Then K. came and we went off to walk. I left the pin right on my dressing-table and now it's gone. But the queerest part is that Georgia Ames was in my room almost all the time, because hers was being swept, and before that she was in Lucy Mann's, with the door wide open into the hall, and my door open right opposite. And yet she never saw or heard anything. Isn't it strange?"

"She was probably busy talking and didn't notice," said Betty. "People are everlastingly tramping through the halls, until you don't think anything about it. Have you looked on the floor and in all your drawers? It's probably tumbled down somewhere and got caught in a crack under the dressing-table or the rug."

"No, I've looked in all those places," said Roberta with finality. "You know I haven't as many things to look through as you."

"Please don't be sarcastic," laughed Betty, for Roberta's belongings were all as trim and tailor-made as herself. "How did you get your cold?"

"Why K. and I got caught in a miserable little snow flurry," explained Roberta, pulling the pink

shawl closer, "and—I got my feet wet. My throat's horribly sore. It won't be well for a week, and I can't try for the play."

Roberta struggled out of the encumbering folds of the green afghan and trailed her other draperies swiftly to the window, whose familiar view she seemed to find intensely absorbing.

"Oh, yes, you can," said Betty comfortingly. "Why, your throat may be all right by to-morrow, and anyway it's only the Portia and Shylock trials that come then. Were you going to try for either of those parts?"

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"Yes," gulped Roberta thickly.

Behind Roberta's back Betty was free to pucker her mouth into a funny little grimace that denoted amusement, surprise and sympathy, all together. "Then I'll ask Barbara Gordon to give you a separate trial later," she said kindly. "Nothing will be really decided to-morrow. We only make tentative selections to submit to Mr. Masters when he comes up next week. He's the professional coach, you know."

But Roberta turned back from the window to shake her head. "I wouldn't have you do that for anything," she said, brushing away the tears. "I'll try for something else if I get well in time. I'm going to bed now. Will you please ask Annie to bring up my dinner? And Betty, don't ever say I meant to try for Shylock. I don't know why I told you, except that you always understand."

Betty felt that she didn't quite understand this time, but she promised to tell Annie and come in late herself to conduct another search for the missing pin. She had just succeeded in dismissing Ted, Jean and Roberta from her mind and concentrating it on the next day's history lesson, when Helen Adams appeared.

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"Helen," began Betty solemnly, "if you've got any troubles connected with trying for parts in the play, please don't divulge them. I don't believe I can stand any more complications."

"Poor thing!" said Helen compassionately. "I know how you feel from the times I have with the 'Argus.' Well, I shan't bother you about trying for a part. I should just love to act, but I can't and I know it. I only wanted to borrow some tea, and to tell you that Anne Carter has come to return my call. You know you said you'd like to meet her."

So Betty brushed her curls smooth and, stopping to pick up Madeline on her way, went in to meet Miss Carter, whose shyness and silence melted rapidly before Betty's tactful advances and Madeline's appreciative references to her verses in the last "Argus."

While Helen made the tea, Miss Carter amused them all with a droll account of her efforts to learn to play basket-ball, "because Miss Adams says it throws so much light on the philosophy of college life."

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"Then you never played before you came here?" asked Betty idly, stirring her tea.

Miss Carter shook her head. "I prepared for college in a convent in Canada. The sisters would have been horribly shocked at the idea of our tearing about in bloomers and throwing a ball just like the boys."

"Oh!" said Betty, with a sudden flash of recognition. "Then it was at the convent where you got the beautiful French accent that mademoiselle raves over. You're in my senior French class. I ought to have remembered you."

"I'm glad you didn't," said Miss Carter bitterly, and then she flushed and apologized. "I'm so ugly that I'm always glad not to be remembered or noticed. But I didn't mean to say so, and I do hope you'll come to see me, both of you,—if seniors ever do come to see sophomores."

The girls laughingly assured her that seniors did sometimes condescend so far, and she went off with a happy look in her great gray eyes.

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"We must have her in the 'Merry Hearts,'" said Madeline. "She's our kind if she can only get over that morbid feeling about her scar."

"But we must be very careful," Helen warned them, with a vivid remembrance of her first interview with Miss Carter. "We mustn't ask her to join until most of us have been to see her and really made friends. She would just hate to feel that we pitied her."

"We'll be careful," Betty promised her. "I'll go to see her, for one, the very first of next week," and she skipped gaily off to dress for dinner. After all there were plenty of things in the world besides the class play with its unhappy tangle of rivalries and heartburnings.

"And what's the use of borrowing trouble?" Betty inquired the next evening of the green lizard. "If you do, you never borrow the right kind."

Jean, to be sure, had done a good deal to justify Bob's theory. She had remembered an urgent message from home which must be delivered to Polly immediately after luncheon, and she kept her innocent little cousin busily engaged in conversation in the lower hall of the Belden House until Betty appeared, having waited until the very last minute in the vain hope of avoiding Jean. But when they opened the door there was Barbara Gordon, also bound for Miss Kingston's office, and much relieved to find that her committee were not all waiting indignantly for their chairman's tardy arrival. So whatever Jean had meant to say to Betty in private necessarily went

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unsaid.

And then, after all her worriment, Jean was the best Shylock!

"Which is perfectly comical considering Bob's suspicions," Betty told the green lizard, the only confidant to whom she could trust the play committee's state-secrets.

All the committee had been astonished at Jean's success, and most of them were disappointed. Christy or Emily Davis would have been so much pleasanter to work with, or even Kitty Lacy, whom Miss Kingston considered very talented. But Emily was theatrical, except in funny parts, Christy was lifeless, and Kitty Lacy had not taken the trouble to learn the lines properly and broke down at least once in every long speech, thereby justifying the popular inversion of her name to Lazy Kitty, a pseudonym which some college wag had fastened upon her early in her freshman year.

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"And because she's Kitty, it isn't safe to give her another chance," said Miss Kingston regretfully, when the fifteen aspiring Shylocks had played their parts and the committee were comparing opinions. "Yes, I agree with Barbara that Jean Eastman is by far the most promising candidate, but—"

"But you don't think she's very good, now do you, Miss Kingston?" asked Clara Ellis, a rather lugubrious individual, who had been put on the committee because she was a "prod" in "English lit.," and not because she had the least bit of executive ability.

Miss Kingston hesitated. "Why no, Clara, I don't. I'm afraid she won't work up well; she doesn't seem to take criticism very kindly. But it's too soon to judge of that. At present she certainly has a much better conception of the part than any of the others."

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"You don't think we've been too ambitious, do you, Miss Kingston?" asked Barbara, anxiously. Barbara knew Jean well and the prospect of managing the play with her capricious, selfish temperament to be catered to at every turn was not a pleasant one.

"I've thought so all along," put in Clara Ellis, decidedly, before Miss Kingston had had a chance to answer. "I think we ought to have made sure of a good Shylock before we voted to give this play. It will be perfectly awful to make a fizzle of it, and everything depends on getting a good Shylock, doesn't it, Miss Kingston?"

"A great deal certainly depends on that," agreed Miss Kingston. "But it's much too early to decide that you can't get a good Shylock."

"Why, who else is there?" demanded Clara, dismally. "Surely every possible and impossible person has tried to-day."

Nobody seemed ready to answer this argument, and Betty, glancing at the doleful faces of her fellow-workers felt very much depressed until a new idea struck her.

"Miss Kingston," she said, "there have been fifteen senior plays at Harding, haven't there? And hasn't each one been better than any of those that came before it?"

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"So each class and its friends have thought," admitted Miss Kingston, smiling at Betty's eagerness, "and in the main I think they have been right."

"Then," said Betty, looking appealingly at Clara and Barbara, "I guess we can safely go on thinking that our play will be still better. 19— is the biggest class that ever graduated here, and it's certainly one of the brightest."

Everybody laughed at this outburst of patriotism and the atmosphere brightened immediately, so Betty felt that perhaps she was of some use on the committee even if she couldn't understand all Clara's easy references to glosses and first folio readings, or compare Booth's interpretation of Shylock with Irving's as glibly as Rachel did.

Just then there was a smothered giggle outside the door and six lusty voices chanted, "By my troth, our little bodies are a-weary of these hard stairs," in recognition of which pathetic appeal the committee hastily dismissed the subject of Shylock in order to hear what the impatient Portias had to say. They did so well, and there was such a lively discussion about the respective merits of Kate Denise, Babbie Hildreth and Nita Reese that the downcast spirits, of the committee were fully restored, and they went home to dinner resolved not to lose heart again no matter what happened, which is the most sensible resolution that any senior play committee can make.

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When Betty got home she found a note waiting for her on the hall table addressed in Tom Alison's sprawling hand and containing an invitation to Yale commencement.

"I'm asking you early," Tom wrote, "so that you can plan for it, and be so much the surer not to disappoint me. Alice Waite is coming with Dick Grayson, and some of the other fellows will have Harding girls. My mother is going to chaperon the bunch.

"Do you remember my kid roommate, Ashley Dwight? He's junior president this year. He's heard a lot about Georgia Ames, real and ideal, and he's crazy to see what the visible part of her is like. I think he meditates asking her to the prom, and making a sensation with her. Can't I bring him up to call on you some day when the real Miss Ames will probably be willing to amuse Ashley?"

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As Betty joyously considered how she should answer all this, she remembered the four box tickets for the Glee Club concert that Lucile Merrifield had promised to get her—Lucile was business manager of the mandolin club this year. Betty had intended to invite Alice Waite and two Winsted men, but there was no reason why she shouldn't ask Georgia, Tom, and the junior president instead. So she went straight to Georgia's room.

"All right," said Georgia calmly, when Betty had explained her project. "I was going to stand up with a crowd of freshmen, but they won't care."

"Georgia Ames," broke in her roommate severely, "I should like to see you excited for once. Don't you know the difference between going stand-up with a lot of other freshmen, and sitting in a box with Miss Wales and two Yale men?"

"Of course I know the difference," said Georgia, smiling good-naturedly. "Didn't I say that I'd go in the box? But you see, Caroline, if you are only a namesake of Madeline Ayres's deceased double you mustn't get too much excited over the wonderful things that happen to you. Must you, Betty?"

"I don't think you need any pointers from me, Georgia," said Betty laughingly. "Has Caroline seen you studying yet?"

"Once," said Georgia sadly.

"But it was in mid-year week," explained the roommate, "the night before the Livy exam. She mended stockings all the evening and then she said she was going to sit up to study. She began at quarter past ten."

"Propped up in bed, to be quite comfortable," interpolated Georgia.

"And at half-past ten," went on her roommate, "she said she was so sleepy that she couldn't stand it any longer. So she tumbled the books and extra pillows on the floor and went to sleep."

"Too bad you spoiled your record just for those few minutes," laughed Betty, "but I'll take you to the concert all the same," and she hurried off to dress.

At dinner she entertained her end of the table with an account of Georgia's essay at cramming.

"But that doesn't prove that she never studies," Madeline defended her protégée. "That first floor room of theirs is a regular rendezvous for all the freshmen in the house, so she's very sensible to keep away from it when she's busy."

"Where does she go?"

"Oh, to the library, I suppose," said Madeline. "Most of the freshmen study there a good deal, and she camps down in Lou Waterson's room, afternoons, because Lou has three different kinds of lab. to go to, so she's never at home."

"Well, it's a wonder that Georgia isn't completely spoiled," said Nita Reese. "Just to think of the things that child has had done for her!"

And certainly if Georgia's head had not been very firmly set on her square shoulders, it would have been hopelessly turned by her meteoric career at Harding. For weeks after college opened she was a spectacle, a show-sight of the place. Old girls pointed her out to one another in a fashion that was meant to be inobtrusive but that would have flattered the vanity of any other freshman. Freshmen were regaled with stories about her, which they promptly retailed for her benefit, and then sent her flowers as a tribute to her good luck and a recognition of the amusement she added to the dull routine of life at Harding. Seniors who had been duped by the phantom Georgia asked her to Sunday dinner and introduced her to their friends, who did likewise. Foolish girls wanted her autograph, clever ones demanded to know her sensations at finding herself so oddly conspicuous, while the "Merry Hearts" amply fulfilled their promise to make up to her for unintentionally having forced her into a curious prominence. But Georgia took it all as a mere matter of course, smiled blandly at the stories, accepted the flowers and the invitations, wrote the autographs, and explained that she guessed her sensations weren't at all remarkable,—they were just like any other freshman's.

"All the same," Madeline declared, whenever the subject came up, "she's absolutely unique. If the other Georgia had never existed, this one would have made her mark here."

But just how she would have done it even Madeline could not decide. The real Georgia was not like other girls, but in what fundamental way she was different it was difficult to say. Indeed now that the "Merry Hearts" came to know her better, she was almost as much of a puzzle to them as the other Georgia had been to the rest of the college.

CHAPTER XI

A DARK HORSE DEFINED

"Did you see Mr. Masters in chapel this morning with Miss Kingston?"

This was the choice tid-bit of news that 19— passed from hand to hand as it took its way to its various nine o'clock classes.

"I thought he wasn't coming until to-morrow," said Teddie Wilson, who followed every move of the play committee with mournful interest.

"He wasn't," explained Barbara Gordon, "but he found he could get off better to-day. It's only for the Shylocks and Portias, you know. We can't do much until they're definitely decided, so we can tell who is left for the other parts."

"Gratiano and the Gobbos will come in the next lot," sighed Teddie. "Seems as if I should die to be out of it all!"

Jean Eastman was just ahead of them in the crowd. "Poor Teddie!" Barbara began, "I only wish —" She broke off abruptly. She didn't want Jean for Shylock, but it would have been the height of impropriety to let even Teddie, whose misfortunes made her a privileged person, know it. "It's a perfect shame," she went on hastily. "You don't feel half so bad about it as we do."

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Ted stared incredulously. "Don't I? I say, Barbara, did you know there was a girl in last year's cast who had had a condition at midyears? She kept still and somehow it wasn't reported to Miss Stuart until very late, and by that time it would have made a lot of trouble to take her out. So they hushed it up and she kept her part. A last year's girl wrote me about it."

"I don't believe she had much fun out of it, do you, Ted?" asked Barbara. "Anyhow I'm sure you —"

"Oh, of course not," interrupted Ted with emphasis.

"What in the world are you two talking about?" demanded Jean Eastman curiously, dropping back to join them.

"Talking play of course!" laughed Barbara, trying to be extra cordial because she had so nearly said a disagreeable thing a minute before.

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Meanwhile Ted, who felt that she should break the tenth commandment to atoms if she stayed in Jean's neighborhood another minute, slipped off down a side hall and joined a group of her classmates who were bound like herself for Miss Raymond's English novelists. They were talking play too, of course,—it was in the air this morning,—and they welcomed Ted joyously and deferred to her opinion as that of an expert.

"Who'll be Shylock, Teddie?" demanded Bob Parker. "That's the only thing I'm curious about."

"Jean," returned Ted calmly, "or at least the committee think so. I can tell by the way Barbara looks at her."

"Beastly shame," muttered Bob. "Why couldn't Emily and Christy have braced up and got it themselves?"

"Now, Bob," Nita Reese remonstrated, "don't you think you're a bit hard on Jean this time? I know she's a good deal of a land-grabber, but now she's gone into an open competition just like any one else, and if she wins it will be because she deserves to."

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"Ye-es," admitted Bob grudgingly. "Yes, of course it will. I know that as well as you do, Nita Reese. Just the same she's never any good in Gest and Pant, is she, Teddie?"

"In what?" demanded Helen Adams and Clara Madison together.

"Gest and Pant—short for Gesture and Pantomime, senior course in elocution," explained Teddie rapidly. "Oh, I don't know. I think she's done some pretty good things once in a while. And anyhow she can't fool the committee and Mr. Masters."

"Of course not," agreed Bob.

"Just the same," said Madeline Ayres, who had come up in time to hear the end of the argument, "we'll stand for her if she gets the part, but until she does we can hope against hope for a dark horse, can't we, Bob?"

"What's a dark horse?" asked Clara Madison in her funny, slow drawl.

"Your vocabulary's getting a big increase this morning, isn't it, Clara?" said Madeline quizzically. "Gest and Pant, short for Gesture and Pantomime; dark horse, short for a person like — Girls, run in, quick. She's begun calling the roll."

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It was a long morning. The committee watched its hours go by complacently enough. They had heard Jean again and liked her better; and the two girls who were to compete with her had improved, too, on second trial. There was no doubt that the Portias were good. They were also nervous. Kate Denise didn't even pretend to "Take notes, young ladies," though Dr. Hinsdale looked straight at her when he said it, and Babbie Hildreth made herself the butt of endless jibes by absent-mindedly mentioning Nerissa instead of Napoleon in History 10. Jean, on the

other hand, was as cool as possible. She sat beside Teddie Wilson in philosophy, much to the annoyance of that unhappy young person, and added insult to injury by trying to discuss the play. Teddie was as unresponsive as she thought consistent with the duty of being lady-like, but Jean didn't seem to mind, for she went off to lunch smiling a satisfied, triumphant little smile that seemed to say she had gotten just what she wanted out of Teddie.

At two o'clock Mr. Masters and Miss Kingston met the play committee in Miss Kingston's office, and the Shylock trials began. At ten minutes before three the great Mr. Masters appeared in the door of the office and tossing a careless "Back at four-thirty sharp" over his shoulder, ran down the stairs as lightly as though he were not leaving riot and ruin behind him. A minute later Barbara Gordon came to the door and explained to the Portias who were waiting to come on at three, that it had been found necessary to delay their appearance until evening. Barbara always looked calm and unruffled under the most trying circumstances, but she shut the door unnecessarily hard and the Portias exchanged amazed glances.

"Something's happened," declared Babe, sagely.

"Oh, wise young judge!" quoted Nita. "Why don't you tell us what it is?"

"I must go if we have to come back this evening," said Kate Denise, and hurried off to find Jean, who had promised to meet her in the library.

Kate understood Jean very well and often disapproved of her, but she had known her a long time and was genuinely fond of her and anxious for her success. Jean had complained of a headache at luncheon and seemed nervous and absent-minded. Kate wondered if she could possibly have broken down and spoiled her chance with Mr. Masters, thus disarranging the committee's plans.

But Jean scoffed at this idea. "I did my best," she declared, "and he was awfully nice. You'll like him, Katie. I suppose he had an engagement, or was tired and wanted to go off somewhere and smoke. He gets up plays all the time, you know. It must be horribly boring."

Meanwhile Miss Kingston and the play committee sat in mournful conclave. Nobody had much to say. Clara Ellis looked "I told you so" at the rest, and the rest looked back astonishment, dismay and annoyance at Clara.

"Is he generally so—so decided and, well,—so quick to make up his mind?" asked Betty, finally.

Miss Kingston laughed at Betty's carefully chosen adjectives and shook her head. "He's generally very patient and encouraging, but to-day something seems to have spoiled his temper. I don't believe, though, that his irritability has affected his judgment. I agree perfectly with what he said about Miss Eastman."

