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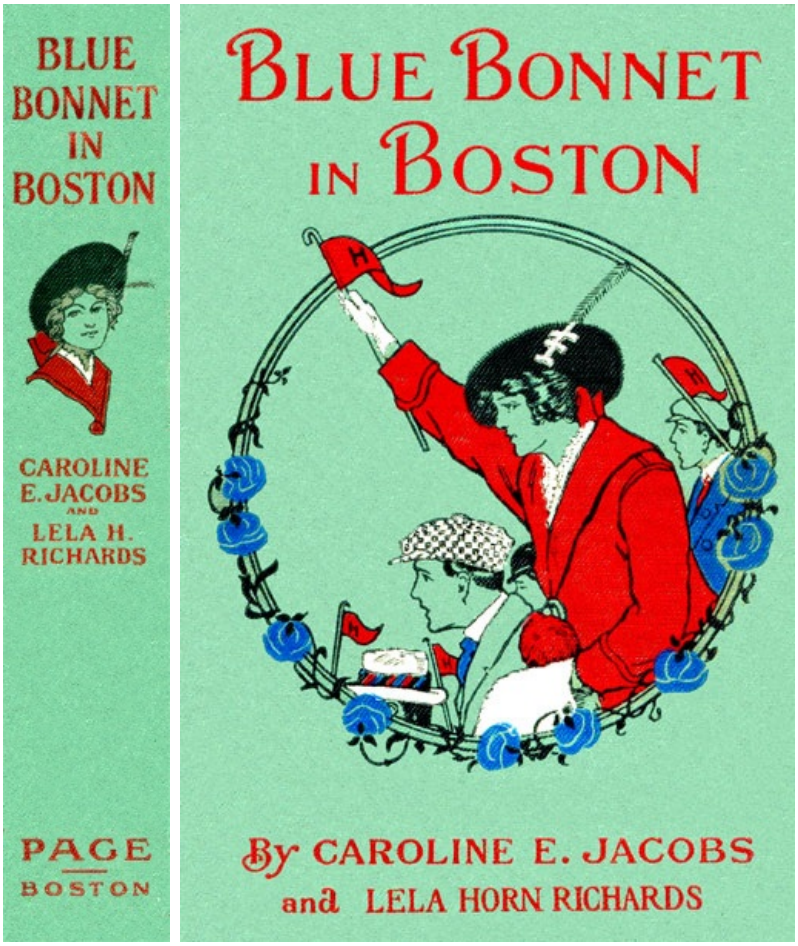
BLUE BONNET IN BOSTON

OR, BOARDING-SCHOOL DAYS AT MISS NORTH'S



"SHE WRENCHED THE WHIP FROM ALEC'S HAND."
(*See page 308.*)

The Blue Bonnet Series

BLUE BONNET IN BOSTON

Or, Boarding-school Days at Miss North's

BY

CAROLINE E. JACOBS

AND

LELA H. RICHARDS

A SEQUEL TO

A TEXAS BLUE BONNET

AND BLUE BONNET'S RANCH PARTY

Illustrated by

JOHN GOSS

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Blue Bonnet in Boston

[1]

CHAPTER I

THE WAIL OF THE WE ARE SEVENS

Blue Bonnet raised the blind of the car window, which had been drawn all the afternoon to shut out the blazing sun, and took a view of the flying landscape. Then she consulted the tiny watch at her wrist and sat up with a start.

"Grandmother!" she said excitedly, "we'll soon be in Woodford; that is, in just an hour. We're on time, you know. Hadn't we better be getting our things together?"

Mrs. Clyde straightened up from the pillows, which Blue Bonnet had arranged comfortably for her afternoon nap, and peered out at the rolling hills and green meadow-lands.

"I think we have plenty of time, Blue Bonnet," she said, smiling into the girl's eager face. "But perhaps we would better freshen up a bit. You are sure we are on time?"

"Yes, I asked the conductor when I went back to see Solomon at the last station. Four-twenty sharp, at Woodford, he told Solomon, and Solomon licked his hand with joy. Poor doggie! I don't believe he appreciates the value of travel, even if he has seen Texas and New York and Boston. He loathes the baggage-car, though I must say the men all along the way have been perfectly splendid to him. But then, any one would fall in love with Solomon, he's such a dear."

[2]

Mrs. Clyde recalled the five dollar bill she had witnessed Mr. Ashe pass to the baggage-man at the beginning of the journey, and the money she had given by his instruction along the way, and wondered how much Solomon's real worth had contributed to his care.

"I'm so glad we're arriving in the afternoon," Blue Bonnet said, as she gathered up magazines and various other articles that littered the section. "There's something so flat about getting anywhere in the morning—nothing to do but sit round waiting for trunks that have been delayed, and wander about the house. I wonder if Aunt Lucinda told the girls we were coming?"

Mrs. Clyde fancied not. A quiet home-coming after so strenuous a summer was much to be desired.

Blue Bonnet and the We Are Sevens had parted company in New York several weeks before, the girls going on to Woodford in care of the General, in order not to miss the first week of school.

[3] The stay in New York had been particularly gratifying to Blue Bonnet, for there had been ample time while waiting for Aunt Lucinda to arrive from her summer's outing in Europe, to do some of the things left undone on her last visit. A day at the Metropolitan Museum proved a delight; the shops fascinating—especially Tiffany's, where Blue Bonnet spent hours over shining trays, mysterious designs in monograms, and antique gold settings, leaving an order that quite amazed Grandmother Clyde, until she learned that the purchase was for Uncle Cliff.

Then there had been a delightful week with the Boston relatives, Aunt Lucinda going straight to Woodford to open the house and make things comfortable for her mother's arrival.

Cousin Tracy, as on that other memorable visit, had proved an ideal host. To be sure, a motor car had been substituted for the sightseeing bus so dear to Blue Bonnet's heart, but she found it, on the whole, quite as enjoyable, and confided to Cousin Tracy as they sped through the crooked little streets or walked through the beloved Common, that she liked Boston ever so much better than New York, it seemed so nice and countrified. There was a second visit to Bunker Hill and the Library, to which Blue Bonnet brought fresh enthusiasm, more stories of Cousin Tracy's coins and medals, and so the days passed all too swiftly.

[4] "Well, at last!" Blue Bonnet exclaimed, as the train began to slacken speed and the familiar "Next stop Woodford" echoed through the car. "Here we are, Grandmother, home again!" She was at the door before the car came to a standstill.

"Doesn't look as exciting as it did when Uncle Cliff and I arrived in the Wanderer, does it?" Blue Bonnet's eyes swept the almost deserted station.

Miss Clyde stood at the end of the long platform, her eyes turned expectantly toward the rear Pullman, with Denham, the coachman, at a respectful distance.

Blue Bonnet sprang from the car steps, greeted Aunt Lucinda affectionately, shook hands with Denham and rushed for the baggage-car to release Solomon.

"He's perfectly wild to see you, Aunt Lucinda," she called back, as she ran toward the car—a compliment which Solomon himself verified a moment later with joyful leaps and yelps and much wagging of tail.

"My, but it seems nice to get home," Blue Bonnet said as she sank back cosily in the carriage and heaved a sigh of content. The sigh shamed her a little. It seemed, somehow, disloyal to Uncle Cliff and Texas. She sat up straight and turned her head away from the houses with their trim orderly dooryards and well-kept hedges, and, [5] for a moment, fixed her mind with passionate loyalty on the lonely wind-swept stretches of her native state; the battered and weatherbeaten ranch-house, Benita—But only for a moment. The green rolling hills, the giant arching elms, Grandmother's stately house just coming into view, proved too alluring, and salving her conscience with the thought that it was her own dear mother's country she had at last learned to love, gave herself up to the full enjoyment of her surroundings.

Katie and faithful Delia were awaiting the arrival of the family on the veranda, their joy at the reunion showing in every line of their happy faces. Blue Bonnet shook hands with them cordially, deposited a load of magazines and wraps in Delia's willing arms and ran in to the house.

In the sitting-room tea was ready to be served. Blue Bonnet curled up in one of the deep armchairs and eyed the table appreciatively. How good it looked—the thin slices of bread and butter, the fresh marmalade, the wonderful Clyde cookies. She leaned back and smiled contentedly.

"Come, Blue Bonnet," Miss Clyde said, entering the room followed by Delia with a brass kettle of steaming water, "make yourself tidy quickly. Tea is all ready."

"All right, Aunt Lucinda, I sha'n't be a minute, I'm quite famished," and to prove the fact Blue Bonnet helped herself to a handful of cookies on her way out of the room. [6]

Aunt Lucinda cast an inquiring glance in her mother's direction.

"I fear you will find Blue Bonnet a bit spoiled, Lucinda," Mrs. Clyde said with some hesitancy. "But we must not be too severe with her. The girls have led a wild, carefree existence all summer. I have done my best to look after them carefully, but I found seven rather a handful."

Something in Mrs. Clyde's tone made her daughter turn and look at her closely. Was it imagination, or did she seem unusually fatigued? Miss Clyde had often wondered during the summer if the responsibility of so many girls had not been too much of a tax on her mother's strength and patience, but her letters had been so cheerful, so uncomplaining, that she had tried to put the thought out of her mind, attributing it to overanxiety.

Blue Bonnet's entrance prevented further questioning.

"I think, if you don't mind, Grandmother, I'll run over and see the General a minute. I promised Alec to look after him," Blue Bonnet said, putting down her tea-cup.

"That would be very nice, Blue Bonnet," Mrs. Clyde answered with a nod and a smile. "The General is going to miss Alec very much this winter."

As Blue Bonnet passed her Grandmother she stooped and putting her arm round her shoulder gave her a gentle hug. Mrs. Clyde reached up and patted the girl's face tenderly. Whatever had been her care, love had lightened the burden, there could be no doubt of that. [7]

"You can't think what a trump she's been, Aunt Lucinda," Blue Bonnet said, straightening the bow at her grandmother's neck. "A regular brick! Why, she's had all the girls at her feet this blessed summer."

"It would have been more to the point if I had had them in hand," her grandmother replied; making haste to add, as she met Blue Bonnet's puzzled eyes, "not but that they were good girls, very good girls indeed."

Blue Bonnet whistled to Solomon and went out of the front door, banging it carelessly. Miss Clyde looked annoyed.

"I am afraid we are going to have to begin all over again with Blue Bonnet," she said with some concern. "She seems so hoydenish. I noticed it immediately."

"It is a good deal the exuberance of youth, Lucinda. Surplus energy has to be worked off somehow. We must be patient with her."

"I have been thinking," Miss Clyde replied, "that it would be wise not to enter Blue Bonnet in the Boston school immediately. If we could keep her with us until after the holidays we could perhaps interest her in some home duties—the girls will all be in school, and we could have her more to ourselves, and, perhaps, smooth down some of these rough corners." [8]

Mrs. Clyde looked wistful.

"I shall miss the dear child so," she said. "I wish we might keep her with us a bit longer. Boarding-school will be the beginning of a long break, I fear."

"It is because of the association that I particularly wish her to enter Miss North's school. She will meet refined girls from some of our old New England families, and the influence cannot fail to be helpful. I hope she will not be tempted to tell them that her grandmother is a brick," Miss Clyde added as an afterthought, but her smile was indulgent rather than critical.

"Girls are much the same the world over," her mother answered with the wisdom of experience. "Blue Bonnet is very like her mother. She was a great romp, but she passed the hoydenish period in safety, so will Blue Bonnet; never fear."

"She must be taught order and system; and a little domestic science under Katie might not come amiss, since she will some day be at the head of a household," Miss Clyde went on, and her mother signified approval. "Then there is mending and darning. On the whole, I think the next three months might be made very profitable to Blue Bonnet right here at home. I am not at all sure but that too much emphasis is given to the cultural side of education, and too little to the domestic these days. A girl to be well educated should be well rounded." [9]

After dinner, when the fire in the grate had been lighted—for the autumn evenings were beginning to bring chill to the air—and the family gathered for an hour's chat before bed, Miss Clyde broached the subject to Blue Bonnet.

"How would you like to continue your vacation for three months longer, Blue Bonnet, to stay on here with Grandmother and me until after the holidays?"

"And have no studies at all?" Blue Bonnet interrupted, her eyes widening with surprise. "What a lark!"

"Well, there would be duties," Miss Clyde admitted. "One could not be altogether idle and keep happy."

"We should like you to be our dear home girl for a while longer, Blue Bonnet," Mrs. Clyde said gently. "It is going to be very hard to give you up."

"But I shall be at home for the week-ends."

"We hope so, dear, if it does not interfere too much with your studies. Sometimes there is distraction in change of scene and habit. When you enter Miss North's [10] school, you will be under her supervision, not ours—subject to her approval."

A little pucker wrinkled Blue Bonnet's brow.

"Shall I? Oh, dear, I do so hate being supervised. I mean by strangers, Grandmother. Will she be terribly strict, and—interfering?"

"Not any more than will be for your interest and welfare."

"Well, I reckon it will be all right. I want to do what you think best for me."

Mrs. Clyde could not withheld the triumphant look that she turned toward her daughter. It said plainer than words, "you see how amenable she is, how sweet her nature."

"And I could see a lot of the girls, even if they are in school. Perhaps the Club could meet oftener."

Miss Clyde was silent. Discretion and diplomacy often availed where hard and fast rules failed with Blue Bonnet. She could be led, easily—never driven.

Miss Clyde's silence puzzled Blue Bonnet more than the unexpected news that she was to remain in Woodford another three months had done. She was unusually keen and alert, intuitive to a degree, and while Aunt Lucinda's manner was all that could be desired, she felt that she had been a disappointment in some way. She rose a little [11] wearily and going to the piano ran her fingers over the keys.

"Let us have a little music, dear, before we retire. It will seem good to hear you play again," Mrs. Clyde said.

Blue Bonnet drifted into one air after another listlessly, as if her thoughts were miles away from the keyboard over which her hands wandered so prettily. The familiar melodies floated plaintively through the still room. She played half through an old favorite, then rose suddenly. When she turned to her grandmother for her usual goodnight kiss her eyes were a little dim with tears. She struggled to hide them, and, excusing herself on the pretext of unpacking her trunks, started for the stairs.

Miss Clyde had risen from her chair as Blue Bonnet rose from the piano. She waited until Blue Bonnet had said good night to her grandmother, then she put her arm affectionately over the girl's shoulder and patted her reassuringly.

"I hope our little girl is not going to be homesick," she said. "There will be much to do in the next three months—much that is pleasant. Some day soon you and I will run up to Boston and have a look at Miss North's school and find out something about its requirements. We shall have a good deal of shopping to do, too. Suitable frocks play [12] as important a part at boarding-school as elsewhere."

Miss Clyde smiled one of her rare sweet smiles, and Blue Bonnet felt as if a weight had been lifted from her heart.

"Aunt Lucinda is a good deal of a dear," she said to herself, as she perched on the window-seat in her bedroom and looked out into the moonlight. "She wants me to be happy. I suppose she doesn't always understand me, any more than I do her. I reckon we'll have to sort of take each other on faith." And lightly humming a little tune she jumped up from the window-seat and plunged madly into the unpacking.

"As long as this is Saturday, would you mind, Grandmother, if I had the girls in this afternoon?" Blue Bonnet inquired at the breakfast-table next morning. And Mrs. Clyde replied:

"Not at all, dear. They will be so busy in school during the week. I will see what Katie has planned for to-day, and, if she can manage it, you might ask them to lunch."

A visit to the kitchen resulted favorably.

"Oh, you're such a duck, Grandmother," Blue Bonnet assured her. "I'll 'phone them right up," an operation which consumed the better part of an hour, since there was so much to relate after a separation of several weeks.

"I'll just run down to the barn and give Chula a lump of sugar and feed Solomon the first thing," Blue Bonnet said as she turned from the telephone. [13]

"Have you made your room tidy?" Miss Clyde inquired, coming out in to the hall at that moment.

"Oh, dear, history repeats itself, doesn't it, Aunt Lucinda?" Blue Bonnet's good-natured laugh was contagious. Miss Clyde smiled in spite of herself.

"I haven't made my bed yet, Aunt Lucinda, if that's what you mean. I hate making it up warm—it's not sanitary, is it? You've said so yourself, often."

Miss Clyde's smile deepened. Blue Bonnet's sudden conversion to the laws of hygiene was too amusing.

"I fancy two hours of this autumn air will have restored its freshness," she said. "Have you finished your unpacking?"

Blue Bonnet recalled the piles of fluffy whiteness that covered chairs and window-seat, and, turning, went up-stairs quickly.

It took some time to get the room in proper order. It might, not have taken so long if the view from the south window had not been so pleasant. Out in the garden the dahlias and coreopsis nodded and beckoned coaxingly, the soft wind stirred the leaves in the apple-trees, and Solomon frisked and rolled with glee in the sunshine.

At last it was finished, at least the furniture had been relieved of its burdens, and the bed made in the most approved fashion. Blue Bonnet was free to join Solomon, [14] and to gather a great bunch of the golden-hued coreopsis to adorn the lunch table. She was thinking of a little plan, as she cut the long stems and arranged the flowers with taste and precision; a little plan she had barely time to execute before Kitty Clark's familiar, "Ooh-hoo, Ooh-hoo!" echoed from somewhere in the vicinity of the front gate.

"I suppose I'm loads too early, but I could hardly wait to see you, Blue Bonnet," was her cheery greeting. "We've all been pining away for you. New York must have been fascinating to have kept you so long."

Blue Bonnet admitted that it was. She even opened her lips to tell of some of its enchantments, but Kitty went on irrelevantly:

"You've missed a heap at school. I suppose you can catch up, but you'll have to dig in, I can tell you. The Czar"—Kitty's name for Mr. Hunt—"isn't bestowing any more favors than usual."

Blue Bonnet's first impulse was to tell Kitty that she would not be back in school with the We Are Sevens this year, but she thought better of it and waited.

Kitty rambled on.

"Latin's a perfect fright and—oh, Blue Bonnet, what, do you think? Miss Rankin's engaged! Yes, she is, honest, truly. She's got a ring, a beauty! She wore it turned in [15] the first two weeks, but now she's picked up courage and turned it round so everybody can see it. She's going to quit after Christmas. They're going to live in Boston. He's a lawyer—Sarah Blake's father knows him, and says he's right nice."

Kitty's patronizing air nettled Blue Bonnet as much as it amused her.

"Why shouldn't he be nice?" she inquired a bit sharply. "Miss Rankin's nice herself."

The remark went over Kitty's head, and the appearance of Sarah Blake down the roadway put a stop to the gossip.

It was the gayest kind of a little party that made the rafters in Mrs. Clyde's dining-room ring with laughter an hour later. Blue Bonnet had insisted upon Grandmother and Aunt Lucinda lunching with them, so Mrs. Clyde sat at one end of the broad board and Miss Clyde at the other.

Blue Bonnet's coreopsis had been rearranged, and put in a charming brown basket. From beneath the basket, and quite concealed from sight, were seven little boxes attached to yellow ribbons which ran to each of the We Are Sevens' plates.

Blue Bonnet could scarcely wait for the dessert to be cleared away before she told the girls to pull the ribbons.

When the boxes came in view there was a scream of delight.

Nimble-fingered Kitty was the first to open hers, and the rest were not long [16] following suit, revealing to the enraptured gaze quaint and oddly designed gold rings, the monogram of the We Are Sevens forming a seal.

There was a rush for Blue Bonnet's side of the table, where that young person was

deluged with caresses and many expressions of gratitude.

"It's Uncle Cliff—he did it," Blue Bonnet managed to say when she could extricate herself. "That is, he suggested it—gave me the money—and I had them made at Tiffany's."

There was a chorus of praise for Uncle Cliff, which must have made his ears ring to the point of deafness, even in far-off Texas.

Amanda made a suggestion.

"Let's go up-stairs in the clubroom and organize a Sorority. W. A. S. looks kind of Greeky in a monogram. We can have rings instead of pins for our insignia."

The idea met with instant favor. There was another rush for the stairs, and a few moments later the Club members were comfortably settled in their quarters with Amanda in the Chair.

Amanda was not quite clear as to the manner of procedure, but she gracefully waved a tack hammer found on the window-sill, in lieu of a gavel, and demanded order.

When quiet at last descended upon the disturbed and noisy assemblage, Blue Bonnet asked if she might have the floor. She looked appealingly at the Chair. [17]

Debby rose to a point of order.

"We've got to elect officers," she said. "Amanda hasn't been elected. I move that Blue Bonnet Ashe be our chairman."

This Was the very opportunity Blue Bonnet wanted for her announcement. She made Debby a profound bow, pushing Amanda out of the way unceremoniously.

"I thank you all for this very great honor," she began, clearing her throat in the most professional manner. She had once attended a woman's club with Miss Clyde in Boston. "But owing to my absence from the city the coming winter I—"

There was a roar of protest from the Club members, en masse.

"I shall be leaving you about the first of January—"

This announcement prevented the further order of business. Cries of "What for? Where to? For how long?" assailed Blue Bonnet.

She made her plans and prospects clear to them.

At first the girls seemed stunned. Joy turned to lamentation. There arose a chorus of wails, plaintive and doleful. They kept it up for some time—in concert—with Sarah Blake looking on in awed silence, forlorn and tearful, as if a real tragedy had descended upon her. [18]

Blue Bonnet took the tack hammer from Amanda's apathetic hand and rapped for order.

"I neglected to state," she said, "that I shall be at home for the week-ends—at least I hope to be. I see no reason why the Club can't go on. I'm sure Grandmother would love to let you have this room when I'm not here. Let's go on with the business. I nominate Sarah Blake for president. It takes brains and dignity to be the president of a Sorority. Sarah has both."

"Well, I like that!" Kitty exclaimed with some feeling. "I suppose the rest of us have neither."

"Now, don't get stuffy, Kitty. You know I'm never personal. I meant no reflection on anybody."

"We can't organize a Sorority, anyhow," Kitty objected. "They only have them in colleges and high schools."

"I guess we can have one of our own if we want to," Amanda broke in. "We can originate one, can't we? Everything has to have a beginning, doesn't it?"

"Oh, I suppose you can call it what you like," Kitty said with a toss of her head.

There was some discussion, but Sarah finally received the majority vote and went in with flying colors.

That evening, from her accustomed seat on the hearth rug before a glowing fire, Blue Bonnet told her grandmother of the afternoon's experiences. [19]

"The girls seem sorry to have me go away this winter," she said. "And, oh, Grandmother, you should have heard them wail when I told them."

She leaned her head against her grandmother's knee and a little smile wrinkled the corners of her mouth.

"I hate to leave them, too," she said. "They're such fun."

Mrs. Clyde smoothed the girl's hair gently as she answered:

"I want you to be happy, dear, but it can't all be fun. Aunt Lucinda has a plan for you, which I think we will begin with Monday. You are entering your seventeenth year, now, Blue Bonnet, and there are duties and responsibilities which you can no longer evade."

Blue Bonnet sighed unconsciously.

"I suppose there are, Grandmother," she said, "but—couldn't we just put them off until—well—until Monday?"

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CHAPTER II

[20]

A WEEK-END

Blue Bonnet came down to breakfast Monday morning a trifle uncertain as to whether the day was to be pleasant or profitable to her. She had a very clear conviction that it could not be both. In her experience profitable things were stupid—invariably!

It was raining—a condition of weather Miss Clyde hailed with delight.

"Just the very day to go through the linen closet," she said to Blue Bonnet as they rose from the table. "I think we will begin there this morning."

Blue Bonnet looked out at the lowering clouds and followed her aunt meekly. She, too, was glad that it was raining; otherwise she should have longed to be galloping over the country roads on Chula.

Mrs. Clyde's linen closet was a joy to behold; a room of itself, light and airy, with the smoothest of cedar shelves and deep cavernous drawers for blankets and down comforts.

Blue Bonnet had been in the room occasionally, when she had been sent for sheets for an unexpected guest. She had brought away the refreshing odor of sweet lavender in her nostrils, and a vision of the neatly piled linen before her eyes.

[21]

To-day she watched her aunt as she opened drawers, took the white covers from blankets and comforts, inspected sheets and patch-work quilts with an eye to necessary darning.

What a dreadful waste of time to have cut up all those little patches and have sewn them together, Blue Bonnet thought, as her aunt folded a quilt and returned it to its particular place on the shelf. She felt sure that Aunt Lucinda could have bought much prettier quilts with less bother.

"It seems almost like a sanctuary, here," she said at last, leaning against the window and watching the proceedings with interest. "It's so beautifully clean, and I adore that lavender smell. Where does it come from?"

Miss Clyde reached under a sheet and brought forth a small bag made of white tarlatan filled with dried flowers and leaves.

Blue Bonnet buried her nose in it.

"Oh, I love it," she said. "I must get some and send it to Benita. Benita is very particular about our beds. She says my mother was."

"She could not have been a Clyde and escaped that, my dear. It is a passion with all of us—linen and fine china."

Blue Bonnet nodded brightly.

"When I have a home I shall have a linen closet just like this," she said, glancing about admiringly.

[22]

"Then you cannot begin too soon to learn how to take care of it. Few things require closer supervision than a linen closet, in any home. You must learn to mend; not ordinary mending, but fine darning."

Miss Clyde cast her eye over a pile of sheets. She opened one and handed it to Blue Bonnet, directing her attention to a rent which had been skillfully repaired in one corner.

Blue Bonnet noted the stitches of gossamer fineness with absorbed interest. Then she folded the sheet carefully and handed it back with a sigh.

"I never could do it, Aunt Lucinda. Never, in a thousand years. I know I couldn't. I hate sewing."

"Then I fear you could never have a linen closet like this, Blue Bonnet. Mending represents but a small part of the detail and system necessary to good housekeeping."

"But, maybe, perhaps I could hire some one. Couldn't I, don't you think?"

"You certainly could not instruct servants if you did not know how to work, yourself. That would be quite impossible. Could your teachers have imparted their knowledge to you if they, themselves, had not been students?"

The argument seemed plausible. Blue Bonnet's sigh deepened. [23]

"I shall employ a trained housekeeper," she said, as if that settled the question.

"Then you will miss the joy that comes through laboring with your own hands—the joy of accomplishment, Blue Bonnet. I hope you will change your mind."

Miss Clyde took a careful survey of a shelf where sheets were piled, and from it she filled her mending basket.

"Delia has overlooked these in my absence," she said, almost apologetically. "Linen should always be mended carefully before it is put away."

She straightened the window blinds to a correct line, closed all drawers carefully, and ushering Blue Bonnet into the hall, locked the door behind them.

In the sitting-room the rain beat furiously at the window-panes, a cold east wind rattled the casements, but a glowing fire in the grate offset the gloom.

Miss Clyde drew a chair up to the fire and took a piece from the basket.

"Bring up a small chair, Blue Bonnet. One without arms will be best." Blue Bonnet drew the chair up slowly.

Miss Clyde found her thimble and selected a proper needle.

"Go up and get your work-basket, Blue Bonnet."

When Blue Bonnet came down with her basket her aunt was holding a sheet up to the light. [24]

"It is growing thin in places," she said, laying it on Blue Bonnet's knee, "but a few stitches will preserve it for some time yet."

The next hour was one not soon to be forgotten by Blue Bonnet. Threads knotted at the most impossible places; stitches were too long, sometimes too short. Her hands grew hot and sticky. At the end of an hour her cheeks were flushed and her head ached.

Miss Clyde took the work from the tired and clumsy fingers and smoothed the hair back from the warm brow.

"I think you have done very well for the first time, Blue Bonnet. Next time it will come easier. You would better rest now, and perhaps Grandmother will read to us until lunch time."

"Yes," Mrs. Clyde said, "I will indeed. What shall it be, Blue Bonnet?"

Blue Bonnet thought a minute, then she clapped her hands softly.

"I know, Grandmother. Thoreau! I read something of his this summer on the ranch, and I liked it."

Mrs. Clyde went into the library, coming back presently with Robert Louis Stevenson's "Men and Books."

"Perhaps you would like to know something of Thoreau's life, Blue Bonnet. Mr. Stevenson gives a fair glimpse of him. At least he does not spare his eccentricities. We view him from all quarters." [25]

The lunch bell rang long before Blue Bonnet thought it time.

"Mark the place, Grandmother," she said, as they went into the dining-room. "I want to hear it all. I don't think I should have liked Thoreau personally, but there certainly is a nice streak in him—the way he loved animals and nature—isn't there?"

About four o'clock in the afternoon the clouds began to break, and Blue Bonnet in stout shoes and raincoat started off with Solomon for a run.

Her grandmother and aunt watched her as she turned her steps in the direction of the schoolhouse.

"Blue Bonnet is a gregarious soul," Miss Clyde said, turning away from the window. "She loves companionship. She likes to move in flocks."

"Most girls do, Lucinda. I often wondered how her mother ever endured the loneliness of a Texas ranch, with her disposition. She seemed to find room in her heart for all the world. But it is not a bad trait," Mrs. Clyde added. "It is a part of the impulsive temperament."

The next few days passed much as Monday had, except that the duties, not to become too irksome, were varied. There was a morning in the kitchen, when Blue Bonnet was instructed into the mysteries of breadmaking and the preparing of [26] vegetables.

It was on this particular morning that Mrs. Clyde, going to the kitchen door to speak with Katie, found Blue Bonnet, apron covered, standing before the immaculate white sink, her hands encased in rubber gloves, with a potato, which she was endeavoring to peel, poised on the extreme end of a fork.

For the first time in nearly twenty years of service, Katie permitted herself the familiarity of a wink in her mistress's direction, and Mrs. Clyde slipped away noiselessly, wearing a very broad smile.

But, if the mornings were tiresome, the afternoons more than compensated. There were long rides on Chula; afternoons when Blue Bonnet came in looking as rosy as one of the late peonies in her grandmother's garden.

"Grandmother!" she would call, dashing up the side drive and halting Chula at the door. "Grandmother, come and look at us!"

Mrs. Clyde would hasten to the door to find Blue Bonnet decked from hat brim to stirrups with trailing vines in gorgeous hues, goldenrod and chrysanthemums tied in huge bunches to her saddle.

Nor was Chula neglected. Often she sported a flaming wreath—her mane bunches of flowers.

"Take all the flowers in," Blue Bonnet would call to Delia. "This week will see the [27] very last of them. The man at the Dalton farm says there is sure to be frost most any night."

When the mail came on Saturday morning there was a pleasant diversion. Miss Clyde sorted the letters and handed a pamphlet to Blue Bonnet. It proved to be a catalogue of Miss North's school, and interested Blue Bonnet greatly. She seated herself in her favorite chair in the sitting-room and turned the pages eagerly.

"Oh, Aunt Lucinda, it's quite expensive, isn't it? A thousand two hundred dollars a year; and that doesn't include—let's see—'use of piano, seat in church, laundry, doctor's bills, music lessons, fencing and riding'—but then I wouldn't have to have all the extras. I could cut out the fencing and riding, of course, and the seat in church—"

"Elizabeth!"

Blue Bonnet turned quickly. It was the first time she had heard her baptismal name in months.

"I beg your pardon, Aunt Lucinda. I didn't think. Please excuse me."

"Certainly, Blue Bonnet. But remember that it is very bad taste to be irreverent."

Blue Bonnet brought the catalogue over to Miss Clyde, and together they looked through it.

"It seems just the place for you, Blue Bonnet," Miss Clyde said. "The location on Commonwealth Avenue is ideal. It is within walking distance of most of the places [28] where you will want to go. This is a great advantage."

Blue Bonnet curled herself up comfortably in the deep chair and looked out through the window dreamily. Slowly a smile wreathed her lips.

"Aunt Lucinda," she said after a moment, "do you know what I'd just love to do? I've been thinking of how much more I have than most girls, and I wish I could pass some of the good things along. Now, there's Carita Judson. Wouldn't she just adore a year in Boston? Why couldn't I ask her to go with me to Miss North's? There's that great big room I'm to have with a bath, and all those advantages—" Blue Bonnet paused.

Miss Clyde was silent for a moment. Blue Bonnet's impulses bewildered her sometimes, they were so stupendous.

Blue Bonnet was insistent.

"There's all that money coming to me that my father left," she went on, "and Uncle Cliff says that some day there will be more—from him. What ever am I going to do with it? Carita Judson has an awfully poor sort of a time, Aunt Lucinda, awfully poor. She mothers all those small children in the family—"

"I daresay for that very reason she could not well be spared."

Miss Clyde was more than half in sympathy with Blue Bonnet's idea; she knew through her mother of Carita's fine father, of the girl's sweetness and refinement in [29] spite of her restricted means and surroundings, but she did not wish to encourage Blue Bonnet in what seemed an impossibility.

Blue Bonnet jumped up from her chair.

"I'm going to write to Uncle Cliff about it this very minute," she said, moving toward the door. "I know he'll think it is a perfectly splendid idea."

"Would it not be better to wait until we have visited the school?" her aunt inquired tactfully. "There might not be room for Carita. The number of pupils is limited, you know. Suppose you wait until Uncle Cliff comes at Christmas. You could consult him then. It would be very unwise to get Carita's hopes up and then disappoint her."

Blue Bonnet had not thought of this.

"But I shall ask him the minute he comes," she assured her aunt as she left the room, taking the catalogue with her. "Just the very minute! I know what he'll say, too, Aunt Lucinda. He'll say that happiness is the best interest one can get out of an investment. I've heard him, no end of times!"

The week ended delightfully for Blue Bonnet.

"It's a sort of reward of merit for working so hard all these mornings," she said, as her grandmother granted permission to follow out a plan of Amanda Parker's.

Amanda's aunt had the second time invited the We Are Sevens for a week-end at [30] the farm.

The girls were to take the street car as far as it would carry them—to be met at that point by a hay wagon.

Blue Bonnet was in high glee. A natural lover of the country, visions of a glorious time rose before her eyes.

She appeared at the corner drug store, where the girls were to take the interurban, a few minutes late. Aunt Lucinda had so many instructions at the last moment that she had been delayed.

The girls were all gathered, looking anxiously down the street. When Blue Bonnet appeared in the snowiest of white sweaters and tam-o'-shanter, as jaunty and blooming as if she were out for an afternoon walk, they immediately protested.

"For ever more, why didn't you wear your old clothes, Blue Bonnet?" Kitty Clark inquired. "That sweater will be pot black before you go a mile, and you'll be as freckled as a turkey egg without some shade for your face."

"The sweater will wash, thank you, that's why I wore it, and I'm not the freckly kind."

The shot was unintentional, but Kitty colored to the roots of her red gold hair.

"You are fortunate," she said. "I am."

"That's the penalty you pay for having such a peach of a complexion," Blue Bonnet [31] retorted, and the breach was healed.

At the end of the car line the hay-rack was waiting. The girls climbed on.

"Wait," Blue Bonnet shouted, jumping off quickly, "I almost forgot I want a picture of you."

While she adjusted the camera, the girls struck fantastic poses, Debby perching herself airily on the end gate of the wagon.

There was a warning cry from the girls, which the staid and sober farm horses misinterpreted. Off they started at a mad gallop, leaving the bewildered Debby a crumpled heap in the roadway.

She was on her feet before Blue Bonnet reached her, laughing and crying in a breath.

"How stupid," she panted. "I might have known that gate would fly open. I guess I'm not hurt any."

Blue Bonnet felt Debby's arms and limbs and made her stretch herself. Then they

fell in each other's arms and laughed until they were weak and hysterical.

"It's a good thing the roads are a bit soft," Blue Bonnet assured her, when she could get her breath. "You're something of a sight with all that mud on you, but it broke your fall."

"Praise be!" Debby murmured, struggling to remove some of the dirt that insisted upon clinging to her skirts. "I'll take mud to a broken limb, any day." [32]

The rest of the journey was made in safety. Once the wagon halted for Sarah Blake to change her seat. Sitting just over the wheel was not altogether desirable. Sarah's stomach rebelled. The whiteness of her lips spoke louder than words. Blue Bonnet changed places with her cheerfully, keeping strangely silent after the first half mile.

"What makes Blue Bonnet so still?" Kitty inquired, surprised.

"Take this seat and find out, Little Miss Why," Blue Bonnet retorted with an effort. "Maybe you haven't as much regard for your tongue as I have. I want to keep mine whole."

The low, rambling farmhouse surrounded by green hills and ancient oaks, with cattle grazing peacefully on the gentle slopes, and the farm dog yelping frantically at the big gates, gave Blue Bonnet the worst pang of homesickness she had felt since she left the ranch.

Wreaths of blue smoke curled upward lazily from the kitchen chimney, and from the dooryard came the most tantalizing odors of chicken frying, coffee boiling, and fresh doughnuts.

Blue Bonnet jumped from the wagon and filled her lungs with the delicious fragrance.

"Girls," she cried, "just smell! It's chicken and coffee and—"

"Doughnuts," Amanda finished with rapture. "Wait until you taste them! Aunt Priscilla is a wonder at cooking. She has the best things you ever ate in your life." [33]

Aunt Priscilla appeared in the doorway at that moment, a wholesome sweet-faced woman of middle age, and took the girls in to the spare bedroom to lay off their things and wash before supper.

Blue Bonnet took off her cap and sweater and laid them lightly on the high feather bed with its wonderful patch-work quilt—the "rising sun" pattern running riot through it.

"It's so clean I hate to muss it up with my things," she said, casting about for a chair.

"I speak for this bed," Kitty said, depositing her things carelessly. "I slept in it the last time we came. It's as good as a toboggan. You keep going down and down and—"

"We're going to draw for it," Amanda announced from the wash-stand where she was wrestling with Debby's mud. "It will hold four; the other three girls will have to go in the next room."

"Why couldn't we bring the other bed in here—I mean the springs and mattress?" Debby suggested. "Do you think your aunt would care, Amanda?"

Amanda volunteered to ask.

Blue Bonnet took her turn at the wash basin and then wandered into the parlor. She looked about wonderingly. Family portraits done in crayon adorned the walls. A queer little piano, short half an octave, occupied one corner of the room, a marble-topped table, the other. A plush photograph album, a Bible and a copy of Pilgrim's Progress lay on the table. The carpet was green, bold with red roses; roses so vivid in coloring that they seemed to vie with the scarlet geraniums that filled the south window to overflowing. [34]

But over it all a spirit of peace and contentment rested—a homey atmosphere, unmistakable and refreshing. Blue Bonnet gazed through the one unobstructed window of the little room wistfully. Twilight was closing in. Somewhere out in the field a cow bell tinkled, and a boy's voice called to the cattle. How familiar it all was.

Amanda's voice broke the stillness.

"Why, Blue Bonnet Ashe," she said, coming in the room followed by her aunt with a lamp, "what are you doing in here all alone? You look as if you had seen a ghost. Come right out in the kitchen. Aunt Priscilla has supper all on the table."

And such a supper as it was!

The chicken, and there seemed an endless amount, was piled high on an old blue platter that Blue Bonnet fancied her grandmother would have paid almost any price

for. Fluffy potatoes, flakey biscuits, golden cream and butter, preserves in variety —everything from a farmhouse larder that could tempt the appetite and gratify the taste. [35]

"I feel as if I never could eat another mouthful as long as I live," Blue Bonnet declared as she rose from the table.

"That's just the way I used to feel last summer on the ranch after one of old Gertrudis' meals," Kitty said.

Amanda's aunt suggested a run down the lane.

Down the lane they ran, laughing and calling; old Shep, stirred from his usual calm, barking and bounding at their heels.

It was too dark for a walk, so the girls soon retraced their steps, settling themselves in the parlor for a visit with the family before going to bed.

"Do any of you play?" inquired Amanda's aunt, looking toward the odd little piano.

"Blue Bonnet does," Kitty announced promptly. "Come, 'little Tommy Tucker must sing for his supper.'"

Blue Bonnet went over to the piano. Kitty's remark served as a reminder. She was glad to repay Amanda's aunt for some of her kindness.

The piano was sadly out of tune, but it is doubtful if Amanda's relatives would have enjoyed a symphony concert as much as Blue Bonnet's simple ballads—the familiar little airs which she gave unsparingly.

After she had quite exhausted her stock, there were clamors for repetition, until Blue Bonnet felt that she had wiped out the debt of the entire "We Are Sevens." [36]

Amanda's aunt was found to be quite reasonable about transferring the bed from the back room. Amanda and the small son of the household undertook its removal, Kitty giving orders.

"Anybody would think you were going to sleep in it, Kitty, you're so particular," Amanda objected. "Get busy and help some."

"I spoke for the big bed," Kitty reminded.

"Yes, and it was selfish of you. We're going to draw for the big bed. I told you that before."

There was a shout of laughter a minute later when Kitty pulled the short slip for the bed on the floor.

Sarah Blake offered to change with her, but the others objected.

"You're an obliging dear, Sarah," Kitty said appreciatively, "but I will stay where I'm put. I don't want to take your place."

Later in the night Sarah wished that she had. She wondered as she shrank to the edge of the bed and tried to make herself as small as possible, if three persons to a bed on the floor, wouldn't have been preferable to the rail which fell to her lot.

It was long past midnight when the last joke was told, the last giggle suppressed. The fun might have gone on indefinitely if, from somewhere in the house, Amanda's uncle's boot hadn't fallen ominously, and Amanda's aunt cleared her throat audibly. [37]

Morning found them up with the larks. There was a stroll down the shady lane before breakfast, and afterward, when the dishes were cleared away and the bedrooms restored to proper order, Amanda's uncle insisted upon piling them all in the big farm wagon and taking them to church.

"It seems to me that it is so much easier to be good—that is, to be religious, in the country," Blue Bonnet said as they neared the meeting-house, and the bell in the small tower rang out slowly. "There's something comes over you when you hear the bell calling, and see the people gathering—"

"'A sort of holy and calm delight,'"

Kitty quoted.

Blue Bonnet nodded.

"I reckon so—that's as near as you can come to it. There are feelings there aren't any words for, you know, Kitty—kind of indescribable."

The sight of seven pretty, attractive girls—city girls—in one pew, occasioned some comment in church; otherwise there was scarcely a ripple to disturb the calm that rested upon the congregation.

"Unless some one will kindly volunteer to play the organ to-day," the minister said, [38]
rising in the pulpit, "we shall have to sing without music. Our organist is sick."

Blue Bonnet glanced about her. No one seemed inclined to offer services. There was a silence of several seconds. The minister waited. Then Amanda's aunt leaned over and whispered something in Blue Bonnet's ear.

Blue Bonnet rose instantly and went to the organ.

She was a little nervous. She knew that organs differed somewhat from pianos, and she wasn't familiar with them, but it never occurred to her to hesitate when she seemed to be needed. She found the hymn and started out bravely. Sometimes the music weakened a little when Blue Bonnet, absorbed in the notes, forgot to use the pedals, but, on the whole, it was not bad, and the minister's hearty handshake and radiant smile after the service more than compensated for any embarrassment she had suffered.

"It has been perfectly glorious," Blue Bonnet declared to Amanda's aunt as they parted with her at daybreak Monday morning. "We've just loved every minute of our visit here, and would you mind—all of you—I want the whole family—standing out there by the big gate while I get a picture of you? I couldn't possibly forget you after the perfectly lovely time you've given us, but I'd like the picture to show to [39]
Grandmother and Aunt Lucinda."

"Oh, Blue Bonnet," Kitty complained, "haven't you enough pictures yet? You've been taking them for a year—and more!"

Blue Bonnet quite ignored the remark as she proceeded to line up Amanda's aunt and her family. She got several snaps, and as she put away her kodak she promised to remember the group with pictures—a promise fulfilled, much to the delight of the farm people, later.

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CHAPTER III [40]

IN BOSTON

"I THINK," Miss Clyde said to her mother one morning late in November, as she put the last article in her suitcase and snapped it shut, "that Blue Bonnet and I will go to a hotel this time. We shall be out shopping all day and making arrangements for Blue Bonnet at school, so that there will be little time for visiting. If you should need me for anything you might wire the Copley Plaza."

"Are you not afraid Honora and Augusta will feel hurt?" Mrs. Clyde remonstrated. "They enjoy Blue Bonnet so much, it seems a pity not to let them see all they can of her."

"They will have plenty of visits with her later on, Mother. I feel sure they will understand. If you keep well, and everything is all right here, we might extend our visit over Sunday. In that case we should go to them, of course."

Blue Bonnet embraced her grandmother affectionately.

"Don't get lonesome, that's a duck," she exclaimed, bestowing an extra kiss.

"Blue Bonnet, please address your grandmother less familiarly. Those expressions [41]
you have acquired are not respectful. I cannot tolerate them any longer," Miss Clyde spoke a trifle sharply.

Blue Bonnet looked surprised.

"I didn't mean it for disrespect, Aunt Lucinda. I only meant it for love; but I won't do it again if it annoys you."

"It does annoy me very much, dear. Stop and think of the word you used just now. A duck! In what possible way could your grandmother resemble a duck?"

"I didn't say she resembled one, Aunt Lucinda. I said—"

But any shade of distinction was too much for Miss Clyde's patience.

"We will not argue the question, Blue Bonnet. Please eliminate the word from your vocabulary. It is inelegant as well as inexpressive."

Blue Bonnet looked a little rebellious as she waved to her grandmother and followed Miss Clyde to the carriage. She wished Aunt Lucinda would grant her a little leeway in her mode of expression—it was so troublesome to always pick and

choose words. Besides, she had her own opinion as to the expressiveness of slang. Grandmother *was* a duck, a perfect—

"Take good care of yourself, dearie," the gentle voice was at that moment calling, "and if you stay over Sunday, send Grandmother a postal."

Blue Bonnet promised, Denham touched the whip to the horses, and she and Aunt [42]
Lucinda were off.

The first visit of the afternoon was to the school. Miss Clyde telephoned Miss North for an appointment, which was made for five o'clock. Miss North also hoped, the maid said, that it would be convenient for Miss Clyde and her niece to dine with her at six, and see something of the school and the girls.

Blue Bonnet was delighted. She had been formally entered in the school some weeks before, her tuition paid, her room engaged for the first of January. This had been necessary on account of limited accommodations.

Miss North was awaiting her guests in her living-room at the head of the first flight of stairs. She took Blue Bonnet's hand cordially, and held it for a moment in a friendly grasp.

"And this is the new member of our family," she said with a pleasant smile, as she brought forth chairs.

Blue Bonnet looked about while her aunt and Miss North chatted.

The room pleased her, it was in such exquisite taste. Soft rugs carpeted the polished floor; beautiful pictures graced the walls; old mahogany lent its air of elegance, and books abounded everywhere.

Miss North pressed a button on her desk after a moment and a neat maid entered.

"Ask Mrs. Goodwin to come here, Martha, please." [43]

Mrs. Goodwin must have been in waiting, for she made her appearance quickly; a motherly looking woman with an alert, cheerful countenance.

"Our house-mother, Mrs. Goodwin, Miss Clyde—Miss Ashe. Miss Clyde would like to see the room we have reserved for her niece, Mrs. Goodwin."

Mrs. Goodwin led the way up a second flight of stairs.

"I am sorry, Miss Clyde, that we could not give Miss Ashe a room alone as you desired, but entering so late it is quite impossible. I am sure she will enjoy her room-mate however, a Miss Cross from Bangor, Maine. We think it a wise plan to put an Eastern and a Western girl together when possible—the influence is wholesome to both."

She rapped softly on a door at the front of the building.

"May we come in, Miss Joy?" she said to the girl who opened the door slowly, book in hand.

"Certainly," she answered, far from cordially, and, acknowledging the introductions, went over to the window where she resumed her reading.

The room was large and airy—a corner room with four windows. Mrs. Goodwin threw up the blinds of the south windows.

"The view is beautiful from here," she said.

She crossed the room and opened a door, disclosing a small hall. [44]

"The bathroom and closets are here."

Between the large west windows were two single beds, and in a corner a grate with an open fire gave a homey touch. There was a desk in the room too. Blue Bonnet supposed it was to be used jointly. She looked about; there was plenty of room for another. She would ask Aunt Lucinda to buy one for her; and a bookcase to hold some of her favorite volumes.

Blue Bonnet was exceedingly quiet during the rest of the tour through the building, and at dinner. When she was alone with her aunt in the street she burst forth:

"I just can't do it, Aunt Lucinda. I never in this world can room with that girl and be happy. Joy Cross! Who ever heard of such a name? It's plain to be seen which she'll be. A cross, all right!"

Miss Clyde looked at Blue Bonnet in amazement.

"Anybody would know to look at her she couldn't be a joy! Did you notice how she shook hands, Aunt Lucinda?"

"That will do, Blue Bonnet. It is very unjust to criticize people you don't know.

Appearances are often deceiving. Miss Cross may prove a delightful companion—"

"Oh, no, Aunt Lucinda. She couldn't—not with that nose. It's the long thin kind—the kind that pokes into everything. And her eyes! Did you notice her eyes? They're that awfully light kind of blue—they look so cold and unfeeling; and she was so—so—uncordial when Mrs. Goodwin said I was to room with her. She wasn't even polite. She didn't say she was glad, or that would be nice or—she didn't say anything—" [45]

"There wasn't time to say much," Miss Clyde answered.

"Grandmother says there is always time for courtesy," Blue Bonnet flashed, and Miss Clyde knew that her niece had the best of the argument.

"Nothing can be done at present, Blue Bonnet. You heard Mrs. Goodwin say that all the rooms are taken. Perhaps some change can be made later—but now—"

"Now, I shall just have to take up my cross and bear it, of course; but I sha'n't cling to it a minute longer than I have to, you may be sure of that."

Despite the seeming irreverence, Miss Clyde smiled. Blue Bonnet's tempestuous little outbursts were often entertaining if they were reprehensible. They sometimes reminded Miss Clyde of a Fourth of July sky-rocket. They glowed in brilliancy and ended in—nothing! Likely enough Blue Bonnet would finish the term quite adoring her room-mate. She ventured to suggest this. [46]

Blue Bonnet scorned the idea. She was sure that she should just hate her!

Blue Bonnet was up early the next morning, ready for the shopping expedition which promised to be of more than ordinary interest. Aunt Lucinda seemed inclined to be almost extravagant, Blue Bonnet thought, as together they made out the shopping list and pored over the advertisements in the papers.

"Let's begin at Hollander's, Aunt Lucinda," Blue Bonnet said. "I love Hollander's. We could get the Peter Thompsons there, and my evening dresses and slippers and things."

The "evening dresses" amused Miss Clyde.

"I am afraid you did not read the school catalogue very carefully, Blue Bonnet. It especially requested simplicity of dress."

"I know it did, Aunt Lucinda, but you saw how sweetly the girls were gowned at dinner. Perhaps the dresses *were* simple, but they looked expensive and—dressy," she added for want of a better word. "That pretty dark girl that sat next me had on the darlingest pink organdy with a Dutch neck. Oh, it was so dear. I wonder where she got it?"

She had not long to wonder. The Boston shops seemed to have anticipated the needs of girls all over the country. Blue Bonnet stood entranced before cases of the daintiest frocks that could be imagined. [47]

"Oh, Aunt Lucinda," she exclaimed, holding up two that attracted her, "I can't make up my mind which of these is the prettier. I adore this blue crepe with these sweet buttons, but the white organdy is such a love with that white fixing—and, oh, will you look at that yellow chiffon! I suppose I couldn't have chiffon, could I? It looks too partified."

Miss Clyde thought not.

"But you might try on the white, and the blue gown," she said.

They fitted admirably with a few alterations, and to Blue Bonnet's great joy Miss Clyde took both—and yet another; a sheer white linen lawn with a pink silk slip, which called forth all the adjectives Blue Bonnet could muster.

Then came an exciting moment when slippers and hose were selected; dainty but serviceable underwear, and the little accessories that count for so much in a girl's wardrobe.

"I feel exactly as if I were getting a trousseau," Blue Bonnet said, as they started for a tailor's, where she was to be measured for suits. "And, Aunt Lucinda, there's just one more thing I want—two things! A desk and some books. You saw that desk in the room I am to have. Well, the cross—I mean Miss Cross—had her things in it. I saw them. I don't want to share it with her. We'd be forever getting mixed up and fussing. I'd like to avoid that." [48]

Miss Clyde remembered the check Mr. Ashe had sent—the half of which had not yet been spent, and the instructions that everything was to be provided for Blue Bonnet's happiness and comfort. Had she a right to refuse? She, too, wanted Blue Bonnet to be happy and comfortable, but her New England training from youth up made the lavish spending of money almost an impossibility. She greatly feared that the increased allowance Mr. Ashe had insisted upon giving Blue Bonnet for her

private use at boarding-school, would inculcate habits of extravagance.

After they left the tailor's a desk was soon found, suitable in every particular—mahogany, of course, since the other furniture in the room was.

Coming out of the furniture store Miss Clyde and Blue Bonnet passed a floral shop. Blue Bonnet gave a little cry of surprise.

"Look, Aunt Lucinda, there's Cousin Tracy!"

She slipped up to him quietly, putting her arm through his. He turned in a dazed sort of fashion.

"Well, well," he said. "Where did you come from?"

"Woodford."

"When, pray?"

"Yesterday."

Mr. Winthrop seemed surprised, and Miss Clyde made haste to explain. [49]

"Look here," he said, putting his hands on Blue Bonnet's shoulders and turning her toward the florist's window.

A miniature football game was being shown in gorgeous crimson and gold settings. The field was outlined in flowers and the little men in caps and sweaters were most fascinating.

Blue Bonnet gave his arm a squeeze.

"It's the Harvard-Yale game, isn't it,—to-morrow? I'm crazy about it. Oh, I do hope Harvard wins! My father was a Harvard man. So are you, I remember."

"Want to see it?" Cousin Tracy asked, as if seeing a Harvard-Yale game were the simplest thing possible.

Blue Bonnet fairly jumped for joy.

"Could I? Could we get tickets?"

Cousin Tracy nodded and touched his breast pocket significantly.

"I have two. Right by the cheering section."

She crossed her hands in an ecstatic little fashion that expressed the greatest excitement and joy.

"You wouldn't mind, would you, Aunt Lucinda? Why, the We Are Sevens wouldn't get over it in a week. It seems too good to be true."

Before Miss Clyde and Blue Bonnet parted with Mr. Winthrop all arrangements had been completed, and Blue Bonnet walked away as if she were treading on air. [50]

That night the following letter found its way into the Boston mail:

"Copley Plaza Hotel, Boston, Mass.,

"November 28th, 19—.

"Dearest Uncle Cliff:—

"Aunt Lucinda and I came up here yesterday to buy my clothes for school, and also to see what kind of a room I was to have when I come up for good the first of January.

"Aunt Lucinda has been awfully nice about everything, letting me get most of the things I wanted. I have some loves of dresses, which I won't take time now to describe, as you will be in Woodford so soon for Christmas and will see them. They will be fresh, too, for Aunt Lucinda says I can't wear any of them until I am at Miss North's. Aunt Lucinda bought me a perfect treasure of a desk—mahogany, with the cunningest shelves underneath for books. She bought me some new books, too—some that I've wanted for a long time. There's 'The Life of Helen Keller;' grandmother has one, and I simply adore it; and Thoreau's 'Week on the Merrimac,' and one or two of Stevenson's—Robert Louis, you know—and a new 'Little Colonel,' my old one is worn to shreds. Oh, yes, and a beautiful new dictionary; it looks too full of information for anything, and [51] there's a perfectly dear atlas with it besides. We got a copy of Helen Hunt's 'Ramona,' too. We don't know yet if Miss North will allow me to have any love stories; but, if she won't, Aunt Lucinda will keep it for me. I wouldn't part with it for anything. We had such fun getting the books;

only Aunt Lucinda kept fussing about modern bookstores, and wishing that I might have seen the 'Old Corner Book Store,' where she used to come when she was a girl. She says she used to spend whole days there browsing around—she really said that—and poking under the counters and behind things for what she wanted. Just fancy! I think a nice polite clerk that comes up to you with a pleasant smile and says, 'What can I do for you, Madam?' is much nicer, don't you?

"I've saved the worst of my news for the last. I hope it won't make you unhappy, for there will be some way out of it, I reckon. It's this: I hate the room-mate I've got to have. She's perfectly horrid—you wouldn't like her a bit, Uncle Cliff; and the way she shakes hands—well, it makes you feel as if you were going to have to support her until she got through with the ordeal—so limp, and lack-a-daisy. She's tall and thin, with straw-colored hair and white eyelashes and cold blue eyes, and she's from Bangor, Maine. I tried to talk with her for a minute while Aunt Lucinda and the house-mother were making arrangements about me, but all I could [52] gather was that she was a Senior, and from the State of Maine. Why do you suppose these Easterners always say from the State of something? Seems so much easier to just say Maine.

"There was another girl that I sat next to at dinner (we stayed to dinner) who was real nice and so pretty. Her name is Annabel Jackson, and she's from Tennessee. She had on such sweet clothes. I didn't talk to her much, for I couldn't get the other one off my mind—Joy Cross, from the State of Maine. Such a name! Joy! If it could only have been Patience or Hope or Faith—even Dolores, but I suppose it couldn't.

"Uncle Cliff, I've been wishing so that Carita Judson could go to school here at Miss North's with me. She has such a hard time with all those babies to tend. I told Aunt Lucinda that I wished I could send her out of some of my money, but she said to wait until you got here and then talk it over. I don't know whether she could get a room now or not, the school is so full this year—that's why I have to have the cross. You could be thinking it over, couldn't you, Uncle Cliff, and let me know as soon as you come?

"I reckon I've about got to the end of my news now, except that Cousin Tracy is going to take me to the Harvard-Yale game to-morrow. I'm so wild over it that I know I sha'n't sleep a wink to-night. I will write Alec [53] about it when I get back to Woodford and tell him to give the letter to you and Uncle Joe to read.

"Give my love to all the folks on the ranch. How's Benita? Did she like the lavender bags I sent for the sheets? I hope she uses them as I told her. I rather thought she might hang them around her neck or give them to Juanita. I know if the We Are Sevens were here they would send heaps of love. Aunt Lucinda sends her best regards. I am counting the days now until Christmas. I check off every day on the calendar until I see you.

"With dearest love, I am,
"Your affectionate niece,
BLUE BONNET ASHE.

"P. S. Please tell Alec that Aunt Lucinda has promised to look after the General and Solomon when I'm gone. I am going to miss Chula awfully, but there is a riding-school where Miss North lets the girls get horses and ride with a teacher.

"P. S. Miss North seems very nice, but you never can tell how people are going to be until you live with them, I hope for the best. B. B."

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CHAPTER IV [54]

A SURPRISE

"WELL, to begin at the very beginning," Blue Bonnet said, looking into the eager faces of the We Are Sevens, "we took an automobile from Cousin Tracy's house, where we were staying over the week-end. Of course we could have taken the Cambridge subway, but Cousin Tracy said we were to have all the frills; and, anyway, the subway is so jammed on the day of the game that it takes forever to get anywhere—especially home, after everything is over. Why, Cousin Tracy says—"

"Yes, we know all about that," Kitty said, "get on to the game."

"Well, we took the automobile and went straight to the Stadium. You never saw so many automobiles in all your life. They would reach from here to—"

"Oh, Blue Bonnet, we don't care a rap about the automobiles," Kitty declared impatiently. "What did you do when you got to the Stadium?"

"We took our seats. You see, we got to the Stadium about one o'clock, and as the game didn't begin until two, we had a perfectly lovely time watching the people [55] gather. Cousin Tracy said there were about forty thousand. The cheering section was just a solid mass of college men, with a band at the bottom, and the most elastic lot of cheer leaders in white sweaters you ever saw. This is the way they do it."

Blue Bonnet dug her elbows into her knees, supported her face in her hands and yelled:

"'Har´-vard! Har´-vard! Har´-vard!'

"And Yale would yell out like the snapping of a whip:

"'Yale! Yale! Yale!'

"But the most exciting moment was when the Yale men came trotting out on the field in white blankets and blue legs."

"In blue legs!" exclaimed Sarah Blake in surprise.

"Well, that was the impression. A few minutes later the Harvard team came trotting on. They had black sweaters and red legs. They peeled off the black sweaters though, showing crimson underneath. Then the game began. I can see them yet."

Blue Bonnet closed her eyes and her lips curled in a smile.

"Then what? Go on!" said Debby.

"Then they played. And how they played, Kitty! And when it was over and Harvard had won. Did you hear me?—*Harvard won*—twenty to nothing, and for the first time in years, it was as if—well, as if pandemonium were let loose." [56]

The high tension of the We Are Sevens relaxed for a brief second.

"And then," Blue Bonnet went on, "then, the funniest thing happened. The students jumped down from their seats and performed a serpentine dance the entire length of the field. When they got to the goal posts they threw their derbies over. It was too funny to see the black hats flying thick and fast." Blue Bonnet laughed merrily.

"A man passed us afterward with the most pathetic-looking thing on his head; it hardly resembled a hat, it was so crushed and battered; but he was explaining to a friend that it would do to get him home. He looked so silly; but he didn't seem to care a speck. Why, they all lost their heads completely. Even Cousin Tracy—you know how terribly dignified he is—got so excited that he began singing

"'Fair Harvard, thy sons to thy jubilee throng,'

"at the top of his voice. Everybody went perfectly crazy."

"Then what happened?"

"Much, Amanda. We went up on top of the Stadium. It has a promenade all round it, on top; the view is beautiful—the Charles River, and Cambridge across it, and thousands and thousands of automobiles, and the crowd moving in a solid mass—the [57] people still cheering and laughing—oh, it was great! I felt as if I wanted to stay on forever!"

"It must have been heavenly," Kitty murmured. "Did the girls look pretty?"

"Pretty? Well, they certainly did. I was just going to tell you about that. The Yale girls all wore big bunches of violets—a Yale emblem. The Harvard girls wore dark red chrysanthemums. I had some, and a pennant, which I waved madly. There were more pretty gowns than you ever saw at one time in all your life. Great splashes of color all through the crowd; and the furs—that reminds me: all of a sudden I realized that my fur was gone. The white fox that Uncle Cliff gave me last Christmas. You can imagine the sinking sensation of my heart."

"Oh, dear, you lost it?" Sarah murmured.

"Yes, but I found it. It had slipped off my back and dropped behind the seat. You can believe I held on to it mighty tight after that."

Blue Bonnet sighed deeply as she recalled the averted tragedy.

"Did you go home then?"

"Go home? Well, I should say not. People never go home until they have to, after a big game like that; they're too excited—they have to work it off gradually. Cousin Tracy and I went to dinner where there were loads of Harvard people dining. After [58] dinner we went to a light opera, and there—"

Again Blue Bonnet went off into peals of laughter.

"—a man came out and had the audacity to sing:

"'I am so fond of violets.'

"Imagine! Why, the Harvard men didn't let him finish the first line before they had him off the stage—"

"Mobbed him?" Sarah gasped.

"Call it what you like. I don't think they injured him, for he came back and sang Harvard songs—nothing else; sang like an angel, too."

"Oh, but you were in luck, Blue Bonnet," Kitty sighed. "I could die happy if I'd had your chance."

"It does make you feel that way, Kitty. I can see myself telling my grandchildren about that game. It's almost like an inheritance, something you can pass along. I've cut out all the notices from the papers and kept the literature they passed around. Now, I think I've told you every blessed thing. Would you all like to come up-stairs and see my new clothes?"

There was an immediate rush for Blue Bonnet's room.

Miss Clyde wondered an hour later, when she rapped at the door and glanced in, if [59] the place would ever again take on its natural shape and order. Bureau drawers yawned; furniture was pulled about; the window-seat held a mass of underwear, shoes and dresses; but the faces of the We Are Sevens reflected pride and approval.

"Aunt Lucinda," Blue Bonnet called, "Sarah says she will come over Saturday and help sew the markers on my clothes. Isn't that lovely?"

"It is very kind of Sarah, I am sure."

"And, Aunt Lucinda, don't you think it would be nice to have a little tea, or luncheon or something, and let all the girls help?"

"It would be nice to have the girls, Blue Bonnet, but—"

Miss Clyde hesitated. She had seen samples of the We Are Sevens' sewing, and visions of Blue Bonnet's underwear after it had braved the first wash, rose before her eyes.

"But what?"

"Marking clothes is rather a particular piece of work, you know."

Blue Bonnet glanced about quickly to see if this reflection had given offence. None was visible. A relieved expression was rather more in evidence.

"I think *I* could help, perhaps, Miss Clyde," Sarah said, determined not to have her one accomplishment thrust aside so lightly.

"I am sure you could, Sarah, and thank you very much; your work is always [60] beautiful. Perhaps you would do some of the handkerchiefs."

The next two weeks seemed to take wings—they flew along so fast. The grey days had come; bleak, raw days when clouds hung over the hills, threatening snow and ice.

"Only five days now until Uncle Cliff comes," Blue Bonnet said one morning, pausing in her sewing—she was making bureau scarfs for her room at school, taking the greatest pride and interest in them.

"Five days! I can hardly wait. Grandmother, did you ever think what Uncle Cliff's been to me? Why, he's been father, mother, brother, sister! Many's the time on the ranch when I'd get lonesome he'd play tag with me, or marbles, or cut paper dolls and make me swings—anything to make me happy. Seems like I'm only just beginning to understand how much I owe him; always before I've just kind of taken everything for granted. Sometimes I can hardly wait until I'm grown up to make a nice home for him—to take care of him, and do the things—the little things men like to have done for them."

Miss Clyde turned and scrutinized Blue Bonnet's face closely.

What was this child saying? This woman-child, who only yesterday was romping through the house, indulging in childish dreams—childish sports.

"I'm beginning to feel grown up, sometimes, Grandmother. Going on seventeen is a [61]
pretty good age, isn't it? It won't be long now until I'm twenty-one, and then I suppose I'll have to take up responsibilities—learn how to run the ranch."

She sighed heavily.

"I fancy Uncle Cliff will stand back of you for some time yet, dear."

Blue Bonnet nodded confidently.

"Yes, and there's Alec. Pretty soon he'll know how to manage everything on the ranch, too. Uncle Cliff's getting awfully fond of him. Maybe when Alec is through school he'll make him manager of the whole place. Wouldn't that be fine? I think Alec will always be better out in the open. He can't stand city life, it's too cramped for him."

"It certainly would be fine for Alec."

"Yes, and for Uncle Cliff, too. He gets mighty tired of the grind—that's what he calls it sometimes. Why, his little trips East are about the only pleasure he has; and yet—I don't believe you could drive him off the Blue Bonnet Ranch. He loves everything about it, from the smallest yearling to each blade of grass. He says my father did too, and *his* father. It's a kind of a family trait."

She laughed softly.

"And you have inherited the feeling?" Grandmother asked.

"Oh, I love it," the girl answered. "Of course I love it—but I'm not crazy to winter [62]
and summer on it."

Mrs. Clyde seemed satisfied. It would be easier to transplant Uncle Cliff sometime in the future, she thought, than to sacrifice Blue Bonnet to the Texas wilderness. The bond between herself and the child was riveting so close that the thought of a possible separation often appalled her. Yet she did not wish to be selfish; Blue Bonnet's allegiance was to her uncle—there could be no doubt of that.

"By the way, Grandmother, did I tell you that the General has a new picture of Alec? It's just fine. I'll run over and get it."

She was back in the shortest possible time, excited and breathless.

"There he is," she said, thrusting the picture in her grandmother's hands. "Did you ever see anybody change so in your life? That shows what Texas air will do for people. Why, he's fat, positively fat, for him, isn't he?"

"He certainly seems to have grown stouter," Mrs. Clyde admitted.