"Yes," agreed Barbara, "he put into words what we all felt when we first heard her. Afterward we wanted so much to think she was good that we actually cheated ourselves into thinking so."

"Do tell me what happened," begged Rachel Morrison. She had been kept at home by a belligerent sophomore who insisted upon being tutored at her regular hour, and had arrived only just in time for Mr. Masters's dramatic exit.

"Why, he was perfectly calm while the Shylocks were performing," explained Barbara. "We had Jean come last because we thought that would give them all the best chance. He smiled blandly while she was going through her part and bowed her out as if she had been a second Booth. Then he sat back and looked at me and said 'Well?' and I said, 'Do you like her best, Mr. Masters?' He glared at me for a minute and then began to talk about the seriousness of giving a Shakespearean play and the confidence he'd felt in us to advise us to give this one, and the reasons why none of the girls he'd heard would do at all for Shylock. When he was through he just picked up his hat and coat and told us to go and get the other girls who tried, as he'd be ready to see them at half-past four. After that he apologized to Miss Kingston if he'd been 'in the least abrupt'—and went."

"And what are we to do now?" demanded Clara, wearily.

"Get them—the forlorn hopes, as he called them," said Barbara, determined to be cheerful, "and hope that we shall be happily disappointed in them. Somebody's got to be Shylock, you know. Betty, will you go for these three girls on Main Street?" She handed Betty a slip of paper. "Clara, will you try to find Emily Davis? Rachel, you look tired to death. Go home and rest. Josephine and I can manage the campus people."

"There's no use in your getting the Miller girls," said Clara, decisively. "One lisps and the other stammers."

"That's true," agreed Barbara, cheerily. "We'll leave them out, and Kitty Lacy has gone home ill. I wish we could think of some promising people who haven't tried at all. Eleanor Watson used to act very cleverly. Betty, do you suppose she would be willing to come and read the part?"

Betty shook her head. "I don't think she would take a part under any circumstances, but certainly not if she had to compete with Jean. They're such old friends."

"How about Madeline Ayres?"

"She's set her heart on being the Prince of Morocco," laughed Betty, "because she wants to be

blackened up. Anyway I don't think—"

"No, I don't either, Betty," interposed Miss Kingston. "Miss Ayres couldn't do a part like Shylock."

"Then I don't believe there is any one else who didn't try before," said Barbara. "We must just hope for the best, that's all."

Betty had opened the door preparatory to starting on her rounds when she happened to remember Roberta and her exaggerated disappointment over missing the last week's trials.

"Barbara," she began timidly, closing the door again, "I know some one who intended to try but she was sick with the grippe and couldn't. It's Roberta Lewis. She told me not to speak of her having wanted to try, but I don't see why she shouldn't have a chance now, do you? She couldn't be worse than some of them."

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"She certainly couldn't," laughed Barbara.

"She did awfully well in that little girl play you had," said Clara Ellis, condescending to show a little real interest in the question at issue. "Did you see it, Miss Kingston?"

Miss Kingston hadn't seen "The Little Princess" and didn't know Roberta; but she agreed that there was no reason why any girl who was willing to take it shouldn't have a chance to show what she could do toward satisfying Mr. Masters.

"But it isn't that I think she will do particularly well," Betty explained, honestly. "Only I was sorry for her because she seemed to care such a lot. Shall I stop and ask her on my way?"

Barbara said yes and Betty hurried over to the Belden. Roberta was out, but a neat sign pinned to her door promised that she would be "Back in a few minutes," so Betty scribbled a hasty note to explain matters and hurried off again. She had not much idea that Roberta would care to try for Shylock now, but she was glad she had thought of giving her the chance. Roberta was so quiet and self-contained and so seldom expressed a wish or a preference that it was worth while taking a little trouble to please her.

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"Even if there isn't much sense in what she wants," thought Betty, as she tramped up Main Street.

The Main Street Shylocks all lived in the same house and not one of them was in. Betty pursued them back to the campus, caught one at the library and another in chemistry "lab.," and followed the third down town where she was discovered going into Cuyler's for an ice. As this last captive happened to be the most promising Shylock, next to the ones that Mr. Masters had already seen, Betty led her back to the campus in triumph, too thankful at having her safe to notice that it was fully a quarter to five before they reached college hall.

Roberta was sitting by herself on a low window-seat near Miss Kingston's door. She looked pale and frightened and hardly smiled in answer to Betty's gay little nod and wave of the hand.

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"Goodness, I hope she'll do decently," thought Betty, and was opening the door as softly as possible when somebody gave it a quick push from the other side. It was the great Mr. Masters coming out again.

"Oh, Miss Lewis," he called over to Roberta, "have you learned the Portia scenes too? I forgot to ask you. Well, suppose you come over and read them to-night. We should all like to hear you."

Betty stared in amazement; so did the Shylocks who crowded the stairs and windowledges. There was no mistaking the fact that this time the great Mr. Masters was genuinely pleased. He held the door open for Betty to pass into the office, assured Roberta once more that he should expect to see her in the evening, and went inside himself, leaving a buzz of excitement behind him and meeting a similar buzz that hushed politely as he came forward.

"Well, Miss Kingston," he said, rubbing his hands together with an air of supreme satisfaction, "we've found our Shylock. I'm glad you let her in first this time. I was really getting worried. May I ask why you young ladies kept her up your sleeves so long?"

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Barbara explained.

"But you must have known about her," Mr. Masters persisted. "Why, she's marvelous. She'd save your play for you, single-handed. Hasn't she taken part in any of your college performances?"

Barbara explained about that too.

"Then how did she happen to come to light at all?" he demanded.

This time Barbara looked at Betty, who blushed and murmured, "I didn't suppose she could act very much. I really didn't."

Mr. Masters laughed heartily at this. "Well, she seems to be a thorough mystery," he said. "And now the only question is where we need her most, in case I don't like your first choice in Portias any better than I did your Shylocks. We ought to have these other people in, I suppose. Of course there's no question about Miss Lewis, but we'd better know what they can all do, especially if there are any more of Miss Wales's dark horses among them."

By dinner time the astonishing news had spread over the campus. Roberta Lewis was going to be Shylock. She hadn't been in but one play since she entered college and then she took somebody's place. Nobody had thought she would get it. Nobody knew she could act except Betty Wales. Betty found out about her somehow—she was always finding out what people could do,—and she got her in at the last minute because Mr. Masters didn't like Jean's acting,—or somebody didn't. Roberta's was magnificent. They wanted her for Portia too. Mr. Masters had said it was a great pity there weren't two of her. How did she take it? Why, she acted shy and bored and distant, just as usual. She seemed to have expected to be Shylock!

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But she wasn't "just as usual." She was sitting by her window in the dark, with Mary Brooks's picture clutched tightly in one hand and her father's in the other, and she was whispering soft little messages to them.

"Dear old daddy, you were in all the fraternities and societies, and on all the college papers and the 'varsity eight. Well, I'm on one thing now. You'll have one little chance to be proud of me, perhaps, after all these four years.

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"Now, Mary Brooks, do you see what I can do? I couldn't write and I couldn't be popular or prominent or a 'star' in any of the classes. I'm not that kind. But after all I shall be something but just one of the Clan before I leave.

"Oh, I wonder if Mary and father would like to sit together at the play."

While Roberta was considering the probability that they would, Betty knocked her soft little knock on the door. Roberta always knew Betty's knock.

"Come," she called in a queer, trembly voice. How was she ever going to thank Betty for seeing what no one else saw, and helping her to stick to it and get her chance in a nice quiet way that wouldn't make her feel awkward if she failed?

But Betty didn't give her time to open her mouth. "You dear old thing!" she cried. "Oh, I am so happy! I never thought you'd get it. Honestly, I didn't. I just thought you might as well try. Roberta, you ought to hear the things Mr. Masters has been saying about you."

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Roberta laughed happily. "It's nice, isn't it?" she said. "Didn't you think I could get a part? You were the one who told me I ought to try."

"Yes," said Betty solemnly, "I thought you'd get one of the Sals probably—you know the ones I mean,—Solanio, and the others that sound like him. We call them the Sals for short, I never dreamed of your being Shylock, any more than I planned for you to be Ermengarde. You did it every bit yourself, Roberta Lewis, by just happening to come around at the right times."

"And by coming to the right person," added Roberta.

But Betty only laughed at her. "It's bad enough to be blamed for things you've done," she said. "I simply won't be praised for things I haven't done. I never was so pleased in my life. Roberta, Miss Kingston says you're a genius. To think of my knowing a genius! I must go and tell Helen Chase Adams."

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Down-stairs Madeline was telephoning to Clara Madison, who, owing to her strong prejudice against bed-making, still lived off the campus. "A dark horse," she explained, "is a person like Roberta Lewis. I didn't have time to tell you this morning. Good-b—Oh! haven't you heard? She's going to be Shylock. No, the committee haven't announced it yet, but Mr. Masters shouted it aloud in the corridor at college hall. Don't forget what a dark horse is, Clara."

The B's, innocently supposing that Roberta was out because her windows were dark, were celebrating in Nita's room, while they awaited her return. This meant that Babbie was doing a cake-walk with an imaginary partner, Babe a clog-dance, and Bob a highland fling, while Nita hugged her tallest vase and her prettiest teacup and besought them to stop before Mrs. Kent came to see who was tearing the house down.

Bob stopped first, though not on account of Nita's bric-a-brac or a possible visit from Mrs. Kent.

"Nita," she demanded breathlessly, "did you say Betty thought of Roberta?"

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"Yes," Nita assented. "Nobody else on the committee knows her at all except Rachel, and she is as surprised as the rest of us."

"Gee!" Bob's tone was deep with meaning. "Then I know who won't like it."

"Who?" Babe ended her dance to ask.

"Jean Eastman," said Bob solemnly.

Babe gave her a disdainful glance. "How much brains do you think it takes to find that out, Bob Parker? Of course she won't like it."

But Bob only smiled loftily and declared that if Roberta hadn't come in by this time they must all

CHAPTER XII

CALLING ON ANNE CARTER

Pleasant things generally submerged the unpleasant ones at Harding, so Betty's delight in Roberta's unexpected success quite wiped out her remembrance of Bob's theories about Jean, until, several days after the Shylock trials, Jean herself confirmed them.

"I want to be sure that you know I'm going to try for Bassanio," she said, overtaking Betty on the campus between classes, "so you can have plenty of time to hunt up a rival candidate. I can't imagine who it will be unless you can make Eleanor Watson believe that it's her duty to the class to try. But this time I hope you'll come out into the open and play fair, or at least as nearly fair as you can, considering that you ought to be helping me. I may not be much on philanthropy, but I don't think I can be accused of entirely lacking a sense of honor."

"Why Jean," began Betty, trying to remember that Jean was hurt and disappointed and possibly didn't mean to be as rude as her words sounded, "please don't feel that way. It wasn't that I didn't want you for Shylock. Of course Roberta is one of my best friends and I'm glad to have her get the big part in the play, because she's never had anything else; but I didn't dream that she would get it."

"Then why did you drag her in at the last minute?"

Betty explained how that had happened, but Jean only laughed disagreeably. "I consider that it was a very irregular way of doing things," she said, "and I think a good many in the class feel the same way about it. Besides—but I suppose you've entirely forgotten that it was I who got you on the play committee."

"Listen, Jean," Betty protested, anxious to avoid a discussion that would evidently be fruitless. "It was Mr. Masters, and not I or any of the other girls, who didn't like your acting, or rather your acting of Shylock. And Mr. Masters himself suggested that you would make a better Bassanio. Didn't Barbara tell you?"

"Oh, yes," said Jean, "she told me. That doesn't alter the fact that if you hadn't produced Roberta Lewis when you did, Mr. Masters might have decided that he liked my Shylock quite well enough."

"Jean," said Betty, desperately, "don't you want the play to be as good as it possibly can?"

"No," retorted Jean, coolly, "I don't. I want a part in it. I imagine that I want one just as badly as Roberta Lewis did. And if I don't get Bassanio, after what Barbara and Clara Ellis have said to me, I shall know whom to blame." She paused a moment for her words to take effect. "My father says," she went on, "that women never have any sense of obligation. They don't think of paying back anything but invitations to afternoon tea. I must tell him about you. He'll find you such a splendid illustration. Good-bye, or I shall be late to chemistry." Jean sped off in the direction of the science building.

"Oh, dear," thought Betty, sadly, "I wish I weren't so stupid and so meek. Madeline can always answer people back when they're disagreeable, and Rachel is so dignified that Jean wouldn't think of saying things like that to her."

Then she smiled in spite of herself. It was all such a stupid tangle. Jean insisted on blaming her, and Roberta and the committee had insisted on praising her for finding 19— a Shylock, when she never intended or expected to do anything of the kind. "It just shows," thought Betty, "that the things that seem like deep-laid schemes are very often just happenings, and the simple-looking ones are the schemes. Well, I certainly hope Jean will get Bassanio. Eleanor's window is open. I wonder if she can hear me."

"Oh, Eleanor," she called, when the window had been opened wider in response to her trill, "there isn't any committee meeting this afternoon. Don't you want to go with me to see Anne Carter? Let's start early and take a walk first. It's such a lovely glitter-y day."

The "glitter-y" day foregathered with a brisk north wind after luncheon, and it was still mid-afternoon when Betty and Eleanor ran up Miss Carter's front steps, delighted at the prospect of getting in out of the cold. At the door they hesitated.

"It's so long since I've regularly called on anybody in college," laughed Betty, "that I've forgotten how to act. Don't we go right up to her room, Eleanor?"

"Why yes. That's certainly what people used to do to us in our freshman year. Don't you remember how we were always getting caught with our kimonos on and our rooms fixed for

sweep-day by girls we'd never seen?"

"I should think so." Betty smiled reminiscently. "Helen Adams used to get so fussed when she was caught doing her hair. Then let's go right up. We want to be friendly and informal and make her feel at home. She has the front room on the second floor. Helen spoke of its being so big and pretty. I do hope she's in."

She was in, for she called a brisk "come" in answer to Betty's knock. She was sitting at a table-desk by the window, with her back to her door, and when it opened she did not turn her head. Neither did Jean Eastman who sat beside her, their heads together over the same book. Jean was reading aloud in hesitating, badly accented French, and paid even less attention to the intruders than Miss Carter, who called hastily, "In just one minute, Miss Harrison," and then cautioned Jean not to forget the elisions. 235

"But we're not Miss Harrison," said Betty laughingly, amazed and embarrassed at the idea of meeting Jean here.

At the sound of her voice both the girls turned quickly and Miss Carter came forward with a hearty apology for her mistake. "I was expecting some one else," she said, "and I thought of course it was she who came in. It was very stupid of me. Won't you sit down?"

"But aren't we interrupting?" asked Betty, introducing Eleanor.

"Nothing more important than the tail end of some French," answered Jean Eastman curtly, going to get her coat, which hung over a chair near the door. As she passed Miss Carter she gave her a keen, questioning look which meant, so Betty decided, that Jean was as much surprised to find that this quiet sophomore knew Betty Wales and her crowd, as Betty had been to see Jean established in Miss Carter's room on a footing of apparent intimacy. 236

"I've been here ever since luncheon," Jean went on, "and I was just going, wasn't I, Miss Carter? Oh, no, you're not driving me away—not in the least. I should be delighted to stay and talk to you both if I had time." And with a disagreeable little laugh Jean pinned on her hat, swept up her books, and started for the door.

Strange to say, Miss Carter seemed to take her hasty departure as a matter of course and devoted herself entirely to her other visitors, until, just as Jean was leaving, she turned to her with a question.

"Oh, Miss Eastman, I don't remember—did you say to-morrow at four?"

For a full minute Jean stared at her, her expression a queer mixture of anger and amused reproach. "No, I said to-morrow at three," she answered at last and went off down the stairs, humming a gay little tune.

Betty and Eleanor exchanged wondering glances. Jean was notorious for knowing only prominent girls. Her presence here and her peculiar manner together formed a puzzle that made it very difficult to give one's full attention to what Miss Carter was saying. There was also Miss Harrison. Was she the senior Harrison, better known as the Champion Blunderbuss? And if she was coming, why didn't she come? 237

Betty found herself furtively watching the door, which Jean had left open, and she barely repressed a little cry of relief when the Champion's ample figure appeared at the head of the stairs.

"I'm terribly late," she called out cheerfully. "I thought you'd probably get tired of waiting and go out. Oh," as she noticed Miss Carter's visitors, "I guess I'd better come back at five. I can as well as not."

But Betty and Eleanor insisted that she should do nothing of the kind.

"We'll come to see you again when you're not so busy," Betty promised Miss Carter, who gave them a sad little smile but didn't offer any objection to their leaving the Blunderbuss in possession.

"Well, haven't we had a funny time?" said Eleanor, when they were outside. "Did you know that Miss Carter tutored in French?" 238

"No," answered Betty. "Helen never gave me the impression that she was poor. Her room doesn't look much as if she was helping to put herself through college, does it?"

"Not a bit," agreed Eleanor, "nor her clothes, and yet Miss Harrison certainly acted as if she had come on business."

"Yes, exactly like Rachel's pupils. They always come bouncing in late, when she's given them up and we're all having a lovely time. Miss Carter acted businesslike too. She seemed to expect us to go."

"Well then, what about Jean?" asked Eleanor. "I couldn't make her out at all. Has she struck up some sort of queer friendship with Miss Carter or was she being tutored too?"

Betty gave a little gasp of dismay. "Oh, I don't know. I hoped you would. You see—she's trying for a part in the play."

"Then she can't be conditioned," said Eleanor easily. "Teddie Wilson has advertised the rule about that far and wide, poor child."

"And you don't think Jean could possibly not have heard of it?" Betty asked anxiously.

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"Why, I shouldn't think so, but you might ask her to make sure. She certainly acted very much as if we had caught her at something she was ashamed of. Would you mind coming just a little way down-town, Betty? I want to buy some violets and a new magazine."

Betty was quite willing to go down-town, but she smiled mournfully at Eleanor's careless suggestion that she should speak to Jean. Asking Jean Eastman a delicate question, especially after the interview they had had that morning, was not likely to be a pleasant task. Betty wondered if she needed to feel responsible for Jean's mistakes. She certainly ought to know on general principles that conditions keep you out of everything nice from the freshman team on.

A visit from Helen Adams that evening threw some new light on the matter.

"Betty," Helen demanded, "isn't Teddie Wilson trying for a part in our play?"

"Helen Chase Adams," returned Betty, severely, "is it possible you don't know that she got a condition and can't try?"

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"I certainly didn't know it," said Helen meekly. "Why should I, please?"