"And those corduroys—don't they look good—and the sombrero?"

Blue Bonnet's face glowed.

"I don't think you like it," she said, after a moment, taking the picture in her own hands and regarding it jealously.

"Why, yes, I do, dear. Only it seems a bit strange to see Alec in that garb. It is [63]
cowboy style, is it not?"

"Yes, but it's cowboy dress, and cowboy life, and cowboy freedom that has given Alec health. He'd never have got it here in Woodford in a thousand years."

"That is true, Blue Bonnet. You are right. What did the General think of the picture?"

"He loves it! I reckon it looked better to him than a West Point uniform with nothing inside of it."

Mrs. Clyde smiled.

"I think the General got over that dream long ago, Blue Bonnet. He is perfectly delighted with Alec's recovery."

Blue Bonnet put the picture on the mantel-shelf, and, folding her work neatly, went to the window and looked out. She stood a moment lost in thought.

"I think I'll go for a gallop, Grandmother," she said, turning suddenly. "I've just time before dinner. I won't have many more chances."

"The clouds look heavy, dear."

"I know; that's why I want to go. I love the damp air in my face. It's so refreshing."

But out among the hills where the clouds lay the thickest and the wind blew the sharpest, the world seemed a little dreary to Blue Bonnet.

"You poor little things," she said to the sparrows hopping from fence to tree forlornly. "The prospect of a New England winter is not as alluring as it might be, is it? Why don't you try Texas? It's warm down there—and sunshiny—and— [64]

"What's the matter with me?" she said, pulling herself up in the saddle. Then she laughed.

"I know. I'm homesick because I'm going away, and it's perfectly ridiculous. Who ever heard of any one being homesick before they started? I sha'n't stand for it!

"It's a good thing Aunt Lucinda didn't hear that, Chula. She'd be horrified. What I mean is, I sha'n't let it creep in. If I do it will make me miserable, and I can't afford to be miserable with Uncle Cliff coming."

Blue Bonnet turned Chula sharply and headed toward home, forcing a little tune to her lips, a smile to her eyes, with a determination that would have done credit to a much older person.

"Why, dearie, you did not ride far, did you?" was Grandmother's cheery welcome.

"No, it was bleaker than I thought. The wind was cold, too, but it was refreshing just the same."

Mrs. Clyde eyed her lovingly.

Little tendrils from the fly-away hair strayed over her forehead and a healthy red showed through the tan of her cheeks.

Her grandmother thought of a sweet wild rose just bursting into bloom as she looked at her. There was something about Blue Bonnet that breathed the spirit of all wild things—flowers and sweeping prairies, broad expanses. [65]

"There is a letter for you, Blue Bonnet. You must have known to have hurried so."

"Why, it's from Uncle Cliff!"

Blue Bonnet tore the end off of the envelope hastily and began reading aloud:

"'I fear I cannot reach Woodford the day before Christmas as I had anticipated, Honey, because of a matter here which is delaying me, but I will arrive sometime on Christmas Day. Go right on with any plans you may have for that day, as trains are uncertain and I might get in very late. If I am not there in time to say "Merry Christmas," remember that I am saying it in my heart and wishing every happiness to the best little girl in the world. I shall answer your letter in person; we will discuss the room-mate at that time, and also the other matter which seems to lie so close to your heart.'"

"He means Carita Judson," Blue Bonnet explained. "I told him how much I wanted her to go with me to Miss North's school."

"'Remember me to your Grandmother and Miss Clyde, and tell them that I am anticipating my coming visit with pleasure. Enclosed you will find a little check for the Christmas shopping which I had hoped to enjoy with you, but since I cannot you must enjoy it for us both.'" [66]

"That's all. Isn't he a dear! Well, if he gets here on Christmas Day I sha'n't complain."

Blue Bonnet handed the little pink slip of paper which had been enclosed in the letter, to her grandmother.

"Take care of it for me, Grandmother. I don't need it any more than I do a sore thumb, as Uncle Joe used to say."

Christmas week dawned bright and clear. Real Christmas weather, Blue Bonnet thought one morning as she opened her window and looked out at the trees in the apple orchard with their burden of glistening snow.

Christmas was to be celebrated rather differently from last year. Since Uncle Cliff was not to arrive until Christmas morning, Blue Bonnet had been permitted to spend the preceding days much as she pleased, shopping, and enjoying the We Are Sevens' holidays with them.

Two days before Christmas she bounded in to her grandmother's presence in a great state of excitement.

"Grandmother!" she exclaimed, "I've got the loveliest idea! I was just over to Kitty Clark's, and the doctor is getting a Christmas tree ready for the people out at the Poor Farm. They are going to have it at four o'clock to-morrow afternoon, and he says that Kitty and I may go along and help if we want to. I asked him what he was going to give them, and he said not much, unfortunately, but a good time. He said he had hoped to be able to collect enough money this year to buy those old ladies a phonograph—you know—a Victrola—but everybody seems to feel so poor. I thought [67]

of the check Uncle Cliff sent me and I told the doctor about it. He didn't want to take it, but I said he just had to, and I ran home to get it. Where is it, Grandmother?"

"But—Blue Bonnet, you couldn't get a phonograph here in Woodford. Not the kind you would want—"

"No, of course not; but Doctor Clark said if you thought best for me to give the money he could telephone to Boston this noon, and they could get it here on the four-twenty train, without any doubt. Oh, Grandmother, please don't say no. Seems to me I can't stand it if you do. Don't you remember how old Mrs. Prior loved Alec's songs that day she was here to see us? Why, she just seemed starved—"

Mrs. Clyde rose and went to the foot of the stairs.

"Lucinda," she called, "come down a minute, will you?"

Blue Bonnet did not give her grandmother time to explain, but laid her plan before her aunt in a torrent of words. [68]

At first, Miss Clyde seemed bewildered. Then a very tender, sympathetic look passed between mother and daughter.

"I hardly think, Blue Bonnet, that your check would pay for the Victrola," Miss Clyde said. "We should not want to get anything but the best—something that would last; and records are very expensive."

Blue Bonnet looked woefully disappointed. Then she smiled delightedly.

"But, Aunt Lucinda, there's money left from what Uncle sent to buy my clothes, you said so. Let's take that. Oh, please, Aunt Lucinda."

"I think it would be a beautiful thing to do, Lucinda," Mrs. Clyde said, and Blue Bonnet flew to her grandmother and gave her a hug that nearly took her off her feet.

"You know how little those poor people have to amuse them, and, as Blue Bonnet says, Mrs. Prior seemed quite starved for music."

Miss Clyde never acted upon impulse. She thought for a few moments, then turning, went up-stairs slowly. When she came down she handed Blue Bonnet a check.

"I think this will buy the Victrola—and some records, too," she said. "I would suggest that Doctor Clark get old-fashioned music—they would like that best." [69]

Mrs. Clyde and her daughter watched Blue Bonnet as she flew up the street. When they turned from the window, there were tears in the eyes of the elder woman.

"It was a generous impulse," she said; "like one of her mother's loving deeds. I think perhaps—she knows—approves, Lucinda."

When the We Are Sevens heard of what Blue Bonnet had done, they insisted upon adding their mite to the occasion; so Doctor Clark suggested that it be turned into a We Are Sevens' party—the girls helping to give the occupants of the Farm a real Christmas. The rest of the day, therefore, was spent in the making of cakes and cookies, fudge and pinoche—enough, Doctor Clark said when he saw it, to keep him employed at the farm for weeks to come.

The Victrola came in on schedule time. Blue Bonnet and the doctor were at the train to meet it. It would have been hard to say which was the happier. The doctor's kindly face beamed as the box was loaded on to an express wagon and Blue Bonnet's joy found vent in laughter.

It was a merry procession that wended its way toward the Poor Farm a little later. Doctor Clark and Kitty leading the way in the phaeton with heavily laden baskets, old Denham and the rest of the We Are Sevens following in the Clyde carriage. [70]

It must be confessed that the Christmas tree celebration was a bit disappointing to Blue Bonnet. The old ladies—and the men, who were permitted to attend also—seemed awed into silence. Perhaps the sparkling tree, bright with candles and tarlatan bags of sweets, brought memories cruel in their poignancy; and the old-fashioned songs had rather a depressing effect than otherwise.

Doctor Clark saw the shade of disappointment cross Blue Bonnet's face, and hastened to reassure her.

"It will be a great source of happiness to them, later, when the keen edge of memory has been dulled by frequent contact with the wonderful invention," he said. "Come out sometime and see for yourself."

Blue Bonnet was rather silent as she rode home that afternoon, in spite of the We

Are Sevens' chatter.

"The world seems an awfully unequal sort of place, doesn't it?" she said to Sarah Blake. "Some people don't have enough money to make them comfortable, and others have so much they don't know how to spend it. What do you suppose is the reason?"

The question was beyond even thoughtful Sarah's ken. [71]

"I don't know," she said, with all the hopelessness of a poor minister's daughter; "but I have heard Father say that if everybody could be started out equal—begin all over again—the same ones would be on top in no time, treading on those less fortunate. It seems to be the law of things, Blue Bonnet."

"But it's not fair!" Blue Bonnet insisted vehemently. "It makes me feel wicked to have so much more than others."

"But look at the good you can do—the people you can make happy. Maybe that is why you have it."

The thought comforted Blue Bonnet.

"I *will* do good," she said, and there was conviction in her tone. "I *will*, Sarah Blake. Just you wait till I come of age. Maybe I'll have an orphan asylum all my own. You'll see!"

As Blue Bonnet entered the house on her return from the Farm, she was conscious of some sort of scurrying just inside the sitting-room. She looked about wonderingly as she hung her hat and coat on the hall rack, but could see nothing unusual. The hat, hung insecurely, fell off its peg, and she turned from the sitting-room to pick it up. The next moment a pair of strong arms enveloped her and a deep pleasant voice [72] was saying, "Merry Christmas, Blue Bonnet."

"Uncle Cliff—Uncle Cliff!" was all she could say. "How ever did you get here? Why, it isn't Christmas yet!"

"Shall I go back and wait, Honey? It is only another day."

This time her arms were about him in a grip that left no doubt as to his welcome.

"Well, I should say not! Only—you know you said—you thought it wouldn't be possible to get here to-day. If I had known I wouldn't have been away for anything. Come in to the fire this minute and tell me all about the ranch and Uncle Joe and Benita and Alec—and everything."

By the fire they had their visit out, and then Uncle Cliff turned to Grandmother.

"Do you think, Mrs. Clyde, that I might give Blue Bonnet the Christmas present I brought for her? On the ranch we scarcely ever waited beyond Christmas Eve for our gifts, did we, Honey?"

Blue Bonnet smiled broadly.

"Oh, do let him, Grandmother. There'll be plenty of things left for to-morrow."

"Your Uncle is your legal guardian, dear. I think the privilege is his without asking."

"What is the present? Where is it?" Blue Bonnet asked, her eyes shining.

"I think Grandmother took it up in your room. I suspect you might find it there." [73]

Mrs. Clyde nodded.

Blue Bonnet was out of the room and climbing the stairs in a twinkling. A second later Grandmother and Uncle Cliff heard a shout of joy, then laughter and animated conversation.

"She found it without much difficulty," Mr. Ashe said, smiling.

A moment later he was being smothered in caresses, and a voice was saying between tears and laughter:

"Oh, Uncle Cliff, if you aren't the darlingest, best uncle anybody in this world ever had!" While a slim, shy young girl with soft brown eyes looked on with interest.

There was an explanation on Uncle Cliff's part, and then Blue Bonnet took the girl's hand in her own affectionately.

"Carita," she said, "have you met the family? You remember Grandmother, of course; and this is my aunt, Miss Clyde. Aunt Lucinda, this is Carita Judson. She's come to go with me to Miss North's, and I'm the happiest girl in Massachusetts!"

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CHAPTER V

[74]

BOARDING-SCHOOL

The reception-room at Miss North's school was not elaborate. It had none of the attractiveness of Miss North's own living-room. It looked cold, business-like, and uninviting—at least so Blue Bonnet thought as she sat waiting to say her last good-bys to Uncle Cliff and Aunt Lucinda.

The parting with Grandmother had been something of a wrench. Blue Bonnet had managed to keep herself pretty well in hand, for Grandmother's sake; but to-day it was different. Everything was so strange—so forbidding. Even the presence of Carita seemed of small comfort. Carita was lovely—but, after all, she couldn't fill Grandmother's place, nor Uncle Cliff's, nor even Aunt Lucinda's.

Uncle Cliff rose from the stiff-backed chair he had been occupying for the last half hour, and took Blue Bonnet's hand. Aunt Lucinda got up, too.

A frightened, half panicky look came into Blue Bonnet's face. The feeling that she was about to be left alone with strangers for the first time in her life came over her in a great wave. She reached up and taking hold of the lapels of her uncle's coat, held him fast.

[75]

"Must you go now—right this minute, Uncle Cliff?" she said, and he could feel her trembling.

Mr. Ashe looked at his watch.

"I am afraid so, Honey. Trains don't wait, you know. I must be off to-night, sure."

Blue Bonnet turned to Aunt Lucinda and kissed her with warmth; then she walked between her uncle and aunt down the length of the long corridor to the front door. Carita also clung to Uncle Cliff. At the door they all paused.

"Now you have everything that you need, Blue Bonnet?" Aunt Lucinda inquired. "You are quite sure? You can write immediately if anything has been forgotten, remember—"

"Yes, you are to have whatever you need, Honey," Mr. Ashe interrupted.

"Yes, Aunt Lucinda, I won't forget. Yes, yes, Uncle Cliff, and you'll write often, won't you? I'll be so lonesome just at first. Good-by—good-by!" There was a droop to the last note of the second good-by—a quaver that went straight to Uncle Cliff's heart and made him turn round and take Blue Bonnet once more in his arms.

"Why, Honey!" he said, as the brown head went down on his breast, and the quick sobs shook the slender form. "Now, now! What are you crying for? Do you want to go back to Grandmother's? You only have to say so, you know."

[76]

The head shook violently on the broad shoulder that sheltered it, but no answer came.

"Do you want to go home with me—back to the ranch?"

Again the head shook—no!

Mr. Ashe unlocked the arms that had gone about his neck so lovingly, and lifting the wet face looked into it tenderly.

"Don't, Honey," he said, and there was a catch in his own voice. "Don't, please. Uncle Cliff can't bear to have you cry. He'll hear those sobs every step of the way back to Texas—and long after."

Blue Bonnet straightened up and made a brave effort to smile through her tears.

"Oh, no, you mustn't! I didn't mean to give way like that. I thought I was going to be all right—and then—all at once—it just had to come. It's homesickness. I've been fighting it for a month!"

"Remember you are responsible for Carita, too."

Mr. Ashe drew the solemn-eyed young girl who had been witnessing Blue Bonnet's little outburst into the circle.

Blue Bonnet turned quickly and put her arms round Carita.

"If Carita dares act like this, I'll exert my authority and spank her," she said, giving that young person a warm hug. "I'm to mother her in every particular. Isn't that right, Uncle Cliff?"

[77]

"You are never to forget that you are responsible for her being here, Honey. You must make her happy and set her a good example at all times."

Blue Bonnet's merry laugh brought the smiles back into Uncle Cliff's face.

"I'll try and not lead her into temptation, at any rate."

"That might be a good thing to remember, Blue Bonnet."

"And now, dear," Miss Clyde said, "perhaps you and Carita would better go up to your rooms and get your things out of your trunks. Miss North wanted them emptied as soon as possible, so that they could be taken to the trunk-room."

"All right, Aunt Lucinda. Good-by then—good-by! No, Uncle Cliff, I'm going to be good now. My love to everybody on the ranch—*everybody*, remember." She continued to wave her good-bys heroically until the corner was turned and Uncle Cliff and Miss Clyde lost to view.

"Now for the unpacking, Carita. Come along. I'll help you first. That's a motherly spirit, I'm sure."

"Yes, begin by spoiling me—that's right!"

Blue Bonnet gave the hand in hers a little squeeze.

"A little spoiling won't hurt you a bit. I doubt if a great deal would. There are some [78] people you can't spoil."

"I wouldn't advise you to try too hard," Carita laughed.

They stopped first at Blue Bonnet's room, which was two floors below Carita's.

"I don't like your being so far away from me, at all," Blue Bonnet said, as she turned on the light and laid her coat and hat on the bed. "That's a silly rule having the younger girls all together on one floor. They need the older girls to keep them straight."

"I fancy Fraulein can do that," Carita said resignedly, remembering the eagle-faced teacher in charge of the hall. "Mary Boyd says she's a pill!"

"A—what?"

"A pill! I asked Mary what that meant, and she said a *dose*. You know—something you have to take and don't like."

Blue Bonnet's eyes roamed ceiling-ward and a queer expression curled her lips.

"You must introduce Mary to Aunt Lucinda, Carita. It would, perhaps, make her appreciate my vocabulary."

"I think I'm going to like her just the same."

"Aunt Lucinda?"

"Oh, no! I mean—that is—I like *her*, of course. I meant Mary Boyd, my room-mate. She's awfully jolly."

Carita had arrived at the school in the afternoon and had been shown to her room [79] immediately, while Blue Bonnet finished some shopping with Uncle Cliff and Aunt Lucinda.

"I think I'd like to see Mary Boyd. Let's go up to your room now and get your things out of the trunk."

"Yes, we will, only my things are out. Mary helped me this afternoon while you were away. I'm all settled."

Nevertheless Blue Bonnet led the way to the floor above.

Mary Boyd opened the door herself. She was just coming out of the room, pitcher in hand, on the way to the bathroom for some cold water. She had on a gay little kimono and her hair was neatly brushed and braided for the night.

"Back again?" she said to Carita, with a smile.

"Yes, and this is my friend, Blue Bonnet Ashe."

"How do you do?" Mary said, pausing a moment. "First year here, too?"

"Yes, my first year."

Mary waved her hand toward the room.

"Make yourselves at home," she said hospitably. "Everything is in a muss, yet. I only got in myself this morning. I'll be back in a minute."

"Don't you think she's nice?" Carita asked with enthusiasm, as soon as the door closed. [80]

"She seems to be. You're in luck, Carita. I wish you could see *my* cross!"

"We Freshies haven't any of the lugs you grown-ups sport," Mary said, entering the room with her pitcher of water. "There's only one bathroom on this floor for six girls. Fancy! Getting a bath is a regular Saturday night affair."

"This is your first year here, too, then," Blue Bonnet said with some surprise.

"No—second."

"And you are a Freshman?"

"Well, you see, I was out last year part of the time—typhoid fever—and—oh, I'm no high-brow, anyway! Mother thought I'd best take the year over again. She says I've plenty of time. I'm just fifteen."

She laughed good-naturedly, showing a set of teeth dazzling in their perfection and whiteness.

"I'm working hard this year, though. You see, I want a room with a bath, and you have to be a Sophomore to get it."

"I see. An incentive, isn't it?"

"This is a fairly good room, don't you think? It's the best on the floor. Carita's lucky—that is, as far as the room goes. My room-mate was called home three weeks before Christmas. Her mother died. Poor little Nell!"

"I'm sorry for her," Carita said sympathetically, "but if she hadn't gone I couldn't have entered the school this year, it was so crowded." [81]

Somewhere down the length of the hall a gong sounded.

"What's that for?" Blue Bonnet asked.

"Bed. In a half hour another will ring and every light on this floor will go off instantly."

Blue Bonnet looked at her watch.

"You mean to say you have to be in bed at half-past nine o'clock?"

Mary nodded.

"Well, I reckon I'd better run. I haven't unpacked yet."

"Oh, they aren't so awfully particular the first day. School doesn't really begin until to-morrow."

Blue Bonnet started to say good night to Carita. As she bent to kiss her she paused.

"Why don't you come down and stay with me to-night?" she said. "My room-mate isn't back yet. I shouldn't be half so lonesome."

"All right—if—do you think they'd mind?"

Carita addressed Mary.

Mary took a look down the hall.

"Skip along," she said generously. "All's serene on the Potomac. You'd better hurry though, while the coast's clear."

And hurry they did.

Blue Bonnet turned out the light in her room, which she had left burning, and threw up the window blinds, letting in a stream of silver light. [82]

"I reckon we can undress by that," she said, "and I can get up an hour earlier in the morning and unpack."

But the rising-bell had been sounding some seconds when Blue Bonnet opened her eyes to the light the next morning. She sprang out of bed with a bound, and dragged forth Carita, who still clung to her slumbers.

"Get up, Carita," she said. "That's some kind of a bell ringing for something or other—goodness knows what! Maybe it's breakfast. I don't know."

A look at her watch reassured her. Seven o'clock. Breakfast was at seven-thirty—she remembered hearing that somewhere.

"Oh, Blue Bonnet, I could have slept twenty minutes yet," Carita wailed sleepily. "I can dress for a party in ten minutes. Yes, I can, honestly!"

"Maybe—in Texas! You're in Boston now. Boston means a cold bath with a good rub, and getting into your clothes for the day—all of which takes time."

At seven-thirty they were dressed, waiting for the breakfast-bell to ring.

[83] The dining-room at Miss North's was not large, but it was cheerful and inviting. There were some five or six tables and at the head of each sat a teacher.

Miss North met Blue Bonnet and Carita at the door and took them to her own table. When the meal was over she assigned them to their regular places, and again Blue Bonnet found to her dismay that she and Carita were separated.

As they left the dining-room Mary Boyd came along and took Carita off peremptorily.

"I'll take care of her," Mary announced, with a wave and a smile. "She'll be in a lot of my classes." They passed on, arm in arm.

Blue Bonnet was feeling a bit forlorn and neglected when a voice, soft and sweet, said at her elbow:

"Miss North has asked me to show you about this morning."

Blue Bonnet turned and looked into the face of the Southern girl she had admired the first day she visited the school.

"Perhaps you don't remember me, but we were introduced. My name is Annabel Jackson."

"Oh, I remember you—yes, indeed; and I'm Blue Bonnet Ashe."

"We have prayers the first thing," Annabel said, leading the way to the chapel. "The gong will ring in five minutes. I reckon we won't be too early if we go now."

[84] "Dear me, do you have a gong to breathe by?" Blue Bonnet asked laughingly. "Seems to me one rings every five minutes."

"Not quite; but that little electric hammer runs the school—with Miss North behind it."

Miss North's school was supposed to be non-sectarian, so far as religious government went; but in expression it was very much Episcopalian.

Blue Bonnet listened to the prayers read in a pleasant monotone by one of the teachers, taking part in the responses.

Prayers over, Annabel led the way up-stairs.

"We have a half hour to put our rooms in order," she said, leaving Blue Bonnet at her own door. "I'll call for you in a little while. I'm just down the hall—number fifteen—if you get through first, stop for me."

"I haven't unpacked yet. I think, if I have a minute, I had better take my gowns out of the trunk," Blue Bonnet answered.

"You won't have much time now. Wait until this afternoon. We have from four to five o'clock free. I'll help you then."

The rest of the morning was spent in the classroom. By noon Blue Bonnet had met a number of the girls—including two of Annabel's most intimate friends: Sue Hemphill, from somewhere in the Middle West, and Ruth Biddle, a Pennsylvania girl. Ruth was Annabel's room-mate; a plain-looking girl, but decidedly aristocratic—blue [85] blood written in every line of her delicate features and rather aloof bearing.

Sue Hemphill was the nicer, Blue Bonnet thought after a few moments' conversation. She was much friendlier, and much prettier; with soft grey eyes that twinkled mischievously, and a saucy little nose that inclined upward, giving her face a piquant, merry expression, quite irresistible.

"Miss Ashe is a new girl—a Junior," Annabel explained to her friends. "She's on our floor—in number ten, with Joy Cross."

Sue Hemphill crumpled up like a withered rose-leaf and leaned against a blackboard for support.

"Oh, you poor thing! You must have been born for trouble—."

"Now, Sue, don't!" Annabel protested. "Just because you had her last year and didn't like her—"

"Do you? Does Ruth? Does anybody?" Sue asked.

"Miss North does," Ruth replied; "and Mrs. Goodwin and Mrs. White and Madame de Cartier and Professor Howe—"

"The entire Faculty, to say nothing of the janitor and maids," Sue interrupted.

"You mean—that she's a sort of teacher's pet?" Blue Bonnet, asked slowly.

"Well—'pet' would be going some, for Joy," Annabel laughed. "But you're warm—very warm!" [86]

"Or you will be, before many days. You'll be a regular barometer, going up—going up—going up—"

Annabel put her hand over Sue's mouth.

"Stop, Sue! Don't mind her, Miss Ashe. She's an awful tease. Joy isn't anything worse than a stick—a bore. If you have a nice disposition you'll get on splendidly—Sue hasn't!"

"Oh, thanks," Sue said, bowing profoundly. "It is because of my long association with you, then;" and with this good-natured banter she was off to lunch.

At two-thirty in the afternoon there was a general exodus from the classrooms, the recitations for the day being over. It had been rather a strenuous period for Blue Bonnet—the continuous round from seven o'clock in the morning. She was a little weary as she left the English class, and filed out with the other girls who stopped to chat for a minute as they put away their books.

Down the hall came Mary Boyd with Carita still in her train. Blue Bonnet stopped them and inquired how Carita had got on during the day.

Carita was all enthusiasm.

"Oh, just fine, Blue Bonnet, thank you. Mary has been such an angel. We are in the same Algebra class—and French, too. Isn't that nice? We can get our lessons together." [87]

Annabel Jackson came out of a classroom and joined the group.

"Hello, Sozie," she said to Mary, pinching her cheek affectionately.

Mary colored with the pleasure that comes from being noticed by one of the older and evidently popular girls in the school.

"Hello, Annabel," she answered. "This is my new room-mate—Carita Judson, from Texas."

Annabel acknowledged the introduction indifferently. Carita was too young to be particularly interesting to her. Annabel was eighteen, and considered herself quite a young lady.

Blue Bonnet and Annabel drifted on toward their rooms.

"What sort of a girl is Mary Boyd?" Blue Bonnet asked. "She's rooming with a little friend of mine. Carita and I come from near the same place in Texas."

"Mary? Oh, Mary is a dear. A little spoiled, I reckon. She's an only child, I believe, and has a perfectly doting father. She's always just as you see her—smiling or laughing. Did you ever see such teeth in your life? The girls call her 'Sozie.' You know that picture, don't you? Sozodont! Girl all smiles and teeth."

"What do we do now?" Blue Bonnet asked, pausing at her own door. [88]

"Now we exercise—walk. Generally we go over to the Fenway. In the spring and fall we play tennis."

"Do we all go? I mean all the girls together?"

"Yes, all of us—à la chain gang. The animals march out two by two."

"Alone?"

"Hardly. It's like the Charge of the Light Brigade—teacher to the right of us—teacher to the left of us—teacher in front of us—"

"Really?"

"No, not really. Only to the back and front of us—usually. You'll have fifteen minutes to get into a walking suit if you care to; if you don't, just put on a big coat. It's raw out to-day."

Blue Bonnet preferred to freshen up. She brushed the tumbled hair, bathed her face in cold water, and put on a very smart-looking little grey suit with a Norfolk jacket and tam-o'-shanter to match.

She thought of Carita as she came out of her room, and started up-stairs after her. A teacher stopped her.

"The young ladies meet for their walk in the reception-room down-stairs," she said. "There is no visiting back and forth in the rooms except between four and five o'clock."

Blue Bonnet found the girls, Carita among the rest. [89]

"We will walk together, Carita," she said.

"All right, I have so much to tell you, Blue Bonnet."

A teacher overheard the remark.

"The younger girls usually walk together," she said, turning to Blue Bonnet. "Have you no partner?"

"No. I only entered yesterday."

Mrs. White cast her eye over the waiting group. Each girl seemed supplied with a companion.

"So many of the girls are not back yet. Perhaps you would walk with me," she said.

"Thank you," Blue Bonnet answered politely.

They took their places at the rear of the line, and the brisk walk began. During that brief half hour, Blue Bonnet laid the foundation of a friendship that was to prove invaluable to her throughout her school year.

Mrs. Alicia White was a vocal teacher—*the* vocal teacher of the school it might be said, for there were several. She was in charge of the department and most efficient.

There was just enough mystery surrounding Mrs. White to make her an object of interest to the girls, and she had her full share of popularity among them. An army officer's widow, she had been thrown upon her own resources early in life, and having had exceptional musical advantages, as well as a good voice, had taken up [90] teaching as a means of earning a livelihood.

She was a slight, fair woman, rather plain of features, but her face had a way of lighting into something closely akin to beauty when she became animated, and there was charm in her manner.

It had leaked out—probably without the slightest foundation—that Mrs. White had been deserted by her army husband, and around this bare incident all sorts of fantastic stories had been woven. At the hands of the girls the poor man suffered all kinds of indignities. Sometimes he was lured from the path of duty by a fascinating woman—at others drink, or his terrible temper caused the separation; but whatever his sins, they all redounded to the glory of Mrs. White, and deluged her with sympathy.

To the gossip of the school Mrs. White was apparently oblivious—if not oblivious, impervious. Her interest in the girls was rather indifferent, except for a chosen few, upon whom she bestowed a good deal of attention. Annabel Jackson was one of her special favorites.

Blue Bonnet found before the walk ended that Mrs. White had charge of the floor upon which she roomed, and a number of other things incident to school life and discipline.

Blue Bonnet had barely laid aside her things after returning from the walk when a [91] knock at the door startled her. She opened it, admitting Annabel, Ruth, and Sue Hemphill.

"We came over to help you unpack," Annabel announced. "Three of us can do it quickly, and then perhaps you will come over to my room for a cup of tea. We have a whole hour to ourselves now."

Blue Bonnet was grateful, but a little embarrassed. She didn't especially care to open her trunk and bare its contents to utter strangers; but Sue was already tugging at the straps, and Ruth opening bureau drawers preparatory to putting things away.

Blue Bonnet took the key from her purse and unlocked the trunk.

As the gowns and underwear, hats and shoes, tumbled forth, there were exclamations of delight and approval.

"Oh, what a love of a hat! Do get out of the way, Ruth, so I can try it on;" this from Annabel.

"And, oh, what a sweet organdy! Where did you get that white wool Peter Thompson? I've searched the town for one."

Blue Bonnet turned from unwrapping something very dear to her to answer Sue.

Annabel leaned over her shoulder, watching with interest the small package in her

hands.

"What is it?" she asked. [92]

Blue Bonnet took off the last wrapping and disclosed to view a small miniature.

The girls crowded round her.

"Oh, how lovely!" they exclaimed in a breath. "Who is it?"

Blue Bonnet hesitated a brief second, gazing lovingly at the picture.

"My mother," she answered softly.

"Isn't she beautiful! Is she in Texas?" Ruth inquired.

"No. She's—dead."

There was a hush for a moment.

"Where's your father—have you one of him?" It was Annabel this time.

Blue Bonnet made another dive in the trunk and brought forth a package. From it she drew a photograph which she handed to Annabel.

"Is he in Texas—on the ranch you were telling us about?"

"No. He's dead—too."

There was a longer silence this time, and then it was Sue who put her arm through Blue Bonnet's shyly.

"I know what it means," she said. "I have lost my mother, too. I still have my father, though, thank Heaven, and Billy. You must know Billy—he's my brother at Harvard—the best ever—why—"

Annabel lifted her hands in protest. [93]

"Now, Sue's going to take the pulpit," she said, "and we'll get a discourse on Billy! Billy the great! Billy the supreme—Billy—"

Ruth gave Annabel a push.

"You're jealous," she said, "because you haven't got such a brother yourself. Billy's all right. He's everything Sue says he is."

In the midst of the banter that followed, the door opened, and Joy Cross entered.

She put her suitcase down by the bed, and nodded to the girls indifferently. They nodded back and went on with the inspection of Blue Bonnet's wardrobe.

Blue Bonnet put the miniature carefully away in the bureau drawer, and, with that instinct of politeness which is inborn, went over to Joy and extended her hand.

Joy took it listlessly. The girls scarcely turned round.

When the clothes had all been put away, Annabel renewed her invitation to tea. She did not include Joy, and Blue Bonnet felt rather indignant. It seemed so rude.

"You girls certainly have it in for my room-mate," she said, as she closed the door, and a wave of sympathy went back to Joy.

Ruth Biddle shrugged her shoulders and made a grimace.

"She isn't in our crowd," she said, as if that excluded her from the right to exist—almost. [94]

Annabel's room was a good deal like Annabel. It inclined to frills. It was furnished charmingly in cretonnes—pink, with roses and trailing vines. Pennants from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Cornell, and many other colleges adorned the walls. Everything in view—and there was much—expressed Annabel. Ruth's personality—if she had any—was entirely missing.

Annabel shook up a cushion and tucked it behind Blue Bonnet comfortably. She had a hospitable manner that fitted pleasantly with the cosiness of the room. Blue Bonnet looked about admiringly.

"I didn't know they allowed you to have so much in your room," she said, surprised.

"They don't—ordinarily. I've been here a long time, and things accumulate. Anyway, I told Miss North that if I couldn't have things the way I wanted them this year, I'd go somewhere else. They'll do a good deal to keep you after they once get you. You'll soon find that out."

"Oh, I don't know," Ruth said from her end of the room, where she was operating a chafing dish, "they send you away fast enough if you don't keep the rules. You

remember that Fanny Price, last year."

"Oh, well,—*that*, of course. Fanny Price hadn't any business here in the first place." [95] Annabel began to arrange the tea cups.

"Will you have lemon in your tea?" she asked. "Do you mind if we call you Blue Bonnet? It's something of a mouthful, but I like it."

"Please do. I should love it. I take lemon, thank you."

"It's a good thing you do. Cream is an unknown quantity in this room. We did have some Eagle Brand, but Ruth spread the last of it on her crackers yesterday."

"On crackers?"

"Yes. Ever try it?"

Blue Bonnet made a face.

"Oh, it's not so bad. You'll come to it—some day when you're starving."

"Starving? Don't you get enough to eat here?"

"Yes—but it's not the Copley Plaza—exactly. We manage to get fat, anyway. That reminds me—where's Wee? Go get her, Sue, and ask her to bring over some Nabiscos, if she happens to have any handy. Wee's a regular life-saving station, usually."

Sue dashed out of the room and came back in a minute with a very large, stout girl, whom she introduced as her room-mate, Deborah Watts—better known as "Wee."

Good nature, affability—all the essentials of comradeship—fairly oozed from Deborah Watts. She took Blue Bonnet's hand in a grip that hurt, but Blue Bonnet felt [96] its sincerity and squeezed back.

A bright girl in the school had once compared Deborah Watts to a family horse. Not a pretty comparison, but apt, when one knew Deborah.

The girl said that Deborah was safe, gentle, and reliable. Safe enough to be trusted with old people; gentle enough for children; and that she could, at times, get up enough ginger to give the young people a fair run. The comparison went even farther. The girl declared that sometimes—oh, very occasionally, under pressure and high living—Deborah could kick up her heels and light out with the best, and that when she did, people held up their hands in horror and said: "What ever in the world has got into Deborah Watts!"

Her room-mate and friends had beheld her in this enviable state a number of times, and had pronounced her—in boarding-school vernacular—a perfect circus.

"Can you cook things in your room?" Blue Bonnet inquired of Ruth, gazing at the chafing dish with the water steaming in it.

"You can have a chafing dish, if that's what you mean; that is, you can if you happen to be a Senior. Annabel and I graduate in June. Our menu is limited, however. We seldom roast fowl, or boil coffee"—she winked at Sue—"or try entrées, except—"

All three girls went off into peals of laughter. All but Wee Watts, who remained as [97] sober as a judge.

"Do we, Wee?"

"Wee do!" giggled Annabel.

No one offered to explain the joke and Blue Bonnet looked mystified.

"First year?" Deborah inquired of Blue Bonnet.

"First," Blue Bonnet said. "I have answered that question fifty times to-day. I believe I'll have a placard printed and hang it round my neck."

"It might save breath during the next few days," Sue remarked. "Everybody you meet will ask you that. It sort of breaks the ice."

Blue Bonnet put down her tea cup and rose.

"It was awfully good of you girls to be so nice to me to-day. I appreciate it ever so much. I think I must go now. Carita will be looking for me. Come and see me, won't you? I'm in number ten"—she nodded toward Deborah Watts. "Not being a Senior I can't make you tea, but I might manage to have some crackers and Eagle milk. Good-by."

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CHAPTER VI

[98]

NEW FRIENDS

Blue Bonnet found Carita up in her room, the centre of an admiring group. Refreshments, here, as in the corridor below, seemed to be in order.

Mary rose from a shoe-box which she was occupying, and offered it to Blue Bonnet. Several other girls rose also and offered their chairs.

Blue Bonnet took the shoe-box and acknowledged the introductions. The girls were all about Carita's own age—between fifteen and sixteen.

Carita reached over and touched the girl nearest her.

"Here's a girl as far away from home as we are, Blue Bonnet. She's from California —Los Angeles."

Blue Bonnet turned her attention for a moment to the girl—Isabel Brooks.

Isabel's eyes were red and swollen. She dropped her head as Blue Bonnet looked at her, and her breast heaved.

"Now, now!" Mary Boyd said, springing up from the bed on which she had perched. "Don't you cry any more. You'll be sick if you do, and they'll put you in the Infirmary. [99] Here, eat some more candy."

Isabel refused the candy and continued her sobbing. One or two others around the room, moved by Isabel's weeping, commenced to cry also.

Mary seemed helpless.

"Oh, dear," she said, and her own lip began to quiver, "they always do it—these new girls! They get us every last one started."

Blue Bonnet looked at Carita. Tears were in her eyes, and, even as Blue Bonnet looked, her head went down in her hands and she, too, began to sob.

Blue Bonnet rose to the occasion instantly. It was like a call to arms—the sight of those lonely children.

She looked at her watch.

"We have twenty minutes yet, to visit. Let's play a game. I know a fine one. Come on, everybody."

There was not the slightest response.

Mary Boyd took hold of Isabel and dragged her to her feet. Then she roused the others.

"Come on," she said. "You've got to play, whether you want to or not. How do you do it—Miss—"

"Call me Blue Bonnet."

The girls stood up listlessly—a sorry looking group.

"You can sit down," Blue Bonnet announced. "You don't have to stand—just keep [100] your eyes on me. You are each of you a musical instrument."

She went round and whispered something in the ear of each girl.

"Now, I'm the drum. I stand here and beat. Rub-a-dub-dub! Rub-a-dub-dub—like that. Everybody must try to represent her instrument. Carita, you're a fiddle. Pretend to handle a bow. Isabel, you're a piano. Run your hands up and down as if you were playing a scale.

"Watch me. I beat the drum. When I stop beating and imitate one of your instruments—suppose it is the fiddle—then you stop playing the fiddle, Carita, and begin to beat the drum. If you don't stop instantly, and begin to beat the drum before I call out fiddle, you have to stand up here and take my place. See?"

Before five minutes had passed there was such hilarity in the room that it took several knocks at the door to bring a response.

A thin angular form stood in the doorway, and a stern voice said:

"Young ladies, I haf you to report to Miss North if not this noise stop instantly. *Instantly.* You understand? I speak not again!"

"Oh, isn't she too exasperating," remarked Peggy Austin, one of the older girls, as

Mary closed the door—a little quicker than might have been thought compatible with good manners. [101]

"I perfectly abominate her," Mary answered. "I am going to ask Miss North if Fraulein can't be removed from this hall. I don't think it's one bit fair for us to have her all the time. She's just too interfering."

"It wouldn't do a particle of good to ask, Sozie," Peggy said. "Miss North caters to Fraulein, herself. She says she is the finest German teacher she ever saw. She imported her from Berlin at great expense and personal sacrifice to the Empire. The nation's been in mourning ever since she left!"

Mary giggled, and the new girls looked interested. Peggy's solemn face carried conviction.

"Goodness me," Carita exclaimed, "couldn't the Germans afford to keep her?"

Peggy shook her head.

"No," she declared, pretending to weep in her handkerchief, "it makes me cry to think of their disappointment—the poor things!"

A gong sounded, but the girls lingered.

"I want to see you after dinner, Carita," Blue Bonnet said as she left the room.

"We go down to the gymnasium and dance a while, after dinner," Mary called out.

"All right. I engage the first three dances then, Carita. Don't forget."

Blue Bonnet went down to her room thoughtfully; a vision of those homesick children before her eyes. She wondered what people meant by sending such infants away from home. Why, there was one who seemed scarcely old enough to comb her own hair. All of a sudden she felt old—grown up; responsibility weighed on her—the responsibility of Carita. [102]

On her own hall she passed Mrs. White.

"What a serious face," the teacher said. "I hope it is not homesickness."

Blue Bonnet smiled brightly.

"No, I think I've fought that all out."

"That's good! Youth is not the time for tears."

"But I have just come from a regular downpour."

"It sounded like a downfall. I was in Madame de Cartier's room, just underneath. We thought the ceiling was coming through."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I am afraid it was my fault. Those children were so horribly homesick that I suggested a game."

"That was very thoughtful, I am sure. Some of those young girls really suffer terribly. Sometimes it makes them quite ill."

Blue Bonnet wondered why Fraulein could not have been so reasonable. *She* certainly was disagreeable. She wished Carita might be under Mrs. White's wing. What a dear Mrs. White was, anyway.

Blue Bonnet opened her bedroom door, still lost in thought. The early winter twilight filled the room, almost obscuring her room-mate who sat near a window straining her eyes over a book. [103]

Blue Bonnet snapped on the light.

"You'll ruin your eyes," she said pleasantly. "That's what my aunt always says to me when I read in the twilight."

Joy forced a half smile and continued reading.

"I suppose we get dressed for dinner now?" Blue Bonnet, ventured, beginning to unfasten her waist.

"Yes."

"Is dinner just at six?"

"Yes."

"What do we do in the meantime?"

"Study—or practise; or read, if you wish."

Blue Bonnet went into the bathroom and made as much of her toilet as was

possible. When she came out, Joy was still poring over her book.

"That must be a hard lesson you are getting," Blue Bonnet remarked.

"It's a book I'm reading."

"Oh!"

There was an interval of silence during which Blue Bonnet put the finishing touches to her toilet. When she was quite dressed she stood hesitatingly by one of the windows, gazing out over the brightly lighted city. Suddenly she turned and flew down the hall, knocking softly at number fifteen. [104]

The door opened slightly and Annabel peered out.

"May I come in—please? I'm threatened with a terrible attack of—the blues, I reckon."

Annabel pulled her in quickly.

"Surely," she said, "only hurry. This isn't strictly according to Hoyle."

"You mean it's against the rules?"

Annabel nodded, her mouth full of pins.

"Then I'd better go."

"Nonsense, stay where you are! I was dying for some one to hook me up. Ruth's in the tub—been there an hour. If you hear any one coming, step in the closet."

"I shouldn't have come only I knew I was going to be homesick, and—"

"And Joy wasn't a very good antidote, was she?"

"Hardly. She won't talk."

Annabel laughed.

"You'll have to do what Sue did last year. That awful silence got on her nerves. Not that she was so anxious to hear Joy talk, but she got tired of putting forth all the effort. Well, she got somebody to make out a list of subjects on a typewriter. She gave it to Joy. 'Now,' she said, 'for goodness sake, *talk*. Choose, in any order you like, but *talk*!'" [105]

Blue Bonnet laughed merrily.

"Ssh!" Annabel warned. "You mustn't do anything more than breathe during this hour."

Blue Bonnet got up again.

Annabel pushed her back in the chair.

"Sit still," she said.

"What would they do if they found me?"

"That depends upon who found you. If it were the German lady above—"

"Fraulein?"

"Yes."

"Has she anything to do with this floor?"

"There isn't anything in the school that she hasn't something to do with."

"And if it were Mrs. White?"

"Mrs. White would do her duty. She would send you to your room—and you'd go—a heap quicker than you would for Fraulein."

"I think I'll go anyway. Oh, there's a knock!"

Annabel opened the door a crack.

"May I come in, Annabel?"

It was Mrs. White's voice, and Annabel was obliged to open the door.

Mrs. White looked at Blue Bonnet.

"I think I'll have to escort Miss Ashe to her room and show her the rules," she said, smiling.

"I'm ready. I was just going."

"Very well. We'll 'kill two birds with one stone.' I was going to your room to talk [106]

over your music."

Arm in arm they went down the corridor.

Mrs. White turned Blue Bonnet round after they had entered the room, and drew her attention to a white placard on the wall near the door.

"There," she said, "you will find all the rules."

She ran her finger along the printed column until she came to the one she wanted. Then she read aloud:

"'Visiting among students is forbidden except between the hours of four and five in the afternoon, and two and six on Saturdays.'

"Didn't you see these rules, Miss Ashe?"

"Oh, yes, I saw them," Blue Bonnet answered with unconcern that amazed Mrs. White. "I didn't read them. I hate rules!"

"But I am afraid you will have to read these—and obey them!"

"I suppose so."

Blue Bonnet sighed. "You see," she explained, "I've been brought up rather differently from most girls—that is, up to a year and a half ago. I lived on a big ranch in Texas with my uncle. Everything there was as free as the air and water. We didn't have any restrictions. Boston seems to be made up of 'em."

"We do have a good many conventions, that's true—especially here. It would be [107] chaos without them. You can see that, can't you?"

"Oh, yes."

"And you will try to keep the rules?"

"Of course I'll try. I shouldn't like to displease *you*."

The compliment was so naïvely given, and so evidently sincere, that Mrs. White looked pleased.

"I appreciate that very much," she said, "but you must keep on equally good terms with your *own* conscience—have its approval, always."

The building in which Miss North conducted her school for girls had originally been a private mansion. It was interesting and attractive, with many odd nooks and mysterious passages that lent charm and romance to its young occupants. In recent years property adjoining had been added for recitation and school purposes; two houses welded into one.

The entire basement of the annex had been remodeled into a well-equipped gymnasium, and at the rear of the lot a swimming pool had been erected.

It was the custom of the girls to repair to the gymnasium after dinner for a half hour's frolic. Usually they danced.

Blue Bonnet and Carita followed the other girls down-stairs and through the [108] narrow passage that connected the two buildings, a passage known as the subway—or sub.

"Mercy, isn't this spooky?" Carita said, taking a better hold on Blue Bonnet's arm.

"Oh, this isn't anything? Wait a minute."

Mary Boyd drew the girls over to a door at one side of the gymnasium and flung it wide.

"That's a part of the furnace room," she said. "You can go through here and follow another little dark hall—oh, much worse than this—and it takes you to the kitchen and pantries. We went down one night last year—"

"One night?"

Carita shuddered.

"Yes, it was loads of fun. There were five or six of us. We ate enough apple sauce and fresh bread to kill us."

At the piano in the gymnasium a girl was playing a two-step.

"Let's sit here and talk," Blue Bonnet said to Carita, drawing her to a secluded corner. "I feel as if I had hardly seen you."

Sue Hemphill passed, and, seeing Blue Bonnet, dropped into a seat beside her.

"Well," she said, "how do you girls like it by this time?"

"The school, you mean?" Blue Bonnet asked.

"Yes."

"It's been rather strenuous to-day. I'm beginning to look forward to bedtime. I'm tired." [109]

"It is tiresome—getting adjusted."

"What do we do after this half hour? It's a regular merry-go-round, isn't it? A continuous performance."

Sue laughed.

"We study the next hour. Sometimes—twice a week—we have a short lecture on general culture. You'll be taught how to enter a room properly, and how to leave it—"

"I know that already."

"Of course, but it has to be impressed."

"Then what?"

"Then we go to our rooms. Sometimes we settle down, and sometimes we don't. It depends. Once in a while we have a feast. We'll invite you next time."

Blue Bonnet looked interested.

"Where do you have it?"

"Oh, in our rooms sometimes—but it's risky. The sky parlor is the best place. That's up in the attic—under the eaves. It's fine! There's no teacher to bother. It's a little cold just now. They don't heat it, but you can put on your bath-robe and be comfy. We're waiting now for Wee Watts to get her clean clothes back from home. You see, she only lives an hour or two out of the city, and she sends her things home to be washed. When they come back, her mother always fills up the suitcase with cakes [110] and cookies and jam—well, not jam, any more. The last jar she sent, broke, and spilled all over a new silk waist she was sending Wee for a party. It was quite tragic."

"The loss of the jam—or the waist?"

"Both. It was hard on Wee, losing the waist. You see, she's so stout she can't borrow much from the rest of us."

Annabel came up at that moment and asked Sue to dance, so Carita and Blue Bonnet visited until the gong sounded.

On the way up to the study hall, Miss North stopped Blue Bonnet.

"Will you come to my office a moment after study hour?" she said. "I want to go over your program with you. The room is just beyond the reception hall on the first floor."

Blue Bonnet found Miss North waiting when she entered the room an hour later.

"You found your classes this morning, all right?" she began.

"Yes, thank you, Miss North."

"And decided upon your course?"

"Yes. Professor Howe thought I could enter the Junior class without any trouble. I'm taking college preparatory. I don't know yet whether I'll go to college or not, but [111] my aunt wanted me to prepare."

There was a few moments' conversation relative to the work, and Miss North rose.

"Good night," she said, holding out her hand. "I hope you are going to be happy with us. You found the girls pleasant? Annabel Jackson is about your age."

"I'm not seventeen yet," Blue Bonnet said. "I reckon my clothes make me look older. I begged Aunt Lucinda to let me have them a little longer than I've been wearing. Yes, I like the girls very much. Good night."

In her own bed, under cover of darkness, Blue Bonnet had much to think about that night. Opposite her, as still as the dead, Joy Cross slumbered. Blue Bonnet's mind

went back over the day. How full it had been—and strange! She almost felt as if she had been transported to another world. In the stress and excitement of the new surroundings her old life faded like a dream. Even the We Are Sevens seemed remote and indistinct in her tired brain.

She dozed off, finally, to dream of marching to gongs. Gongs that urged and threatened; and of a certain German individual who lived in a garret, and who growled like a savage beast if she made the slightest sound as she passed her door.

[112] The next two weeks fairly flew along, and Blue Bonnet was too busy to be homesick. There were good long letters from home often; from the faithful We Are Sevens, full of news and cheer; and from Uncle Cliff, in far-off Texas.

Blue Bonnet found the course she had selected a hard one, with a good deal of outside reading in English. Then there was her music, vocal and instrumental. Practising took up a great deal of time.

The teacher of piano—Fraulein Schirmer—was very nice, Blue Bonnet thought, and she was glad to tell her aunt that she liked her, since she and Fraulein had been such good friends in Munich.

Because of Miss Clyde, Fraulein took much interest in Blue Bonnet, discovering a good deal of musical ability, she wrote Miss Clyde.

Mrs. White still continued to be the joy she promised, and Blue Bonnet looked forward to her vocal lessons with the keenest pleasure.

"Will I ever sing really well?" she asked Mrs. White one morning, and Mrs. White had answered:

"That depends upon yourself, and how much you want to sing. You have a good voice, plenty of excellent timbre in it. You have even more—the greatest essential of all—temperament. You live—you feel—you have the sympathetic quality that spells success—with work!"

[113] Blue Bonnet went from her lesson feeling that she had the world almost in her grasp.

Her English teacher, too, Professor Howe—- Blue Bonnet could not understand why a woman should be called Professor—was delightful. A storehouse of knowledge, she made the class work so interesting that the forty-five minutes of recitation usually passed all too quickly.

Professor Howe was an unusually able woman, much looked up to by the Faculty and pupils. She was middle-aged—past the fortieth milestone, at any rate—and somewhat austere in manner. Those who knew her best declared that her stern demeanor was a professional veneer, put on in the classroom for the sake of discipline, and that underneath she was intensely human and feminine. She had charge of the study hall and acted as associate principal.

Professor Howe interested Blue Bonnet. She didn't mind the austere manner at all. There was something behind it—a quick flash of the eye, a sudden smile, limited usually to a brief second; an intense, keen expression that acted like an electric battery to Blue Bonnet. It stimulated her to effort. No matter what else had to be neglected, English was invariably prepared.

And, as admiration usually begets admiration, Professor Howe was attracted to Blue Bonnet.

[114] "Miss Elizabeth Ashe," she said to Miss North at the end of the second week, "promises to be a bright pupil. She has an unusually clear mind, and good judgment. She's going to be quite a stimulus to the class."

Miss North seemed a little surprised.

"That's rather odd," she said. "Miss Root told me only a half hour ago that Miss Ashe was very indifferent in her mathematics—absolutely inattentive."

Professor Howe raised her eyebrows ever so slightly, but she made no comment.

Blue Bonnet could have explained. If not to Miss North's satisfaction, to her own, entirely. She hated Miss Root, and she hated mathematics, which added fuel to fire.

At the end of the third week of school Blue Bonnet was summoned to Miss North's office.

Miss North looked serious as she motioned Blue Bonnet to a seat and opened the conversation.

"I am very sorry to find that you are not doing well in your mathematics, Miss Ashe. What is the trouble?"

"I hate mathematics and I dislike Miss Root," Blue Bonnet replied with a frankness

that quite took Miss North's breath away.

"That is very disrespectful, Miss Ashe; I cannot have you speak of one of your teachers in that way."

"But I don't like her, Miss North, not a bit!"

"That is not to the point. Why are you inattentive?" [115]

"I'm not. I am only stupid!"

Miss North was obliged to smile.

"I can hardly think that," she said. "I have excellent reports from other teachers regarding your work."

Blue Bonnet let the compliment pass without any show of pride or pleasure.

"I meant stupid in mathematics. I always have been."

"Perhaps you haven't got hold of them properly. The difficulty often begins in the primary grades."

"Perhaps that is it. I always had a tutor or a governess on the ranch. I hated arithmetic, so we didn't bother much with it. When I entered school in Woodford I just managed to slide through my mathematics. I never got more than a passing grade."

Miss North looked at Blue Bonnet as if she were some new species of girl with whom she was unfamiliar. Such honesty was quite without precedent.

"And Miss Root? Why do you dislike her?"

"Miss Root is too sarcastic. When I make a mistake she calls the attention of the class to it."

Miss North looked stern.

"You may be excused, now, Miss Ashe," she said. "I will investigate this matter."

A day or two later there seemed to be a change of atmosphere in Miss Root's [116] classroom. Miss Root was very nice to Blue Bonnet—even trying to unravel hard knots, and Blue Bonnet gave strict attention. She stopped Blue Bonnet one day at the end of a period.

"You see what you can do when you try, Miss Ashe," she said.

Blue Bonnet flushed a warm red.

"I tried all the time, Miss Root—but—I reckon—maybe we didn't just understand each other."

The girl's sweet smile was more appealing than her words. Such spontaneity was infectious. A faint pink crept into the teacher's withered cheek, and for a moment the dull grey of her humdrum existence changed to a startling blue. She held out her hand.

"I daresay that was just the trouble. You are very young to have so much philosophy. If you are puzzled again, come to my room. I want you to like mathematics—they are great mental gymnastics. You must learn to get fun out of them."

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CHAPTER VII [117]

IN TROUBLE

It was Monday morning—the beginning of Blue Bonnet's fourth week at Miss North's school. Prayers were just over and Blue Bonnet had come up to her room to make her bed. She was drawing up the counterpane when there was a rap at the door and Mary Boyd entered.

"Oh, Blue Bonnet," she said, her eyes wide with excitement; "Carita's sick—real sick! Mrs. Goodwin just came to our room and took her to the Infirmary."

Blue Bonnet looked at Mary in amazement.

"Sick?" she repeated. "Sick? Why, she was all right yesterday."

Mary shook her head.

"No, she wasn't. She hasn't been well for several days; but she begged me so not to tell anybody that I didn't. I wish now I had. I'm awfully frightened about her. She's had headache for a week. Goodness knows what she's got! That's the way typhoid fever and a lot of things come. You ache all over—"

[118] "Mary," Blue Bonnet said sternly, "it was very wrong of you not to tell me. I am responsible for Carita. If anything should happen to her here—" she paused; the thought was too dreadful to contemplate.

Blue Bonnet started out the door.

Mary caught, and held her tightly.

"Where are you going, Blue Bonnet?"

"To the Infirmary, of course. Let me go."

"No, no, you can't! It's strictly against the rules. Carita's quarantined. They've sent for the doctor."

The word quarantined sent a fresh chill to Blue Bonnet's heart.

"Rules or no rules, I'm going to Carita."

But Mary held her fast.

"Oh, no, Blue Bonnet, please, please don't! It will get you in trouble. Go find Mrs. Goodwin. She's awfully nice, really she is. She'll tell you all about it."

But Mrs. Goodwin was nowhere to be found.

"That settles it," Blue Bonnet said. "I shall go to the Infirmary." And to the Infirmary she went.

The door was closed. Blue Bonnet opened it boldly.

Carita lay on one of the little hospital cots, her eyes closed, her face almost as white as the sheet that was drawn up close about her.

[119] "Carita—Carita, dear," Blue Bonnet said softly, kneeling down beside her. "What's the matter? Why didn't you tell me you were sick?"

The closed eyelids fluttered for a second, then opened wide with terror.

"Oh, Blue Bonnet, go out of here, quick! They don't know what I've got. You might catch something!"

For answer Blue Bonnet smoothed the black hair from the white brow and looked into the face eagerly.

"Please—please go, Blue Bonnet. I'm all right. Really I am! Please go away; anyway until the doctor comes."

A little red spot began to glow in each of the white cheeks and Carita tried to sit up in bed. She fell back limply.

Blue Bonnet was terror stricken.

"What do they mean by leaving you alone?" she said, clasping and unclasping her hands. "It's outrageous!"

"I've only been alone a few minutes. Mrs. Goodwin just stepped out a minute."

As Carita spoke the door opened and Mrs. Goodwin herself entered, followed by a very professional looking man carrying a satchel.

Mrs. Goodwin looked at Blue Bonnet in surprise, and as the doctor went over to Carita's bed, she took her to one side.

[120] "You must go out of here at once, Miss Ashe; this is quite against the rules."

Blue Bonnet caught Mrs. Goodwin by the arm impatiently.

"What is the matter with Carita? Is it anything very dreadful—a disease like typhoid or anything?"

"We don't know yet," Mrs. Goodwin replied, opening the door and showing Blue Bonnet out.

"Will you please let me know as soon—as soon as you know yourself, Mrs. Goodwin?"

The alarm in the girl's face appealed to the kind house-mother and she promised willingly: reiterating that Blue Bonnet must not come again to the Infirmary without

permission.

Blue Bonnet passed out of the room slowly, casting a lingering glance toward Carita. The doctor had her hand, was feeling her pulse.

"I will come to your room, Mrs. Goodwin, after my English period, at nine forty-five. May I? Perhaps you will know more then. May I, please?"

"Yes, Miss Ashe. And say nothing about this to any of the girls."

Blue Bonnet promised and went to her class reluctantly.

At nine forty-five she left the classroom and went straight to Mrs. Goodwin's room, but Mrs. Goodwin was not in. She went on to the Infirmary.

This time she knocked and stepped back well from the door. [121]

Mrs. Goodwin came out, closing the door behind her. Her face looked serious, though she tried to speak lightly.

"The doctor cannot tell for another forty-eight hours just what is the matter with Miss Judson. He hopes it is nothing serious."

"Is it anything contagious—like a fever?"

"We don't know."

"May I see Carita a minute?"

"Not to-day."

"Will some one stay with her all the time? I should like her to have a nurse."

"I will not leave Miss Judson, Miss Ashe. She will have every care. Please do not come up on this floor again. I will keep you advised as to her condition. Do not make yourself unhappy about it. I know that you are very anxious."

"Oh, I am, Mrs. Goodwin. Awfully—awfully anxious! You see—" she hesitated—"I am responsible for Carita's being here, and if there's anything very much the matter, I ought to send for my aunt."

"That will all be attended to, Miss Ashe, at the proper time."

"But what did the doctor say?"

"He thinks Miss Judson may be getting acclimated. She has lived a very free life in the open country, and this confinement, for a while, may tell upon her. I really think [122] it is nothing more than that."

Blue Bonnet decided to skip her French, and went to her own room to think a little while. She had barely closed the door when there was a knock.

Fraulein stood just outside the door, an inquisitive, disagreeable expression on her face.

"Are you ill, Miss Ashe?" she said.

"No, Fraulein, I am not ill."

"Then why are you in your room at this hour? Have you not some class? French?"

"Yes, I have French at this hour."

"And you go not to the lesson?"

There was surprise and indignation in Fraulein's expression.

"I shall haf to report you to Miss North."

Blue Bonnet picked up her French books and pushed past Fraulein.

"I will save you the trouble," she said. "I am going to Miss North now, myself."

Fraulein stared after the flying figure.

"She is one impertinent young person," she said to herself, and followed Blue Bonnet down the first flight of stairs to make sure that she really went to Miss North's office.

Miss North was at her desk, busy with some papers.

"May I speak with you, Miss North?" Blue Bonnet said. [123]

"What is it, Miss Ashe?"

"You know about Carita, Miss North?"

"Mrs. Goodwin has reported her illness."

"I think that my aunt should be notified at once."

Blue Bonnet did not realize in her excitement that her tone was a bit dictatorial.

"We are responsible for Carita, and—"

"Miss Judson will have every attention, Miss Ashe. She is in no immediate danger. I shall notify Miss Clyde as soon as I think it necessary."

"You mean that you will not notify her to-day?"

"Hardly—to-day."

"Then I shall, Miss North! I want to report to you that I didn't go to my French class this morning. You will probably hear of it from Fraulein Herrmann, though I should have told you anyway."

She was out of the room and half way down the hall when Miss North called her.

Blue Bonnet came back and took the chair to which Miss North pointed, wonderingly.

"Why did you not go to your French class, Miss Ashe?"

"Because I was so worried about Carita. I knew I couldn't make any kind of a recitation."

"That does not excuse you from going. You may report now to Madam de Cartier. In regard to Miss Judson—" Miss North paused, as trying to think of the best way to [124] impress her authority upon the very determined young girl before her.

"You will leave Miss Judson to the care of Mrs. Goodwin and Doctor Giles for the present. As soon as there is the slightest cause for alarm your aunt will be notified. You may go now."

In the hall Blue Bonnet met Mary Boyd.

"How's Carita?" Mary asked. "Have they found out what's the matter with her?"

"No. The doctor can't tell yet."

"What doctor?"

"I think his name is Giles."

"Doctor Giles! Oh, mercy, they always get him, and he's slower than molasses at Christmas. That's just the way he did when I was sick. First he said it was cold—then it was grippe; then it looked like something else. By the time they got my mother here I was so sick I didn't know her."

"Mary," Blue Bonnet said, actually frightened, "is that really true? Aren't you exaggerating?"

"No. You ask Peggy Austin. She'll tell you!"

But Blue Bonnet's mind was made up. She would take no chances. If she had been a little older, a little more experienced, she would have taken Mary's opinion of Doctor Giles for exactly what it was worth—the prejudice of a spoiled child. But Blue Bonnet was very young herself, and very much excited.

She went directly to Professor Howe's room, but Professor Howe was teaching. So [125] was Madam de Cartier. Blue Bonnet's next period was vacant, so she went to the study hall and slipped into her seat quietly.

Fraulein Herrmann was in charge of the room. She looked at Blue Bonnet suspiciously, and watched her as she got out her books.

Blue Bonnet opened her Latin, but the words danced before her eyes. Study was out of the question. Her mind and heart centred upon Carita. Poor little Carita, white and forlorn, miles and miles away from her father, her mother, shut up in a room with a woman she scarcely knew, the thought was intolerable.

For a few minutes she sat thinking. How could she get word to Aunt Lucinda? There was the long distance telephone, but she hardly knew how to manage that; there might be complications, and then any one could hear, the telephone was so publicly placed.

Suddenly it flashed over her that she could get a letter—a special delivery—to Woodford that afternoon. One of the day pupils would mail it.

Unmindful of Fraulein's watchful eye, she leaned over and spoke to her seat-mate, Ethel Merrill.

"Would you do me a favor, Ethel?" she asked.

"Surely," Ethel replied.

Blue Bonnet explained—a bit indefinitely. It was a letter—a very important one— [126]
that must be mailed at noon.

Ethel promised to take it without fail.

Blue Bonnet got out some paper and began writing hastily.

> "Dear Aunt Lucinda:—Will you please come up at once. Carita is sick. The doctor doesn't know yet what's the matter with her, he can't tell for forty-eight hours,—"

"Miss Ashe!"

Fraulein's stentorian tones rang out sharply.

Blue Bonnet looked up, startled.

"What haf you there, Miss Ashe? This is a time for study, not for the writing of letters."

Blue Bonnet remained silent.

"You may bring the paper to the desk, Miss Ashe."

Blue Bonnet gathered up her books, picked up the letter which she had been writing and tore it into bits. Then she got up and started to leave the room.

Fraulein was white with anger.

"Come back to your seat, this instant, Miss Ashe," she demanded.

Blue Bonnet continued on her way out of the room.

Fraulein ran after her, insisting upon her return.

Blue Bonnet hurried to her room, and, entering, locked the door behind her. She [127]
dropped her books on the table, and for a moment sat staring out of the window. What should she do? She had defied several rules that morning. Perhaps they would expel her. Well, they could! She wasn't particularly anxious to remain in the school if Fraulein Herrmann did, anyway. The house hardly seemed large enough for both.

Suddenly she sat up with a start. There was Cousin Tracy! Why hadn't she thought of him before! She could telephone to him, and he could get Aunt Lucinda. The thought acted like magic, and she was scurrying down the hall to the telephone in less than a minute.

She got Cousin Honora, but Cousin Tracy was out. Cousin Honora was not even expecting him home to lunch, but she would try to locate him and send him out to the school. Was anything wrong?

Blue Bonnet admitted that there was, a bit reluctantly, and hung up the receiver, leaving Cousin Honora mystified and uneasy.

As she started back to her room she remembered that she had not yet reported to Professor Howe. She went back, and entered Professor Howe's office just as Fraulein Herrmann was leaving it.

Professor Howe looked serious as she motioned Blue Bonnet to a seat and closed the door quietly.

"I have a very unpleasant report of you, Miss Ashe," she said firmly, but gently. "I [128]
am surprised and sorry. What have you to say in the matter?"

The idea that she was to have a chance to explain, had not entered Blue Bonnet's head. Professor Howe's tendency to fairness changed her viewpoint instantly. She felt ashamed—humiliated in the presence of this clear-eyed, soft-voiced woman, whose glance fell upon her with an expression almost maternal in its interest.

Slowly—one by one—the tears gathered in Blue Bonnet's eyes and rolled down her cheeks. But for the ticking of the clock above the desk, there was absolute silence in the room.

Professor Howe reached over and took Blue Bonnet's hand in her own.

"Tell me about it," she said, "everything—from the beginning."

And Blue Bonnet did tell her, omitting not a single detail.

When she had finished Professor Howe was silent for a moment.

"Did you ever think, Miss Ashe," she said presently, "what a chaotic, unpleasant place this world would be without law, and order, and discipline?"

Blue Bonnet had to confess that she had not thought much about it.

"Think *now*, for a moment. Take the case of your friend, Carita. If there had been [129] no rule against your going to the Infirmary this morning, and Carita had come down with a contagious disease, you, by your presence there for only a moment, might have carried the contagion to a dozen others. Would you have had the right to do that, do you think, simply because of your interest in your friend?"

Blue Bonnet shook her head slowly.

"And in regard to sending for your aunt. Could you not have trusted Miss North, my child? She has been operating this school successfully for many years. She has the interest of each and every pupil at heart—she knows their needs. She has perfect confidence in our physician."