"Only because everybody else does," said Betty, and wondered if Jean could possibly belong with Helen in the ignorant minority. It seemed very unlikely, but then it seemed a sheer impossibility that Helen should have sat at the Belden House dinner-table day after day and not have heard Teddie's woes discussed. At any rate now was her chance to get some information about Miss Carter.

"While we are talking about conditions," she began, "does your friend Anne Carter tutor in French?"

Helen nodded. "It's queer, isn't it, when she has so much money? She doesn't like to do it either, but mademoiselle made her think it was her duty, because all the French faculty are too busy and there was no other girl who took the senior course that mademoiselle would trust. Anne thinks she'll be through by next week."

"Were many people conditioned in French?" asked Betty.

"Why, I don't know. I think Anne just said several, when she told me about it."

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"What I mean is, are all those she tutors conditioned?"

"Why, I suppose so," said Helen, vaguely. "Seniors don't generally tutor their last term unless they have to, do they? There wouldn't be much object in it. Why are you so interested in Anne's pupils, Betty?"

"Oh, for no reason at all," said Betty, carelessly. "Eleanor and I went up to see her this afternoon, and some one came in for a lesson, as I understood it, so of course we didn't stay."

"What a shame! You'll go again soon, won't you?"

"Not until after she gets through tutoring," said Betty, decidedly.

"I wish Helen Adams had never seen that girl," she declared savagely to the green lizard after Helen had gone. "Or at least—well, I almost wish so. Whatever I do will go wrong. If I ask Jean whether she knows about the rule, she'll be horribly disagreeable, but if she gets Bassanio and then Miss Stuart reports her condition she'll probably come and tell me that I ought to have seen she was conditioned and warned her. Anyway I shall feel that I ought. It's certainly much kinder to speak to her than to ask Barbara to inquire of Miss Stuart. Eleanor can't speak to her. No one can but me." The lizard didn't even blink, but Betty had an inspiration. "I know what. I'll write to her."

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Betty spent a long time and a great deal of note-paper on that letter, but at last it read to her satisfaction:

"DEAR JEAN:

"After you left this afternoon Miss Harrison came in, evidently to be tutored. So I couldn't help wondering if you could possibly have had the bad luck to get a condition, and if so, whether you know the rule about the senior play,—I mean that no one having a condition can take part. Please, please don't think that I want to be interfering or disagreeable. I know you would rather have me ask you now than to have anything come out publicly later.

"BETTY."

Two days later Jean's answer appeared on the Belden House table.

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"If you thought I had a condition in French, why didn't you go and ask mademoiselle about it? She would undoubtedly have received you with open arms. Yes, I believe that Miss Carter, whom you seem to know so intimately all of a sudden, tutors the Harrison person. Just why you

should lump me with her, I don't see. I know the rule about conditions and the play as well as you do, but being without either a condition or a part, I can't see that it concerns me particularly.

"Yours most gratefully,
"JEAN REAVES EASTMAN."

Betty read this note through twice and consigned it, torn into very small pieces, to her wastebasket. But after thinking the whole matter over a little more carefully she decided that Jean had had ample grounds for feeling annoyance, if not for showing it, and that there would be just time before dinner to find her and tell her so.

Jean looked a good deal startled and not particularly pleased when she saw Betty Wales standing in her door; but Betty, accepting Jean's attitude as perfectly natural under the circumstances, went straight to the point. 244

"I've come to apologize for my mistake, Jean," she said steadily, "and to tell you how glad I am that it is a mistake. I don't suppose I can make you understand why I was so sure—or at least so afraid——"

"Oh, we needn't go into that," said Jean, with an attempt at graciousness. "I suppose Miss Carter said something misleading. You are quite excusable, I think."

"No," said Betty, "I'm not. I've studied logic and argument and I ought to know better than to depend on circumstantial evidence. I'm very, very sorry."

Jean looked at her keenly. "I suppose you and Eleanor have discussed this affair together. What did she think?"

"I haven't mentioned it to her since the afternoon we were at Miss Carter's, and she doesn't know that I wrote you. That day we both felt the same—that is, we didn't know what to think. If you don't mind, I should like to tell her that it's all right."

"Why in the world should you bother to do that?" asked Jean curiously. 245

"Because she'll be so glad to know, and also because I think it's no more than fair to all of us. You did act very queerly that afternoon, Jean."

"Oh, did I?" said Jean oddly. "You have a queer idea of fairness. You won't work for me when I've put you on a committee for that express purpose; but no matter how disagreeable I am to you about it, you won't take a good chance to pay up, and you won't let Eleanor take hers."

"Let Eleanor take hers?" repeated Betty wonderingly.

"Yes, her chance to pay up her score. She owes me a long one. You know a good many of the items. Why shouldn't she pay me back now that she has a good chance? You haven't forgotten Mary Brooks's rumor, have you? Eleanor could start one about this condition business without half trying."

"Well, she won't," Betty assured her promptly. "She wouldn't think of mentioning such a thing to anybody. But as long as we both misunderstood, I'm going to tell her that it's all right. Good-bye, Jean, and please excuse me for being so hasty." 246

"Certainly," said Jean, and Betty wondered, as she ran down-stairs, whether she had only imagined that Jean's voice shook.

The next afternoon Mr. Masters and the committee, deciding that Jean's Bassanio was possibly just a shade more attractive than Mary Horton's, gave her the part. Kate Denise was Portia, and everybody exclaimed over the suitability of having the lovers played by such a devoted pair of friends. As for Betty, she breathed a sigh of relief that it was all settled at last. Jean had won the part strictly on her merits, and she fully understood Betty's construction of a committee-woman's duty to the play. Nevertheless Betty felt that, in spite of all their recent contests and differences of opinion, they came nearer to being friends than at any time since their freshman year, and she wasn't sorry that she had gone more than halfway in bringing about this happy result.

Meanwhile the date of the Glee Club concert was fast approaching. Georgia Ames came in one afternoon to consult Betty about the important matter of dress. 247

"I suppose that, as long as we're going to sit in a box, I ought to wear an evening gown," she said.

"Why, yes," agreed Betty, "if you can as well as not. It's a very dressy occasion."

"Oh, I can," said Georgia sadly. "I've got one all beautifully spick and span, because I hate it so. I never feel at home in anything but a shirt-waist. Beside my neck looks awfully bony to me, but mother says it's no different from most people's. The men are coming, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, they're coming," assented Betty gaily, "and between us we've been asked to every tea on the campus, I should think. So they ought to have a good time in the afternoon, and college men are always crazy over our concerts."

"Your man will be all right," said Georgia admiringly, "and I'll do my best for the other one. Truly, Betty, I am grateful to you. I think it's awfully good of you to ask me. Even if you asked me because I'm the other Georgia's namesake, you wouldn't do it if you didn't like me a little for myself, would you?"

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"Of course not, you silly child," laughed Betty.

"I want you to have my reserved seat for the basket-ball game," went on Georgia. "The subs each have one seat to give away, and I've swapped mine with a sophomore, so you can sit on your own side."

"I shall clap for you, though," Betty told her, "and I hope you'll get a chance to play. The other Georgia wasn't a bit athletic, so your basket-ball record will never be mixed with hers."

Betty repeated Georgia's remark about being nothing but the other Georgia's namesake to Madeline. "I think she really worries about it," she added.

Madeline only laughed at her. "She hasn't seemed quite so gay lately—that probably means warnings from her beloved instructors at midyears. It must be awfully hard work to keep up the freshman grind with everybody under the sun asking you to do things. Georgia hates to snub people, so she goes even when she'd rather stay at home. Twice lately I've met her out walking with the Blunderbuss. I must talk to her about the necessity of being decently exclusive."

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CHAPTER XIII

GEORGIA'S AMETHYST PENDANT

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"Has your man come yet, Lucy?"

"Mine hasn't, thank goodness! He couldn't get off for the afternoon."

"Mine thought he couldn't and then he changed his mind after I'd refused all the teas."

"Oh, I wouldn't miss the teas for anything. They're more fun than the concert."

"Of course she wouldn't miss them, the dressy lady, with violets to wear and a new white hat with plumes."

"The Hilton is going to have an orchestra to play for dancing. Isn't that pretty cute?"

"But did you hear about Sara Allen's men? They both telegraphed her last evening that they could come,—both, please note. And now she hasn't any seats."

So the talk ran among the merry crowd of girls who jostled one another in the narrow halls after morning chapel. For it was the day of the Glee Club concert. The first installment of men and flowers was already beginning to arrive, giving to the Harding campus that air of festive expectancy which it wears on the rare occasions when the Harding girl's highest ambition is not to shine in her classes or star in the basket-ball game or the senior play, but only to own a "man."

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Tom Alison and his junior roommate arrived at the Belden soon after luncheon. Tom looked so distinguished in a frock coat and high hat that Betty hoped her pride and satisfaction in taking him around the campus weren't too dreadfully evident.

Ashley Dwight was tall, round-shouldered, and homely, except when he smiled, which he did very seldom because he was generally too busy making every one within hearing of his low voice hysterical with laughter over his funny stories. He took an instant fancy to Georgia, and of course Georgia liked him—everybody liked Ashley, Tom explained. So Betty's last worry vanished, leaving nothing to mar the perfection of her afternoon.

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The Hilton girls' brilliant idea of turning their tea into a dance had been speedily copied by the Westcott and the Belden, and the other houses "came in strong on refreshments, cozy-corners, and conversation," as Ashley put it. So it was six o'clock before any one dreamed that it could be so late, and the men went off to their hotels for dinner, leaving the girls to gloat over the flower-boxes piled high on the hall-table, to gossip over the afternoon's adventures, and then hurry off to dress, dinner being a superfluity to them after so many salads and sandwiches, ices and macaroons, all far more appetizing than a campus dinner menu.

"I'll come down to your room in time to help you finish dressing," Betty promised Georgia. "My things slip on in a minute."

But she had reckoned without a loose nail in the stair-carpet, which, apparently resenting her hasty progress past it, had torn a yard of filmy ruching off her skirt before she realized what was happening.

"Oh, dear!" she mourned, "now I shall have to rush just as usual. Helen Chase Adams, the gathering-string is broken. Have you any pink silk? I haven't a thing but black myself. Then would you try to borrow some? And please ask Madeline to go down and help Georgia. Her roommate is going rush to the concert, so she had to start early."

Helen had just taken the last stitches in the ruffle and Betty was putting on her skirt again, when Tom's card came up to her. By the time she got down-stairs they were all waiting in the reception-room and Mr. Dwight was helping Georgia into her coat and laughing at the chiffon scarf that she assured him was a great protection, so that Betty didn't see Georgia in her hated evening gown until they took off their wraps at the theatre.

"Awfully sorry I couldn't come to help you," she whispered, as they went out to the carriage, "but I know you're all right."

"I did my little best not to disgrace you," Georgia whispered back. "My neck is horribly bony, no matter what mother thinks; but I covered some of it up with a chain."

When they got to the theatre, almost every seat was filled and a pretty little usher hurried them through the crowd at the door, assuring them importantly over her shoulder that the concert would begin in one minute and she couldn't seat even box-holders during a number. Sure enough, before they had fairly gotten into their places, the Glee Club girls began to come out and arrange themselves in a rainbow-tinted semicircle for the first number. They sang beautifully and looked so pretty that Tom gallantly declared they deserved to be encored on that account alone; and he led the applause so vigorously that everybody looked up at their box and laughed. Alice Waite had the other seats in it, and as the three men were friends and all in the highest spirits, it was a gay party.

"There's Jerry Holt," Tom would say, "see him stare at our elegance."

"Oh, we're making the rest of the fellows envious all right," Ashley would answer. "Who's the stunning girl in the second row, next the aisle? We don't miss a thing from here, do we?"

"Prettiest lay-out I've ever seen, this concert is," Alice's escort would declare fervently. "Sh, Tommie, the banjo club's going to play."

And then they would settle themselves to watch the stage and listen to the music for a while.

"It's all good, but what I'm looking forward to is this," said Ashley Dwight, pointing out the Glee Club's last number on his program. "I can't wait to hear 'The Fames of Miss Ames.'"

"The what?" asked Betty, consulting her card. "Why, Georgia Ames, is it about you? Did you know they were going to have it?"

Georgia nodded. "The leader came and asked me if I cared. She seemed to think it would take, so I told her to go ahead. But I didn't realize that this concert was such a big thing," she added mournfully, "and I didn't know I was going to sit in a box."

"Pretty grand to be sitting in a box with the celebrity of the evening, isn't it, Ashley?" said Tom.

And Ashley said something in a low voice to Georgia, which made her laugh and blush and call him "too silly for anything."

Finally, after the Mandolin Club had played its lovely "Gondolier's Song," and the Banjo Club its amusing and inevitable "Frogville Echoes," the Glee Club girls came out to sing "The Fames of Miss Ames," which a clever junior had written and a musical sophomore had set to a catchy melody. A little, short-haired girl with a tremendous alto voice sang the verses, which dealt in witty, flippant fashion with the career of the two Georgias, and the whole club came in strong on the chorus.

"And now she's come to life,
 (Her double's here).
 And speculation's rife,
 (It's all so queer).
 The ghost associations,
 Hold long confabulations,
 And the gaiety of nations
 Is very much enhanced by Georgia dear!"

It was only shameless doggerel, but it took. Topical songs always take well at Harding, and never had there been such a unique subject as this one. Between the verses the girls clapped and laughed, nodded at Georgia's box, and whispered explanations to their escorts; and when at last the soloist answered their vociferous demands for more with a smiling head-shake and the convincing statement that "there wasn't any more—yet," they laughed and made her sing it all over.

This time Georgia asked one of the men to change seats with her, and slipped quietly into the most secluded corner of the box, behind Betty's chair, declaring that she really couldn't stand it to be stared at any longer. She looked positively pretty, Betty thought, having a chance for the first time to get a good look at her. The sparkle in her eyes and the soft color in her cheeks that the excitement and embarrassment had put there were very becoming. So was the low dress, in spite of the fact that Georgia was undoubtedly right in considering herself a "shirt-waist girl."

Her neck wasn't particularly thin, or if it was the lovely old chain that she wore twisted twice around it kept it from seeming so. Betty turned to ask her something about the song and noticed the pendant that hung from her chain. It was of antique pattern—an amethyst in a ring of little pearls, with an odd quaint setting of dull gold. It looked familiar somehow. It was—yes, it was just like Nita Reese's lost pin—the one that belonged to her great grandmother and that had disappeared just before the Belden House play—one of the first thefts to be laid to the account of the college robber. Only, instead of a pin this was a pendant, fastened to the chain by a tiny gold ring. That was the only difference, for—yes, even the one little pearl that Nita had lost of the circle was missing here.

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Betty didn't hear Georgia's answer to her question. She turned back to the stage, which swayed sickeningly as she watched it. At last the song ended, and while she clapped mechanically with the rest she gave herself a little shake, and told herself sternly that she was being a goose, that it was absurd, preposterous, even wicked—this thought that had flashed into her head. Nita's pin wasn't the only one of its kind; there might be hundreds just like it. Georgia's great grandmother probably had had one too.

Betty talked very fast on the way up to the Belden. She was thankful that Tom and his friend were going back to New Haven that night and would have time for only the hastiest of good-byes.

"See you later, Miss Ames," Ashley Dwight called back as he ran down the steps after Tom.

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"He's asked me to the prom, Betty. Think of that!" explained Georgia, her eyes shining.

"How—nice," said Betty faintly. "I'm awfully tired, aren't you?"

"Tired!" repeated Georgia gaily. "Not a bit. I should like to begin all over again this minute. I'm hot though. We walked pretty fast up the hill." She threw back her coat and unwound the scarf that was twisted over her hair and around her throat. It caught on the amethyst pendant and Georgia pulled it away carefully, while Betty watched in fascinated silence, trying to make up her mind to speak. She might never have a good chance again. Ordinarily Georgia wore no jewelry,—not a pin or a ring. She had certainly never worn this pendant before at Harding. It would be so easy and so sensible to say something about it now and set her uncomfortable thoughts at rest.

Betty wet her lips nervously, made an heroic effort, and began.

"What a lovely chain that is, Georgia." She hoped her voice sounded more natural to Georgia than it did to herself. "Is it a family heirloom?"

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Georgia put up her hand absently, and felt of the chain. "Oh, that,—yes, it is. It really belongs to mother, but she let me bring it here. She's awfully fond of old jewelry, and she has a lot. I hate all kinds, but this covers my bones so beautifully."

"The pendant is lovely too," put in Betty hastily, as Georgia moved off toward her room. "Is that old too?"

"I don't know," said Georgia stiffly. "That isn't a family thing. It was given to me—by somebody I don't like."

"The somebody must like you pretty well," said Betty, trying to speak lightly, "to give you such a stunning present."

Georgia did not answer this, except by saying, "Good-night. I believe I am tired," as she opened her door.

Up in her own corridor Betty met Madeline Ayres. "Back so soon?" said Madeline, who refused to take Glee Club concerts seriously. "I've had the most delicious evening, reading in solitary splendor and eating apples that I didn't have to pass around. I'm sure your concert wasn't half so amusing. How did Georgia's song go?"

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"Finely," said Betty without enthusiasm. "Did she tell you about it while you helped her dress?"

"No, for I didn't help her. I went over to the Hilton right after dinner. Lucile told me, in a valiant attempt to persuade me that I was foolish to miss the concert."

"Oh," said Betty limply, opening her own door.

Madeline hadn't seen the pendant then. Probably some freshman who didn't know about Nita's loss had helped Georgia to dress. Well, what did that matter? She had Georgia's own word that the pin was a gift. Besides it was absurd to think that she would take Nita's pin and wear it right here at Harding. And yet—it was just the same and the one little pearl was gone. But a person who would steal Nita's pin, wouldn't make a present of it to Georgia. Then the pin couldn't be Nita's.

"I'm getting to be a horrid, suspicious person," Betty told the green lizard. "I won't think about it another minute. I won't, I won't!"

And she didn't that night, for she fell asleep almost before her head touched the pillow. Next morning she woke in the midst of a long complicated dream about Georgia and the green lizard. Georgia had stolen him and put a ring around his tail, and the lizard was protesting vigorously

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in a metallic shriek that turned out, after awhile, to be the Belden House breakfast-bell jangling outside her door.

"They never ring the rising-bell as loud as that," wailed Betty, when she had consulted her clock and made sure that she had slept over. Before she was dressed Georgia Ames appeared, bringing a delicious breakfast tray.

"Helen said that you have a nine o'clock recitation," she exclaimed, "and I thought you probably hadn't studied for it and would be in a dreadful hurry."