"Yes, but Mary—one of the girls—said that he was awfully slow and old fashioned, and I—"

"Mary Boyd is only a silly little girl. She wouldn't know the qualifications of a good doctor if she were asked to give them. You should never rely on immature judgment. It is apt to be colored with prejudice."

Blue Bonnet got up.

"I reckon I have made a mistake, Professor Howe. I'm sorry. I was so awfully worried and upset about Carita."

"Of course you were. I can quite understand that. On the other hand, we do not expect you to love and trust us all at once. Confidence comes by degrees; but we *do* [130] want you to believe that your *best* interests are considered here—always."

Blue Bonnet started to leave the room.

"One moment, Miss Ashe. Will you say to Fraulein Herrmann what you have just said to me—that you are sorry—sorry for what she deems an impertinence on your part in the study hall?"

Blue Bonnet flushed to the roots of her brown hair.

"But I am *not* sorry, Professor Howe."

"Not sorry to have been rude, Miss Ashe?"

"I think Fraulein Herrmann was rude to me. She called to me before the whole room—she—"

"You were disobeying the rules, Miss Ashe. Fraulein was right. Study hour is not the time for letter writing. You will apologize, I am sure."

The little smile so rare and fleeting that Blue Bonnet loved appeared for a brief second. It won the girl as nothing else could.

"I will then—to please you," she answered, and went to find Fraulein immediately.

The day dragged on drearily. Blue Bonnet was unhappy and ill at ease. Although Professor Howe had been so kind, she felt that she was by no means out of the woods yet. There was still Miss North to reckon with, and Fraulein Herrmann had been none too gracious about accepting her apology. Perhaps they might still expel her. [131] There was that Fanny Price last year that the girls had spoken of. She had been sent away for breaking the rules. What a blow it would be to Grandmother and the We Are Sevens. They'd be disgraced forever—and Aunt Lucinda! The thought brought terror to her heart. Why, Aunt Lucinda wouldn't be able to hold up her head in Woodford.

It was getting on to four o'clock and still Cousin Tracy had not come. Evidently Cousin Honora had had difficulty in locating him.

There was no news from Carita, either. Mrs. Goodwin was not in her room, and Blue Bonnet was afraid to venture to the Infirmary.

At four o'clock there was a stir along the hall. The girls were visiting. Blue Bonnet decided to have a minute's chat with Annabel Jackson.

Annabel, as usual, had the chafing dish going. She was making cocoa, and hailed Blue Bonnet's presence with delight.

"Goodness," she said, after a moment, during which Blue Bonnet had not spoken, "what's the matter? You look like a funeral!"

Blue Bonnet tried to smile, but the effort was a failure.

"Got the blues?"

"No."

"Not homesick?"

Blue Bonnet shook her head, and a tear splashed down on her blouse. [132]

"Why, Blue Bonnet, what is it, dear?" Annabel asked, really surprised.

Blue Bonnet struggled for self control. She sat up very straight, and made a remark about the cocoa.

"Never mind about the cocoa. What's happened?"

"Nothing—at least—I can't tell you, Annabel."

"Why can't you?"

"Because—I can't!"

Annabel slipped down on the couch beside Blue Bonnet and put an arm over her shoulder.

"Oh, please," she said. "Come, tell me. Maybe I can help."

It was at that identical moment that Sue Hemphill put her head in the door.

"Why, Blue Bonnet," she said, "Martha's been hunting everywhere for you. Miss North wants you in her office right away. There's a man with her—a dumpy—I beg your pardon—but a short, stout man with a bald head. I think it's your uncle, or cousin. Anyway, hurry! There's something doing. Miss North looks like a war cloud without a ghost of a silver lining. She was just laying it off to your—ah—em—relative. Do hurry. I'm simply wild to know what's up, and come right back and tell us all [133] about it. Don't forget!"

She gave Blue Bonnet a gentle push out into the hall and watched her as she descended the stairs slowly.

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CHAPTER VIII [134]

PENANCE

Blue Bonnet went down-stairs slowly; her heart in a tumult of conflicting emotions. As she passed the reception-room and neared Miss North's office, she heard Cousin Tracy's voice, gentle and patient, raised now a trifle in protest.

"I am sure," he was saying, "that Blue Bonnet meant no interference or harm in sending for me. It was a most natural impulse, which I hope you will find it possible to pardon."

Cousin Tracy was sitting stiffly on the edge of a chair, his cane and hat held tightly, as if he intended putting them in use at the earliest possible moment.

Miss North's position was also somewhat strained and alert. She motioned Blue Bonnet to a seat, and went on with the conversation.

"That is no doubt true, Mr. Winthrop; but it is not altogether to the point. Miss Ashe has been willful and disobedient in this matter. She has shown an absolute disregard of rules—a lack of faith in my word. I promised her this morning that Miss [135] Judson should have every attention and care, and that Miss Clyde should be notified at the proper time. You will understand, of course, Mr. Winthrop, that if each parent who has a daughter in this institution were to be notified the moment that child becomes indisposed, it would cause unnecessary alarm, as well as expense. It is a very common thing, at the beginning of the year, to have the Infirmary half full of girls who are suffering from colds, change of climate, homesickness; minor ills, insignificant and trivial. It is our habit to call our physician, Doctor Giles, immediately. We rely implicitly upon his judgment. Perhaps you may know of Doctor Giles? He has something of a reputation in the city."

"Yes," Mr. Winthrop said, "I know him very well indeed; in fact he is my physician—and friend."

Miss North cast a quick look in Blue Bonnet's direction.

"Then you know something of his skill," she said. "He has just left here—his second visit to-day. He finds Miss Judson much better, absolutely without temperature—in fact, quite normal. Her illness, superinduced by homesickness, has at no time been

alarming. She has a bilious cold—always disagreeable—and some difficulty in adjusting herself to this climate after the fresh air of the prairie. This, I believe, is the history of the case. You see how simple it is—scarcely sufficient to cause this—teapot tempest!" [136]

As Miss North spoke a change came over Blue Bonnet's countenance. She was gifted as few people are in this world, in that she had the ability to see herself as others saw her. At the present moment the vision was anything but pleasing or gratifying. Miss North's argument, clear and logical, spoke straight to her conscience. She realized all at once that she had been meddlesome and officious, and she longed to make amends.

There was silence for a full minute. Mr. Winthrop had no further defence in favor of Blue Bonnet—that was evident.

Miss North waited for him to speak. He cleared his throat audibly and opened his lips; but, before the words came, Blue Bonnet had leaned forward to the very edge of her chair and addressed Miss North.

"I see your point—perfectly—now," she said. "I didn't this morning. I'm terribly sorry that I've caused you all this annoyance. I reckon it was because—" she stopped, unwilling to allow herself the slightest loophole of escape through an explanation. "There is no excuse for me at all. I apologize, Miss North, and I'm willing to take my punishment—anything you think right—only I hope—it won't be expulsion. Grandmother could never stand that. It would most kill her!"

There was a grave, old-fashioned dignity about the way Blue Bonnet acknowledged her error. It appealed to Miss North. She was so frank, so evidently sincere, that almost without an instant's hesitation Miss North replied: [137]

"I accept your apology, Miss Ashe. We try never to expel for mistakes—unless they are serious enough to be contaminating in influence. As to a punishment—we will discuss that later. You may come here—to my office, for a few minutes after study hour this evening."

Blue Bonnet shook hands with Mr. Winthrop, thanked him for coming, and went back up-stairs as slowly as she had come down ten minutes before.

In order to lose no time, or miss hearing all the details of the interview with Miss North, Annabel and Sue were waiting in Blue Bonnet's room.

As Blue Bonnet opened the door they made a rush for her.

"For goodness' sake, tell us what this is all about!" Sue said, dragging her over to the couch. "We're just dying to know!"

Blue Bonnet sat down with a sigh.

"There isn't much to tell," she said wearily. "I've been perfectly horrid about Carita being ill, that's all—she's sick, you know. They wouldn't let me see her this morning—that is, they kept me out of the Infirmary, so I sent for Cousin Tracy."

"You sent for your cousin!" Annabel exclaimed. [138]

"Yes."

"How did you send for him?"

"Telephoned."

Sue went off in a gale of laughter.

"I adore your nerve," she said. "Oh, isn't this lovely!"

"Didn't you know that would get you in trouble?" Annabel asked.

"I didn't seem to care—this morning. I wish I had."

"Was Miss North—awful?"

"No, she was lovely."

"Didn't she take away your privileges?"

"I don't know yet—she's to tell me later."

"Well, she will, so cheer up," Sue comforted. "The worst is yet to come!"

"Oh, Sue, stop! She doesn't know anything about it, Blue Bonnet. I shouldn't worry. Come on over in my room and have some eats."

Annabel's tone was persuasive, but Blue Bonnet shook her head.

"Oh, come on! Sue wants to fix your hair. By the way, may I wear your white Peter Tom to-night? I'm wild for one."

Blue Bonnet got out the dress and handed it to Annabel.

"Thanks, awfully," Annabel said. "You are welcome to anything of mine, you know. One gets so tired of one's own things. Sue and I change all the time." [139]

"You mean *you* do the changing," Sue said, laughing. "Annabel's worn out every pair of silk stockings I've got—honestly she has! I've got on a pair of Wee Watts' now, and they sag something awful. I think it's so inconsiderate of Wee to be fat. Nobody ever can borrow from her!"

She raised her skirt and the girls shrieked with laughter at the baggy stockings.

"Let's all change round to-night," Annabel suggested. "Blue Bonnet can wear my pink organdy, and I'll wear this—"

"Where do I come in?" Sue interrupted.

"At the head of the procession, as usual, dearest," Annabel promised. "You can wear that sweet yellow gown of Blue Bonnet's. Can't she?"

"I reckon she can," Blue Bonnet said. "I've never worn it myself yet."

"Oh, that doesn't matter: she'll christen it."

Blue Bonnet got the dress from the closet.

Sue examined it closely, measuring it to her own length.

"I'm afraid it is a little long for me. Maybe I could take a tuck in it somewhere. Yes, I can; here! See?"

Blue Bonnet saw! She also had visions of Aunt Lucinda if the gown were torn or stepped on, but she couldn't be disagreeable and selfish. She followed the girls on in to Annabel's room. [140]

Sue pushed Blue Bonnet into a chair and began taking the bow off her hair.

"I've been wild to get at your hair ever since I first saw you. You're too old to wear it in a braid. Here, give this ribbon to Carita; she's in the infant class yet."

Annabel opened a box of chocolates and curled up comfortably on the couch, from which vantage she watched operations lazily.

"Part it, Sue," she said, studying Blue Bonnet's face. "She has a heavenly nose for it—real patrician. Didn't any one ever tell you that you ought to wear it parted?"

"No—I can't remember that any one ever did."

"How funny! Your face is made for it."

Sue brushed the soft fly-away hair, coiling it low over the ears and twisting it into a becoming knot on the neck.

Annabel clapped her hands with delight.

"Didn't I tell you?" she said. "Here, take this mirror. Isn't it splendid? Why, it makes you look all of twenty. You could go to a Harvard dance and get your program filled in two minutes with your hair like that!"

Blue Bonnet took the mirror and looked at herself from all angles.

"BLUE BONNET TOOK THE MIRROR AND LOOKED AT HERSELF FROM ALL ANGLES."

"It is rather nice," she said, and a rosy flush stole into her cheeks. "But Aunt Lucinda would never stand for it. I know she wouldn't!" [141]

"Change it when you go home then. But you are too old for hair-ribbons—really you are. Isn't she, Sue?"

Sue thought so—decidedly.

Blue Bonnet picked up the ribbon Annabel had so scorned and smoothed out its wrinkles gently. She hated to give it up, somehow; it linked her to her childhood. She wasn't half as anxious to grow up as Annabel was. She didn't want to look twenty—yet! There was so much time to be a woman.

The five o'clock gong sounded.

Blue Bonnet picked up her things and started for her room.

"Wait—the dress," Annabel said. She got out the pink organdy.

Blue Bonnet glanced at it shyly.

"If you don't mind, I believe I'll wear my own."

Annabel looked hurt.

"All right, if you feel that way, of course. Then we won't wear yours." She handed Blue Bonnet the Peter Thompson.

"Oh, yes, you will—please do! You are quite welcome. I only thought—- I—you see, I have never worn anybody's clothes in my life. It seems so funny—"

Sue came to the rescue.

"Nonsense. You'll get over that. You can't be so particular in boarding-school. Everybody does it. If Annabel doesn't care, why should you?" [142]

Blue Bonnet took the dress and went to her room. When the gong sounded for dinner she emerged, radiant in the pink organdy. A critical observer might have thought the waist line a trifle too high, and the skirt a wee bit short. Of the becomingness, however, there could be no doubt. The gown was pretty, and it suited Blue Bonnet, bringing out the wild rose coloring in the face that glowed and dimpled above it.

Miss North bore the reputation in the school, with pupils and teachers, of being just. She was often accused of being severe—of being cross; of being too strict; but even those who cared for her the least had to acknowledge her general fairness.

Therefore, although it may have been in her heart to pardon Blue Bonnet unreservedly, she felt that a punishment was due her; and she proceeded to mete out that punishment in full accordance with the offence. Blue Bonnet's privileges were taken away for a week. That meant she could have no communication with the girls outside of school hours. She could not visit during the chatting hour; she was denied shopping expeditions—even the Friday afternoon Symphony concert; which was, perhaps, the hardest thing to bear, because Blue Bonnet loved music.

[143] Severe? Yes, perhaps; but nothing could have served half so well to give the girl a proper regard for authority and self government. Blue Bonnet finished the week happier for having expiated her treason to school law—ready to begin the next week with the slate wiped clean.

The week slipped by quickly, too, as weeks have a habit of doing. There were other things beside visiting with the girls and dancing in the gymnasium after dinner. There was the half hour every day just after lunch when Miss North read to the girls in the study hall—a half hour Blue Bonnet always looked forward to eagerly. Miss North was an excellent reader, as well as a keen critic. She read from the poets usually,—Shakespeare, Tennyson, Browning,—though sometimes, by way of variety, an essay or modern drama was substituted.

Miss North felt the pulse of her audience by instinct. She could tell without so much as a glance who was giving attention and who was indifferent. She had a habit of pointing a long, slender finger at some particular girl, and asking for an explanation of what she had been reading.

Blue Bonnet's strict attention pleased her. She liked the girl's appreciation of good literature and her ability to fathom difficult passages.

"Give me the text of 'A Grammarian's Funeral,'" she said to Blue Bonnet one day during this week of penance, after finishing the poem. She knew that she was asking [144] a difficult thing; but she wanted to test Blue Bonnet's perception—her mental acuteness.

"You mean tell what it is about?" Blue Bonnet asked.

"Exactly, Miss Ashe."

"Well—" Blue Bonnet halted lamely for a second, "I couldn't understand it—that is, all of it—but I think it's about some students taking the body of their teacher up a mountain to bury it—and singing as they went."

Miss North smiled and a laugh went round the room.

Blue Bonnet sank down in her seat, covered with confusion, totally unaware that she had said anything that might be regarded as funny. She looked up in surprise, her cheeks flaming.

Miss North explained.

"You have the idea, Miss Ashe. It amuses the class to think of students singing as they bury their teacher, though I daresay there might be more truth than poetry in it."

There was no sarcasm in her tones. She laughed with the rest. Blue Bonnet's attention had delighted her.

There had been another pleasure during the week, one that Blue Bonnet greatly appreciated. She was allowed ten minutes with Carita in the Infirmary.

[145] Carita was sitting up—her long hair brushed and braided smartly; her face—still a bit white—wreathed in smiles.

Blue Bonnet hovered over her.

"Have you been awfully lonely, Carita?"

"No—not a bit."

"Really?"

"No, truly I haven't. Mrs. Goodwin is such a dear, Blue Bonnet. She makes me think of my mother. She read to me—and cooked things for me, herself: the best milk toast, with cream on it; and to-day I had ice-cream—"

"You did? Well, that's more than we had. This was heavenly hash day!"

"I've had visitors, too; Miss North—she brought me those flowers over there—"

Blue Bonnet turned to look at two pink roses on a table by the bed.

"—and Fraulein—"

"Fraulein!"

"Yes—and she was real nice—as nice as *she* could be, you know. Mary sent me this by Mrs. Goodwin—look!"

Carita brought from beneath her pillow a large, handsome scrap book.

"Oh, a scrap book!"

"A memory book," Carita corrected. "You put everything in it, you know; things to remind you of the school after you have graduated or gone away. I hope I'll get it [146] awfully full. Oh, Blue Bonnet, I know I'm going to be so happy here—in the school. Everybody has been so good to me."

A little mantle of shame spread over Blue Bonnet's face and dyed it a glowing red.

"And I'm doing penance for trying to thrust attention on Carita which she didn't need," she thought.

But the penance—indeed, the mistake itself—had brought its reward: Blue Bonnet had learned her first lesson in faith.

Friday came, and Blue Bonnet watched the girls as they started for the Symphony concert. How pretty they looked!

Annabel had peeked in Blue Bonnet's room at the last minute, ostensibly to say good-by, but purposely to borrow the white fox muff and a pair of gloves. Annabel was an inveterate borrower; not from any lack of clothes, but because she loved dress extravagantly.

"So sorry you can't go, dear," she said. "It's just awfully too bad! There's to be a wonderful singer to-day—I can't seem to think of her name; it's one of those long Italian ones—but her clothes are perfect dreams. I'm dying to see her gown. If we get anywhere near Huyler's after the concert I'll bring you some candy. That's one reason I wanted your muff; it holds such oceans. I think maybe we'll get into S. S. [147] Pierce's too. If we do, I'll stock up. My allowance came this morning; I'm feeling particularly opulent."

With a nod and a wave she was off, and Blue Bonnet was left alone. She practised for a while, getting in a little extra time; it was a good chance with so many pianos idle.

She was deep in the intricacies of a sonata when the door of the practice-room opened, and Martha, Miss North's maid, entered.

"There's a gentleman to see you in the reception-room, Miss Ashe," she said. "Miss North says you may see him for fifteen minutes."

"A gentleman! To see me?"

"Yes, Miss Ashe."

"An old gentleman, Martha?"

"No—a young man."

Blue Bonnet looked puzzled.

"That's queer. Where's his card?"

"He didn't send one, Miss Ashe."

Blue Bonnet went to her room, took a sweeping glance in the mirror, gave her hair an extra brushing, got out a clean handkerchief and went down-stairs quickly.

A tall young man came forward eagerly as she entered the reception-room.

For a moment she stared in dumb amazement, then she gave a cry of delight:

"Alec! Oh, how glad I am to see you! How ever in the world did you happen to [148] come? How's Uncle Cliff, and Uncle Joe, and everybody on the ranch? Have you been to Woodford or are you just going?"

"One question at a time—please. Let's see, the first—Oh, yes; I happened to come because I got my appointment to West Point—"

"You did? How perfectly splendid! When?"

"A couple of weeks ago. I came on immediately to prepare. Mr. Ashe is well, so is Uncle Joe. They sent you all sorts of messages. I have been in Woodford for several days. I came through here the first of the week, but I wasn't in shape to call—exactly

—not on a young lady in a fashionable boarding-school. I'm afraid I wouldn't have been admitted. I had to have some clothes—"

"How awfully well you're looking," Blue Bonnet interrupted.

"Oh, I'm fine—can hold my own now, I think; thanks to Texas. That's a great country you've got down there."

Blue Bonnet beamed with pleasure.

"Isn't it, though! Is Benita well?"

"Fine."

"How's Uncle Joe's rheumatism?"

"Better, I guess. Haven't heard him complain."

"Then it *is* better," Blue Bonnet said. "And old Gertrudis—and Juanita? How are they?"

"Fine—all of them."

"Oh, how I should love to see them! When is Uncle Cliff coming to see me?" [149]

"Along about Easter vacation, I think." Blue Bonnet fairly jumped with joy.

"He is? Really—aren't you joking, Alec? He hasn't said anything about it to me."

"Maybe I've let the cat out, then. Well—it's true just the same. That's the way he talks now. Hadn't we better sit down?"

"Oh, I'm awfully rude. Sit here."

She drew forth as comfortable a chair as the room afforded.

"You took me so by surprise that I forgot my manners."

"I expected to find you over-stocked on 'em, to tell the truth. My, but you look grown up! What have you been doing to your hair? Does Miss Clyde stand for that?"

"Aunt Lucinda hasn't seen it yet. It's something new."

"The We Are Sevens are still clinging to hair-ribbons. I saw Kitty Clark this morning. She was on her way to school."

"You did? I'm wild to see the girls. I'm going home next week to stay over Sunday. That is, I am, if I can manage to keep the rules. I'm doing penance this week."

Alec gave a low whistle.

"What have you been up to?" he asked.

"We'll talk of that another time. And you got your appointment! How pleased the General must be." [150]

"Yes—rather! He's no end pleased. It's been his dream, you know. As far as I'm concerned I'd as lief take to ranching. I'm pretty much in love with that Texas of yours. Look at the brawn it's put on me."

He doubled up his arm to show the muscle, and Blue Bonnet nodded approvingly.

"It's certainly made you over," she said. "You look as if you could fight now. You'd have made a poor soldier before!"

The fifteen minutes passed with lightning rapidity.

Blue Bonnet got up first.

"It seems very—inhospitable," she said, "but I reckon I've got to ask you to go now."

"Go? Why, I've just come!"

"I know, but Miss North said you could stay fifteen minutes—that's all. I don't know how she ever happened to let me see you in the first place. I'm just a bit in disgrace this week."

"I had a very pressing note from your aunt, that's why, I fancy. I sent it on up before I saw you. Miss Clyde said I was to see you; she doesn't usually mince matters."

They both laughed.

"She certainly does not," Blue Bonnet admitted.

"Couldn't you ask to have the time extended?" Alec looked wistful. "Why, I haven't [151]

given you half the messages from the ranch yet."

"I might try. I'll see."

She came back in a few minutes with Miss North.

"Miss Ashe tells me that you have just come from her home in Texas," Miss North said. "I can quite appreciate how much you have to tell her of her friends. Perhaps you would stay and dine with us?"

Alec seemed a bit embarrassed. To dine among so many girls was not as alluring as it sounded.

"Oh, do, Alec—please!" Blue Bonnet insisted.

Blue Bonnet was invited to sit at Miss North's table for the occasion. The Seniors sat at Miss North's table, so Alec had Blue Bonnet next to him, and Annabel opposite —an embarrassment of riches.

The girls seemed overwhelmed with such unexpected good fortune. They acted as if they had suddenly been struck dumb. Miss North and Blue Bonnet took turns breaking the silence with trivial generalities.

To Alec it seemed as if the meal would never end. He answered the questions put to him mechanically, owing to his extreme embarrassment; but he found courage toward the end of the meal to cast a sly glance in Annabel's direction—a glance not unobserved by Annabel.

Out in the hall, away from Miss North's watchful eye, he said to Blue Bonnet: [152]

"If you ever get me into a deal like that again, you'll know it! It was worse than busting my first broncho."

And, although it was January, and the thermometer registering freezing weather, he took out his pocket handkerchief and mopped the perspiration from his neck and brow.

He made his adieux to Miss North very charmingly, however, thanking her for her hospitality; and Blue Bonnet left him at the reception-room door, conscious that broncho busting, and other things incident to ranch life, had not made any serious inroads on his native good breeding.

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CHAPTER IX [153]

WOODFORD

"Now, Carita, tell me all of it—everything you heard. Come on, I think I ought to know."

Blue Bonnet and Carita had been interrupted in the packing of their suitcases for a week-end at Woodford, by Annabel Jackson, who had stepped in Blue Bonnet's room to return a dress. Her presence had caused Carita to let slip a bit of gossip prevalent in the school.

Carita squeezed a waist into the last bit of space her suitcase afforded, and turned to Blue Bonnet.

"Oh, what do you ask me for, Blue Bonnet? I don't like to tell you—really I don't! What's the use? Oh, dear, I wish I hadn't dropped that hint. I didn't mean to—it just slipped out."

"Go on. Tell me."

Carita sighed deeply.

"It's just gossip. Like enough there isn't a word of truth in it."

"Never mind. Tell me."

"All right, then: Mary Boyd says that Annabel Jackson is a perfect little toady—that she always finds out if a girl has money and nice clothes and things, before she has anything to do with her. She says Annabel has found out that you have a great deal of money, and that's one reason she's so nice to you." [154]

"But I haven't a great deal of money—not to spend here, anyway. I haven't any bigger allowance than Annabel has—or Sue, for that matter!"

"Yes, but it's got out about your ranch; that you have a lot coming to you some day —and—and that you brought me here—that you're paying my way—"

Blue Bonnet turned sharply.

"Who told that? That's my business and Uncle Cliff's—entirely!"

"You said something about being responsible for me when I was sick. I reckon the girls put two and two together and started the story. I can't think how else it got out."

Blue Bonnet put her arms round Carita and gave her a swift hug.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Carita. It must make you feel—horrid!"

"Not a bit," Carita answered cheerfully. "Everybody knows that a poor clergyman's daughter would never get in a school like this without some help. It was splendid of you to do it. I don't mind any one's knowing. Honestly I don't, Blue Bonnet. Don't be angry."

Blue Bonnet sat down limply in a chair and covered her face with her hands. [155]

"Oh, Blue Bonnet! Why did you make me tell you? I knew it would only make you unhappy. What difference does it make, anyway?"

"Just this difference: I like Annabel—for herself—and she likes me for what I've got. I suppose that's the way *all* those girls feel—Sue and Wee, and Ruth—"

Carita was down at Blue Bonnet's side in an instant, her arms about her.

"You know that isn't true, Blue Bonnet. Everybody loves you for yourself. Why, I have the loveliest 'trade last' for you, right this minute. I'll give it to you now, and you can save mine till you hear it. Mary Boyd says—"

Blue Bonnet shrank away, and shook her head.

"Never mind," she said, "it isn't compliments I want. It's friends!"

"Well, you've got 'em—loads! Look at the We Are Sevens! They perfectly adore you. Now, don't they?"

"Well, I reckon they like me," Blue Bonnet acknowledged, and her face brightened.

"I shouldn't have told you all this, Blue Bonnet, only you made me. I wouldn't have dropped the hint about Annabel, only I think she's so awful nervy about wearing your clothes. Why, your Peter Tom's a sight—and that yellow dress—"

"Oh, I don't care about the clothes, Carita. Uncle Cliff will get me some more. [156]
Annabel hasn't hurt them any. The Peter Tom will clean. You know how white wool soils, yourself."

Indeed there was no excuse that Blue Bonnet would not have made for Annabel. She had grown very fond of the little Southern girl in the five weeks past. Annabel had a way of ingratiating herself into the affections of her associates. She had the charm that is an inheritance of the South; the musical softness of speech, the daintiness of person, the warmth of heart; and—although Blue Bonnet had it yet to learn—a genius for friendship.

In Annabel Jackson's veins flowed the bluest of Southern blood. Her grandfather—the old General, known throughout the length and breadth of Tennessee—was an aristocrat of the old school. He boasted of an ancestry that defied criticism. Annabel was not a snob—but she was a sybarite; she loved the soft things of life, the luxuries, the pleasures: she turned toward them as naturally as a flower turns to the sun. This tendency had earned for her the reputation of "toady" by those who did not understand her, or were inclined to judge from the surface. She gave—was in a position to give—- as much as she got, always, and her affections were sincere and lasting.

Blue Bonnet finished packing her suitcase.

"Well, I'm not going to worry over what Mary says," she announced after a few [157]
minutes' deliberation. "I think Mary is apt to take snap judgment. She put me on the wrong track altogether about Doctor Giles. She said he was a regular old fogy—too slow for words, and—why, he's a man with a big reputation—Cousin Tracy's own doctor."

"Mary is a dear, though," Carita said loyally. "She's apt to be a little opinionated, maybe. Peggy Austin thinks she is—though Peggy dotes on her."

"Most smart people are," Blue Bonnet admitted. "Mary is as sharp as tacks. We've just three-quarters of an hour to get the train. I wonder if Mrs. White is ready to take us to the station."

A thick glittering mantle of snow lay over Woodford. Blue Bonnet had never before arrived in the winter, and the snow was not as inviting as the green hills and leafy swaying elms of the early autumn; but the sight of old Denham, with Solomon at his heels, put aside all thought of gloom.

Denham was pacing up and down the platform swinging his arms back and forth briskly to ward off the cold. Solomon paced with him, alert and expectant.

Miss Clyde had not ventured to the station because of the cold; but she and Grandmother were at the parlor window when the carriage drove up, watching for the visitors.

[158] It was, as always, a happy home-coming. There was no gloom inside the stately old house. Cheerful fires blazed on the hearths, the little brass kettle steamed and sang on the tea-table, and Grandmother's eyes shone with joy. She held Blue Bonnet in a close embrace, while she scanned her face for any change that five weeks might have brought there.

"Why, how well you look, dear," she said, turning her to the light. "How very well! You are as plump as can be. You have rounded out wonderfully."

Blue Bonnet laughed and patted her Grandmother's cheek affectionately.

"Yes, that's the only difficulty, Grandmother. Boarding-school has a tendency to round people out—too much! I wish you could see Wee Watts—one of the girls. She's huge! Poor Wee, she hates it so."

Mrs. Clyde was small and thin, and she never could understand why any one objected to being stout. In her eyes flesh was becoming.

Nor was Carita forgotten. She shared with Blue Bonnet in Grandmother's caresses and attention. Mrs. Clyde's warm heart went out to the slender, pale young girl, so far from her own relatives and friends.

[159] Miss Clyde was busy serving tea, but she cast covert glances in Blue Bonnet's direction. There was something beside the "rounding out" that interested her. There was a different air, a decided improvement in her niece. What was it? Not poise—yet! It was too soon to expect that.

Blue Bonnet and Carita chatted as they drank their tea.

Miss Clyde listened attentively. Yes, there *was* a change. Blue Bonnet was growing up. But what made such a difference? Suddenly she knew! It was Blue Bonnet's hair. It was put up.

"How long have you been putting up your hair, Blue Bonnet?" she asked.

Blue Bonnet started and colored.

"Not so very long, Aunt Lucinda. The girls made so much fun of hair-ribbons—the girls I go with. They thought I was much too old to wear them, and after I took them off, it was so hard to go back to them again. Don't you like it this way? The girls liked it parted. They said—they seemed to think my nose suited it."

Aunt Lucinda could not resist a smile. She hesitated before she spoke—she was eminently truthful. Much as she disliked the idea of Blue Bonnet's putting up her hair, she could not deny the becomingness of it.

"It's very pretty," she said slowly. "I don't think you need to cover your ears so completely, do you? The style is too old for you, though. You look—much older."

[160] Blue Bonnet drew a sigh of relief. This was so mild to what she had expected. She glanced in Grandmother's direction.

There was a far-away expression in Mrs. Clyde's eyes, as if she were looking beyond Blue Bonnet—back into the shadowy past. She was: Blue Bonnet with her brown hair coiled low, curling about her neck and brow, was her mother over again—a perfect replica.

Miss Clyde noticed it, also, and when Blue Bonnet and Carita went up-stairs she spoke of it.

"How Blue Bonnet grows to resemble her mother. Do you remember, Elizabeth wore her hair that way when she first began putting it up? The child grows to be more of a Clyde every day."

"We're going out to see Chula," Blue Bonnet announced, coming back after she had put her things away.

"Chula? Why, dear, didn't Aunt Lucinda write you that Chula is out at pasture? She was eating her head off in the barn, and with no one to exercise her—"

Blue Bonnet looked disappointed.

"Of course," she said, "she must have just gorged. I can quite fancy; but I did want to see her."

She laid the apples she had begged from Katie on the tea-table.

"Suppose you take Solomon for a run over to the General's," Mrs. Clyde suggested. [161]
"Alec is at home. You must make the best of your visit; he is leaving on Monday."

"Where's he going?"

"To Washington, to school. He prepares there for West Point. He has a trying period before him, and much hard work. Be sure to put on rubbers and big coats. It is very cold to-day."

Blue Bonnet and Carita were off in a trice.

Alec met them at the stile.

"Was just coming over to see you," he said, shaking hands.

"All right. We'll go back."

"No, come along. Grandfather is expecting this visit."

The General was comfortably ensconced before the fire. He greeted the girls with real delight. Blue Bonnet was one of his special favorites.

It was dinner-time before Blue Bonnet had finished with half her news of school, and she seemed surprised when she looked at her watch.

"Oh, my, we must run," she said, flying out the door and pulling Carita after her. "Aunt Lucinda will be serving dinner. Come over, Alec—to-night if you can."

"Perhaps," he called after her. "I'm up to my ears in work just now. Preparing for the Point's no joke, you know."

Aunt Lucinda was serving dinner, and the girls scrambled into their places hastily. [162]

"I wish we could see the We Are Sevens to-night," Blue Bonnet said as she began the meal. "It seems like a year since I last saw them. Sometimes I can hardly remember how they look."

"You will have plenty of time to refresh your memory," Miss Clyde promised. "They have planned for every hour of your visit—almost."

After dinner there was a cosy chat around the fire. There was so much that Aunt Lucinda and Grandmother wanted to know about the school, and so much to tell.

About eight o'clock there was a terrific pull at the door bell—then another—and still another!

Blue Bonnet looked startled. Then she jumped up from her chair.

"It's the We Are Sevens," she said. "I know it is! I'll go."

She opened the door to admit—not only the We Are Sevens, but a number of the We Are Sevens' friends, boys, mostly—Alec in the lead.

"Oh, it's a party! A surprise party! Come quick, Carita."

There was a great stamping of snow from many pairs of feet, glad greetings of welcome, mingled with shouts of laughter. The old house rang with merriment.

Mrs. Clyde and her daughter did not act as if they were greatly surprised. Indeed [163]
they had been taken into the secret some days before. So had Katie, who at that moment was preparing all sorts of good things in the kitchen, to be served the young people later.

Blue Bonnet gave each of the We Are Sevens an extra hug, and looked into their faces long and eagerly.

"Why, you haven't changed a bit!" she remarked.

One might have thought the separation had covered five years, rather than five weeks.

"But you have, Blue Bonnet—lots! What is it?" Kitty asked.

"It's her hair," Debby discovered. "She's put it up! And her dresses are longer, too."

There was a general inspection, during which the boys looked on disinterestedly.

The evening passed like a dream to Blue Bonnet. It was so good to be at home again, among one's friends; people who loved you for yourself.

"Haven't we had a heavenly time to-night, Carita," Blue Bonnet asked between yawns, after they had retired. "Didn't Kitty Clark look pretty? I'm going to get after her hair to-morrow and do it like mine. Won't it be sweet? She has such loads."

By noon the next day, each of the We Are Sevens were wearing their locks parted, and coiled in a knot—regardless of the adaptability of noses. [164]

Saturday was quite as busy as Friday had been. There was another gathering at Alec's in the evening; a farewell party, for very soon Woodford was to know Alec no more.

The General seemed a bit sad as he watched the young people in their frolics. He was facing a long separation from his grandson: the old home was going to be very lonely without him. Many times he had wished that Boyd Trent's record would permit of his bringing *him* back again, but fresh grievances had followed in Boyd's wake, and reports of him were disappointing in the extreme. And yet the General was happy—very happy. Alec's health had been restored, and he had his appointment; two things for which the General was devoutly thankful.

Sunday there was the service in the little church. Blue Bonnet did not have to be urged to go as on that first occasion. She and Carita were dressed and waiting when Denham drove round, exactly at a quarter before eleven, as he had been in the habit of doing for almost a quarter of a century.

"That was a very nice sermon," Blue Bonnet remarked on the way home. "I think Doctor Blake is growing. Don't you, Aunt Lucinda?"

Miss Clyde smiled.

"Or Blue Bonnet is," she said quickly.

"Perhaps that is it, Aunt Lucinda. Anyway he's more interesting." [165]

It was five o'clock on the Friday afternoon that Blue Bonnet and Carita had left for Woodford, that Joy Cross entered the room which she and Blue Bonnet occupied jointly. She glanced about, a look closely akin to joy lighting her plain features. Joy Cross was a recluse by nature, and the thought of having the room solely to herself for three days gave her infinite pleasure.

She laid an armful of books on the table by the window, then drew up a comfortable chair and sat for awhile looking out into the gathering twilight. The pleased expression which she had worn when she entered the room gradually died from her face, and in its place came one of discontent.

Between Blue Bonnet Ashe and Joy Cross there was no love lost. They disliked each other with the utmost cordiality. Blue Bonnet disliked Joy on general principles—possibly because she could not approach her, understand her; and Joy disliked Blue Bonnet because Blue Bonnet stood for everything that she herself wanted to stand for, and couldn't.

This evening as she sat looking out into the dusk, her figure, usually so apathetic and lifeless, took on an animated line, and stiffened into something that suggested a smothered, half-dead temperament breathing into life. She took her arms from the [166] back of her neck, where they had been supporting her head, and digging her elbows into her knees made a place for her chin to rest in the palms of her hands. She sat this way for a long time, thinking, and her thoughts, for the most part, were occupied with her room-mate.

She wished she could get rid of her—be alone. She was tired of the running in of the girls who had taken Blue Bonnet up; their incessant gabble; their whispered conversations during the visiting hour. To be sure, Blue Bonnet had tried, time and time again, to draw her into these conversations, but she had no desire to be drawn in. She hated Annabel Jackson—the little snob—and Ruth Biddle's impertinences were beyond endurance. These girls had snubbed her since her entrance as a Sophomore, three years before, leaving her out of their festivities,—ignoring, scorning her, just as on the other hand they had taken up this new room-mate, deluging her with devotion, showering their gifts and attentions upon her.

Joy Cross was a scholar—so reputed, and justly; but one of life's most important lessons had passed her by. She had never learned that to receive, one must give; to be loved, one must love; to attain, one must reach out. It never occurred to her to weigh her own shortcomings and throw them into the balance with those of her enemies. She spent no time in introspection, self examination. She set a high [167] standard on her own virtues, and, like most persons of this character, was oblivious to her faults.

Her three years in the school had been marked by no serious difficulties. She had

been able to hide most of the unpleasant things in her nature, by her very aloofness. She had no close friends. She was judged by her work, her attention to duty, her obedience to rules; all of which were apparently beyond criticism. Her teachers, though they respected her, never grew fond of her. She led her classes through assiduous application, rather than brilliancy of mind.

She was an omnivorous reader. The only rule she ever thought of breaking, was to rise in the dead of night, when the house was still, and taking a secreted candle, lock herself in the bathroom—which had an outside window to give back no tell-tale reflection—and read until the dawn.

She changed her position after awhile, and getting up went to the door and locked it, listening for footsteps down the hall. None passed, evidently, for she went over to her bed and turning back the mattress brought out a book which had been carefully hidden. Then she drew up the comfortable chair again, placing it by a table which stood near Blue Bonnet's bureau. Adjusting the reading lamp to a proper angle, she was soon lost in the book, the leaves of which she turned with eager haste. [168]

She had been reading but a short time when a knock at the door startled her. Reaching over, she pulled out one of Blue Bonnet's bureau drawers stealthily, and laid the book inside, carefully covering it with some underwear. Then she opened the door.

Miss Martin, assistant to the house-mother, stood outside.

"I began to think you were not here, Miss Cross," she said. "May I come in?"

Joy opened the door.

"I was busy," she answered, dropping her eyes. "I came as quickly as I could."

Miss Martin was not long in making her business known.

"I am inspecting drawers, and I am late to-day. Things seem to have piled up so this week. Shall I begin with yours? It is quite unnecessary; they are always immaculate—but rules are rules."

She smiled pleasantly, and glancing through the drawers found them neat and orderly. She then turned to Blue Bonnet's bureau.

Under the usual pallor of Joy Cross's face a dull red mounted, dying out quickly, leaving it whiter than before.

"Miss Ashe is away, isn't she? Gone home for the week-end. She seems to be an unusually sweet, attractive girl—so unaffected and genuine. You must count yourself very lucky, Miss Cross—Why, what is this?" [169]

She drew from its hiding-place the book that had been placed there only a moment before, and held it closer to the light.

"To whom does this belong, Miss Cross, do you know? I am amazed to find such a book in this room. French literature of this kind is expressly forbidden."

Joy shook her head slowly. Her lips refused to speak.

"You have never seen it before?"

Again the head shook slowly.

"Have you seen Miss Ashe reading it at any time?"

"No, Miss Martin."

"This is her drawer, is it not?"

"Yes—it is her drawer."

Miss Martin finished the inspection of the bureau rather hurriedly, and book in hand, left the room.

Joy went over to the window and stood looking out. The color had come back into her face, but her hand trembled as she put it up to brush a stray lock of hair from her forehead.

She had not really meant to incriminate Blue Bonnet Ashe, but circumstances were against her. It had all happened so quickly—she hadn't had time to think clearly. There had been but one thought in her mind; she, a Senior, could not afford to be found with a book of that character in her possession. It might mean defeat after three years' struggle—struggle to graduate with the highest honor. She had been cheated out of so much in Miss North's school—*that* should not escape her, now! No, her record must go on, clear to the end. [170]

She took a few steps round the room and then came back to the window. She was frightened. Her heart beat like a trip hammer and her face was hot, burning, as if

with fever. She threw the window open and let the cold air fan her face—her hot hands. What should she do? What *could* she do, without bringing down upon herself the gravest consequences?

A Senior in Miss North's school stood for something—was supposed to stand for *all* that was honorable, above board. She was trusted, looked up to—privileged. Anything that touched her honor touched the school,—lowered the standard of the class. A Senior stood as an example—a pattern for juniors and younger girls, and she ... well, she had blundered—terribly! If it became known that she was the owner of the book—that she had lied to Miss Martin—

Visions of her father—old, silent, unforgiving—passed before her eyes; her mother —patient, long-suffering—who had made one sacrifice after another to keep her in this school, far beyond her means. The vision of those faces settled Joy's mind—made [171] a coward of her. Her disgrace should not touch them. She would not acknowledge the book, no matter what came! Blue Bonnet Ashe could disclaim any knowledge of it. She was innocent—could prove that she was. If she, herself, kept still, the storm would soon blow over. No one could prove the book was hers. No one had seen it in her possession. She could not explain—now. She had incriminated herself by telling an untruth. A lie, in the eyes of Miss North, was a serious offence, and in a Senior—intolerable—unforgivable—a malicious, willful lie that injured another....

The gong sounded for dinner. Joy hesitated. She hated to meet Miss Martin, at whose table she sat. She thought she would not go to dinner. On second thought she knew she must—that she was in a difficult position and must play the game to the end.

She went into the bathroom and bathed her flushed face in cold water, straightened her tumbled hair, resumed her usual attitude of indifference to the world in general, and going down to the dining-room slipped into her place quietly.

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CHAPTER X [172]

UNDER A CLOUD

DIRECTLY across the hall from Blue Bonnet Ashe roomed two girls—Angela Dare and Patricia Payne, the latter better known to her schoolmates as "Patty."

Angela Dare was the pride and hope of the school. She was unusually gifted in English, and gave promise of doing something brilliant in verse. She had the face and temperament of a poet—even the name—if names count for anything; for, as Ruth Biddle once said, "a lovely poem wouldn't look half so good with Susie Simpkins signed to it as Angela Dare!"

Angela had large blue eyes, as serene as a summer's day, and oddly translucent. Her head with its crown of yellow hair was charming in contour, and her face, ivory in coloring, gave her an ethereal, lily-like appearance, distinctive and unusual. She lived in a world of her own, which was satisfying and all absorbing.

It was Deborah Watts, practical and efficient, who one day found Angela in the heart of the Boston shopping district, wending her way through the busy throng, [173] eyes heavenward, her gaze transfixed and rapturous.

"Angela—Angela Dare!" Deborah Watts said, "what are you doing? You'll be killed in all this traffic. Look where you're going. Have you any money? Do you know where you are?"

To all of these questions Angela shook her head in a dazed fashion and burst into tears, because Deborah had spoiled a poem upon which she had been working for hours.

"I almost had it, Deborah, and it was so good. Quite the best thing I've done this year. It went like this:"

Again the gaze sought the skies but the lips faltered.

"Oh, Deborah; now see what you've done! I can't get it! I never shall be able to again—not just that way, and it was so pretty—a sonnet. The lines were in three quatrains and a couplet, with the climax in the octave—you—oh, I'm so annoyed at you."

And it is recorded that the next minute Angela was steeped in regret—- not for the lost verse, but because of her ingratitude and rudeness to Wee, by which it will be seen that she had all the eccentricity of genius, combined with rare kindness of

heart, a combination that endeared her to teachers and pupils.

Patty Payne was Angela's balance wheel—a rudder that safely steered her through [174]
tides and winds. Patty was the complement of Angela; a perfect foil in every way. To begin with, Patty was dark. She had snapping black eyes that could grow as soft and luminous as stars under the right conditions. She had cheeks like a winter apple, so soft and ruddy were they, and she was the president of the athletic association. She adored Angela in a splendid wholesome way; respecting her talent, her amiability, her spiritual nature—qualities negligible in Patty's own make up.

Angela's and Patty's room was known, for some reason, possibly because of Angela's name and temperament, as the "Angel's Retreat."

It was in the "Angel's Retreat" at four-thirty o'clock in the afternoon after Blue Bonnet's return from Woodford, that a number of girls were gathered. The room was filled with them. They sat on the bed, on the couch, on the floor, and the topic of conversation was personal characteristics.

Sincerity had been discussed; truthfulness disposed of; jealousy and temper aired to the satisfaction of all, and courage was now under discussion.

"I haven't very many virtues," Deborah Watts was saying, trying to assume a modest attitude, and failing; "but I think I am fairly courageous—that is, I meet big things rather well: sickness and accidents and—"

"You don't look as if you'd ever been sick in your life," Blue Bonnet said. [175]

"I haven't," Wee admitted, "but I have absolutely no fear of it—"

"Were you ever in an accident?" Patty inquired.

"No, I can't say that I ever was—but—what I mean is, I am not nervous. I haven't any fear of things happening when I'm riding, or train wrecks or—"

"How about a mouse?" Sue Hemphill inquired. "You said the other night—"

Wee stiffened perceptibly.

"Oh, how absurd, Sue—a mouse! Nobody is afraid of a mouse—really afraid—they're just so horrid, that's all. They're such squirmy things—ugh! No, what I mean is—I guess I'm not very clear, but I hardly know what *fear* is. I'm never afraid of being out nights—"

"I'm not either," Angela Dare said, "that is, not if my muse is along. I'm so absorbed—"

A laugh went round the room. Angela's muse was the signal for merriment.

"I think intuition is *my* long suit," Annabel Jackson said. "Sometimes it's perfectly uncanny. I can almost read people's thoughts and know what they are going to say and do."

"How?" Sue inquired.

"Oh, I don't know how. No one can account for those things."

"I thought you might help Mary Boyd—she's short on intuition—just at present." [176]

"What's Mary done now?" a half dozen voices inquired.

Sue laughed.

"Mary's furious," she said. "She's preparing for one of her monthly flights to Chicago. She's packing up."

The girls roared with laughter. Mary's flights home were too funny. She packed up several times a month, but she never got as far as the station.

"What's the matter this time?"

"Same old story. Fraulein! I think it is a shame those children have to have her all the time. She's ruining their dispositions. They all just hate her."

"What did Mary do, Sue?"

It was Blue Bonnet who asked this time.

"Oh, you'll have to get the particulars from her. It's as good as a vaudeville stunt to hear Mary tell it. They were having an orgy of some kind last night—"

"Was Carita in it?" Blue Bonnet asked rising, all the anxiety of a mother hen for a lost chicken in her attitude.

"I think she was. There was a room full."

Blue Bonnet started for the door.

"I must go and see," she said. "I hope Carita isn't in trouble."

"Come back again," the girls called after her. "We've something to discuss later." [177]

Mary's room was in a state of confusion. In a corner Carita sat, weeping softly.

"Mary's going home," she said, and a sob shook her. "She says she's going to-night. Oh, I'll miss her so, Blue Bonnet."

"Going home?"

Blue Bonnet turned to Mary.

"Well, I should say I am," Mary announced, dragging out one garment after another from her closet. "I wouldn't stay in this school another day for anybody. Fraulein has acted perfectly outrageously. I think she's crazy!"

Blue Bonnet stared in amazement.

"What's she done, Mary?"

"Done! Well, she's done enough to drive me out of this school—that's all!"

She pounded a cork in a bottle of hair tonic she was getting ready to pack. The cork refused to stay in the bottle. Mary gave it another jab—the bottle broke and the contents spilled over the dresser. She tried to rescue an ivory-handled brush and mirror, but it was too late.

"There," she cried, the tears springing to her eyes; "see what I've done—perfectly ruined Peggy Austin's brush! Well, she shouldn't have left it in here."

Blue Bonnet took the brush and tried to wipe off the spots. She pushed Mary into a [178] chair and drew one up for herself.

"Now," she said, "tell me all about it. What has Fraulein done?"

At first Mary was silent.

"Tell me," urged Blue Bonnet.

"Well, we were having a party in here last night—a sort of feast. It was Peggy's birthday and her mother sent her a box. Peggy's room is so near Fraulein's she never can have anything there, so we had it here. We waited till all the lights were out, and it was as still as could be. We were having a dandy time, when Peggy said she'd forgotten a box of candy in her room and went to get it. We waited for her, and after a while there was a knock on the door—just a little timid knock, as if Peggy were trying to fool us. She knew a knock like that would scare us to death, so we thought we'd fool her. I happened to have a pitcher of water on the stand there, so we opened the door a little way—it was pitch dark—and let her have it, full force!"

"Well?"

"Well—it wasn't Peggy—it was Fraulein! Didn't you hear her scream? It was enough to wake the dead. Miss North came running and Miss Martin—she's on this floor too, now, and—"

Carita's grief had suddenly turned to mirth. She rocked back and forth in her chair [179] shaking with laughter.

"Oh, Blue Bonnet, you couldn't have helped laughing to save you—it was perfectly killing. Fraulein was so angry she just tore round. She threatened to have us all expelled—disgraced—everything you could think of! At least we took it for that—it was all in German—every word."

"And Miss North has taken away all my privileges for two weeks—two whole weeks! That means that I can't go to the party the girls are getting up for the twenty-second, or anything, and I'm just not going to stand it. I'm going home! You see if I don't—this time!"

She got up and began hauling more things from the closet.

"No, you're not," Blue Bonnet said gently, putting her arm round her. "You're not going to do anything of the kind, you know you're not. You'd be ashamed to. It would look as if you were afraid to face the music—and you can—you must!"

It was Mary's turn to look amazed.

"That's not why I'm going," she said. "I'm not afraid of punishment."

"That's the way it would look."

"I don't care how it would look. I wouldn't be here to see anyway."

"Then you haven't any pride."

"I guess I have as much pride as you have, or any one else!" [180]

"Not if you're going to run away, you haven't. Besides, I can't blame Fraulein so very much for being angry. It isn't so funny to be drenched like that. She was doing her duty, wasn't she?"

"Oh, she's always snooping round, if that's what you mean. Get her on your own hall for awhile and see how you like it."

"I shouldn't like it. Not at all; but that's not the point."

"What is the point?"

"That you've made a mistake and you aren't big enough to take the blame. My uncle says that making a mistake isn't such a very grave thing in itself, it's human nature. The trouble comes in not trying to correct it."

Mary looked out of the window, a frown on her face.

"You'd better not be so preachy," she said. "Everybody hates a goody-goody—here!"

Blue Bonnet laughed.

"Don't worry," she said. "I'll never be called that by any one who knows me! I've done nothing but make mistakes and get in hot water all my life. Wasn't I doing penance last week myself?"

"Then I should think you would know how other people feel."

"I do. That's why I'm trying to advise you. I reckon it's a mighty selfish way to look [181] at it, Mary, but you'll be a heap happier yourself to do the square thing. It gives you such a comfy sort of feeling."

"I'm perfectly comfortable now," Mary said obstinately. "I wish it had been a hose instead of a little pitcher—"

Blue Bonnet put her hand over Mary's mouth and gave her a little hug.

"You don't wish anything of the kind. You're angry. When people are angry they aren't responsible. I'm going to tell you something I did last summer to one of my very best friends when I was angry."

She told Mary of how she had almost let Kitty Clark drown in the swimming pool of the Texas stream; how Kitty had cut her head on the rock, and of the consternation that followed.

Mary listened almost unbelievingly.

"You did—that, Blue Bonnet?"

"I did, Mary, and it was a dear lesson. I've had a line on my temper ever since—sometimes it gets away, for a while, but not so often. Now come on, be a thoroughbred! Go and talk to Fraulein."

Mary shrank away protesting.

Blue Bonnet shrugged her shoulders and started to pick up the room.

"All right, Mary, if you've got a damp cotton cord for a back bone—" [182]

Mary got up out of her chair instantly.

"*That's* something I haven't got. I'll just show you, Miss Blue Bonnet Ashe."

She flew out of the room and Carita ran to the door to watch her.

"She's knocking on Fraulein's door, as sure as you live," she announced, coming back.

"Of course," Blue Bonnet said, hanging a couple of dresses back in the closet. "Mary's all right. She doesn't mean half she says."

A few of the girls were waiting for Blue Bonnet in the "Angel's Retreat."

"Hurry up," Ruth Biddle said, as she entered the room. "We've a lot to say to you—too much for ten minutes."

"Go ahead, then, I'm listening."

"You are about to have a great honor conferred upon you," Ruth continued.

"'Some achieve greatness—some have it thrust upon them,'" Blue Bonnet quoted. "This is the thrusting kind, I suppose—"

"We want you to join our club, Blue Bonnet," Annabel said. "We haven't time to be

frivolous. I have a lesson in exactly seven minutes with Mrs. White. Will you?"

Blue Bonnet looked stunned.

"A club!" she said. "What kind of a club?"

"Oh, just a club—something like a sorority. I'm the president, if that's any inducement." [183]

"It certainly would be, Annabel, but—you see I belong to one club—a little one in Woodford. I don't know how the girls would feel about my joining another."

"You won't be in Woodford much from now on," Annabel said. "You'd better take the 'good the gods provide,'—it's some club!"

"I don't doubt that—but—what do you do?"

"We don't give our private affairs to the public," Sue said, laughing to take the edge off the rather bald statement. "Do you, in your club?"

"Well—there isn't much to tell."

"There is, in ours. We have a serious purpose—sometimes."

"Who's in it?"

Ruth counted on her fingers.

"Annabel, Sue, Wee, Angela and Patty—myself, of course, and you, if you'll come."

"Why, it would be another We Are Sevens," Blue Bonnet said. "That's the name of our club. Isn't that odd?"

"Sleep over it, Blue Bonnet, and let us know to-morrow. It'll keep," Wee Watts suggested.

"All right, suppose I do. I'll try to let you know to-morrow if I can. I'd really like to write to the girls—"

A knock at the door interrupted the sentence.

"Is Miss Ashe here?" Martha inquired. "If she is, Miss North would like to see her in the office." [184]

"Mercy, how popular some people are!" Ruth remarked. "What is it, Blue Bonnet? More trouble?"

"Not this time," Blue Bonnet said, her head up, her eyes shining. "My conscience is clear anyway."

Miss North, as usual, was busy. She motioned Blue Bonnet to a chair and went on with her work. When she had finished, she unlocked a drawer in her desk and taking out a book, handed it to Blue Bonnet.

"Is this your property, Miss Ashe?" she inquired.

Blue Bonnet took the book, opened it, looked it over from cover to cover and handed it back.

"No," she said, "it isn't mine. It's French. I couldn't translate it."

"You are quite sure that it is not your book, or one that you borrowed?"

Blue Bonnet glanced at the book again.

"Perfectly sure, Miss North. I never saw it before."

"That is very strange, Miss Ashe. The book was found in your drawer while you were at home for the week-end. Miss Martin found it covered with some underwear."

The puzzled expression on Blue Bonnet's face would have cleared her in any court of justice; but Miss North had dealt with consummate actresses in her time. She was on her guard. [185]

Blue Bonnet took the book again in her hands and turned over a few leaves, her face still surprised and bewildered.

"In *my* drawer! Who do you suppose could have put it there?"

She looked Miss North clearly in the eyes.

"That is what I am trying to find out. It is the kind of book that is expressly forbidden in the school, Miss Ashe. This is a very serious matter."

Blue Bonnet laid the book on the desk instantly, giving it a little push as if contaminated by the touch.

"And you think, Miss North, that *I* would have a book like that in my drawer?"

"I should not like to think it, Miss Ashe, but—"

Blue Bonnet did not let her finish the sentence.

"Doesn't my word count for anything? I am in the habit of telling the truth."

Miss North hesitated. She believed the girl innocent, but she had had so many experiences—boarding-school was a hotbed for them, she sometimes thought. Her position was a trying one.

"I *want* to believe that you are telling the truth. Miss Ashe, but—I am sorry to say that I have known girls, who thought they were truthful, to dissemble—to—" [186]

"I am not one of those girls, Miss North. I give you my word of honor that I never saw that book, or one like it, in my life, until this minute. That is all I can say—you may believe me or not."

She started to leave the room, her head held a trifle higher than usual, her eyes bright and snapping.

"One moment, Miss Ashe. There is no need for anger. This, as I stated before, is a serious matter. It is possible that the girl who brought this book into the school did not realize its full import; its true significance. No girl could read it without taking away much of the bloom that it is our privilege to guard and preserve. Even I, at middle age, should find this book—obnoxious."

"And you think that I would secrete a book of that kind in my drawer? That I would touch it any more than you would?"

Blue Bonnet's eyes were appealing now, almost pathetic in their mute inquiry.

"Do you know of any one who would be likely to put the book in your drawer, Miss Ashe?"

Miss North had ignored Blue Bonnet's question for a moment.

"No, Miss North, I do not. I don't believe any of the girls I know would have done it."

"Very well. You may go now. The matter will be thoroughly investigated." [187]

"And in the meantime I remain under suspicion?"

Blue Bonnet looked as if she had been struck a blow. It was the first time in her life that her word had ever been doubted in the slightest particular. She had a great reverence for the truth. It was an inheritance. "Straight and true like an Ashe, Honey"—the words rang in her ears now—would always—like an armor they wrapped themselves about her—protected her....

"We have many of us rested under an injustice, Miss Ashe, but right always triumphs. I am old fashioned enough to believe that. The matter will be sifted to the bottom."

Blue Bonnet went up to her room feeling that a cloud had settled upon her—a cloud black and ominous.

Joy Cross sat in her accustomed seat by the window, reading. She did not glance up as Blue Bonnet entered, but, if anything, turned her face farther away.

Blue Bonnet sat down listlessly. Her first thought was to question Joy in regard to the book, but she hated to mention it; to have any one know that she was mixed up in such an unsavory affair. Who could have done such a thing—such a contemptible, cowardly thing? Who, in school, disliked her enough to put her in such a position? [188] How had it happened?

Round and round in a groove went her thoughts, bringing no solution. She got up after a while, and opening her top bureau drawer, took out a small box safely guarded in one corner. From the box she drew a miniature which she gazed at long and tenderly.

Joy Cross put away her book and left the room.

Blue Bonnet took the miniature to the light. Her throat ached with the sobs that she had suppressed in Joy's presence. Now the torrent broke.

"Oh, Mother, Mother!" she cried, sinking into a chair, "why can't I have you to tell me what to do?—why did you have to leave me when I needed you so?—other girls have mothers—fathers, too—"

So violent was her grief that she did not hear the door open softly, nor see the gentle, sweet-faced woman who came swiftly toward her and knelt beside her.

"Why, Miss Ashe! Blue Bonnet, dear—what is all this about? What is the matter? Can I help you?"

The girl raised her face and struggled with her tears.

"I just wanted my mother—for a minute," she said slowly. "Sometimes I need her so —want her—nobody knows how much! I suppose girls never do get used to being [189] without a mother, do they, Mrs. White—no matter how kind and dear one's friends and relatives may be?"

"Couldn't you tell me what the trouble is? Perhaps I could help you?"

Blue Bonnet shook her head.

Mrs. White lifted the girl's wet face and held it between her cool, firm hands.

"Did you know," she said after a moment, "that I was a mother once—for ever so short a while—a little daughter, dear. She would have been almost your age if she had been spared to me. I, too, know how terrible death is—how it robs us—"

"Oh, were you—were you?" Blue Bonnet cried, her own sorrow for the moment forgotten in another's grief. "It must have been awful to give her up—awful! I'm so sorry."

There was an awkward silence for a moment, and then Blue Bonnet thrust the miniature into Mrs. White's hands.

"Did I ever show you this? It's my mother. I got it last year on my sixteenth birthday. I love it better than anything in the world."

Mrs. White gazed at the likeness for some minutes.

"It is a lovely face," she said, handing it back. "A lovely face—*better* than lovely—womanly. One feels the spirit back of it. When you are lonely again, think what a gift [190] such a mother has been. What a privilege to follow in her footsteps—carry out her hopes of you—her ideals."

She was gone, her own cup overflowing, before Blue Bonnet could reply. Just before the gong sounded for dinner she came back for a moment, smiling and serene.

"I brought you this," she said. "I tore it off my calendar a few moments ago. It has a little message for you. Let's pin it up here in your mirror for a day or two, so you will see it every time you dress."

And over Mrs. White's shoulder Blue Bonnet read:

"Life is mostly froth and bubble,
One thing stands like stone:
Kindness in another's trouble,
Courage in one's own."

Under the "courage in one's own," a faint line had been drawn.

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CHAPTER XI

[191]

THE CLOUD LIFTS

"WHAT'S the matter with Blue Bonnet?" Annabel Jackson asked Sue Hemphill. "She looks sick—or worried to death. What's happened?"

"I don't know," Sue said, shrugging her shoulders. "I thought myself she looked awfully upset this morning, but when I asked her if anything was wrong, she said—I can't remember what she did say—but I took it that she wasn't going to tell, if there was."

"There's something the matter. That look she's got on her face doesn't spell happiness—not by a long ways."

"Why don't you use your Sherlock Holmes talent on her," Sue inquired flippantly.

"My what, Sue?"

"This intuition business you were telling us about yesterday. You said you could read people's thoughts."

"I didn't say I was a mind reader, did I?"

"Well—something like that."

"Oh, Sue, how perfectly ridiculous! Tell that to one or two more and I'll be a spiritualistic medium holding seances in my room." [192]

Sue laughed, starting the dimples dancing in her cheeks. Those dimples saved Sue many a scolding. They defended her sharp tongue—exonerated malice. They pointed like a hand on a sign post to mirth and pure good nature. "You can't be angry with Sue when those dimples pop out," more than one girl had said.

The morning had been a trying one for Blue Bonnet. She had great difficulty in keeping her mind on her studies. Even Professor Howe had to ask for closer attention —an unheard of thing.

"Are you ill, Miss Ashe?" she had asked, calling Blue Bonnet to the desk after the class adjourned. "You don't look well. Better go up and show your tongue to Mrs. Goodwin or Miss Martin."

"It isn't my tongue—that is—I'm not at all ill, thank you, Professor Howe," Blue Bonnet replied absently.

She passed on to her Latin class, a little droop in her usually straight shoulders showing listlessness. She sat down by Wee Watts and opened her book, but her gaze wandered to the window.

"You may translate, Miss Ashe," Miss Attridge said for the second time and Blue Bonnet did not hear.

A titter went round the room. Blue Bonnet's gaze rested on the housetops. She was miles and miles away from the small recitation room. [193]

"Come, Miss Ashe, the third oration, please; begin where Miss Watts left off—Cicero attacks Catiline, saying:"

Blue Bonnet came back with a start, and with Wee's assistance found the line.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Attridge. Where Deborah left off, you say?"

It was the same with French and with Algebra. Blue Bonnet's mind was busy with but one theme—one thought—that revolved round and round again, hemming her in with despair: Who had secreted the book in her drawer? To whom did it belong? How could she establish her innocence?

"Cheer up, cheer up," Sue Hemphill said, as she passed Blue Bonnet in the hall after lunch. Sue was executing a fancy step down the hall and her whole manner betokened the utmost excitement.

"You look cheerful enough for all of us, Sue," Blue Bonnet answered. "What's happened to you?"

"Billy's coming—going to be here for dinner; so is his room-mate, Hammie McVickar."

"Hammie! What a funny name!"

"Hamilton! Funny little chap, too. Wait till you see him."

Sue giggled as she pirouetted back and forth.

"Decided about the club yet, Blue Bonnet?"

"Not yet," Blue Bonnet said. She wondered if her face betrayed lack of interest. The thought of the club had entirely passed out of her mind. [194]

"What do you call this club, Sue?"

Sue took a whirl and a glide and stopped at Blue Bonnet's side.

"The Ancient Order of Lambs," she said, and darted off again.

Blue Bonnet ran after her and brought her to a standstill.

"Sue! tell me. What is it?"

"That's it, of course. Why not?"

"The Ancient Order of Lambs! Really?"

"Really.

"We amble and we gamble,
We frolic and we bleat;
Something new in lambkins
Rather hard to beat!"

"Dear me, is that from Angela's pen?"

"Angela! Mercy, I should hope not! Angela doesn't write doggerel—she writes verse."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Blue Bonnet said meekly.

"Blue Bonnet, you'd make such a love of a lamb. Do join us."

"I reckon I would," she said, her natural humor coming to the surface. "I'm always being led to slaughter—if that helps any. I can't say I'm a willing sacrifice, however."

"You'll do," Sue said, taking up the step again. "I'll tell the girls you've about made [195]
up your mind—and—Blue Bonnet, come here, listen! Put on that white dress to-night; the one with the pink under it, will you? I want you to meet Billy and Hammie, if I can arrange it. Don't forget!"

The day wore on wearily. Blue Bonnet had seen nothing of Miss North; no word came from the office.

At five o'clock she started to dress for dinner. She got out the white dress half heartedly. Only because she wanted to please Sue did she consider it at all.

She tried to talk with Joy as she dressed, but Joy was unusually silent. Her monosyllables were low and indistinct. Twice Blue Bonnet turned to catch a word and Joy's face startled her: it was white and lifeless, almost expressionless save for the eyes—they were troubled.

"Are you ill, Joy?" Blue Bonnet asked kindly; but Joy turned her face away and answered "No," quickly.

Much to her surprise, Blue Bonnet found herself a guest at Miss North's table. She slipped into the place assigned her next to Annabel. In a moment Sue came in with her guests. They found their places just opposite.

As soon as she could gather courage after the introductions Blue Bonnet looked [196]
across the table at her neighbors. She remembered Sue's remark about Hammie McVickar, and laughed outright. Sue had said he was a "funny little chap." Perhaps he was, but he towered six feet two, if an inch; a magnificent, big, clean-limbed fellow with brown eyes and a nice face that attracted Blue Bonnet.

Billy was interesting, too. He was very much like Sue. His eyes twinkled mischievously, and dimples, less prominent than Sue's, showed when he laughed.

These young men showed none of Alec's embarrassment. They chatted and joked, making the best of their opportunity—they considered it such; indeed quite a lark to invade seminary walls.

Blue Bonnet learned before dinner was over that Billy was the illustrious half-back on the Harvard team; had contributed much to the game she had seen in the autumn; that Hammie McVickar also shared honors.

The meal passed all too quickly, and Annabel and Blue Bonnet left the dining-room reluctantly. They had barely reached the gymnasium for the half hour of dancing, when Sue caught up with them breathlessly.