Betty thanked her, feeling very guilty. Georgia was wearing a plain brown jumper dress, with no ornament of any kind, not even a pin to fasten her collar; and she looked as cool and self-possessed and cheerful as usual. In the sober light of morning it seemed even more than absurd to suppose that she was anything but a nice, jolly girl, like Rachel and K. and Madeline,—the sort of girl that you associated with Harding College and with the "Merry Hearts" and asked to box parties with a nice Yale man, who liked her and invited her to his prom. 263

In the weeks that followed Betty saw a great deal of Georgia, who seemed intent on showing her gratitude for the splendid time that Betty had given her. Betty, for her part, felt that she owed Georgia far more than Georgia owed her and found many pleasant ways of showing her contrition for a doubt that, do her best, she couldn't wholly stifle. The more she saw of Georgia, the more clearly she noticed that there was something odd about the behavior of the self-contained little freshman, and also that she was worrying a good deal and letting nobody know the reason.

"But it's not conditions or warnings or anything of that sort," Georgia's round-eyed roommate declared solemnly to Betty, in a burst of confidence about the way she was worrying over Georgia. "She sits and thinks for hours sometimes, and doesn't answer me if I speak to her. And she says she doesn't care whether she gets a chance to play in the big game or not. Just imagine saying that, Miss Wales." 264

"She's tired," suggested Betty loyally. "She'll be all right after vacation."

Meanwhile, in the less searching eyes of the college world, Georgia continued to be the spoiled child of fortune. She came back from the prom, with glowing tales of the good times she had had, and whether or not she cared about it she was the only "sub" who got a chance to play in the big game. She made two goals, while Betty clapped for her frantically and her class made their side of the gallery actually tremble with the manifestations of their delight.

It was just as Betty was leaving the gym on the afternoon of the game that Jean Eastman overtook her.

"Could you come for a walk?" she asked abruptly. "There is something I want to get settled before vacation. It won't take long. It's about Bassanio," she went on, when they had gotten a little away from the crowd. "I want to give up my part. Do you suppose Mary Horton would take it now?" 265

"You want to give up Bassanio?" Betty repeated wonderingly.

"Yes. There's no use in mincing matters. I did have a condition in French, and Miss Carter was tutoring me, just as you thought. I had worked it off the day I answered your note, but of course that doesn't alter anything. They say mademoiselle never hands in her records for one semester until the next one is almost over, so nothing would have come to light until it was too late for a new person to learn the part. Don't look so astonished, Betty. It's been done before and it may be done again, but I don't care for it myself." Then, as Betty continued to stare at her in horrified silence, "If you're going to look like that, I might as well have kept the part. The reason I decided to give it up was because I didn't think I should enjoy seeing your face at the grand dénouement. You see, when you and Eleanor came in that afternoon I thought you'd guessed or that Barbara Gordon and Teddie Wilson, who knew of a similar case, had, and had sent you up to make sure. But after you'd apologized for your note and squared things with Eleanor, I—well, I didn't think I should enjoy seeing your face," ended Jean, with a little break in her voice. "I—told you I had a sense of honor, and I have." 266

Betty put out her hand impulsively. "I'm glad you changed your mind, Jean. It's too bad that you can't have a part, but you wouldn't want it in any such way."

"I did though," said Jean, blinking back the tears. "I knew it would come out in the end,—I counted on that, and I shouldn't have minded Miss Stuart's rage or the committee's horror. But you're so dreadfully on the square. You make a person feel like a two-penny doll. I don't wonder that Eleanor Watson has changed about a lot of things. Anybody would have to if they saw much of you."

Betty's thoughts flew back to Georgia. "I wish I thought so."

"Well," said Jean fiercely, "I do. That's why I've always hated you. I presume I shall hate you worse than ever to-morrow. Meanwhile, will you please tell Barbara? I can't help what they all think, and I don't care. I only wanted you to see that I've got a little sense of obligation left and that after I've let a person apologize—Don't come any further, please." 267

Jean ran swiftly down the steep path leading to the lower level of the back campus and Betty

turned obediently toward home, feeling very small and useless and unhappy. Jean's announcement had been so sudden and so amazing that she didn't know what she had said in response to it, and she was quite sure that she hadn't done at all what Jean expected. Then this confirmation of her suspicions about Jean gave her an uneasy feeling about Georgia. That baffling young person was just leaving the gym as Betty got back to it, and the sight of her surrounded by a bevy of her admiring friends reassured Betty wonderfully. Nevertheless she decided to go and see Miss Ferris. There was something she wanted to ask about.

After half an hour spent in Miss Ferris's cozy sitting-room, she started out to find Barbara, armed with the serene conviction that everything would come out right in the end.

"How do people influence other people?" she had demanded early in her call. "There is some one I want to influence, if I could, but I don't know how to begin." 268

"That's a big question, Betty," Miss Ferris assured her smilingly. "In general I think the best way to influence people is to be ourselves the things we want them to be—honest and true and kind."

Betty mused on this advice as she crossed the campus. "That was a good deal what Jean said. I guess I must just attend to my own affairs and wait and let things happen, the way Madeline does. This about Jean just happened."

She passed Georgia's door on her way up-stairs. The room was full of girls, listening admiringly to their hostess's reminiscences of the afternoon. "That sophomore guard was so rattled. She kept saying, 'I will, I will, I will,' between her teeth and she was so busy saying it that she forgot to go for the ball. But she didn't forget to stick her elbow into me between times—not she. I wanted to slug her a little just for fun, but of course I wouldn't. I perfectly hate people who don't play fair."

Betty went on up the stairs smiling happily. She wanted to hug Georgia for that last sentence.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MOONSHINERS' BACON-ROAST

Jean's sudden retirement from the cast of "The Merchant of Venice" was the subject of a good deal of excited conjecture during the few days that remained of the winter term. Betty explained it briefly to Barbara, who in turn confided Jean's story to the rest of her committee. All of them but Clara Ellis thought better of Jean than they ever had before for the courage she had shown in owning herself in the wrong. Teddie Wilson, being in Jean's French division, remembered her letter from the last year's girl and made a shrewd guess at the true state of affairs; but realizing just how sorely Jean had been tempted she was generous enough not to ask any questions or tell anybody what she thought. So the Harding world was divided in its opinions, one party asserting that Jean's acting had proved a disappointment, the other declaring that she had wanted to manage the whole play, and finding that she couldn't had resigned her part in it. Jean herself absolutely refused to discuss the subject, beyond saying that she was tired and had found it necessary to drop something, and she was so sarcastic and ill-tempered that even her best friends began to let her severely alone. Toward Eleanor her manner was as contemptuous as ever, and she kept haughtily aloof from Betty. But one day when two of the Hill girls, gossiping in her room, made some slighting remarks about Betty's prominence in class affairs, Jean flashed out an indignant protest. 270

"She's one of the finest girls in 19—, and if either of you amounted to a third as much, you could be proud of it. No, I don't like her at all, but I admire her immensely, so please choose somebody else to criticise while you're in here."

Meanwhile the winter term had ended, the spring vacation come and gone, and the lovely spring term was at full tide in Harding. If you were a freshman, it made you feel sleepy and happy and utterly regardless of the future terrors of the conditioned state in comparison with the present joys of tennis and canoeing or the languorous fascination of a hammock on the back campus,—where one goes to study and remains to dream. If you were a senior it made a lump come in your throat,—the fleeting loveliness of this last spring term, when all the trials of being a Harding girl are forgotten and all the joys grow dearer than ever, now that they are so nearly past. 271

"But it's not going to be any daisy-picking spring-term for 19—," Bob Parker announced gaily to a group of her friends gathered for an after-luncheon conference on the Westcott piazza. "Isn't that a nice expression? Miss Raymond used it in class this morning. She wanted to remind us, she said, that the Harding course is four full years long. Then she gave out a written lesson on Jane Austen for Friday."

"What a bother!" lamented Babbie, who hadn't elected English novelists. "Now I suppose we

can't have either the Moonshiners' doings or the 'Merry Hearts' meeting on Thursday."

"Who on earth are the Moonshiners?" asked Katherine Kittredge curiously.

"Learn to ride horseback and you can be one," explained Babbie. "They're just a crowd of girls, mostly seniors, who like to ride together in the cool of the evening and make a specialty of moonlight. We're going to have a bacon-roast the first moonlight night that everybody can come."

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"Which will be the night after never," declared Madeline Ayres sagely.

"What's the awful rush about that bacon-roast?" asked Babe. "I should think it would be nicer to wait awhile and have it for a sort of grand end-up to the riding season."

"Why, there isn't but one more moon before commencement," explained Babbie, "and if we wait for that it may be too hot. Who wants to go on a bacon-roast in hot weather?"

"The 'Merry Hearts' are going to decide about passing on the society, aren't they?" asked Rachel. "That's a very important matter and we ought to get it off our hands before too many other things come up. Girls, do you realize that commencement is only five weeks off?"

"Oh, please don't begin on that," begged Babe, who hated sentiment and was desperately afraid that somebody would guess how tear-y she felt about leaving Harding. "I'll tell you how to settle things. Let's go over all the different afternoons and evenings and see which ones are vacant. Most of the 'Merry Hearts' are here and several Moonshiners. We can tell pretty well what the other girls have on for the different days."

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"I'll keep tab," volunteered Katherine, "because I belong to only one of these famous organizations. Shall I begin with to-morrow afternoon? Who can't come then to a 'Merry Hearts' meeting?"

"We can't. Play committee meets," chanted Rachel and Betty together.

"Mob rehearsal from four to six," added Bob.

"Helen Adams has to go to a conference with the new board of editors," put in Madeline. "I heard her talking to Christy about it. It begins early and they're going to have tea."

"To-morrow evening—Moonshiners' engagements please," said Katherine briskly.

"Class supper committee meets to see about caterers," cried Babe. "We can't put it off either. Last year's class has engaged Cuyler's already,—the pills! That committee takes out me and Nita and Alice Waite."

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"Rehearsal of the carnival dance in the play," added Babbie promptly, "and Jessica, alias me, has to go."

"Thursday as I understand it is to be devoted to picking, not daisies, but the flowers of Jane Austen's thought for Miss Raymond." Katherine looked at Babbie for directions. "Shall I go on to Friday afternoon?"

"Class meeting," chanted several voices at once.

"It won't be out a minute before six," declared Bob. "We've got to elect the rest of our commencement performers—"

"Which isn't very many," interposed Madeline.

"Well, there'll be reports from dozens and dozens of committees," concluded Bob serenely, "and there'll be quantities of things to discuss. 19— is great on discussions."

"In the evening," Betty took her up, "Marie is going to assign the junior ushers to the various functions, and she's asked most of us to advise her about it, hasn't she?"

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Several girls in the circle nodded.

"Then we come to Saturday," proclaimed Katherine. "Evening's out, I know, for Dramatic Club's open meeting."

"I'm on the reception committee," added Betty. "We shall have to trim up the rooms in the afternoon."

"All the play people have rehearsals Saturday."

"Saturday seems to be impossible," said Katherine. "How about Monday afternoon?"

"The Ivy Day committee has a meeting," announced Rachel in apologetic tones. "But don't mind me, if the rest can come then."

"The Prince of Morocco has a special audience granted him by Miss Kingston for Monday at five," said Madeline. "But don't mind him."

"Dear me," laughed Betty. "I hadn't any idea we were such busy ladies. Is everybody in 19— on so many committees, do you suppose?"

"Of course not, simple child," answered Bob. "We're prominent seniors,—one of the leading crowds in 19—. I heard Nan Whipple call us to a freshman that she had at dinner last Sunday."

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"And all of us but Madeline work early and late to keep up the position," added Babbie grandly.

"The Watson lady is an idler too," put in Madeline, with quick tact, remembering that Eleanor had mentioned no engagements. "We're content to bask in the reflected glory of our friends, aren't we, Eleanor?"

Eleanor nodded brightly and Babbie returned to the matter in hand. "We shall never get a date this way," she declared. "Let's put all the days of next week after Monday into Bob's cap. The first one that K. draws out will be the 'Merry Hearts' afternoon; and the next the Moonshiners' evening. Those that can't come at the appointed times will have to stay at home."

Everybody agreed to this, and Madeline gallantly sacrificed a leaf from her philosophy notebook to write the days on.

"Friday," announced Katherine, drawing out a slip, "and Thursday."

"Those are all right for me," said Madeline.

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"And for me."

"Same here."

"And here."

"We'd much better have drawn lots in the first place," said Babbie. "Now if it only doesn't rain on Thursday and spoil the full moon! Tell the others, won't you, girls? I'm due at the Science Building this very minute."

It didn't rain on Thursday. Indeed the evening was an ideal one for a long gallop, with an open-air supper to follow. This was to be cooked and eaten around a big bonfire that would take the chill off the spring air and keep the mosquitoes at a respectful distance. Most of the Moonshiners belonged to the Golf Club, and they had gotten permission to have their fire in a secluded little grove behind the course. Babbie, who had organized the Moonshiners and was their mistress of ceremonies, held many secret conferences with Madeline Ayres and the two spent a long afternoon sewing behind locked doors, on some dark brown stuff, which Babbie subsequently tied into a big, untidy parcel and carried up to Professor Henderson's. So the Moonshiners expected a "feature" in addition to the familiar delights of a bacon-roast, and they turned out in such numbers that Bob had to ride a fat little carriage horse and Babbie bravely mounted the spirited mare "Lady," who had frightened her so on Mountain Day. But there was no storm this time to agitate Lady's nerves, and they kept clear of the river and the ferries; so everything went smoothly and the Moonshiners cantered up to the Club house at half past eight in the highest possible spirits.

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They could see the grove as they dismounted and every one but Babbie was surprised to find the fire already lighted. The dishes and provisions had been carried out in big hampers in the afternoon, and the wood gathered, so there was nothing to do now but stroll over to the fire and begin.

"Why, somebody's there," cried Betty suddenly. She was walking ahead with Alice Waite. "I can see two people. They're stooping over the fire. Why, Alice, it's two dear little brown elves."

"Just like those on my ink-stand," cried Alice, excitedly. "How queer!"

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Everybody had seen the picturesque little figures by this time, and the figures in their turn had spied the riding-party and had begun to dance merrily in the fire-light. They were dressed in brown from head to foot, with long ears on their brown hoods and long, pointed toes curling up at the ends of their brown shoes. They looked exactly like the little iron figures of brownies that every Harding girl who kept up with the prevailing fads had put on her desk that spring in some useful or ornamental capacity. They danced indefatigably, pausing now and then to heap on fresh wood or to poke the fire into a more effective blaze, and looking, in the weird light, quite fantastic enough to have come out of the little hillside behind the fire, tempted to upper earth by the moonlight and the great pile of dry wood left ready to their hands. For a few minutes after the Moonshiners' arrival the trolls resolutely refused to speak.

"'Cause now you'll know we ain't real magic," explained Billy Henderson indignantly, when his chum had fallen a victim to Bob's wiles and disclosed his identity.

The fire was so big and so hot by this time that it threatened to burn up the whole grove, so the small boys were persuaded to devote their energies to toasting thin slices of bacon, held on the ends of long sticks, and later to help pass the rolls and coffee that went with the bacon, and to brown the marshmallows, which, with delicious little nut-cakes, made up the last course.

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The Moonshiners had spent so much time admiring Babbie's brownies that they had to hurry through the supper and even so it bid fair to be after ten before they reached the campus. Betty, Bob, and Madeline happened to get back to the horses first and were waiting impatiently for the rest to come when Bob made a suggestion.

"Mr. Ware is helping stamp out the fire. Let's get on and start for home ahead of the others. Then we can let most of them in if they're late. Our matron will rage if she catches us again this

week.”

“All right,” agreed Madeline. “Mr. Ware said he had told a man to be at the Westcott, ready to take some of the horses. Let’s not tell any one. They’ll be so surprised to find three horses gone.”

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“We shall have to hurry then,” whispered Betty. “They’ll be here any minute.”

“On second thought,” said Madeline, “I don’t believe I can pick out my own horse. It’s inky dark here under the trees.” Madeline had ridden all her life but she seldom went out at Harding, and so hadn’t a regular mount, like most of the other Moonshiners.

“Of course you can, Madeline,” scoffed Betty. “You rode Hero, that big black beast hitched to the last post, next to my horse. Don’t you remember tying him there?”

Bob backed her sturdy cob out from between two restless companions, and with much laughter and whispering and many injunctions to hurry and to be “awfully still,” the three conspirators mounted and walked their horses quietly down the drive.

“My stirrups seem a lot too long,” Betty whispered softly, as they passed down the avenue, dusky with the shadows of tall elms. “Whoa, Tony! Wait just a minute, girls. Why—oh, Bob, Madeline,—I’ve got the wrong horse. Somebody must have changed them around. This is Lady.”

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Whether it was Betty’s nervous clutch on the reins as she made this dire discovery and remembered Lady’s antics on the ferry-boat, or whether the saucy little breeze which chose that moment to stir the elm branches and set the shadows dancing on the white road, was responsible, is a matter of doubt. At any rate Lady jerked back her pretty head impatiently, as if in answer to her name, shivered daintily, reared, and ran. She dodged cat-like, between Bob and Madeline and out through the narrow gateway, turned sharply to the right, away from Harding, and galloped off up the level road that lay white in the moonlight, between the Golf Club and a pine wood half a mile away.

Betty had presence of mind enough to dig her knees into Lady’s sides, and so managed somehow, in spite of her mis-fit stirrups, to stay on at the gate. She tugged hard at the reins as Lady flew along, and murmured soothing words into Lady’s quivering ears. But it wasn’t any use. Betty had wondered sometimes how it felt to be run away with. Now she knew. It felt like a rush of cold wind that made you dizzy and faint. You thought of all sorts of funny little things that happened to you ages ago. You wondered who would plan Jessica’s costumes if anything happened to you. You wished you weren’t on so many committees; it would bother Marie so to appoint some one in your place. You made a neat little list of those committees in your mind. Then you got to the pine wood, and something did happen, for Lady went on alone.

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Madeline, straining her eyes at the gateway, waiting for Bob and Mr. Ware to come, couldn’t see that.

“She was still on the last I could see,” she told them huskily, and Mr. Ware whipped his horse into a run and rushed after Lady.

Madeline looked despairingly at Bob. “Let’s go too,” she said. “I can’t stand it to wait here.”

“All right.”

They rode fast, but it seemed ages before they got to the pines. Mr. Ware was galloping far ahead of them.

“If she’s gone so far she’ll slow up gradually on that long hill,” suggested Bob, trying to speak cheerfully.

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“Isn’t it—pretty—stony?” asked Madeline.

“Yes, but after she’d run so far she wouldn’t try to throw Betty.”

“Suppose we wait here. Oh, Bob, what shall we do if she’s badly hurt?”

“She can’t be,” said Bob with a thick sob. “Please come on, Madeline. I’ve got to know if she’s —” Bob paused over the dreadful word.

There was a little rustling noise in the bushes beside the road. “Did Mr. Ware have a dog?” asked Madeline.

“No,” gulped Bob.

“There’s something down there. Who’s there?” called Madeline fearlessly, and then she whistled in case Bob had been mistaken about the dog.