"Come back," she called. "Miss North has given you permission to come to the reception-room and meet Billy and Hammie. Hurry, they can only stay a half hour."

It is needless to say the girls hurried, slowing down modestly before reaching the [197]
reception-room door.

It was a pleasant half hour. Blue Bonnet felt as if some one had lifted a curtain and given her a glimpse into another world. It was her first experience in entertaining college men. She enjoyed the good-natured banter—the give and take that passed between them; the college stories. She settled down in her chair and listened to the others talk; wide-eyed, keenly alert, but quiet as a mouse. Sue and Annabel kept up a chatter, and Billy and Hammie were entertaining in the extreme.

"Isn't Billy a dear?" Sue said, running into Blue Bonnet's room to say good night. "And isn't Hammie McVickar splendid? I think he's the best-looking man I know. Billy says he's a prince—the fellows at college all swear by him. So glad you could meet them. Good night. Sleep well."

Strange to say, Blue Bonnet did sleep well. She was worn out with the day's worry and anxiety; but she awoke the next morning with a depression that manifests itself even before the eyes open, sometimes.

"What is wrong with me?" she thought, and, in an instant, she knew. The book—the terrible book! Would she be able to straighten it all out to-day?

But another day was to pass, and yet another before the cloud lifted. [198]

It was on the fourth day after the visit to Miss North's office that Blue Bonnet felt she could no longer endure the strain, and decided to take Annabel Jackson into her confidence. She had thought it all out carefully, and realized that she must unburden to some one. Carita was too young to be helpful—besides, she didn't wish to worry Carita.

"May I see you for a minute after school, Annabel?" she asked.

"Of course," Annabel answered. "I think it is about time you saw me—or somebody! You look as if you had the weight of the universe on your shoulders lately. Are you going to tell me what it is all about?"

"Yes."

"All right. Where shall I meet you?"

"In my room after the walk. Joy practises then. We can be alone."

Strictly on time, Annabel appeared at Blue Bonnet's door, was ushered in and the door locked.

Blue Bonnet laid the whole story before Annabel—all she knew of it.

Annabel listened attentively, her eyes narrowing occasionally, her breath coming quick and sharp. There was a dead silence when Blue Bonnet finished, and then Annabel jumped up from her seat and took a few turns about the room. She was [199] thinking something over, Blue Bonnet knew.

"I think—I believe I have a clue. In fact I know I have. Leave this to me for a day or two. I wish you had come to me sooner. There was no need of your suffering like this. I think I know the young person—"

She stopped abruptly and stooping kissed Blue Bonnet lightly on the cheek. She came back after she had left the room and inquired quite casually where Joy Cross was practising at this hour.

"In number six, I think, Annabel. She used to, anyway."

"Thank you. I want to see her a minute."

In number six Joy Cross was pounding out an exercise. She looked up as Annabel opened the door and went on with her practising.

"May I speak with you a minute?" Annabel said.

Joy wheeled on her stool.

"For a minute," she said. "I'm busy."

"It will only take a minute, I fancy. When do you intend to acknowledge the book you hid in Blue Bonnet Ashe's drawer while she was away?"

The shock was so sudden—so unexpected—that Joy Cross grew faint. Every vestige of color died out of her face.

"I don't know what you mean," she said slowly. "What are you talking about?"

"You know what I'm talking about, all right. Do you remember the day two weeks [200] ago when we were out walking and stopped in that queer little book shop? One of the girls wanted to get her Quatre-vingt-treize. You went to another part of the shop—alone. I came up behind you—something had attracted my attention—you didn't see me. I heard you ask for the book—I will not mention the name. I saw the clerk hand it to you—give you your change. Saw the whole transaction with my own eyes! This is no hearsay."

Joy Cross turned round to the piano and hid her face in her hands.

"I haven't words to express my opinion of you, Joy Cross," Annabel went on. "A girl who would put another girl in the position you have put Blue Bonnet Ashe—as honest and innocent a girl as ever drew the breath of life. You're a coward—a miserable—"

Joy turned and threw out her hand beseechingly.

"Wait," she said, "please wait! I want to tell you. I'm all you say, perhaps—but—if you would only listen—"

Annabel had turned away impatiently.

"I didn't mean to hurt Blue Bonnet Ashe—please believe that, Annabel. It was all a mistake—an accident. I thought it would right itself, and I kept still. I did buy the book—I was reading it in my room; some one knocked at the door—I was sitting by [201] Blue Bonnet's bureau—I reached over and laid it in her drawer—just until I opened the door. I meant to take it right out again—but—it was Miss Martin. She was inspecting drawers—she found the book—she—I—oh, can't you see how it was—how

it all happened—so quickly? I couldn't think of anything but the disgrace. I wanted to save myself. I wouldn't have cared so much if I hadn't been a Senior. I thought it might keep me from graduating—from some of the honors that I have fought for. I never dreamed it would go so far. I thought—oh, I don't know what I thought—why I did it. I suppose I'm ruined utterly."

She burst into the wildest weeping. Tears sprang to Annabel's own eyes. She was a sympathetic girl. She wished she could bring herself to put her arm round Joy—to give her a word of encouragement—but she couldn't. There was something that repelled her in the convulsed form; the thin body with its narrow, heaving shoulders; the unattractive blond head.

"Well, there is only one thing to do now, of course you understand that, Joy. You must go to Miss North immediately."

Joy raised her head; her eyes wide with terror.

"Oh, no, not that! I can't do that. I can't! I can't!"

"You *will*," Annabel said sternly. "Stop that crying! Haven't you any nerve at all? [202]
You will go to Miss North at once! Immediately, do you understand? or I will. An innocent girl has suffered long enough."

Annabel had drawn herself up to her full height. Her cheeks blazed. She was a fair representative of her illustrious grandsire as she stood there, her fighting blood up.

"You understand? You go at once—this minute!"

Joy staggered to her feet. Annabel watched her as she started for the door; followed her as she crossed the building to her own room and paused.

Annabel paused too, but only for a second.

"Miss North is in her office at this hour," she said. "Go immediately"—and Joy went, her limbs almost refusing to bear her to the floor below.

What transpired in that office will never be known to any one save Miss North and Joy Cross. The gong had sounded for dinner before Joy emerged, white and silent, and neither she nor Miss North appeared at the evening meal.

Blue Bonnet felt better after she had confided in Annabel. She scarcely knew why, except that Annabel seemed to see a way out of the difficulty, and she had the reputation of being reliable and level headed.

With a lighter heart than she had known for several days, she dressed for dinner [203]
and entered the dining-room with a smile on her lips.

"Praise be!" Sue said, when Blue Bonnet laughed at one of her jokes. "I thought you had given up laughing, Blue Bonnet. You haven't even smiled since Tuesday. Coming down to the Gym to dance to-night?"

"I think I will. I've got to run up-stairs first and get a clean handkerchief."

She ran up-stairs lightly, and, entering her room, switched on the light. She started for the bureau, but the sight of her room-mate, stretched face downward on her bed, arrested and changed her course.

"Why, Joy," she said, "what on earth's the matter? Haven't you been to dinner?"

Joy Cross sat up. She was as pitiable a looking sight as one could imagine. Her face, always white and expressionless, was ashen, and she shook with nervousness.

Blue Bonnet was horrified at her appearance and started for the door to call Mrs. Goodwin or Miss Martin.

"Wait," Joy called, her eyes burning into Blue Bonnet's. "Wait!"

She pulled herself together, struggling for self control.

"I want to tell you—" the words came with painful effort—"I *must* tell you. I've been
a coward long enough. *I* put that book in your drawer." [204]

The utter hopelessness in the voice swept all thought of anger from Blue Bonnet's heart, and flooded it with pity. She could not find voice to speak for a moment.

"You, Joy? You! I can't believe it!"

A look of pride flashed over Joy's face. In that brief second she stood once more on her old ground—trusted, respected.

"I suppose not," she said dully, and the flush died from her face. "No one would have believed me so wicked! They don't know me as I am."

Tears welled in her eyes.

"Tell me about it, Joy, please. I know you didn't do it on purpose. You couldn't have. I never did anything to make you hate me like that."

She went over to the grate and stirring the embers into a ruddy glow drew up a chair and coaxed Joy into it.

"Now we can talk better," she said, sitting down on the hearth rug beside her. "Tell me how it happened. It's been such a mystery to me."

Joy glanced down into the face upturned in the firelight and almost gasped at its serenity. There was not a trace of anger in the eyes lifted to her own—nothing but kindness—and that look, somehow, made it harder to proceed than any torrent of words.

Between long pauses Joy told Blue Bonnet all that she had told Annabel Jackson [205] and Miss North; and Blue Bonnet listened breathlessly, a little sigh escaping her lips as Joy finished the story.

There was tense silence for a minute, and then Blue Bonnet reached up shyly and took Joy's hand in her own.

"I suppose I ought to be awfully angry at you, Joy, for letting me suffer as I have the past few days—but—somehow—I'm not—at all. I feel so sorry for you that there isn't any room for anger. I think I can understand how it happened."

"You can! It doesn't seem possible that any one could see my side."

Blue Bonnet gazed into the fire and spoke slowly.

"Oh, yes, they could. All but the untruth, Joy—that was the worst, of course—but then—maybe you haven't been brought up on the truth as I have. The truth is a sort of religion in our family. That and 'do unto others.'"

Joy was quick to come to the defence of her family.

"No—I can't find excuse in that. My people are truthful. They're queer, maybe, but they are truthful and honest."

Perhaps it was the gentle pressure of Blue Bonnet's hand, the sympathy in her eyes, that gradually brought forth the story of Joy's life. Before she had finished, Blue Bonnet's tears mingled with Joy's, and the grasp tightened on the hand held in her [206] own.

In that half hour Joy poured out her heart in a way she would have thought impossible an hour before. She told Blue Bonnet of her cold, indifferent father; of the patient, long-suffering mother who had planned and saved, and sacrificed to keep her in school, and of how she had longed to repay the devotion with the highest honors the school could give.

"It was the thought of my mother's awful disappointment that tempted me to lie to Miss Martin," she said. "It all happened so quickly I scarcely had time to think clearly. I was so afraid of being expelled—I will be now, of course. Miss North is going to bring the whole thing before the Faculty to-morrow."

"Oh, no—surely she won't do that!" Blue Bonnet cried. "Did you tell her what you've just told me, Joy?"

"No. I'm not playing for sympathy. I'll take what's coming, if—if only the girls didn't have to know."

"They don't," Blue Bonnet said determinedly. "Nobody knows it but Annabel Jackson and myself. Annabel won't tell, and nobody ever knows what goes on in Faculty. Now, what is that?"

A knock had startled both girls. Blue Bonnet went to the door.

"Oh, dear," she said, "I forgot all about going to study hour. I just know that's [207] Fraulein."

Fraulein it was.

"You were not in the study hall, Miss Ashe," she said, craning her neck to see into the room.

Blue Bonnet stepped outside and closed the door.

"No, I wasn't. I was engaged."

"You were excused?"

"No—I was not."

"Then I shall haf to report to Miss North."

The color came into Blue Bonnet's cheeks and her eyes flashed.

"Do," she said. "I don't mind giving you that little treat."

"I perfectly abominate that woman," she said, going back to the hearth rug. "She can anger me quicker than any one I ever knew. I was terribly rude to her; but she is so aggravating. She adores getting something on me."

When the gong sounded for bed Blue Bonnet had drawn a tub of hot water for Joy's bath, and urged her into it.

"It will make her sleep better," she said to herself as the door closed between them. "Poor girl; my heart aches for her. If she stays here the girls have just got to be nicer to her—that's all! And she's going to stay—she *must*, even if I have to send for Uncle Cliff to help straighten things out."

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CHAPTER XII

[208]

INITIATED

It was the next afternoon after Blue Bonnet's interview with Joy Cross that she ran up to Carita's room to chat a moment during visiting hour.

"Whew!" Mary Boyd said, blowing into the room breezily and tossing an armful of books into the middle of her bed, "what's up? There's been a Faculty meeting. The seats of the mighty were filled to overflowing. I just saw every teacher in the building filing out. You should have seen Fraulein! She had Madam de Cartier buttonholed in the hall talking to her like mad. She dropped her voice as I passed, so I couldn't get a word."

"Mary!" Carita exclaimed, "you wouldn't have listened, would you?"

"Oh, I don't know. Yes, I think I should if I'd had the chance. I'd like to know what's the matter—there's something, all right."

"Mary, you're so curious," remarked Peggy Austin from the couch. "It was a regular meeting, wasn't it?"

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"Indeed it wasn't. Faculty's met on Tuesday since time began. Guess I ought to know. I've just escaped being up before it twice."

Blue Bonnet was silent. She could have enlightened Mary; but she guarded the secret of Joy Cross's trouble. Blue Bonnet had been called to Miss North's office just before Faculty convened, but not a word as to the outcome of Joy's difficulty had been mentioned. Miss North had merely told her what she already knew; that Joy had put the book in the drawer and that Blue Bonnet was exonerated from all blame. Miss North complimented her on her patience, as well as her silence. She wished the matter to be kept as quiet as possible.

Blue Bonnet had gone out of the office with a lighter heart than she had known in some days—and yet she was troubled for Joy. She hoped Joy would not be sent home—hoped it with all her heart; and once while Miss North was talking, she had almost ventured to speak with her about it; but it seemed rather presumptuous—as if Miss North might not quite understand her own business.

She was wondering as Mary spoke how it would all end, and a little frown wrinkled her brow.

"What's the matter with you, Blue Bonnet?" Mary asked. "You're as sober as a judge. They weren't discussing you in the meeting, were they?"

Blue Bonnet started. Mary had come so close to the truth that it brought the color to her cheeks.

[210]

"Oh, I just wager they were! Look how she's blushing."

Carita was indignant.

"The very idea, Mary. What's Blue Bonnet done? You are the worst—"

"I know what's the matter with Blue Bonnet," Peggy Austin said. "She's *scared* pink! She had better be, too. She's going to be initiated into the Lambs to-night. They won't do a thing to her! Why, when they took Angela Dare in, she had hysterics. They had to get a doctor for her. It nearly broke up their club. Miss North said it came near ending sororities for all time in the school."

"Oh, pooh," Mary scoffed. "Angela has no business in one anyhow. She's too

emotional. One never knows what she's going to do. She has high strikes over exams—and just anything. Angela's only half human. She's like that Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe—or somebody who was so frail in body—"

"Mrs. Stowe!" Blue Bonnet exclaimed.

"She means Mrs. Browning," Peggy said loftily. "English isn't Mary's long suit."

"No, but I can add two and two," Mary returned sharply.

Peggy was as weak in mathematics as Mary was in English.

[211] Blue Bonnet finished her visit with Carita and went back to her room. She opened her desk and getting out an invitation looked it over carefully. At the top of the note-paper reposed a tiny golden lamb, and underneath, the letters A. O. O. L. formed a monogram in blue and gold. A skull and cross-bones had been drawn in ink and a message followed:

> "The presence of Miss Blue Bonnet Ashe is demanded at twelve o'clock to-night, February the nineteenth, at number fifteen Fifth Avenue: the said Miss Ashe to appear in a winding sheet, noiseless shoes and a bath-robe. Miss Ashe has the privilege of bringing refreshments with her if inclined; the committee suggesting that they be in keeping with the shades of night: skeleton salad, ghost sandwiches, assorted spooks or witches' delight. A roasted hobgoblin will be served soon after the meeting opens. Please be on time, and hold your honorable body in readiness for this or any other sacrifice that may be demanded by the Order.
>
> "Fraternally yours,
> COMMITTEE ON INITIATION."

Blue Bonnet laughed as she folded up the invitation and put it back in the desk. Her mind reverted to the time, a day or two back, when Sue Hemphill had fastened a little enameled sprig of mint—the pin of the Order—on her dress with the remark: [212]

"This means that you are now pledged to our Order. Mint is our emblem. You'll get the roast at the initiation."

She stood for a moment looking out the window, her thoughts on the event before her. She wondered about the little golden lamb at the top of the note-paper—what its significance was. In regard to the refreshments she wished she had known about those sooner. If she could have had a day's notice, Huyler's could have prepared a witches' delight—ghost sandwiches that the girls would not have forgotten in a week. She remembered some April fool's candy Kitty Clark once got—the most delectable looking stuff imaginable—but, ugh! Her mouth burned yet when she thought of it.

She ran across the hall and knocked softly at Annabel's door. Annabel was some time in answering. When she did, she poked her head out the tiniest bit, and Blue Bonnet saw a flash of white sheets which seemed, from her brief glance, to cover the room.

"Sorry to be inhospitable, Blue Bonnet, but I can't let you in. You see you aren't expected until to-night. At twelve, remember; and, for goodness' sake, take a look down the hall before you venture out. We don't want Fraulein to spoil things. I reckon Sue had better fix up your pillow before you come." [213]

"Fix up my pillow!" Blue Bonnet said, a bit mystified.

"Yes. She'll show you. She's an artist at it."

Blue Bonnet's amazement deepened and Annabel explained.

"She'll get some of Wee Watts' hair. She's got a Jane, and a switch, too—it's about the color of yours—and she'll pin it on your pillow—fix it up so that if Fraulein suspects anything and takes a peek in your room she'll swear you're sleeping like a baby."

Blue Bonnet fairly gasped.

"Oh, we haven't been here three years for nothing, let me tell you," Annabel confessed. "You need all your wits."

"How am I going to wake up?" Blue Bonnet asked. "I know I never can without an alarm of some kind. I'm an awfully good sleeper."

"That's easy. Tie a string round your wrist and put the string outside the transom—let it hang down the wall. Nobody will see it after the lights are out. Some of us will

pull it and waken you about a quarter to twelve. Don't wake Joy. She might go to Miss North, or do something."

"No, she wouldn't. Joy isn't so bad as we all thought, Annabel. I want to tell you about her sometime. We must try to be nicer to her if she stays here." [214]

"Oh, she'll stay, never fear. They aren't expelling any graduates—especially a student like Joy Cross. She's made a wonderful record. Miss North's got to admit that, whatever else Joy's done. Good-by. See you later. I'm in an awful hurry. You'll excuse me, won't you?"

About five minutes before time for the lights to be put out, there was a gentle knock at Blue Bonnet's door. Sue Hemphill put her head in and glanced round.

"Where's Joy?" she asked, drawing something in after her.

"In the bathroom."

"Good! Here, turn down your bed quick, Blue Bonnet."

Blue Bonnet complied, and Sue swiftly deposited a pillow underneath the sheet, leaving only a brown head gracefully exposed to view.

Blue Bonnet clapped her hand over her mouth to prevent a shriek. The thing so resembled a human head that it convulsed her for a moment.

"Sue! How ever did you do it? Why, from the back it looks just like me. I always braid my hair that way at night. It's wonderful!"

"Practice makes perfect. Get in on the other side and don't disturb it. Cover it up a bit more till Joy gets to bed. Don't forget the string on your arm, and, whatever you do, don't get scared and scream when I yank it. Remember! Good night." [215]

She was off before Blue Bonnet could say a word, even ask a question.

Blue Bonnet got out her night-dress and threw it over the brown head on the pillow, loitering about her undressing. Joy finished her toilet and got into bed quickly. A moment more and the lights were off.

Blue Bonnet tied the string to her arm, but she had to wait until Joy fell asleep before she could put it through the transom, and Joy was unusually wakeful. Blue Bonnet heard her tumble and toss upon her bed while she tried to ward off sleep herself. She gave up in despair finally. It would never do to get up on a chair and put the string through with Joy awake. She fell into a doze thinking what she should do, and the next thing she knew she was being shaken rudely while a voice in her ear whispered:

"Get up, quickly! You're late. We couldn't find the string anywhere."

Blue Bonnet got into the sheet and bath-robe and sped across the hall to number fifteen.

Number fifteen presented a weird appearance. Heavy black cloth had been tacked over the transom to shut out all light and two or three candles burned about the room dimly. On the wide couch six ghostly figures rocked back and forth mumbling an incantation. [216]

"Is the candidate ready for initiation?" a voice from the couch asked. "If so, let her speak."

Blue Bonnet nodded.

"The master of ceremonies will then conduct her to the middle of the room and blindfold her."

The ghost in the centre of the group rose, and stretching out her arms, gave forth an edict of some kind in a stage whisper. Blue Bonnet couldn't catch it all—it was purposely jumbled—but it began:

"Oh, spirits of all departed lambs, attend! attend!
Hear me call! Hear me call!"

When the last note of the incantation had faded into silence, a strange stillness settled upon the room. This lasted for several minutes. Blue Bonnet stood quietly, wondering what was to happen next. She had not long to wait. A slender little ghost slid from the couch and pattering about the room softly, extinguished each light. Then came a command.

"Conductor, advance the candidate. Let her extend the hand of fellowship to her sister lambs."

Blue Bonnet was marched forward a few steps. She extended her hand. The thing that met hers caused her to drop it instantly, and the cold chills passed up and down

her spine. If she had only known that it was but a rubber glove filled with cold water, she could have breathed more easily. She stifled a cry.

"THE GHOST IN THE CENTRE OF THE GROUP ROSE."

"The candidate is warned not to scream," came a stern voice from out the [217] darkness, and Blue Bonnet struggled for better self control. Something soft and woolly was next thrust into her arms—something that said "bah-bah" a bit mechanically, and Blue Bonnet cuddled it warmly. It was suspiciously like the old Teddy bear that she used to take to bed with her on lonely nights at the ranch. Somebody proclaimed it a mascot.

Then followed a succession of pranks numerous and frivolous; and when the fun grew too riotous for discretion the master of ceremonies requested order.

"Is the candidate now ready to take the oath of allegiance?" was asked the conductor, who stood guard over Blue Bonnet.

"She is ready," the guard answered.

It would hardly be fair to go too deeply into the ritual of a secret organization. It is sufficient, therefore, to say that during the next fifteen minutes Blue Bonnet learned more of the character and habits of the girls she had chosen as friends than she had dreamed of in two months' association. She learned, among other things, that the lamb which they had chosen as their emblem, signified sacrifice: that these girls gave one-tenth of their allowances monthly for settlement work. She found a new [218] meaning in friendship; a new impetus for service.

It was after the serious part of the ceremony that the real fun began. The bandage, which had been removed for a little time, was again bound about Blue Bonnet's eyes securely, and she stumbled forth into the darkness, upheld by two ghosts who shook with suppressed mirth as they guided her uncertain footsteps. Blue Bonnet had a suspicion that she was being led over the same ground times without number as the journey progressed, but she went forward without a murmur. When they had at last reached the sky parlor, where the feast was to be held, the bandage was once more removed and congratulations were in order, Annabel was the first to extend them.

"Welcome, sister lamb," she said, squeezing Blue Bonnet's hand. "You're game, my dear. Our hats are off to you. You didn't balk once."

The sheets were quickly changed for heavy bath-robes, for the sky parlor was cold and draughty. Japanese fashion the girls sat on the floor around the food, which had

been gathered from different quarters for several days. Deborah Watts' suitcase had, as usual, played an important part. Delicious cake, home-made bread, generous slices of ham for sandwiches, testified gloriously to her mother's housekeeping. The other girls had added their full quota. One might have imagined that Huyler's and [219] Pierce's had been raided, from the candies and other delicacies that greeted the eye; but the initiation of the Lambs was always an "Occasion."

"Remember the time the Proctortoise caught us up here?" Sue Hemphill asked, helping herself to her sixth sandwich. "Proctortoise" was one of Fraulein's many appellations. "I never was so scared in my life. That was my first midnight feast, and I thought for some time it would be my last."

"I reckon I do remember," Annabel said. "I lost my privileges for a month because I owned I got it up. It was the time Mother sent me that huge box of good things on my birthday. Wasn't that the grandest box, Wee? Remember how sick you got from eating so much of Mammy Jane's fruit cake and mince pie?" Mammy Jane was Annabel's old nurse, who regarded Annabel as the apple of her eye.

Wee rolled her eyes heavenward and laid her hand on her stomach tenderly.

"Remember! Well, I guess I do. I've never touched a piece of fruit cake since."

"I'm the same way about lemon pie," Sue admitted. "I ate a whole one up here at a feast once, and I've never been able to stand the sight of one since."

"This old room could tell some great tales if it could speak, couldn't it?" Patty Paine said, looking about. "It's a barren hole, but I adore it. I've had some great times here. [220] Remember the night we thought we heard some one coming and we got into the trunks? That was the time Angela fell down-stairs and had hysterics. It was initiation night, too, wasn't it? My, but wasn't Miss North furious! I thought she'd freeze into an icicle. It took her weeks to thaw out."

"Had you a suspicion that she *had* thawed out?" Ruth inquired.

"Oh, she isn't so bad, Ruth," Patty defended. "I've got a right soft spot in my heart for Miss North—"

"Girls! what was that noise?" Angela Dare interrupted in a whisper. "I'm sure I heard some one walking."

A hush fell over the room. The girls strained their ears.

"Oh, Angela! You're always hearing things. Your imagination is worse than your conscience. They're both ingrowing," Ruth declared. "I don't think you heard a blessed thing!"

"Yes, she did, Ruth," Blue Bonnet insisted. "I heard it, too."

"You did?"

"Yes—shh—there! You heard it then, didn't you?"

All admitted that they did hear some sort of a sound and sat with bated breath.

"It's a rat or a mouse! Oh, see—there it goes—look, behind that big brown trunk!" [221]

The appearance of Fraulein accompanied by Miss North could scarcely have caused greater confusion. The girls scattered in every direction. Wee Watts made an attempt to climb the wall in her anxiety to escape, turning over an old chair that fell with dreadful clatter.

"Wee Watts," Annabel said sternly, "stop acting so silly. Get down off that old box instantly. It's going to break with you. We'll every one be caught here in another minute. Exercise some sense!"

But Wee, her limbs shaking with fright, clung helplessly to the rough beams in the old attic wall, beseeching the girls to let her alone.

"I'll faint if it comes near me—I know I shall," she wailed, her teeth chattering. "Oh—oh—there it goes again—oh, oh, don't scare it this way—don't—don't, Annabel! Please—please—"

Blue Bonnet climbed up beside Wee and put her hand over her mouth.

"Hush!" she said. "Do you want to get us all in trouble? I thought you had such courage—met big things so well—"

"Oh, I do, Blue Bonnet—I really do—but this is a little thing—such a horrid little thing—oh, oh—it's under this box—oh—" A piercing scream rent the air.

At the same instant seven girls darted for the door. They tumbled over each other [222] in a mad effort to escape. Blue Bonnet found herself alone in a dark hall not knowing which way to turn. She stood still a moment, her heart beating violently. It was not a

pleasant situation. The other girls knew the building perfectly—every nook and cranny—just where to go. She felt against the wall and a knob met her fingers. A second later she was in a room lit by a dim moon. Feeling her way along the wall to the window she threw up the blind. In the nearest corner a form huddled.

"Who is in this room?" Blue Bonnet whispered.

"Oh, Blue Bonnet," came the answer, "is it you? I was going back to find you. I thought you'd be scared to death. Isn't this the worst ever? Who would have thought Wee could have been such a fool! Take hold of my hand; I know every step of the way."

"Do you think any of the girls have been caught, Annabel?"

"I don't know. If they haven't it's good luck, not good management. Look out—there ought to be a step here—yes, there is, walk carefully. No sprained ankles to-night."

Just how they reached their rooms Blue Bonnet never quite knew. She trusted Annabel and followed meekly as a newly born lamb should. When they parted at Blue Bonnet's door Annabel gave Blue Bonnet a swift hug.

"You're game clear through," she said. "I think everything is all right. I can't hear a [223]
sound anywhere."

Somewhere down the length of the hall a clock struck. Annabel and Blue Bonnet both counted: one—two—three!

"Three o'clock and all is well!" Annabel said. "Good night. Don't worry."

It was at breakfast the next morning that Madam de Cartier remarked to one of the girls at the French table:

"I fancied I heard a scream last night—or this morning, rather. It sounded down Commonwealth Avenue. A piercing scream, as though some one were in great distress. Did any one else hear it?"

"Yes, Madam de Cartier," Sue Hemphill said, equal to the occasion. "It was dreadful, wasn't it? As if some one were horribly frightened. It was about three o'clock, I think. I was awake and heard the clock striking on the lower corridor. What could it have been?"

"I really don't know, Miss Hemphill, though I have a theory. I may be quite wrong, however. It seems strange, doesn't it? This street is so eminently respectable and quiet."

Sue met Madam de Cartier's eye unflinchingly. There was an unfathomable twinkle in Madam's that meant much or little. Madam was naturally merry. Nevertheless, [224]
Sue, for all her bravado, was worried. She changed the subject immediately.

"Sue's perfectly furious at Deborah," Annabel said, catching up with Blue Bonnet on the way to chapel. "She won't speak to her this morning. I ran in to borrow a tie a minute before breakfast, and Wee had been crying. Poor old Wee! I feel sorry for her. She's such a good sport generally. I reckon she can't help being afraid of mice. Some people are, you know—awfully!"

"Do you think anybody knows about what happened?" Blue Bonnet asked.

Annabel laughed.

"I don't know. Miss North acted awfully queer this morning. One of the girls asked if anybody heard that scream in the night, and the funniest look came over Miss North's face. To tell the truth, I think the teachers know all about it and the joke's on us. I haven't been so scared in an age. It's pretty risky for a Senior to be up to such high jinks."

"Will Miss North do anything about it, do you think?"

"No—I hardly think so. She's pretty lenient to the 'Lambs.' We help support her pet charity. She's terribly interested in settlement work. Anyway, I don't believe she half minds a little innocent fun; but, of course, she couldn't sanction it openly." Annabel stifled a yawn. "I'm so sleepy I don't know how I'm ever going to get through this [225]
day. I scarcely slept a wink all night. I got to worrying about that candle we left burning in the sky parlor; and finally, after numerous and painful visions of the building burning down at my own personal expense, I got up, felt my way along those dark halls, and put it out."

"You went back alone!" Blue Bonnet gasped.

"I did. I think myself I deserve a medal—don't you?"

"You deserve several, Annabel. It was too plucky for anything. Why didn't Ruth go with you?"

"Oh, Ruth was asleep. It seemed a pity to wake her. I didn't mind much. I never was afraid of the dark."

It was late in the afternoon that Sue Hemphill, coming into her room, found the following note pinned to her pincushion with her best hatpin:

"DEAR OLD ROOMY:

"Please forgive me for being such a silly goose last night. I couldn't help it—truly I couldn't, Sue. I have always gotten perfectly panicky over those little beasts ever since I can remember. I can't bear to have you angry with me. I know I feel worse than you do about it, for I must have seemed such an awful fool. It was all the worse because I had boasted about my courage the other day. I never will again. I am going to see if Miss North will let me take Mrs. White and the 'Lambs' to see Maude Adams next Saturday afternoon—my treat. I have a birthday check coming and I'd love to spend it that way. [226]

"Your loving pal,
WEE."

"Dear old Wee," Sue said, as she read the note through twice and then carefully pinned it in her memory book. "She's got the biggest heart. Nobody could stay angry at her two minutes—I can't anyway. And," she added, philosophically, "I suppose if she's afraid of mice, she's *afraid*—and that's all there is to it."

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CHAPTER XIII [227]

SUNDAY

LITTLE has been said about the living-room at Miss North's; one of the pleasantest places in the building. The approach to it was by the way of a rather unusual stairway, and this stairway had a peculiar significance in the school life. It parted on a landing just before it reached the living and dining-room floor, dividing into two separate avenues. One side was claimed by the Seniors; the other by the Juniors. A Senior never thought of coming down the Junior side; and the Juniors were quite as particular. Each class had its own "stair song" and on festive occasions the stairs played an important part.

The living-room was just across the hall from the dining-room; and when classes entertained—as they did often—the rooms were thrown open and used as one.

But it was on Sunday that the living-room appeared at its best. A beautiful fire of hickory logs always blazed on the ample hearth, casting a rosy glow over the polished oak beams in the ceiling, dancing and flickering on the handsome rugs and old mahogany furniture which had come down with generations of Norths. [228]

At the extreme end of the room were placed three chairs—similar to bishops' chairs in design. The centre one belonged to Miss North. From it on Sunday morning, and often on Sunday evening, she read to the girls; and the girls loved this quiet hour more than almost any other thing that came into their lives. It was a diversion to come into the living-room's warmth and cheer directly after breakfast on Sunday morning, rather than file into chapel. It was delightful to relax after the strain and discipline of the week; to gather in groups and chat intimately; to sit where one pleased—even on the hearth rug, if one desired, while listening to the reading.

It was Miss North's desire to make this place as much a home living-room as possible; to get far away from institutional life.

There was always a little time in which to chat after the girls gathered on Sunday morning; then Miss North took her seat and the exercises began. There were a few hymns and the lesson for the day from the Scriptures. Miss North was an excellent Bible student, and she interested and held the girls in these readings and talks

through her knowledge and ability to impart what she knew in a fascinating manner. Thus a quiet and peaceful hour was spent, which meant much in the general culture and up-building of the girls' characters. Many a young woman looking back in after years felt grateful for the high ideals put before her at that time. [229]

"I adore these Sunday mornings," Blue Bonnet said, linking her arm through Annabel Jackson's as they left the room after an especially helpful talk. "I think Miss North is wonderful. She never preaches at you; but what she says sticks. I'd a lot rather hear her talk than Sarah Blake's father—our minister at home. Aunt Lucinda says Mr. Blake is very spiritual, but he's terribly prosy. I have the awfullest time trying to keep awake when he talks—it's dreadful!"

"Well, you'll have a treat to-day at Trinity, Blue Bonnet. The Bishop is going to preach. I adore him. He's terribly good to look at, too, with all his fixings—his cross and ring and beautiful robes. I had a letter to him when I came here, and he called one day. He wasn't nearly so handsome without his robes; but he was perfectly dear—and quite jolly. I expected to be awed by him; but I wasn't, a bit. I almost caught myself telling him everything I'd done since I arrived here; but I checked myself in time."