“It’s I—Betty Wales,” answered a shaky little voice, with a reassuring suggestion of mirth in it. “I’m so glad somebody has come. I’m down here in a berry-patch and I can’t get up.”

Madeline was off her horse by this time, pushing through the briars regardless of her new riding habit.

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“Where are you hurt, dear?” she asked bending over Betty and speaking very gently. “Do you suppose you could let me lift you up?”

Betty held out her arms, with a merry laugh. "Why, of course I could. I'm not one bit hurt, except scratched. The ferns are just as soft as a feather bed down here, but the thorns up above are dreadful. I can't seem to pull myself up. I'm a little faint, I guess."

A minute later she was standing in the road, leaning against Madeline, who felt of her anxiously and asked again and again if it didn't hurt.

"Hasn't she broken her collar-bone?" asked Bob, who was holding the horses. "People generally do when they have a bad spill. Are her arms all right?"

"I suppose I didn't know how to fall in the proper way," explained Betty, wearily. "I can't remember how it happened, only all at once I found myself down on those ferns with my face scratched and smarting. If Mr. Ware went by ahead of you I suppose I must have been stunned, for I didn't see him."

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"He's probably hunting distractedly for you on the hill," said Bob, glad to have something definite to do. "I think he's caught Lady, and I'll go and tell him that we've caught you."

Just then Professor Henderson's surrey drove up. It had come for Billy, and Babbie had thoughtfully sent it on to bring back "whoiver's hurted," the groom explained. But he made no objection to taking in Betty, though, rather to Billy's disappointment, she did not come under that category.

"I never saw a broken arm, ner a broken leg, ner a broken anything," he murmured sleepily. "I thought I'd have a chance now. Say, can I please put my head in your lap?"

"My, but your knees wiggle something awful," Billy complained a minute later. "Don't you think they're cracked, maybe?"

So Madeline put the sleepy elves in front with the driver and got in herself beside Betty. Curled up in Madeline's strong arms she cried a little and laughed a good deal, never noticing that Madeline was crying, too. For just beyond the berry-patch there was a heap of big stones, which made everything that Bob and Madeline had feared in that dreadful time of suspense seem very reasonable and Betty's escape from harm little short of a miracle.

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It was striking eleven when the riding party and the surrey turned up the campus drive and the B's noticed with dismay that the Westcott was brilliantly lighted.

"I know what's happened," wailed Babe. "Our beloved matron has found us missing and she's hunting for us under the beds and in all the closets, preparatory to calling in the police. Never mind! we've got a good excuse this time."

But the Westcott was not burning its lights to accommodate the matron. The B's had not even been missed. Katherine met them in the hall and barely listened to their excited accounts of their evening's adventure.

"There's been plenty doing right here, too," she said.

"What?" demanded the three.

"College thief again, but this time it's a regular raid. For some reason nearly everybody was away this evening, and the ones who had anything to lose have lost it—no money, as usual, only jewelry. Fay Ross thinks she saw the thief, but—well, you know how Fay describes people. You'd better go and see what you've lost."

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Luckily the thief had neglected the fourth floor this time, so they had lost nothing, but they sat up for an hour longer, consoling their less fortunate friends, and listening to Fay's account of her meeting with the robber.

"I'm pretty sure I should know her again," she declared, "and I'm perfectly sure that I've seen her before. She isn't very tall nor very dark. She's big and she looks stupid and slow, not a bit like a crafty thief, or like a college girl either. She had a silk bag on her arm. I wish I'd asked her what was in it."

But naturally Fay hadn't asked, and she probably wouldn't see the thief soon again. Next morning Emily Lawrence telegraphed her father about her watch with diamonds set in the back, and he sent up two detectives from Boston, who, so everybody supposed, would make short work of finding the robber. They took statements from girls who had lost their valuables during the year and from Fay, prowled about the campus and the town, and finally went back to Boston and presented Emily's father with a long bill and the enlightening information that the case was a puzzling one and if anything more turned up they would communicate it.

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Georgia Ames displayed no unusual interest in the robbery. She happened to tell Betty that she had spent the entire evening of the bacon-roast with Roberta, and Betty, watching her keenly, was almost sure that she knew nothing of the excitement at the Westcott until the B's came over before chapel to inquire for "the runaway lady" and brought the news of the robbery with them. The "runaway lady" explained that she wasn't even very lame and should have to go to classes just as usual. Then she hid her face for a minute on Bob's broad shoulder,—for though she wasn't lame she had dreamed all night of Lady and stones and briars and broken collar-bones,—and Bob patted her curls and told her that Lady was going to be sold, and that she should have been frightened to pieces in Betty's place. After which Betty covered her scratches with a very

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CHAPTER XV

PLANS FOR A COOPERATIVE COMMENCEMENT

It was Saturday afternoon and time for the "Merry Hearts" meeting, which had been postponed for a day to let every one recover from Thursday evening's excitement.

"Come along, Betty," said Roberta Lewis, poking her head in at Betty's half-open door. "We're going to meet out on the back campus, by Nita's hammock."

"Could you wait just a second?" asked Betty absently, looking up from a much crossed and blotted sheet of paper. "If I can only think of a good way to end this sentence, I can inform Madeline Ayres that my 'Novelists' paper is done. She said I couldn't possibly finish it by five. See my new motto."

"Do not let study interfere with your regular college career," read Roberta slowly. "What a lovely sentiment! Where did you get it?"

"Helen gave it to me for a commencement present," said Betty, drawing a very black line through the words she had written last. "Isn't it just like her?"

"Do you mean that it's like her to give you something for commencement that you won't have much use for afterward?"

"Yes," laughed Betty, "and to give it to me because she says I made her see that it's the sensible way of looking at college, although she thinks the person who got up these mottoes probably meant it for a joke. She wishes she could find out for sure about that. Isn't she comical?"

"Yes," said Roberta, "she is. You haven't written as much as you've crossed out since I came, Betty Wales. We shall be late."

Betty shut her fountain pen with a snap, and tossed the much blotted page on top of a heap of its fellows, which were piled haphazard in a chair beside her desk.

"Who cares for Madeline Ayres?" she said, and arm in arm the two friends started for the back campus, where they found all the rest of the senior "Merry Hearts" waiting for them. Dora Carlson couldn't come, Eleanor explained; and Anne Carter and Georgia thought that they were too new to membership in the society to have any voice in deciding how it should be perpetuated.

"It's rather nice being just by ourselves, isn't it?" said Bob.

"It's rather nice being all together," added Babbie in such a significant tone that Babe gave her a withering glance and summarily called the meeting to order.

The discussion that followed was animated, but it didn't seem to arrive anywhere. There were Lucile and Polly and their friends in the sophomore class who would be proud to receive a legacy from the seniors they admired so much; and there was a junior crowd, who, as K. put it, were a "jolly good sort," and would understand the "Merry Hearts" policy and try to keep up its influence in the college. Everybody agreed that, if the society went down at all, it ought to descend to a set of girls who were prominent enough to give a certain prestige to its democratic principles, and who, being intimate friends, would enjoy working and playing together as the first generation of "Merry Hearts" had, and would know how to bring in the "odd ones" like Dora and Anne, when opportunity offered.

"But after all," said Rachel dejectedly, "it would never be quite the same. We are 'Merry Hearts' because we wanted to be. The idea just fitted us."

"And will look like a rented dress suit on any one else," added Madeline frivolously. "Of course I'm not a charter member of 19—, and perhaps I ought not to speak. But don't you think that the younger classes will find their own best ways of keeping up the right spirit at Harding? I vote that the 'Merry Hearts' has done its work and had its little fling, and that it would better go out when we do."

"Then it ought to go out in a regular blaze of glory," said Bob, when murmurs of approval had greeted Madeline's opinion.

"I know a way." Betty spoke out almost before she thought, and then she blushed vividly, fearing that she had been too hasty and that the "Merry Hearts" might not approve of her plan.

"Is it one of the things you thought of while you were being run away with?" asked Madeline quizzically.

Betty laughed and nodded. "You'd better make a list of the things I thought of, Miss Ayres, if the subject interests you so much."

"Was there one for every scratch on your face?" asked Katherine.

Betty drew herself up with a comical affectation of offended dignity. "I almost wish I'd broken my collar-bone, as Bob thought I ought to. Then perhaps I should get a little sympathy."

"And where would the costumes for the play have been, with you laid up in the infirmary for a month?" demanded Babbie with a groan.

"Do you know that's the very thing I worried about most when Lady was running," began Betty, so earnestly that everybody laughed again.

"Just the same it wouldn't have been any joke, would it, about those costumes," said Bob, when the mirth had subsided, "nor about all the other committee work that you've done and that nobody else knows much about."

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"Not even to mention that we should hate to have anything happen to you for purely personal reasons," said Madeline, shivering in the warm sunshine as she remembered how that dreadful pile of white stones had glistened in the moonlight.

"I think this class would better pass a law: No more riding by prominent seniors," declared Katherine Kittredge. "If Emily Davis should get spilled, there would go our good young Gobbo and our Ivy Day orator, besides nobody knows how much else."

"Christy is toastmistress and Antonio."

"Kate is chairman of the supper committee and Portia."

"Everybody who's anything is a lot of things, I guess," said little Helen Adams. She herself was in the mob that made the background for the trial scene in "The Merchant of Venice," and she was as elated over her part as any of the chief actors could possibly be over their leading rôles. But that wasn't all. She was trying for the Ivy song, which is chosen each year by competition. She had been working on her song in secret all through the year, and she felt sure that nobody had cared so much or tried so hard as she,—though of course, she reminded herself sternly it took more than that to write the winning song and she didn't mean to be disappointed if she failed.

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"Order please, young ladies," commanded Babe, who delighted to exercise her presidential dignities. "We are straying far from the subject in hand—to adapt the words of our beloved Latin professor. Betty Wales was going to tell us how the 'Merry Hearts' could go out with a splurge."

"I object to the president's English," interrupted Madeline. "The connotation of the term splurge is unpleasant. We don't wish to splurge. Now go ahead, Betty."

"Why, it's nothing much," said Betty modestly, "and probably it's not at all what Bob is thinking of. It's just that, as Helen says, everybody who is in anything is in a lot of things and most of the class are being left out of the commencement plans. I thought of it first that day we had a lecture on monopolies in sociology. Don't you remember Miss Norris's saying that there were classes and masses and excellent examples of monopolies right here in college, and that we needn't wait until we were out to have a chance to fight trusts and equalize wages."

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"Oh, that was just an illustration," objected Bob blandly. "Miss Norris didn't mean anything by it."

"She's a Harding girl herself," Betty went on, "and it's certainly true, even if she didn't intend it to be acted on. Thursday night when I went over the things I had to do about commencement and thought I couldn't do any of them I felt dreadfully greedy."

"But Betty," Rachel took her up, "don't you think it takes executive ability to be on committees and plan things? Commencement would be at sixes and sevens if the wrong girls had charge of it."

"Yes, of course it would," agreed Betty. "Only I wondered if all the left-out people are the wrong kind."

"Of course they're not," said Madeline Ayres with decision. "What is executive ability, anyway?"

"The thing that Christy Mason has," returned Bob promptly.

"Exactly," said Madeline, "and that is just practice in being at the head of things,—nothing more. Christy isn't much of a pusher, she isn't particularly brilliant or particularly tactful; but she's been on committees as regularly as clockwork all through her course, and she's learned when to pull and when to push, and when to sit back and make the rest push. It's a thing any one can learn, like French or bookkeeping or how to make sugar-cookies. I hate it myself, but I don't believe it's a difficult accomplishment."

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"Perhaps not," protested Bob, "but it takes time, if it's anything like French or cookies—I never tried the bookkeeping. We don't want to make any experiments with our one and only commencement."

"Why, I'm an experiment," said Roberta hastily, as if she had just thought of it and felt impelled

to speak.

"Yes, but you're the exception that proves the rule," said Nita Reese brusquely. Nita's reputation for executive ability was second only to Christy's and she was badly overworked, and tired and cross in consequence. "I don't think I quite get your idea, Betty. Do you want K., for instance, to give up her part in the play to Leslie Penrose, who was told she could have it at first and cried for a whole day when she found there had been a mistake?"

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"Come, Nita," said Madeline lazily, but with a dangerous flash in her gray eyes. "That's not the way to take our last chance to make more 'Merry Hearts.' Let Betty tell us exactly what she does mean."

"Please do, Betty," begged Nita, half ashamed already of her ill-tempered outburst.

"Of course I don't want K. to give up her part," began Betty with a grateful look at Madeline and a smile for Katherine. "I only thought that some of us are in so many things that we're tired and rushed all the time, and not enjoying our last term half as much as we might."

"My case exactly," put in Nita repentantly.

"Whereas there are girls in the class who've never had anything to do here but study, and who would be perfectly delighted to be on some little unimportant commencement committee."

"But they ought to realize," said Babbie loftily, "that in a big college like Harding very few people can have a chance to be at the head of things. Our commencement is pretty enough to pay our families for coming even if the girls they are particularly interested in don't have parts. Being on a committee isn't a part anyway."

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"Girls who are never on them think it is," said Helen Adams.

There was an ominous silence.

At the end of it Babbie slipped out of the hammock and sat down beside Betty on the grass. "It's no use at all fighting you, Betty Wales," she declared amiably. "You always twist the things we don't want to do around until they seem simple and easy and no more than decent. Of course it's true that we are all tired to death doing things that the left-outs will be blissful at the prospect of helping us with. But it's been so every year and no other class ever turned its play and its commencement upside down. And yet you make it seem the only reasonable thing to do."

"Lucky our class-meeting happened to be postponed," said Bob in matter-of-fact tones, "Makes it easier arranging things."

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"A coöperative commencement will send us out with a splurge all right," remarked Babe.

Thus the B's made a graceful concession to the policy of trying more experiments with 19—'s commencement.

"One man, one office—that's our slogan," declared Katherine, when Babe had announced that the vote in favor of Betty's plan was unanimous. "No hard and fast policy, but the general encouragement of passing around the honors. I haven't but one myself, so I shall have to look on and see that the rest of you do your duty."

"Let's make a list of the vacancies that will probably occur in our midst, as it were," suggested Rachel.

"I wonder if we couldn't lengthen the Ivy Day program and make room for a few more girls in that way," put in Eleanor. "The oration and the song don't take any time at all."

"Fine idea!" cried Madeline. "We have a lot of musical and literary talent in the class that isn't being used anywhere. We'll turn it over to the Ivy Day committee with instructions to build their program accordingly."

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"But we must manage things tactfully," interposed Babbie, "as we did about the junior usher dresses. We mustn't let the left-overs suspect that we are making places for them."

"By the way," said Madeline, "have you heard that this year's junior ushers are going to keep up the precedent, out of compliment to us?"

"Pretty cute," cried Babe. "I hope they'll manage to look as well as we did."

"And as we are going to again this year in our sweet simplicity costumes," said Babbie, with a little sigh of regret for the wonderful imported gown that her mother had suggested buying as part of her commencement present.

It was growing late, so the "Merry Hearts" made a hasty outline of procedure, and delegated Rachel to see Marie Howard and ask her to help with the plan as far as she could at the approaching class-meeting. Luckily this was not until the following Tuesday, so there was plenty of time to interview all the right people and get the coöperative campaign well established before Marie rose at the meeting to read what would otherwise have seemed an amazing list of committee appointments. Emily Davis gave up Gobbo at once and Christy, after weighing the relative glories of being toastmistress and Antonio decided that she could help more at the class supper. Both girls declared that they were delighted to be relieved of part of their responsibilities.

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"Those toasts that I hadn't time to brown properly were getting on my nerves," Christy declared.

"And my Ivy oration was growing positively frivolous, it was so mixed up with young Gobbo's irresponsible way of changing masters," confessed Emily. "I've wanted to drop out of the play, but I was afraid the girls would think me as irresponsible as Gobbo. Leslie Penrose knows my part and she can step into the place as well as not."

It was a surprise to everybody when Kate Denise joined the movement, without even having been asked to do so. She gave up everything but her part as Portia, and used her influence to make the rest of the Hill girls do the same.

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"I guess she remembers how we did them up last year on the dress business," chuckled Bob.

"She's a lot nicer than the rest of her crowd," Babbie reminded her, "and I think she's tired of acting as if she wasn't."

"I hate freaks," said Babe, "but it is fun to see them bustle around, acting as if they owned the earth. Leslie's whole family is coming to commencement, down to the youngest baby, and the fat Miss Austin is fairly bursting with pride just because she's on the supper committee. She has some good ideas, too."

"Of course they're proud," said little Helen Adams sententiously. "Things you've never had always look valuable to you."

Helen had won in the song contest. Her family would see her name and her song in print on the Ivy Day program, and May Hayward, a friend of hers and T. Reed's in their desolate freshman year, was to be in the mob in Helen's place.

All the changes had been made without any difficulty and no one was worrying lest experiments should prove the ruin of 19—'s commencement. Mr. Masters had protested hotly against Christy's withdrawal from the play, but the new Antonio was proving herself a great success and even Mr. Masters had to admit that the whole play had gained decidedly the minute that the actors had dropped their other outside interests. But the great difference was in the spirit of good-fellowship that prevailed everywhere. Everybody had something to do now, or if not, then her best friend had, and they talked it over together, told what Christy had suggested about the tables for class-supper, how Kate was having all her own dresses made for Portia and Nerissa couldn't afford to, so Eleanor Watson had lent her a beautiful blue satin, or what the new Ivy Day committees had decided about the exercises. There was no longer a monopoly of anything in 19—. Incidentally, as Katherine pointed out, nobody was resting her nerves at the infirmary.

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Betty would have been perfectly happy if she hadn't felt obliged to worry a little about Georgia Ames. Ashley Dwight had been up to see her twice since the prom. Betty felt responsible for their friendship and wondered if she ought to warn Tom that she really didn't know anything about Georgia. For suppose Georgia hadn't had anything to do with the Westcott house robbery; that didn't prove anything about her having taken Nita's pin in the fall.

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If Madeline had spoken to her protégée, as she intended to do, about excluding the Blunderbuss from her acquaintance, Georgia had paid the advice scant heed. The Blunderbuss came to see her more and more often as the term went on. To be sure Georgia was very seldom at home when the senior called. Indeed her roommate was getting to feel decidedly injured because Georgia never used her room except to sleep and dress in.

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CHAPTER XVI

A HOOP-ROLLING AND A TRAGEDY

19— was having its hoop-rolling. This is the way a senior hoop-rolling is managed: custom decrees that it may take place on any afternoon of senior week, which is the week before commencement when the seniors' work is over though the rest of the classes are still toiling over their June exams. Some morning a senior who feels particularly young and frolicsome suggests to her friends at chapel that, as the time-honored official notice puts it,

"The day has come, the seniors said,
To have our little fling.
Let's buy our hoops and roll them round,
And laugh and dance and sing."

If her friends also feel frolicsome they pass the word along, and unless some last year's girls have bequeathed them hoops, they hurry down-town to buy them of the Harding dealer who always keeps a stock on hand for these annual emergencies. The seniors dress for luncheon in "little girl" fashion, skirts up and hair down, and the minute the meal is over they rush out into

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the sunshine to roll hoop, skip rope, swing in the long-suffering hammocks under the apple trees, and romp to their hearts' content. Freshmen hurrying by to their Livy exam, turn green with envy, and sophomores and juniors "cramming" history and logic indoors lean out of their windows to laugh and applaud, finally come down to watch the fun for "just a minute," and forget to go back at all.

19— had its hoop-rolling the very first day of senior week. As Madeline Ayres said when she proposed it, you couldn't tell what might turn up, in the way of either fun or weather, for the other days, so it was best to lose no time. And such a gay and festive hoop-rolling as it was! First they had a hoop-rolling parade through the campus, and then some hoop-rolling contests for which the prizes were bunches of daisies, "presented with acknowledgments to Miss Raymond," Emily Davis explained. When they were tired of hoops they ran races. When they were out of breath with running they played "drop the handkerchief" and "London Bridge." After that they serenaded a few of their favorite faculty. Then they had a reformed spelling-match, to prove how antiquated their recently finished education had already become.

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Finally they sat down in a big circle on the grass and had "stunts." Babbie recited "Mary had a little lamb," for possibly the thousandth time since she had learned to do it early in her junior year. Emily Davis delivered her famous temperance lecture. Madeline sang her French songs, Jane Drew did her ever-popular "hen-act," and Nancy Simmons gave "Home, Sweet Home," as sung into a phonograph by Madame Patti on her tenth farewell tour.

Most of these accomplishments dated back as far as 19— itself, and half the girls who heard them knew them by heart, but they listened to each one in breathless silence and greeted its conclusion with prolonged and vigorous applause. It was queer, Alice Waite said, but some way you never, never got tired of seeing the same old stunts.

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When the long list of 19—'s favorites was finally exhausted and Emily Davis had positively refused to give the temperance lecture for a third time, the big circle broke up into a multitude of little ones. Bob Parker and a few other indefatigable spirits went back to skipping rope; the hammocks filled with exclusive twos and threes; larger coteries sat on the grass or locked arms and strolled slowly up and down the broad path that skirted the apple-orchard.

Betty, Helen and Madeline were among the strollers.

"One more of the famous last things over," said Madeline with a regretful little sigh. "I'm glad we had it before the alums, and the families begin to arrive and muddle everything up."

"Did I tell you that Dorothy King is coming after all?" asked Betty, who, in a short white sailor suit, with her curls flying and her hoop clutched affectionately in one hand, looked at least eight years too young to be a senior, and supremely happy.

"Has she told you, Helen?" repeated Madeline dramatically. "She tells me over again every time I see her. When is Mary Brooks scheduled to arrive?"

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"Thursday," answered Betty, "so that she can see the play all three times."

"Not to mention seeing Dr. Hinsdale between the acts," suggested Madeline. "What do you two say to a picnic to-morrow?"

Helen said, "How perfectly lovely!" and Betty decided that if Helen and Madeline would come to the gym in the morning and help with the last batch of costumes for the mob, she could get off by three o'clock in the afternoon.

"That reminds me," she added, "that I promised Nerissa to ask Eleanor if she has any shoes to match her blue dress. The ones we ordered aren't right at all by gas-light."

"There's Eleanor just going over to the Hilton," said Helen.

"Find out if she can go to the picnic," called Madeline, as Betty hurried off, shouting and waving her hoop. "We'll be asking the others."

"El-ea-nor!" cried Betty shrilly, making frantic gestures with her hoop. But though Eleanor turned and looked back at the gay pageant under the trees, she couldn't single out any one figure among so many, and after an instant's hesitation she went on up the Hilton House steps.

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So Betty stepped across the campus alone, and being quite out of breath by the time she got indoors went slowly up-stairs and down the long hall to Eleanor's room. The house was very still—evidently its inmates were all out watching the hoop-rolling. Betty found herself walking softly, in sympathy with the almost oppressive silence. Eleanor's door was ajar, so that Betty's knock pushed it further open.

"May I come in?" she asked, hearing Eleanor, as she supposed, moving about inside. Without waiting for an answer she walked straight in and came face to face with—not Eleanor, but Miss Harrison, champion Blunderbuss of 19—.

"Why, what are you doing here?" she asked, her voice sharp with amazement. "I beg your pardon," she added laughingly, "but I thought of course it was Eleanor Watson. She came into the house just ahead of me."

"She hasn't been in here yet," said the Blunderbuss. She had been standing when Betty first caught sight of her. Now she dropped hastily into a chair by the window. "I was sure she'd be

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back soon and I wanted to speak to her for a minute. But I guess I won't wait any longer. I shall be late to dinner."

"Why, no, you won't," said Betty quickly. "It isn't anywhere near dinner-time yet." She didn't care about talking to the Blunderbuss while she waited for Eleanor, but she had a great curiosity to know what the girl could want with Eleanor. "And I don't believe Eleanor will have any more idea than I have," she thought.

But the Blunderbuss rose nervously. "Well, anyway, I can't wait," she said. "I guess it's later than you think. Good-bye."

Just at that minute, however, somebody came swiftly down the hall. It was Eleanor Watson, carrying a great bunch of pink roses.

"Oh, Betty dear," she cried, not noticing the Blunderbuss, who had stepped behind a Japanese screen, "see what daddy sent me. Wasn't it nice of him? Why, Miss Harrison, I didn't see you." Eleanor dropped her roses on a table and came forward, looking in perplexity first at Miss Harrison and then around the room. "Betty," she went on quickly, "have you been hunting for something? I surely didn't leave my bureau drawers open like this." 315

Betty's glance followed Eleanor's to the two drawers in the chiffonier and one in the dressing table which were tilted wide open, their contents looked as if some one had stirred them up with a big spoon. She had been too much engrossed by her encounter with Miss Harrison to notice any such details before.

"No, of course I haven't been hunting for anything," she answered quickly. "I shouldn't think of doing such a thing when you were away."

"I shouldn't have minded a bit." Eleanor turned back to Miss Harrison. "Did you want to see me," she asked, "or did you only come up with Betty?"

The Blunderbuss wet her lips nervously. "I—I wanted to ask you about something, but it doesn't matter. I'll see you some other time. You'll want to talk to Miss Wales now." 316

She had almost reached the door, when, to Eleanor's further astonishment, Betty darted after her and caught her by the sleeve. "Miss Harrison," she said, while the Blunderbuss stared at her angrily, "I'm in no hurry at all. I can wait as well as not, or if you want to see Eleanor alone I will go out. But I think that you owe it to Eleanor and to yourself too to say why you are here."

The Blunderbuss looked defiantly from Betty's determined face to Eleanor's puzzled one. "I didn't know it was Miss Watson's room until you came in and asked for her," she vouchsafed at last.

"You didn't know it was her room?" repeated Betty coldly. "Why didn't you tell me that long ago? Whose room did you think you were in?"

"I thought—I didn't know whose it was."

"Then," said Betty deliberately, "if you admit that you were in here without knowing who occupied the room you must excuse me if I ask you whether or not you were looking through Eleanor's bureau drawers just before I came in." 317

There was a strained silence.

"You can have all the things back," said the Blunderbuss at last, as coolly as if she were speaking of returning a borrowed umbrella; and out of the pockets of the child's apron which she still wore she pulled a gold chain and a bracelet and held them out to Eleanor. "I don't want them," she said when neither of the others spoke. "I don't know why I took them. It just came over me that while all the others were out there playing it would be a good chance for me to go and look at their pretty things."

"And to steal the ones you liked best," added Betty scornfully.

The Blunderbuss gave her a vaguely troubled look. "I didn't think of it that way. Anyway it's all right now. Haven't I given them right back?"

"Suppose we hadn't come in and found you here," put in Eleanor. "Wouldn't you have taken them away?"

"I—I presume so," said the Blunderbuss.

"So you are the person who has been stealing jewelry from the campus houses all through this year." Betty's voice grew harder as she remembered the injustice she had so nearly done Georgia and Miss Harrison's self-righteous attack on Eleanor in that dreadful class-meeting. 318

The Blunderbuss accepted the statement without comment. "They could have had the things back if they'd asked for them," she said. "I couldn't very well give them back if they didn't ask."

"Will you give them back now?" asked Betty, astonishment at the girl's strange behavior gaining on her indignation.

The Blunderbuss nodded vigorously. "Certainly I will. I'll bring them all here to-night. I don't want them for anything. I never wanted them. I'm sure I don't know why I took them. Oh,

there's just one thing," she added hastily, "that I can't bring. It isn't with the rest. But I've got everything else all safe and I'll come right after dinner. Good-bye."



THE GIRLS WATCHED HER IN BEWILDERMENT

The girls watched her go in a daze of bewilderment. Just outside the door she evidently bumped into some one, and her clattering laugh and loud, "Goodness, how you scared me!" sounded as light-hearted and unconcerned as possible.

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"How did you ever guess that she was the one?" Eleanor asked at last.

"It just came over me," Betty answered. "But, why, she doesn't seem to care one bit!"

"About running into me?" asked Jean Eastman, appearing suddenly in the doorway. "Has she been doing damage in here, too?" No one answered and Jean gave a quick look about the room, noticing the rummaged drawers, the girls' excited, tragic faces, and the jewelry that Eleanor still had in her hand. Then she made one of her haphazard deductions, whose accuracy was the terror of her enemies and the admiration of her followers.

"Oh, I see—it's more college robber. So our dear Blunderbuss is the thief. I congratulate you, Eleanor, on the beautiful poetic justice of your having been the one to catch her."

"Yes, she's the thief," said Betty, before Eleanor could answer. She had a sudden inspiration that the best way to treat Jean, now that she guessed so much, was to trust her with everything. "And she acts so strangely—she doesn't seem to realize what she has done, and she doesn't care a bit that we know it. She said——" And between them they gave Jean a full account of their interview with Miss Harrison.

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Jean listened attentively. "It's a pathetic case, isn't it?" she said at last, with no trace of her mocking manner. "I wonder if she isn't a kleptomaniac."

Betty and Eleanor both looked puzzled and Jean explained the long word. "It means a person who has an irresistible desire to steal one particular kind of thing, not to use, but just for the sake of taking them, apparently. I heard of a woman once who stole napkins and piled them up in a closet in her house. It's a sort of insanity or very nearly that. Of course jewelry is different from napkins, but Miss Harrison has taken so much more than she can use——"

"Especially so many pearl pins," put in Betty, eagerly. "Haven't you noticed what a lot of those have been lost? She couldn't possibly wear them all."

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"Perhaps she meant to sell them," suggested Eleanor.

"But her family are very wealthy," objected Jean. "They spend their summers where Kate does, and she says that they give this girl everything she wants. She never took money either, even when it was lying out in plain sight, and her being so ready to give back the things seems to show that she didn't take them for any special purpose."

"Then if she's a——" began Betty.

"Kleptomaniac," supplied Jean.

"She isn't exactly a thief, is she?"

"No, I suppose not," said Jean doubtfully.

"But she isn't a very safe person to have around," said Eleanor.

"I'll tell you what," said Betty, who had only been awaiting a favorable opening to make her suggestion. "It's too big a question for us to try to settle, isn't it, girls? Let's go and tell Miss Ferris all that we've found out so far, and leave the whole matter in her hands."

Then Jean justified the confidence that Betty had shown in her. "You couldn't do anything better," she said, rising to leave. 322

"I wish I'd known her well enough to talk things over with her,—not public things like this, I mean, but private ones. Betty, here's a note that Christy Mason asked me to give you. That's what I came in for, originally. Of course this affair of Miss Harrison is yours, not mine, and I shan't mention it again, unless Miss Ferris decides to make it public, as I don't believe she will. By the way, I wonder if you know that Miss Harrison can't graduate with us."

"You mean that she has been caught stealing before?" asked Eleanor.

"Oh, no, but she couldn't make up the French that she flunked at midyears, and she must be behind in other subjects, too. I heard rumors about her having been dropped, and last week I saw the proof of our commencement program. Her name isn't on the diploma list."

"Oh, I believe I'm almost glad of that," said Betty softly. "It's dreadful to be glad that she has failed in every way, but I can't bear to think that she belongs in our class."

So it was Miss Ferris who met the Blunderbuss in Eleanor's room that night, who managed the return of the stolen property to its owners, with a suggestion that it would be a favor to the whole college not to say much about its recovery, and she who, finding suddenly that the noise of the campus tired her, spent the rest of the term at Miss Harrison's boarding place on Main Street, where she could watch over the poor girl and minimize the risk of her indulging her fatal mania again while she was at Harding. She was nonchalant over having been caught stealing, but her failure in scholarship had almost broken her heart. She had worked so hard and so patiently up to the very last minute in the hope of winning her diploma that, on the very morning of the hoop-rolling, she had been granted the privilege of staying on through commencement festivities and so keeping her loss of standing as much as possible to herself. After listening to Betty's and Eleanor's stories and talking to Miss Harrison herself, Miss Ferris was fully convinced that the Blunderbuss was not morally responsible for the thefts she had committed, and so she was unwilling to send her home at once and thus expose her to the double disgrace that her going just then would probably have involved. So she found her hands very full until the girl's mother could be sent for and the sad story broken to her as gently as possible. 323

It was the one unrelieved tragedy in 19—'s history; there seemed to be absolutely no help for it,—the kindest thing to do was to forget it as soon as possible. 324

CHAPTER XVII

BITS OF COMMENCEMENT

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But Betty Wales couldn't forget it yet. It stood out in the midst of the happy leisure and anticipation of senior week like a skeleton at the feast,—a gaunt reminder that even the sheltered little world of college must now and then take its share of the strange and sorrowful problems that loom so much larger in the big world outside. But even so, it had its alleviating circumstances. One was Miss Ferris's hearty approval of the way in which Betty and Eleanor had managed their discovery, and another was Jean Eastman's unexpected attitude of helpfulness. She assumed her full share of responsibility, discouraging gossip and speculation about the thefts as earnestly and tactfully as Betty herself, and taking her turn of watching the Blunderbuss at the times when Miss Ferris couldn't follow her without causing too much comment. Betty and Eleanor tried to accept her help as if they had expected nothing else from 326

her, and Jean for her part made no reference to that phase of the matter except to say once to Betty, "If Eleanor Watson can stand by her I guess I can. Besides you stood by me, and I didn't deserve it any more than this poor thing does. Please subtract it from all the times I've bothered you."

Betty was very generous with the subtraction. She was in a generous mood, wanting to give everybody the benefit of the doubt that, with a good deal of a struggle, she had managed to give Georgia. Of course the vindicating of the little freshman was quite the happiest result of the whole affair. It didn't take Betty long to identify the amethyst pendant as the one article which the Blunderbuss had said she couldn't return; and she was at once relieved and disappointed, on going over the stolen jewelry with Miss Ferris, to find that Nita's pin was certainly missing. Of course that left room for the possibility that the Blunderbuss had not taken it, and the next thing to do was to consult Georgia and make sure. Betty waited until after dinner that evening for a chance to see her alone and then, unable to stand the suspense any longer, broke abruptly away from her own friends and detached Georgia from a group of tired and disconsolate freshmen sympathizing over examinations.

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"Let's go for a walk all by ourselves," she said.

"No fair, running off to talk secrets," Madeline called after the pair.

"Curiosity killed a cat," Betty chanted gaily back at her, leading the way to the back campus.

"It's awfully nice of you to ask me to come, when so many people want you," said Georgia shyly.

"Oh, no, it's not," protested Betty. "I shall have a whole week with the others after you've gone. Besides, there's something I especially want to talk to you about. Let's go and sit on the bank below the observatory."

They found comfortable seats among the gnarled roots of an old elm, where they could look across at Paradise and down on a bed of gorgeous rhododendrons, over which great moths, more marvelously colored than the flowers, flitted lazily in the twilight. Then Betty plunged into the thick of things.

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"You remember the pendant that you wore on your chain the night of the Glee Club concert. You said it was a present. Would you mind telling me who gave it to you? I have good reason for asking."

Georgia flushed a little and made the answer that Betty had hoped for. "The senior Miss Harrison gave it to me last Christmas. I know you and Madeline don't like her, and I don't like her a bit better. But what can you do, Betty, when some one takes a fancy to you? You can't snub her just because she happens to be stupid and unpopular—not if you're a 'Merry Heart,' anyway."

"No," said Betty, "you can't. But if you don't like her you won't feel so bad about what I've got to tell you."

Georgia listened to the story aghast. "But I'm not so dreadfully surprised," she said. "It explains so many things. She started to take Caroline's class-pin one day in our room. I supposed she had picked it up without thinking, so when she went away I asked her for it and she acted so funny when she gave it back. And then the way she happened to give me this pin. I went to call on her once last fall, after she had asked me to dinner, and I noticed it shining under the edge of the carpet. When I called her attention to it she didn't seem to understand, so I picked it up myself. She acted queer then too, and when I admired it and said what a pretty pendant it would make she fairly insisted on my taking it. Of course I wouldn't, but she had it fixed to go on a chain and sent it to me for Christmas." Georgia interrupted herself suddenly. "It was ages after the Glee Club concert before you found out about Miss Harrison. What did you think of me all that time?"

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"Why just at first I couldn't understand it," said Betty truthfully, "but after I'd thought it over I was sure you weren't to blame and I've been getting surer and surer all the time. But I am awfully glad to know how it all happened."

"And I am awfully glad that it was you who saw it," said Georgia fervently. "I never wore it but that once. I couldn't make her take it back, so I decided to send it to her after college was over—I knew mother wouldn't want me to take such a valuable present from a girl I knew so slightly, and I thought Miss Harrison would be glad to have it back then. You see," Georgia explained, "I think she did things for me in the hope that I would manage to get her in more with the girls I knew. She has been awfully lonely here, I guess. Well, I felt ashamed of having the pin and ashamed of knowing her, and the things Madeline said about her worried me dreadfully, but I couldn't seem to shake her off. Why, I've done everything I could, Betty, that wouldn't hurt her feelings. I've fairly lived in other people's rooms, so that she'd never find me at home, and that hurt my poor little roommate's feelings, so the other day I had to tell her what the matter was. I've never told any one else—I hate people who talk about that sort of thing—but I've been just miserable over it,—indeed I have! And now it seems worse than ever." Georgia's big brown eyes filled with tears.

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But she smiled again when Betty assured her that she thought it was much better to be bothered and to have things come out all wrong than to be always thinking just of yourself.

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"You see," Georgia confessed, "the first time I met her she seemed nice enough and I accepted

her first invitations without thinking, so when she wanted to be intimate I felt as if I had been partly to blame for letting her begin it."

"Yes, you do have to be careful about not being too friendly at first," said Betty soberly, "but I think there are a lot of mistakes worse than that. I'm sorry though, if this has spoiled your first year here."

"Oh, it hasn't," said Georgia, eagerly; "it has just spotted it a little. It was a lucky thing, I guess, that I had something to bother me, or I should have been spoiled with all the good times you've given me. I did try to be a good 'Merry Heart,' Betty. Perhaps I shall have better luck next time."

"I'm sure you will," said Betty, heartily, and after they had arranged for the returning of Nita's pin in such a way as not to involve Miss Harrison, they started back to the Belden, Georgia to begin her packing and Betty to join the rest of the "Merry Hearts," who were spending the evening on the piazza.

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But after all Betty slipped past them and went on up-stairs. She was in a very serious mood. She realized to-night as she never had before that her college days were over. The talk with Georgia had somehow put a period to a great many things and she wanted to be alone and think them over. Her little room was stiflingly hot and she threw the window wide open and sat down before it in the dark, leaning her elbows on the sill. The piazza was just below; she could hear the laughter and merriment, and occasionally a broken sentence or two drifted up to her.

"There's nothing left to do now but commence," declared Bob Parker, loudly.

"And when we have commenced we shall be finished," added Babe, and laughed uproariously at her bad joke.

That was just Betty's trouble,—"nothing left to do but commence," which was quite enough if you happened to be a member of the play committee. But before you "began to commence" all the tangled threads of the four happy years ought to be laid straight, and they weren't, or at least one wasn't. Betty had always felt sure that before Eleanor graduated she would get back her standing with the class. But if she had, there was nothing to prove it; the feeling of her classmates toward her had certainly changed but nothing had happened that would take away the sting of the Blunderbuss's insult last fall and of Jean's taunts at the time of the Toy Shop entertainment. Eleanor would go away feeling that on the whole she had failed. Well, it was too late to do anything now. Betty lit her gas long enough to hunt up a scarf that would furnish at least a lame apology for her delay, and went down to the gay group on the piazza. When thoughts will only go round in a circle, the best thing to do is to stop thinking them.

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"I say, Betty," cried Bob eagerly, "did you know that Christy had gone home? I mean did you know she hasn't come back? She went just for senior week and now her mother is too ill to leave and she's got to stay."

"Poor Chris!" said Betty, suddenly remembering Christy's note which, in the excitement over the Blunderbuss she had forgotten to open. "How lucky that she gave up Antonio."

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"Isn't it?" agreed Bob. "She's coming back for Tuesday of course to run the supper and get her precious little sheepskin. Her mother isn't dangerously sick, I guess, but there are lots of children and Christy seems to think she's the only one who can manage them."

"Think of her missing the play!" said Madeline.

"Perhaps she'll get back by Saturday night," suggested Eleanor, hopefully.

"I think she's a lot more likely not to come back at all," declared Babe, "but it's no use to worry about that yet. Who's going to meet Mary Brooks?"

"Everybody who isn't a 'star,' or hasn't got to be made up early must go," commanded Madeline. "She comes at four-ten, remember. Babbie and Roberta, go in out of this damp."

Up in her room again Betty closed the window against the invading June-bug and hunted high and low for Christy's note. She hardly expected to find it after so long a time, but it finally turned up hidden in the folds of a crumpled handkerchief which she had stuffed carelessly into her top drawer. And luckily it was not too late to do Christy's commission. She merely told of her hasty departure and wanted Betty to be sure that the supper cards, with the menu and toasts on them, were ready in time. The printer was about as dependable as Billy Henderson, Christy wrote; he needed reminding every morning and watching between times.

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Betty dashed off a hasty note of sympathy and apology, promising to make the printer's life a burden until he produced the supper-cards, and went to bed.

Next day commencement began in earnest. Gay young alumnæ carrying suit-cases, older alumnæ escorting be-ribboned class-babies and their anxious nurses, thronged the streets; inconsiderate families began to arrive a whole day before there was anything in particular for them to do. All the afternoon the "mob" people and the other "sups" besieged the stage door of the theatre waiting their turns to be made up, and then, donning heavy veils hurried back up the hill. It was tiresome being made up so early and having to stay indoors all the hot afternoon, but it couldn't be helped, for there was only one make-up man and he must save plenty of time for the principal actors.

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So the campus dinner-tables were patronized by young persons with heavily penciled eyebrows and brightly rouged cheeks, who ate cautiously to avoid smearing their paint and powder, and than ran up-stairs to jeer at the masculine contingent whose beards and moustaches had condemned them to privacy and scanty fare.

"I shall die of starvation," wailed Bob Parker, when she reached the theatre, confiding her sad story to Betty. "I said I didn't mind being a Jew and having my toes stepped on when the Christians hustle me out of court. But how can any one eat dinner with a thing like this," and she held up her flowing beard disdainfully.

"I'm sure I don't know," said Betty absently, consulting a messy memorandum as if she expected to find directions for eating with a beard among its items. "Bob, where is Roberta Lewis? The make-up man wants her this minute. It takes ages to fix on her nose."

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"Portia is afraid she is going to be hoarse," announced another "supe" importantly.

"Then find the doctor," commanded Barbara Gordon swiftly, as Betty disappeared in search of Roberta. "Be careful, men. Look out for that gondola when you move the flies. Rachel, please keep the maskers off the stage."

"Why don't we begin?"

"Did you ever see such a mess?"

"Oh, it's going to be a horrible fizzle. I told you the scenery was too elaborate."

But two minutes later the "street in Venice" scene was ready and Antonio and "the Sals," as the class irreverently styled his friends, were chatting composedly together in front of it.

The house was packed of course and there was almost as much excitement in front as there was behind the scenes. Of course the under class girls and alumnae were delighted, but there was a distinguished critic from New York in the fifth row, and when Shylock appeared he was as enthusiastic as Mary Brooks herself. Even the cynical Richard Blake was pleased. He had come up to see the play and also, so he explained, to be a family to the bereft Madeline; but as Madeline was behind the scenes Eleanor Watson was obligingly looking after him. Her father and mother weren't coming until Saturday, and Jim could only make a flying trip between two examinations to spend Monday in Harding, so Eleanor had plenty of spare time with which to help out her busier friends.

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"I'm going to make out a schedule of my hours," she told Mr. Blake laughingly, "for it would be dreadful if I should forget an engagement and promise to entertain two or three uncongenial people at the same time."

"Indeed it would," agreed Mr. Blake soberly. "To-night, for instance, it would have been fatal. I say, Miss Watson, keep an hour or two open Monday evening. If Madeline should urge me, I believe I'd run up again for that outdoor concert. It must be no end pretty. Ah, the carnival scene. I never saw that put on more effectively, Miss Watson."

The next night the fathers and mothers and cousins and aunts went into ecstasies over "that lovely Portia" and "sweet little Jessica," laughed at young Gobbo's every motion, and declared that Shylock was "just too wonderful for anything." A funny little old lady who sat next to Roberta's father even went so far as to ask him timidly if he didn't agree with her that Shylock was a man. "I've been telling my sister that no college girl could act like that. I guess I know an old man when I see one," she said, and blushed scarlet when he answered in his courtly way, "Pardon me, madam, but Shylock is my daughter. She will appreciate your unstudied compliment."

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When the curtain finally went down on the last performance of the play the committee were almost too tired to realize that they were through, and Katherine Kittredge, alias Gratiano, sank down on the nearest grassy knoll (made of green cambric) and expressed the universal sentiments of the cast.

"Not for all the ducats in Belmont will I call Portia a learned judge again."

"You needn't, K., but please hop up," said Barbara Gordon wearily. "They're singing to us. Get into the centre, Roberta. We've got to let them see us again; they won't stop clapping till we do."

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And then you should have heard the noise!

"Three cheers for good old Shylock," called somebody, and they were given with a will. Then they sang to her.

"Here's to you, Roberta Lewis,
Here's to you, our warmest friend!"

Then they sang to Barbara and to Kate Denise, and to both the Gobbos.

"I say, ain't you folks goin' home till mornin'?" shouted a jovial stage-hand, thrusting his head out from the wings.

The crowd laughed and cheered him, then cheered everybody and went home, singing to

Roberta all the way up the hill.

"But you can't blame them," said Betty Wales. "They don't realize how tired we are, and it's something pretty exciting to have given the play that Miss Ferris and Mr. Masters both say is the best yet."

"And to have had a perfectly marvelous Shylock," added Kate Denise warmly.

"And a splendid Portia," put in Roberta.

"Oh, wise young judges, please don't forget to mention Gratiano," said Katherine Kittredge, and set them all to laughing. 341

"It's been splendid fun," said Barbara. "Don't you wish we could give it all over again?"

Then they sat down on the green knolls and the gondolas and Portia's best carved chairs, and talked and talked, until, as Babbie said, they all felt so proud of themselves and each other and 19— that the stage wouldn't hold them. Whereupon they remembered that to-morrow was Baccalaureate Sunday and that most of their families had inconsiderately invited them out to breakfast,—two facts which made it desirable to go home and to bed as speedily as possible.

It always rains in the morning of Baccalaureate Sunday, but it generally clears up in time for the service, which is in the afternoon; and even if it doesn't the graduating class and its friends are willing to make the best of a bad matter because it would have been so much worse if the rain had waited for Ivy Day. 19—'s Baccalaureate was showery in an accommodating fashion that permitted the class to sleep late in the morning because their families wouldn't want them to go out in the rain, and cleared off just before and just after the service, so that they didn't need the carriages that they couldn't possibly have gotten, no matter how it poured. 342

And it cleared off for Ivy Day. Helen Adams was up at five o'clock anxiously inspecting the watery sunshine to see if it would last.

"For they can't plant the ivy in the rain," she thought, "and if they don't plant it how can they sing the song?"

But the sunshine lasted, Marie planted the ivy,—and the college gardener carefully replanted it later, "'cause them gals will be that disapp'inted if it don't live,"—the class sang Helen's song, and the odes, orations and addresses were all duly delivered.

Then, as Bob flippantly remarked, the fun began. For Mr. Wales had chartered three big touring cars and invited the "Merry Hearts" to go out to Smugglers' Notch for luncheon, with Mrs. Adams, who had never been in an auto before, for chaperon and himself, Will, and Jim Watson as escorts and chauffeurs. 343

By the time they got back the campus was festooned with Japanese lanterns, little tables ready for bowls of lemonade stood under all the biggest trees, and a tarpaulin dotted with camp chairs covered a roped-off enclosure near the back steps of College Hall.

"You've got tickets, father," Betty explained, "so you can sit down in there and listen to the music. Will, you're to call for me."

"For Miss Ayres," Will amended calmly. "Watson is going to take you."

Judge and Mrs. Watson had seats too, so Eleanor and Mr. Blake, Betty and Jim, and Madeline and Will wandered off together, two and two, enjoying snatches of the concert, exploring the campus, and engaging in a most exciting "Tournament"—Madeline's idea of course—to see who could drink the most lemonade. Will was ahead, with Madeline a close second, when a mysterious whistle sounded from the second floor of the Hilton.

"Oh, good-bye, Dick," said Madeline briskly, holding out her hand. "It's time for you to go. Shall I see you to-morrow or not till I get to New York?" 344

"Have we really got to go so soon?" asked Will sadly.

Betty nodded. "Or at least we've got to go and put on old dresses, so as to be ready to join in our class march."

"Why can't we march too?" demanded Mr. Blake.

"Because you're not Harding, 19—," said Madeline with finality.

And so, half an hour later, another procession assembled on the spot where the Ivy Day march had started that morning. But this time 19— was wearing its oldest clothes and heaviest shoes and didn't care whether it rained or not. Four and five abreast they marched, round the campus, up Main Street and back, round and round the campus again. "Just as if we hadn't torn around all day until we're ready to drop," Eleanor Watson said laughingly. It is a perfectly senseless performance, this "class march," which is perhaps the reason why every class revels in it.

But the procession was moving more slowly and singing with rather less enthusiasm, when a small A.D.T. approached the leaders. "Is Miss Marie Howard in this bunch?" he demanded. "She orter be at the Burton, but she ain't." 345

"Yes, here I am," called Marie quickly, and the small boy lit a sputtering match, so that she

could sign his book and read her telegram. It was from Christy: "Awfully sorry can't come for supper. Writing."

"How perfectly dreadful," cried Marie, repeating the message to Bob, who was standing beside her. Bob passed on the bad news, and the procession broke up into little groups to discuss it.

"Why don't you appoint some one to take her place right now?" suggested Bob. "Then she can sit up all night and get her remarks ready. She won't have much time to-morrow."

Marie looked hastily around her and caught sight of Betty Wales standing under a Japanese lantern that was still burning dimly.

"Betty!" she called, and Betty hurried over to her.

"I think we ought to fill Christy's place now," whispered Marie. "Shall I appoint Eleanor Watson or have her elected?"

"Have her elected," said Betty, as promptly as if she had thought it all out beforehand.

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"Then will you propose her?"

Betty shook her head. "That wouldn't do. Eleanor knows how I feel toward her. It must come from the people who haven't wanted her. They're all here, I think." Betty peered uncertainly through the gloom to make sure that Jean and her friends and the Blunderbuss were still out. "If the whole class wants her badly enough, they'll think of her."

Marie stepped out into the light of the one lantern and called the class to order. "It's a queer time to have a class-meeting," she said, "and I'm not sure that it's constitutional, but who cares about that? You all know about Christy and as Bob Parker says the new toastmistress ought to have all the time there is left. So please make nominations."

"Why don't you appoint some one, Marie?" called Alice Waite sleepily.

"Because the toastmistress who presides over our supper ought to be the choice of her class," said Marie firmly.

"Madam president,"—Jean Eastman's clear, sharp voice broke the silence. "It's a good deal to ask of any one, to step in at the last minute like this. Very few of us are capable of doing it,—of making a success of it, I mean. In fact I only know of one person that I should be absolutely sure of. Fortunately no one deserves such an appointment more truly. I nominate Eleanor Watson."

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A little thrill swept over the "queer" class-meeting. Everybody had known more or less about the bitter feud between Jean and Eleanor, and very few people had had the least suspicion that it had ended. Indeed even Betty and Eleanor had not been sure how far Jean's friendliness could be counted upon. Betty, standing back in the shadows where Marie had left her, gave a little gasp of amazement and clutched Bob's arm so hard that Bob protested.

"I second that motion, Miss President." It was the Blunderbuss, and her stolid face grew hot and red in the darkness, as she wondered if any one who knew that she didn't belong to 19— now would question her right to take part in the meeting. "But I was bound to do it," she reflected. "I guess she isn't the kind of girl I thought she was. Anyhow I didn't mean to hurt her feelings before, and this will sort of make up."

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"Any other nominations?" inquired Marie briskly.

There was silence and then somebody began to clap. In a minute the whole meeting was clapping as hard as it could.

"I guess we don't need ballots," said Marie, when she could be heard. "All in favor say aye."

There was a regular burst of ayes.

"Those opposed?"

Silence again.

"There's a unanimous vote for you," cried Bob Parker eagerly. "Speech from the candidate! Betty, you're killing my arm!"

"Speech!" The class took up Bob's cry.

"Where are you, Eleanor?" called Marie, and Eleanor, coming out from behind a big bush said, "I'll try to do my best—and—thank you." It wasn't a brilliant speech to come from the girl who has often been called Harding's most brilliant graduate, but it satisfied everybody, even Betty.

"I did it just to show you that I've got the idea," Jean Eastman muttered sulkily, jostling Betty in the crowd; and that was satisfactory too. Indeed when Betty went to bed that night she confided to the green lizard that she hadn't a single thing left to bother about at Harding.

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE GOING OUT OF 19—

Next morning came the really important part of commencement,—the getting of your diploma, or, to speak accurately, the getting of somebody's else diploma, which you could exchange for your own later.

"Let's stand in a big circle," suggested Madeline Ayres, "and pass the diplomas round until each one comes to its owner."

It wasn't surprising that Eleanor Watson, with her newly acquired duties as toastmistress, should keep getting outside the circle to consult various toasters and members of the supper committee; but it did seem as if Betty Wales might stay quietly in her place. So thought the girls who had noticed that Carlotta Young, the last girl in the line that went up for diplomas had not received any. Carlotta was a "prod"; it was only because she came at the end of the alphabet that she was left out, but thanks to Betty's fly-away fashion of running off to speak to some junior ushers, and then calling the Blunderbuss, whose mother wanted to see her a minute, nobody could find out positively who it was that had been "flunked out" of 19—.

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The next excitement took place when the class, strolling over to the Students' Building to have luncheon with the alumnae—why, they were alumnae themselves now!—met a bright-eyed, brown-haired little girl, walking with a tall young man whose fine face was tanned as brown as an Indian's.

"Don't you know me, 19—?" called the little girl gaily.

"Why, it can't be—it is T. Reed!" cried Helen Adams, rushing forward.

"And her Filipino," shrieked Bob Parker wildly.

"Of course I came. Do you think I'd have missed my own commencement?" said T., shaking hands with four girls at once. "Frank, this is Helen Adams, my best friend at Harding. Miss Parker, Mr. Howard. I'm sorry, Bob, but he's not a Filipino. He's just a plain American who lives in the Philippines."

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"Have you forgotten how to play basket ball, T.?" called somebody.

T. gave a rapturous little smile. "Could we have a game this afternoon? That's what I came for, really. We meant to get here last week, but the boat was late. Yes, I'm sorry to have missed the play and the concert; but it's worth coming for, just to see you all." T.'s bright eyes grew soft and misty. "I tell you, girls, you don't know what it means to be a Harding girl until you've been half across the world for awhile. No, I'm not sorry I left, but it's great to be back!"

Mary Brooks, arrayed in a bewitching summer toilette, stood at the door of the Students' Building, and managed to intercept Betty and Roberta, as they went in.

"You may congratulate me now if you like," she said calmly, leading them off to a secluded corner behind a group of statuary, where their demonstrations of interest wouldn't attract too much attention. The news wasn't at all surprising, but Mary looked so pretty and so happy and assured them so solemnly that she had never dreamed of anything of the kind at Christmas, that there was plenty of excitement all the same.

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"And of course I must have posts at my wedding," said Mary, whereat Betty hugged her and Roberta looked more pleased than she had when Mr. Masters called her a genius. "And bridesmaids," added Mary, with the proper feeling for climax. "Laurie is going to be maid-of-honor, and if you two can come and be bridesmaids and the rest of the crowd almost—bridesmaids, in the words of the poetical Roberta——"

She never finished her sentence for the rest of the crowd had discovered her retreat, and guessing at the news she had for them bore noisily down upon her.

"It's so convenient that she's going to be married this summer," said Babbie jubilantly. "We can have our first reunion at the wedding. I simply couldn't have waited until June to see you all again."

"We couldn't any of us have waited," declared Bob. "Somebody else must get married about Christmas time."

"Why don't you?" asked Babbie nonchalantly, while Madeline looked hard at Eleanor and wished New York and Denver weren't so dreadfully far apart. For how could Dick Blake, busy editor of "The Quiver," make love to the most fascinating girl in the world when she lived at that distance.

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They had something to eat after a while, sitting on the stairs with Mary, while Dr. Hinsdale beamed on them all and brought them salad and ices.

"You mustn't talk about it, you know," Mary explained, "because it won't be announced until next week, and you mustn't think of running off and leaving us out here alone."

"All right," Katherine promised her. "We'll be the mossy bank for your modest violet act. Only do try not to look so desperately in love or everybody who sees you will guess the whole thing, and it will look as if we told."

Most of the seniors spent the afternoon at the station seeing their families off, but Betty left hers in Nan's care and went canoeing with Dorothy King in Paradise. Dorothy was just as jolly and just as sweet as ever. She wanted to know about everything that had happened at Harding since she left it, and especially all about Eleanor Watson.

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"You've pulled her through after all, haven't you?" she said.

"No, she pulled herself through," Betty corrected her. "I only helped a little, and a lot of others did the same. Why even Jean helped, Dorothy."

Dorothy laughed. "I can't imagine Jean in that rôle," she said, "but I'll take your word for it. Let's go and see Miss Ferris."

Miss Ferris was alone and delighted to see her visitors.

"Everything has come out right, hasn't it?" she said, smiling into Betty's radiant face.

Betty nodded. "Just splendidly. Did you know about Eleanor's being toastmistress?"

"Yes, she came in to tell me herself. What has come over Jean Eastman, Betty?"

"I don't know," said Betty with a tell-tale blush that made Miss Ferris laugh and say, "I thought you were at the bottom of it."

"Dorothy used to be the person who managed things of this kind," she went on. "Who's going to take your place, Betty?"

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"According to what I hear nobody can do that," said Dorothy quickly, and Betty blushed more than ever, until Miss Ferris took pity on her and asked about her plans for next year.

Betty looked puzzled. "Why, I haven't any, I'm afraid. I never get a chance to make plans, because the things that turn up of themselves take all my time. I'm just going to be at home with my family."

"Leave out the 'just,'" advised Miss Ferris. "So many of you seem to feel as if you ought to apologize for staying at home."

"Oh, I'm glad to hear you say that," said Betty soberly. "A lot of girls in our class who don't need to a bit are going to teach, and Carlotta Young said to me the other day that she thought we all ought to test our education in some such way right off, so as to be sure it was really worth something."

"And you are sure about yours without testing it?" asked Miss Ferris quizzically.

Betty smiled at her happily. "I'm sure I've got something," she said. "I'm afraid Carlotta wouldn't call it much of an education and I know I ought to be ashamed that it isn't more, but I'm awfully glad I've got it."

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"I'm glad you have, too," said Miss Ferris so earnestly that Betty wondered what she meant. But she didn't get a chance to ask, for somebody knocked just then and the two girls said good-bye and hurried off to dress for their respective class suppers.

19—'s was held in the big hall of the Students' Building. The junior ushers had trimmed it with red and green bunting, and great bowls of red roses transformed the huge T-shaped table into a giant flower-bed.

"I hope they haven't more than emptied the treasury for those flowers," said Babe anxiously, when she saw them.

"Hardly," Babbie reassured her. "Judge Watson sent the whole lot, so you needn't worry about your treasury. He consulted me about the color. Isn't he a dear?"

"Yes, he is," said Bob, "and he evidently thinks his only daughter is another. Where's the supper-chart?"

"Out in the hall," explained Babbie, "with the whole class fighting for a chance at it. But I know where we sit. Betty thought we'd better keep things lively down at the end of the T."

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"Well, I guess, we can do that," said Babe easily. "Where is Betty, anyway?"

"Here," answered Betty, hurrying up. "And girls, please don't say anything about it, but non-graduates don't generally come to the suppers and the seating committee forgot about T. Reed, so she hasn't any place."

"The idea!" cried Bob indignantly. "But she can have Eleanor's seat."

Betty hesitated. "No, because they changed the chart after they heard about Christy's not coming. But Cora Thorne is sick, so I'm going to let T. have my seat, right among you girls that

she used to know——”

“You’re not going to do anything of the kind,” declared Babbie hotly. “Shove everybody along one place, or else put in a seat for T.”

“The chairs are too close together now and Cora’s place is way around at the other end. It would make too much confusion to move so many people. Here comes T. now. I shall be almost opposite Eleanor and Katherine, and I don’t mind one bit.”

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So it happened that Betty Wales ate her class supper between Clara Madison and the fat Miss Austin, and enjoyed it as thoroughly as if she had been where she belonged, between Babbie and Roberta. The supper wasn’t very good—suppers for two hundred and fifty people seldom are—but the talk and the jokes, the toasts and the histories, Eleanor’s radiant face at the head of the table, the spirit of jollity and good-fellowship everywhere,—these were good enough to make up. Besides, it was the last time they would all be together. Betty hadn’t realized before how much she cared for them all—for the big indiscriminate mass of the class that she had worked and played with these four years. She had expected to miss her best friends, but now, as she looked down the long tables, she saw so many others that she should miss. Yes, she should miss them all from the fat Miss Austin who was so delighted to be sitting beside her to the serious-minded Carlotta Young, with her theories about testing your education.

Katherine was reading the freshman history, hitting off the reception, with its bewildering gaiety and its terrifying grind-book, those first horrible midyears, made even more frightful by Mary Brooks’s rumor, the basket-ball game—when that was mentioned they made T. Reed stand on her chair to be cheered, and then they cheered the rest of the team, who, as Katherine said, “had marched so gallantly to a glorious defeat.” As Christy wasn’t there, somebody read her letter, which explained that her mother was better but that the twins had come down with the measles and Christy was “standing by the ship.” So they cheered the plucky letter and then they sang to its author.

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“Oh, here’s to our Christine,
We love her though unseen,
Drink her down, drink her down,
Drink her down, down, down!”

When the team was finally allowed to sit down, Katherine went on to the joys of spring-term, with its golf and tennis, its Mary-bird club and its tumultuous packing and partings. When she had finished and been applauded and sung to, and finally allowed to sit down and eat a very cold croquette, Betty looked over at Emily Davis and the next minute for no reason at all she found herself winking back the tears. She had had such a good time that year and K. had picked out just the comical little things that made you remember the others that she hadn’t mentioned.

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Little Alice Waite was toasting the cast. Alice was no orator. She stammered and hesitated and made you think she was going to break down, but she always ended by saying or doing something that brought down the house.

“I think you ought to have given this toast to somebody else,” she began innocently. “I can’t act, and I can’t speak either, as it happens. Besides words speak louder than actions. No, I mean actions speak louder than words, so I will let the cast toast themselves.”

“Roast themselves, you mean,” said Katherine, pushing back her chair.

And then began a clever burlesque of the casket scene in which Gratiano played Portia’s part, Shylock was Nerissa, Gobbo Bassanio, and Jessica the Prince of Morocco. Next Alice called for the Gobbos and Portia and the Prince of Morocco “stood forth” and went through a solemn travesty of the scene between the father and son that left the class faint and speechless with laughter.

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Then there were more toasts and when the coffee had been served they made the engaged girls run around the table. Betty was sorry then that she wasn’t in her own place, to help get Babbie Hildreth started. Her friends were all sure that she was engaged and she had hinted that she might tell them more about it at class-supper, but now she denied it as stoutly as ever. Finally Bob settled the question by getting up and running in her place,—a non-committal proceeding that delighted everybody.

After that came the last toast, “Our esprit de corps.” Kate Denise had it, for no reason that Betty could see unless Christy had wanted to show Kate that the class understood the difference between her and the other Hill girls. And then Kate was one of 19—’s best speakers and so could do justice to the subject.

“I think we ought to drink this toast standing,” she began. “We’ve drunk to the cast and the team, to our presidents, our engaged girls, our faculty. Now I ask you to drink to the very greatest pride and honor of this class,—to the way we’ve always stood together, to the way we stand together to-night, to the way we shall stand together in the future, no matter where we go or what we do. It’s not every class that can put this toast on its supper-card. Not every class knows what it means to be run, not in the interest of a clique or by a few leading spirits, but by the good-feeling of the whole big class. And so I ask you to drink one more toast—to the girl who started this feeling of good-fellowship at a certain class-meeting that some of us remember, and who has kept it up by being a friend to everybody and making us all want to be friends. Here’s

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to Betty Wales.”

When Betty heard her name she almost jumped out of her chair with amazement. She had been listening admiringly to Kate’s eloquent little speech, never dreaming how it would end and now they were all clapping and pushing back their chairs again, and Clara Madison was trying to make her stand up in hers.

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“Speech!” shouted the irrepressible Bob and the girls sat down again and the big table grew still, while Betty twisted her napkin into a knot and smiled bravely into all the welcoming faces.

“I’m sure Kate is mistaken,” she said at last in a shaky little voice. “I’m sure every girl in 19—wanted every other girl to have her share of the fun just as much as I did. The class cup, that we won at tennis in our sophomore year is on the table somewhere. Let’s fill it with lemonade and sing to everybody right down the line. And while they’re filling the cup let’s sing to Harding College.”

It took a long time to sing to everybody, but not a minute too long. Betty watched the faces of the girls when their turns came—the girls who were always sung to, like Emily Davis, and the girls who had never been sung to in all the four years and who flushed with pride and pleasure to hear their names ring out and to feel that they too belonged to the finest, dearest class that ever left Harding.

“Now we must have the regular stunts,” said Eleanor. There was a shuffling of chairs and she and Betty and the people who had had toasts slipped back to their own particular crowds, leaving the top of the table for the stunt-doers. It was shockingly late, but they wanted all the old favorites. Who knew when Emily Davis would be back to do her temperance lecture or how long it would be before they could hear Madame Patti sing “Home, Sweet Home” through a wheezy gramophone?

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“Was it all right?” Eleanor whispered to Betty as they hunted up their wraps a little later.

“Perfectly splendid,” said Betty with shining eyes. “The loveliest end-up to the loveliest commencement that ever was.”

“We haven’t got to say good-bye yet,” said somebody. “There’s a class meeting to-morrow at nine, you know.”

“Half of us will probably sleep over,” said Babe in a queer, supercilious tone. Not for all the morning naps in the world would Babe have missed that good-bye meeting.

CHAPTER XIX

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“GOOD-BYE!”

“And after commencement packing,” said Madeline Ayres sadly, “and that’s no joke either, I can tell you.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Babe airily. “Give away everything that you can’t sell, and you won’t be troubled. That’s what I’ve done.”

“I couldn’t give up my dear old desk,” said Rachel soberly, “nor my books and pictures.”

“Oh, I’ve kept a few little things myself,” explained Babe hastily, “just to remember the place by.”

“My mother wanted to stay and help me,” laughed Nita. “She thought if we both worked hard we might get through in a day.”

“Mary Brooks did hers in two hours,” announced Katherine, “and I guess I’m as bright as little Mary about most things, so I’m not worrying.”

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“Isn’t it time to start for class-meeting?” asked Betty, coming out on the piazza with Roberta.

“See them walk off together arm in arm,” chuckled Bob softly, “just as if they knew they were going to be elected our alumnæ president and secretary respectfully.”

“Don’t you mean respectively, Bob?” asked Helen Adams.

“Of course I do,” retorted Bob, “but I’m not obliged to say what I mean now. I’m an alum. I can use as bad diction as I please and the long arm of the English department can’t reach out and spatter my mistakes with red ink.”

The election of officers didn’t take long. It had all been cut and dried the night before, and the nominating committee named Betty for president and Shylock for secretary without even going through the formality of retiring to deliberate. Then Katherine moved that the surplus in the

treasury be turned over to “our pet philanthropy, the Students’ Aid,” and Carlotta Young inquired anxiously whether the first reunion was to be in one or two years.

“In one,” shouted the assembly to a woman, and the meeting adjourned tumultuously. But nobody went home, in spite of the packing that clamored for attention.

“Good-bye, you dear old thing!”

“See you next June for sure. I’m coming back then, if I do live away out in Seattle.”

“You’re going to study art in New York, you say? Oh, I’m there very often. Here, let me copy that address.”

“Going abroad for the summer, you lucky girl? Well, rather not! I’m going to tutor six young wigglers into a prep. school.”

“Wasn’t last night fun? Don’t you wish we could have it all over again,—except the midyears and the papers for English novelists.”

“Good-bye!”

“Good-bye!”

“Good-bye!”

But these weren’t the good-byes that came hardest; those would be said later in the dear, dismantled rooms or at the station, for very close friends would arrange to meet again there. But the close friendships would be kept up in letters and visits, whereas these casual acquaintances might never again be renewed.

“I’ve seen you nearly every day for three years,” Madeline Ayres told little Miss Avery, whose name came next to hers on the class-list, “and now you’re going to live in Iowa and I’m going to Italy. The world is a big place, isn’t it?”

But Nita Reese thought it was surprisingly small when she found that Emily Davis was going to teach French in the little town where she lived, and Betty got a great deal of comfort from the fact that four other 19— girls lived in Cleveland.

“Though I can’t believe it’s really over,” Betty confided to Bob. “I don’t feel a bit like an alum.”

“That’s because you still look just like a freshman,” returned Bob, unfeelingly. “I’ll bet you a trolley-ride to any place you choose that you’ll be taken for one before you leave Harding.”

Sure enough Betty, hurrying across the campus a moment later to intercept the man who had promised to crate her desk and then never come for it, was stopped by a timid little sub-freshman with her hair in a braid, who inquired if she was going to take the “major French” examination, and did she know whether it came at eleven or twelve o’clock?

“So we’re all got to go off on a trolley-ride,” shouted Bob jubilantly, and though Betty protested and called Helen to witness that she hadn’t promised Bob any trolley-ride whatever, everybody agreed that they ought to have one last picnic somewhere before they separated. So they all hurried home to do what Katherine called “tall strides of work,” and at four o’clock they were waiting, with tempting-looking bags and bundles tucked under their arms, for a car.

“We’ll take the first one that comes,” Bob decided, “and go until we see a nice picnic-y place.”

Generally no one place would have pleased everybody, but to-day no one said a word against Bob’s first choice,—a steep, breezy hillside, with a great thicket of mountain laurel in full bloom near the summit and a flat rock, shaded by a giant elm-tree, for a table.



"LADIES, BEHOLD THE PRECEPTRESS OF THE KANKAKEE ACADEMY"

It was such a comical supper, for each girl had obeyed Bob's haphazard instructions to bring what she liked best. So Roberta had nothing but ginger-snaps and Babbie solemnly presented each guest with a bottle of olives. Madeline had brought strawberries with sugar to dip them in, and Helen, Betty and Eleanor discovered to their amazement that they had all chosen chocolate éclairs.

"It's not a very substantial supper," said Madeline "but we can stop at Cuyler's on our way back."

"For a substantial ice," jeered Bob.

"Who's hungry anyway after last night?" asked Nita.

"I am," declared Eleanor. "They took away my salad before I was through with it, and K. stole my ice."

"Well, you're growing fat," Katherine defended herself, "and you've got to save your lovely slenderness until after Mary's wedding. She'll tell everybody that you're the college beauty and you must live up to the reputation or we shall be undone."

Katherine knew that she couldn't come on from Kankakee for that wedding, and Helen and Rachel knew that they couldn't either, though they lived nearer. And Madeline was sailing on Saturday for Italy, "to stay until daddy's paint-box runs out of Italian colors." But they didn't talk about those things at the picnic, nor on the swift ride home across the dark meadows, nor even at Cuyler's, which looked empty and deserted when they tramped noisily in and ordered their ices.

"Everybody else is too busy to go on picnics," said Bob.

"We always did know how to have the best kind of times," declared Babbie proudly.

"Of course. Aren't we 'Merry Hearts'?" queried Babe. "Being nice to freaks was only half of being a 'Merry Heart.'"

"Why, girls," cried Nita excitedly, "as long as we didn't give away the 'Merry Hearts,' we can go on being them, can't we?"

"We couldn't stop if we tried," said Madeline. "Remember, girls, two is a 'Merry Hearts' quorum. Whenever two of us get together they can have a meeting."

They said good-night with the emphasis strongly on the last syllable, and went at the neglected packing in earnest. Betty's train didn't go until nearly ten the next morning, but Helen left at nine and Madeline and Roberta ten minutes later, so there wouldn't be much time for anything but the good-byes, that, do what you might, could not be put off any longer.

But after all they were gay good-byes. Helen Adams, to be sure, almost broke down when she kissed Betty and whispered, "Good-bye and thank you for everything." But the next minute they were both laughing at K.'s ridiculous old telescope bag.

"It's a long rest and a good meal of oats the poor beastie shall have at the end of this trip," said Katherine. "Ladies, behold the preceptress of the Kankakee Academy. Father telegraphed me yesterday that I've got the place, and I hereby solemnly promise to buy a respectable suit-case out of my first month's salary."

"Oh, you haven't any of you gone yet, have you?" asked Babbie Hildreth, hurrying up with Eleanor and Madeline. "You see Babe kept more things than she thought and it was too late to send for another packing-box, so she put them into a suit-case and a kit bag and a hat-box. And the carriage didn't come for us, so she tried to carry them all from the car, and of course she got stuck in the turn-stile. The girls are getting her out as fast as they can. They sent us on ahead to find you."

Just as Helen's train pulled in Bob appeared with the rest of the "Merry Hearts" as escort and a small boy to help with her luggage; and they had a minute all together.

"Well," said Madeline lightly, "we're starting out into the wide, wide world at last. I'll say it because I'm used to starting *off* to queer places and I rather like it."

"Here's hoping it's a jolly world for every one of us," said Rachel.

"Here's to our next meeting," added Katherine.

"Girls," said Betty solemnly, "I feel it in my bones that we are going to be together again some time. I don't mean just for a 19— reunion, but for a good long time."

"With me teaching in Boston," laughed Rachel.

"And me teaching in Kankakee," put in Katherine proudly.

"And Madeline in Italy, and the rest of you anywhere between New York and Denver," finished Rachel. "It doesn't look very probable."

"It's going to happen though,—I'm sure of it," persisted Betty gaily.

"Oh, I do just hope so," said little Helen Adams, stepping on board her train.

"They say that what you want hard enough you'll get," said Madeline philosophically. "Come on, Shylock. Don't any of you forget to send me steamer letters."

"Wait! we're going on that train too," cried Babe, clutching her parcels.

"Babe can't make connections if we wait," explained Babbie.

"And she'd get lonely going so far without us," added Bob.

The four who were left stood where they could wave by turns at the two trains until both were out of sight.

Then Betty caught her three oldest friends into a big, comprehensive hug. "After all," she said, "whether we ever get together or not, we've had this—four whole years of it, to remember all our lives. Now let's go and get one more strawberry ice before train-time."

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