Blue Bonnet looked at Annabel with new respect.

"It must have been a beautiful experience," she said.

Annabel paused at Blue Bonnet's door.

"We've just time to do our rooms before we dress. Help me make my bed and I'll return the compliment." [230]

Blue Bonnet complied willingly. Then they went back to her room.

"What are you going to wear to-day, Blue Bonnet?" Annabel asked, her eyes straying toward Blue Bonnet's closet. "I haven't a thing! I've just got to have some new clothes."

Blue Bonnet laughed.

"Poor little 'Flora McFlimsey,'" she said. "'Nothing but your new tailored suit and your velvet hat and your silk waist,' to say nothing of—"

"But I'm tired of them all! I'd so love a change."

Blue Bonnet opened her closet door.

"Choose," she said generously. "Only leave me my muff, to-day. I perish by the wayside in this climate. I'd give—oh, most anything, for a streak of Texas sunshine!"

Almost unconsciously a sigh escaped her. There were days when a vision of the Texas prairie obliterated every other sight.

"Oh, thank you, dear! You're so good about your things. I'll take your black fur hat, if you don't mind—and the blue waist. I'm quite mad about blue just now. I never used to think I could wear it."

Blue Bonnet got out the waist, and Annabel held it against her face, trying the effect. [231]

"I don't know about this 'Alice' shade. What do you think? Can I wear it all right?"

"You look beautiful in anything to me, Annabel—yes, I think it is very becoming. Will you walk with me to-day?"

"Surely; though I suppose Ruth will pout—but no matter! Reckon we had better hurry a little."

Blue Bonnet always declared that there was something about Trinity Church that put her in a pious mood. She felt it first when she came in sight of the splendid edifice. She loved its majesty—- its vast impressive central tower; the quaint cloisters; the rich Galilee porch and the ivy-clad walls; and once inside she could never keep her eyes from straying to the wonderful Tiffany stained glass memorial windows; the famous frescoes, of which "Jesus and the Woman of Samaria" was her favorite. She loved the service, too. Loved it because amid all the grandeur it was simple and impressive, and she could have a part in it.

It was a pretty sight to see the girls from Miss North's school march in to the church, and it spoke well for Miss North's training that they were always dignified and attentive. They took an active part in the service and sang for the very joy of singing. Blue Bonnet's strong, sweet soprano often rang above her fellows, clear and true, and her face reflected the glow that stirred her heart. [232]

"That *was* a wonderful sermon, Annabel," she said as they left the church. "Dear me, how I do wish Mr. Blake could sit under the Bishop for a while. I wonder if he ever heard him. I daresay he hasn't. He's what Grandmother calls a 'dyed in the wool

Presbyterian.'"

She sighed, regretful of Mr. Blake's lost opportunities.

"Cheer up! You don't have to listen to him often," Annabel said consolingly.

"No, that's true. But *think* of Grandmother and Aunt Lucinda! They've been listening to him for most twenty years."

"Oh, well, 'habit's a cable,'" Annabel quoted glibly. "It jerks us along and we get into the way of thinking we like things whether we do or not. I daresay your aunt dotes on him."

"Aunt Lucinda isn't—well—she isn't just the doting kind, Annabel; but I don't suppose she'd trade Mr. Blake for the Bishop if she could. Loyalty's the backbone of Aunt Lucinda. She's very fond of Sarah, too. By the way, did I tell you that Grandmother and Aunt Lucinda are coming up to spend a few days of the spring vacation with me? Aunt Lucinda has a lot of shopping to do, and Grandmother loves a little change. They've asked Sarah Blake to come with them. I wish the rest of the girls could come. Wouldn't it be fun if the Lambs could meet the We Are Sevens?" [233]

"Oh, lovely, Blue Bonnet! I'm quite wild to see Kitty Clark. I'm real jealous of her. She's your best friend, isn't she?"

Blue Bonnet hedged.

"Kitty's a dear," she said; "and the prettiest girl you almost ever saw—but I'm fond of all the girls."

Silence fell between them as they walked homeward. Suddenly Blue Bonnet gave a little joyful cry.

"Annabel! I know what I'm going to do! Alec said that Uncle Cliff was coming at Easter. I'll write to him this very afternoon and ask him to invite the We Are Sevens up here for a day or two just before vacation begins—just the day before—and give us, the Lambs and the We Are Sevens, a party. Maybe a matinee party with a dinner at the Copley Plaza afterward."

"Oh, Blue Bonnet! *Do* you think he would? That would be heavenly."

"He'd adore to do it. I am sure."

Sunday afternoon at Miss North's was given over almost entirely to letter writing, and Blue Bonnet was not long in getting a note off to Uncle Cliff. She was a little ashamed of its scrappiness as she read it over; but what it lacked in news and length was more than made up in affection. It fairly throbbed with love and anxiety to see him, and she had plead the cause of the We Are Sevens with the eloquence of a young Webster. [234]

"He'll never be able to resist that plea," she said to Annabel, who had brought her writing materials into Blue Bonnet's room. "He'll just *have* to come when he gets this. I shouldn't wonder if it didn't bring him sooner than he expected."

She sealed the letter and pounded the stamp on with enthusiasm. To think was ever to act with Blue Bonnet, and the next half hour was given over to planning for the coming event—"the gathering of the clans."

"Don't you think that a matinee party with tea afterward at the hotel would be lovely, Annabel? Then dinner about seven o'clock. We might do something in the evening, too."

Annabel thought it would be well to consult the Lambs on so important a subject, which necessitated an impromptu meeting in the "Angels' Retreat." The tea bell had sounded before the meeting adjourned.

Sunday evening tea was another delight at Miss North's. There was a pleasant informality about it. It consisted of hot rolls and cocoa, a salad and cake, with marshmallows which were to be toasted later in the living-room at the big fireplace.

For an hour after tea the girls sat in the firelight, visiting. Often a speaker was provided for the evening's entertainment—a celebrity, if possible. The best in the way of culture for her girls was Miss North's rule. [235]

To-night the girls were all present. They had dressed with care in compliment to an expected guest; a noted traveler who was to tell them of foreign lands and customs. Miss North viewed them with pleasure. They were her children—a family to be proud of.

A pleasanter scene could scarcely be imagined. The girls stood in groups chatting;

on the hearth rug; in the deep chairs—a picture of youthful loveliness.

"Will you look at Joy Cross!" Ruth Biddle said to Sue Hemphill. "What has got into her? She's been fixed up that way for several days; blue bow—hair curled—"

The close proximity of Joy at that moment stopped the sentence. Blue Bonnet Ashe was bringing her into the group and Annabel held Joy in animated conversation.

"Let's all sit together," Blue Bonnet said, and Joy sat down with the rest. Although but two weeks had passed since Joy's trouble, she was much changed. A little spot of color burned in her usually pale cheeks; and—there was no doubt about it—the blue bow *was* becoming. It brought out unsuspected possibilities in the white skin, and cast a deeper tone to the faded eyes. Joy was happy; and the happiness showed in every change of expression. [236]

It had not been an easy thing for Blue Bonnet and Annabel Jackson to show Joy the many little kindnesses which they had shown her, without becoming patronizing; but they had—somehow—to their credit; and Joy, for the first time in her life, was beginning to taste the sweets of companionship.

Annabel Jackson was a born leader. When she put the stamp of approval on anything, it went; and when she began to stop Joy in halls and recitation rooms for a moment's chat—a bit of advice on lessons—Joy's stock took sudden flight. If Annabel thought her worth while, she surely must be; and Blue Bonnet's interest, added to Annabel's, was the needed touch to bring Joy into the social life of the school.

Not until there was an exodus toward the pipe organ, about which the girls gathered to sing, did Ruth have a chance to express her opinion of Joy's sudden popularity.

"*I* don't intend to take her up," she said haughtily, lagging behind with Sue. "She isn't our kind at all. I don't know what's got into Annabel lately. She's perfectly crazy about Blue Bonnet Ashe—completely under her thumb."

"Lots of us in the same boat, Ruth. I'm quite crazy about her myself."

"Well, she needn't think she can run the school. She's behind this Joy Cross vogue. [237] She's not going to ram her down my throat. The Biddles usually choose their own society."

Sue looked at Ruth sharply.

"You've sort of got an idea that name gives you special dispensation, haven't you, Ruth—kind of a free passport to the upper realms? Well, forget it! It hasn't. It wouldn't get you any farther with folks that count than Cross, or Ashe, or Hemphill. It's what you bring to your name; not what it brings to you. It's like what Miss North said the other day about life. It isn't what you get out of it, but what you put into it that counts."

Ruth's lip curled. It takes more than a rebuke to make a democrat out of an aristocrat.

"Nevertheless I shall retain the privilege of choosing my associates and not having them thrust upon me."

"That's all right, Ruth, but when you get lonesome, come on back into the fold. I've an idea that Joy Cross is going to make a place for herself in the school whether you like it or not. Blue Bonnet seems to have got at her in some way lately, and she says she's really quite likable! She says Joy makes her think of the late chrysanthemums in her grandmother's garden. They never get ready to bloom until everything else is gone; but you appreciate them all the more after they've weathered the frost and [238] come out brave and brilliant. Funny idea, isn't it? Blue Bonnet has such queer ideas. I think she's very unusual."

Ruth, still annoyed, found a place by the organ, while Sue slipped over by Joy, and putting her arm through hers carelessly, joined in the hymns with interest and fervor.

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CHAPTER XIV [239]

SETTLEMENT WORK

Blue Bonnet had been a pupil at Miss North's school a little over three months now, and although she had had her share of fun and frolic, the greater portion of the time had been spent in serious work.

She excelled in her music, and the report that went home from the music department monthly pleased Miss Clyde very much. Blue Bonnet was living up to her aunt's expectations in this part of her work, and Miss Clyde, like many others, was not averse to having her dreams come true. Grandmother was pleased also, and counted the days until she should hear for herself just how much real improvement Blue Bonnet had made. The rigorous New England winter had prevented Mrs. Clyde from visiting Boston as much as she would have liked, and as Miss North objected to many week-ends at Woodford, her visits with Blue Bonnet had been of necessity limited.

Miss Clyde had been more fortunate, and running up to the city often, returned with splendid reports of Blue Bonnet.

"And her manners, Mother, are almost unbelievably improved. I really had quite a [240] shock the other day," she confessed after her last visit. "Several teachers told me that Blue Bonnet would undoubtedly have received the medal for the greatest general improvement at the end of the year had she entered in September. I wish you might have seen her enter the reception-room. Her whole bearing is changed. She has dropped that hoydenish, tomboyish manner that was so offensive when she returned from the ranch. She neither waved, nor called to me from the head of the stairs as she came down, but positively glided into the room with ease and distinction."

"Blue Bonnet is growing into a young woman now," Mrs. Clyde answered. "She is leaving the hoydenish period. She will emerge, butterfly-like, from her chrysalis. I have never doubted it for a moment. There is a time for all things."

"Something else pleased me, too," Miss Clyde went on. "Blue Bonnet seems to have made desirable friends among teachers and pupils. They all like her—even that odd room-mate, whom, you remember, she was predestined to hate. I confess I thought her rather impossible, myself; but Miss Cross seems to have blossomed out suddenly, and Blue Bonnet says—to use her own expression, 'she is not half bad.'"

"Does Blue Bonnet still call her 'the cross?'" Mrs. Clyde asked, smiling broadly.

"Yes, and declares that she has taken up 'her cross' and is 'bearing it cheerfully'— [241] whatever that may mean. Blue Bonnet loves figures of speech. Her comparisons are really very amusing sometimes. I hardly know what to make of her sudden tolerance of this girl; whether it is a case of propinquity, duty, or over-generousness on Blue Bonnet's part. At any rate, she seems to have espoused the cause of the cross, nobly."

"Bless her dear heart," Mrs. Clyde murmured Softly. "The world will never end for Blue Bonnet at her own doorstep. She has a real genius for friendship. I am glad she finds her room-mate pleasant. I feared from her letters that she never would."

"Something has happened to change her mind," Miss Clyde said shrewdly. "The girl's personality never appealed to Blue Bonnet. I rather suspect that Blue Bonnet feels that she needs friends. She has been very unpopular, I understand."

Miss Clyde, unconsciously, had put her finger upon the exact cause of Blue Bonnet's sudden conversion. Joy did need friends. To Blue Bonnet, this need was tragic—pathetic; and she straightway set about bringing Joy into the charmed circle where she, herself, had been welcomed with open arms. It had not been easy work; perhaps she would not have accomplished her aim had she not taken Mrs. White into her confidence. Mrs. White was executive as well as musical. She was tactful, too, [242] and under her guidance Joy was gradually steered into a port that became a haven; a refuge from her old self, her youthful environment.

Another interest had come into Blue Bonnet's life. One that bade fair to rival all others, and pave the way for future usefulness. It was the Settlement work which the "Lambs" engaged in. Her first visit to the poorer districts filled her with horror. She had never known anything about real poverty. A kind fate had lifted her above all that; and when she went for the first time into a day nursery, a free kindergarten, and was told something of the homes the children came from, their limitation, their actual needs, tears blinded her eyes and her throat ached with the lumps that rose there. For a moment she was speechless.

It was the home for crippled children that interested her most. The girls at Miss North's took turns going there to amuse the children. They cut paper dolls, carried toys, and made themselves generally useful during the brief hour they spent within the wards. Blue Bonnet soon began to look forward to these visits, and begged Miss North to allow her to go as often as possible.

It was on her second visit that she was attracted to a small cot, from which a pinched little face with wondrous brown eyes looked up appealingly.

"How do you do?" Blue Bonnet said, dropping down beside the cot and taking the [243] thin hand on the coverlet in her own.

"How do *you* do?" came the laconic answer.

"Nicely, thank you."

"Did you bring paper dolls?"

"Yes."

A look of keen disappointment came over the wan face on the pillow.

"I hate 'em! I hoped maybe you had soldiers. Everything here's for girls!"

"Now, isn't that strange," Blue Bonnet said, untying a parcel with haste. "I brought things for girls last time—seemed sort of natural to buy dolls and dishes, being a girl, but this time I brought the very things you wanted. Soldiers!"

The brown eyes grew round with delight.

"For me? All for me?"

The little hands went out eagerly.

"You may play with them all you like. Perhaps you will want to pass them on to some other little boy when you tire of them."

"I sha'n't never tire of 'em. I just love 'em. Oh, ain't they grand! Why, there's a whole lot, ain't they?"

"A regiment," Blue Bonnet said, delighted with the child's enthusiasm. "And horses! Soldiers must be well mounted, of course!"

The boy was upright in bed now, his face aglow with excitement.

Blue Bonnet made a pillow into a background and put the soldiers in a row before the child. The next moment he was oblivious of her presence. [244]

"Horses!" he said. "Horses! Gee!"

A laugh, utterly out of proportion to the wasted little body from which it emerged, rang through the ward.

"I'm afraid you are getting too excited," Blue Bonnet cautioned. "I'll have to take them away if you make yourself ill with them."

The boy caught up as many of the soldiers and horses as he could, and held to them tightly.

"You can't get 'em," he said, and the brown eyes flashed. "I wouldn't give 'em up to nobody."

"You don't have to give them up. You mustn't get excited, that's all. It's bad for sick people; it gives them fever."

"Aw—I gets fever anyway. I'm used to it. I'm 'bercular! It's in my knee."

"A tubercular knee?"

The boy nodded, and thrusting a pitifully thin leg from beneath the covers, showed a knee carefully bandaged. Blue Bonnet hastily covered it, asking his name by way of changing the subject.

"Gabriel," came the quick answer.

"Gabriel! What a beautiful name! Gabriel—what?"

"You couldn't say all of it if I tell you. It's Jewish."

"GABRIEL LOOKED UP IN DISDAIN."

"Let me try. Perhaps I'll surprise you. Then I'll tell you mine. I have a queer name, too."

"Tell yours first."

"All right. It's Blue Bonnet. Blue Bonnet Ashe."

The child laughed again; less loudly this time.

"It's pretty, though. I like it."

"Why do you like it?"

The eyes half closed for a moment, straying away from the soldiers.

"I don't know. Kind of makes me think of flowers."

"It *is* the name of a flower," Blue Bonnet said, surprised at his intuition. "A very pretty flower that grows down in Texas."

But Texas meant nothing to Gabriel. He was busy again, lining up his soldiers for battle.

"They'll march this way," he said, half to himself—"and these this way. Then they'll fight."

"Oh, I wouldn't let them fight, if I were you. Soldiers don't fight any more—not here in America. This is a land of peace."

Gabriel looked up in disdain.

"Aw—quit yer kiddin'," he paid. "What's soldiers fer?"

Blue Bonnet was not ready with a reply. "You haven't told me your other name," she said. "You took advantage of me. I told you mine."

"It ain't pretty! The kids call me Gaby. That's enough. Call me that."

"How old are you?"

"Nine—comin' next August."

"August? My birthday is in August; the twenty-first."

"That's mine, too!"

Blue Bonnet looked incredulous.

"Really?" she said. "Aren't you mistaken? Certain it's the twenty-first?"

"Sure, I am. Ask her!"

He pointed to a nurse who had come to the foot of the bed.

"That's what he has always said," the nurse vouched.

"Well, we're sort of twins, aren't we, Gabriel? If I'm near Boston next summer we'll have to celebrate, won't we?"

The boy nodded. The soldiers were ready to advance upon the enemy now. Birthdays were of small importance.

"Come again some day," Gabriel called when Blue Bonnet took leave of him. "And bring some soldier books with you."

"If you please," the nurse finished for him. "Miss Ashe won't come again if you are not polite."

"If you please," the child repeated dutifully, and Blue Bonnet went back to school, treasuring the look of gratitude that had shone from eyes set like jewels in a wasted and world-old face; a face that belied claim to childhood, and spoke only of suffering and poverty. [247]

The next week she was back again with some books. The soldiers were still lined up for battle. They looked as if they had seen hard service, but their commander eyed them with pride and pleasure.

"They been in battle more 'en fifty times since you was here," he announced. "They've licked everything in sight—the American army has. This is them on this side. I'd like some British fellers if you could get 'em. Did you know we licked the British, sure 'nough?" he asked, as if the war had just ended.

"We surely did," Blue Bonnet said, matching enthusiasm with his. It was strange to see a little Jewish emigrant espousing the cause of freedom so rapturously. "Showed them their proper place, didn't we?"

"Bet yer!" Gabriel said, doubling up his fist and aiming a blow at the pillow behind the soldiers. "Bet yer!"

A vivid crimson spot glowed in each cheek.

"You must hurry and get well, and perhaps some day you can go and see the soldiers. I have a friend who is going to be one. He'll be at West Point next year."

Gabriel was very much interested, and Blue Bonnet soon found that she was expected to give Alec's life history to the child. [248]

And so this odd friendship between Blue Bonnet and an unfortunate little waif grew, cementing with each visit, reaching out into a future that meant much to the helpless lad; much to the young girl whose character was strengthened and broadened by the contact.

The advantages for culture offered on all sides in Boston were also of inestimable value to Blue Bonnet. The Symphony concerts were a delight, and wonderful and original descriptions went back to Uncle Cliff, Grandmother Clyde, and Aunt Lucinda of celebrities. Blue Bonnet was a discriminating critic—- if one so young could be called a critic. She had a gift for values. This instinct pleased her teachers immensely; especially Mrs. White and Fraulein Schirmer.

Carita, too, was growing and expanding under the new and favorable conditions, proving herself worthy in every particular of Blue Bonnet's friendship and aid. She had a reverence for Blue Bonnet that was akin to worship, and since she persisted in this attitude of affection, it was well that Blue Bonnet's example usually proved worthy of emulation.

It was a fad in Miss North's school, as in most of its kind, for a younger girl to attach herself to a Junior or a Senior; become her satellite, her abject slave if need be. Carita would have been all this, if Blue Bonnet had permitted it; but being of an independent nature Blue Bonnet required very little service from any one. [249]

"Why don't you let me do more things for you, Blue Bonnet?" Carita would say when she was refused the pleasure of waiting upon her. "I don't believe Annabel Jackson has run a ribbon in her underwear this year. Mary Boyd always does it for her. She loves to do it. Peggy Austin waits on Sue Hemphill, hand and foot. Isabel Brooks is getting a terrible case on Wee Watts, too. By the way, Blue Bonnet, did I tell you? Isabel has the sweetest new way of spelling her name. Isobel! You say it quickly—like this—*Is*obel! Mary Boyd thought of it. I do wish I could find a new way

to say Carita, but it seems hopeless."

"Carita! just you let me catch you changing it. *Is*obel! Why, that's perfectly absurd!"

"Not when you get used to it. Peggy thinks it's distinguished. I do too. Peggy has taken up her own middle name. We're all trying to call her by it, but it's awfully hard. She says she perfectly hated it when she was a child, but now she thinks it's quite stylish."

"What is it?"

"Jerusha! Priscilla Jerusha is the whole of it. It does sound dreadful, doesn't it? Peggy loathes it put together. She says her mother does too. She had to be named [250] that for her grandmother because she's going to inherit her money some day. Isn't it splendid that there is such a rage for old-fashioned names now? Peggy says it will make an awful hit with her grandmother when she hears that she is being called Jerusha. She thinks it quite likely that she will do something nice for her. Peggy thinks that she will change the spelling of it though. She thought some of 'Jerrushia.' It is much more foreign sounding, isn't it?"

"It's much more ridiculous," Blue Bonnet said with some impatience. "You children must lie awake nights thinking up these weighty subjects. Jerrushia! Really, Carita, I am amazed at you!"

Which showed that Blue Bonnet was advancing, both in taste and wisdom. "Nearly seventeen" has its advantages over "only fifteen."

This conversation had taken place one afternoon in Blue Bonnet's room during chatting hour, and had been interrupted by the hasty entrance of Sue Hemphill, who was very much excited.

"Blue Bonnet! look here! See what just came in the mail! You have one, too, and so has Annabel! Oh, such a lark! Run down to the box quickly and get your letters!"

Carita was off in a twinkling to save Blue Bonnet the trouble.

Sue threw the letter into Blue Bonnet's lap.

"Read it," she said. "It's from Billy. We're invited to a tea at Harvard. Mrs. White is [251] to chaperon us. It's to be next Friday afternoon, and the boys are coming for us in an automobile."

Blue Bonnet looked as if she didn't quite understand.

"But—Sue, can we go? Will Miss North let us?"

"Oh, yes—with Mrs. White. Why not? You're not doing penance for anything are you?"

"No, certainly not! But it seems quite unusual; going off with a lot of boys like that."

"A lot of boys! There's only Billy, and Hammie McVickar, and an escort for me—Billy doesn't say what his name is. I don't call that such a terrible lot; and Harvard is quite respectable. At least, it is supposed to be."

Sue made a funny little grimace that brought all her dimples into play.

"I think it would be glorious, Sue. I certainly hope Miss North will let us accept."

"She will," Sue said confidently. "She let us go last year. Such fun! It makes me laugh to think of it yet. We went to Billy's rooms. He had a caterer and a great spread. Tea and sandwiches; all kinds of cakes, candies—a huge box for each of us to carry home; and the most beautiful ice-cream with nuts in it. Um! I can taste it yet. Oh, but it was larky!"

"It must have been," Blue Bonnet admitted. [252]

"This time, Billy says, it is to be very select. What he calls a close corporation! Just you and Annabel and I, and Mrs. White. They sent Mrs. White a separate invitation. Wasn't that clever of them, since we just had to have a chaperon? I'm going over to her room now to see if she'll accept. Come along."

Mrs. White evidently felt complimented by the invitation. She was looking it over when the girls entered.

"Of course you won't refuse, Mrs. White, will you?" Sue implored, arms about Mrs. White's shoulders. "Billy quite dotes on you, you know. He says in my note that you've just got to come. He and Hammie will accept no substitute. Billy would be so awfully disappointed if you didn't come."

Mrs. White smiled pleasantly.

"I wouldn't hurt Billy for the world, Susan," she said. The teachers always called Sue "Susan"—those who had known her since her entrance as a very young girl. "You know I never inflict unnecessary pain. I happen to know just how hard your friends would take my refusal. I will consult Miss North."

"Will you? Will you really? Oh, you are such a dear, Mrs. White. And try to show her how very necessary it is for us all to go. Billy does get *so* lonely without me—we're such chums. Father feels dreadfully to have us separated as we are." [253]

Mrs. White promised to put the matter before Miss North as diplomatically as possible, and let the girls know her decision at the earliest possible moment.

"I think afternoon tea is the loveliest thing," Sue said, as they went back to Blue Bonnet's room for a brief visit. "There's something about it that makes one feel so grown up—so sort of lady-like! I've always said that when I keep house—I shall, you know, for father, as soon as I am through school—that I'll serve tea every afternoon, rain or shine, at five o'clock, and advertise the fact among all my friends."

"It's very hospitable," Blue Bonnet replied absently. "Do they have tea every afternoon at Harvard?"

Sue gave a shriek; then she went off into one of her infectious peals of laughter.

"Blue Bonnet! Oh, that's ripping! At Harvard. What do you take them for?"

"I don't know that that's such an awful *faux pas*," Blue Bonnet said with asperity. "They always have afternoon tea at Oxford. Alec Trent has a friend there and he told him so."

"Well—in England—that's different. It's so awfully English, you know."

"That's why I thought maybe they did it at Harvard. Because it is so awfully English, you know!" [254]

Blue Bonnet's eyes twinkled mischievously.

A few hours later, as the girls were on their way to the gymnasium to dance, Mrs. White overtook Sue and stopped her for a moment.

"It is all right, Susan," she said. "Miss North is very glad to have you accept your brother's invitation for Friday afternoon, and I shall go with pleasure."

Sue's feet took wings as she caught up with Blue Bonnet and Annabel.

"We can go," she announced breathlessly. "Friday! Harvard! I just knew we could. Isn't it great? At two-thirty, remember! And girls! Don't forget—borrow everything you can, and look stunning!"

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CHAPTER XV [255]

A HARVARD TEA

STILLNESS reigned in the study hall: stillness save for the occasional rattle of a book, or the falling of a pen or pencil from careless fingers. The large clock at the back of the room ticked regularly, and its hands pointed to a quarter past one.

At the desk Fraulein Herrmann sat, her watchful eyes roaming over the assemblage in search of idleness or disorder. Only a moment before her stentorian tones had rung forth, much to the annoyance of two girls who came under her supervision.

"Emma-*line* and Jassa-*mine* Brown may report at the desk at the end of the period."

Emmalyn and Jassamine Brown, twins, were as much the bane of Fraulein's life as were Mary Boyd and Peggy Austin. Fraulein was not stupid. She had learned that to call forth these names, distorting them with almost unrecognizable inflection, brought its own punishment.

Emmalyn slammed down a book on her desk, her face flushed with mortification. She whispered something to her sister.

"You may say what you have to say to the room, Miss Emma-*line*," Fraulein invited. [256]

Emmalyn paid not the slightest heed.

"Miss Brown! Answer when I speak! Why do you not answer?"

"I didn't know you were addressing me. My name is not Emma-*line*!" She drew out the "line" with provoking mimicry.

Fraulein reddened; but she held her peace. She had encountered Emmalyn Brown before. Sometimes disastrously.

At her desk Blue Bonnet worked busily, glancing often at the clock. She was writing a theme, and writing against time. At one-forty-five her paper must be in Professor Howe's hands. There was a strained expression in her eyes as, elbow on desk, she ran her fingers through her hair by way of inducement to thought.

"It's no use," she said in a whisper to Wee Watts, who occupied a seat with her, "I can't get my brain in working order to-day to save me. Have you a glimmer of an idea about Emerson's essay on 'Compensation?' I've got to write it up."

Wee's face looked as blank as a stone wall.

"Emerson! Heavens, no! He's as deep as the sea. Ask me something easy, Blue Bonnet. My grey matter's at your disposal—what's left of it. I think I've overtaxed it with my own theme. Do you know anything about hypnotism?"

"Hypnotism! I should say not. Look out! Fraulein's weather eye is turned this way. [257]

"I think it's the tea we're going to this afternoon that's distracting me," Blue Bonnet confessed, when Fraulein had removed the weather eye. "I can't seem to get it out of my mind. I know we're going to have a perfectly wonderful time. I wish you were going, Wee."

"Yes—it would be lovely. I suppose Annabel has borrowed everything in sight. I've given her my Egyptian bracelet and my jade ring. Don't let her have your furs to-day. You look so pretty in them yourself."

"Oh, she doesn't want them," Blue Bonnet answered loyally. "I think she's going to get Angela's. They are white fox—almost like mine. Oh, bother! What on earth is 'compensation,' anyway? I've read this essay ten times and it's perfect Greek to me. Don't you know, Wee, really? This thing has got to be handed in in twenty minutes."

Wee searched through her desk for a dictionary.

"Look it up," she suggested, turning to the C's. "Sometimes you can get a start that way."

Blue Bonnet gathered up dictionary and papers and moved to a vacant seat.

"Thank you so much, Wee," she whispered in passing, "I've got to sit alone where I can think. You're *nice*, but you're *too* entertaining."

Again she plunged into her subject and for a few minutes worked diligently. A [258]
white scrap of paper rolled in a ball falling at her feet distracted her attention. She dropped her handkerchief over it in obedience to a slight cough from Sue Hemphill, and drew it into her lap. A second later it lay open in her book.

"Annabel's changed her mind," it read. "She's not going to wear her suit. She thinks she'll wear her new crepe de chine and borrow Patty's fur coat. Don't you think that will make us look out of place in just waists and suits? Answer."

Blue Bonnet crumpled the note in her hand and looked at the clock anxiously. She didn't give a rap what Annabel wore. It was half past one, and she had but three paragraphs written on her theme. She read them through again. They were utterly impossible. She tore the paper into bits and carried the pieces to the waste basket.

Going back to the seat with Wee Watts she put her books in order and awaited the ringing of the gong which signaled the beginning of the next period.

It was unfortunate—for Blue Bonnet at least—that something had happened to disturb Professor Howe's usual calmness of manner. She was irritated. Blue Bonnet felt it in the atmosphere the moment she entered the recitation-room.

"We will begin with Miss Ashe," she said, busying herself with some papers on her [259]
desk. "You may read what you have prepared on the Emerson work, Miss Ashe. Come to the front of the room, please."

Blue Bonnet half rose in her seat and her face flushed scarlet.

"I am not prepared, Professor Howe. I am sorry—but—"

"Have you been ill, Miss Ashe?"

"No, not ill, but—"

"Take your seat and remain after the class is dismissed, Miss Ashe."

"This afternoon, Professor Howe? Oh, I can't to-day. It is impossible—"

Professor Howe made no reply and passed on to the next pupil.

Blue Bonnet did some quick thinking during the next few minutes. How she was to write a theme and get ready to go to Cambridge by three o'clock, was beyond her ability to calculate. Professor Howe would surely excuse her when she explained; explained that she had tried to write the theme and failed—she felt sure of that. But Professor Howe for once was adamant. No explanation sufficed; no amount of pleading prevailed. Blue Bonnet remained after class and, cross and late, reached her room just as Sue and Annabel were leaving theirs, well groomed and immaculate.

"I reckon you'll have to go on without me," she said, her eyes filling with tears of [260]
vexation and disappointment. "Professor Howe's on a regular rampage to-day. She's kept me all this time over an old composition on Emerson. She's made me loathe Emerson for all time. I shall perfectly hate him from this hour forth. Go on, don't wait! I won't spoil everything for the rest of you."

"Nonsense," Annabel said, pushing Blue Bonnet into her room and taking out her clothes from the closet. "Just hurry a little. The boys aren't here yet. It won't hurt them to wait a few minutes anyway. It's no killing matter. Wash in a little cold water; it'll freshen you."

Blue Bonnet emerged presently from the bathroom, rosy and happy, gave her hair a vigorous brushing, and got into the becoming silk waist that Sue held ready for her.

"Thought you were going to wear your crepe de chine, Annabel. Sue said you were. Did you change your mind?"

"Yes, Sue made such a fuss; said you girls were going to wear your suits. I suppose it is more sensible. Here are your gloves. Lucky they're clean! Got a handkerchief? Come on."

Three more attractive girls it would be hard to find than Annabel, Sue and Blue Bonnet, as they made their way to the reception-room, where the boys were waiting.

Billy presented Sue's escort. A rather fine-looking young fellow by the name of [261]
Billings—Ben Billings. "An awfully common name," Sue sniffed to Blue Bonnet at her first opportunity. "Never could abide the name of 'Ben.'"

"Oh, I don't know, Sue," Blue Bonnet replied, "it's probably short for Benjamin. Benjamin Billings isn't so bad. I think it's quite high sounding."

But Benjamin Billings proved to have assets, if he did have a common name. It transpired that he lived in Boston, was a member of a well-known family. In fact the very elegant looking limousine which waited at the curb proved to be his property—or his mother's—and the party went forth in it, gaily.

The ride to Cambridge was delightful. The car just crowded enough to make every one merry and responsive. Blue Bonnet sat squeezed securely between Mrs. White and Billy Hemphill.

Arriving at the college, Billy, who seemed to be the master of ceremonies, went a little ahead of the party, and throwing open the door of his room hospitably ushered the guests in.

"This way," he said, leading them through the sitting-room to the bedroom beyond. "You'll want to take off your wraps."

A trim maid in a neat cap stood waiting to assist the girls with coats and rubbers.

"They're doing it up brown," Sue whispered as Billy left the room. "They've [262]
engaged this maid along with the caterer. Just wait! I do hope they haven't forgotten that heavenly ice-cream like they had before. The kind with the nuts! Oh, girls; look! Isn't that perfectly killing?"

Sue pointed to a vase of flowers on Billy's dresser. They were exquisite pale yellow roses, about which were tied—as stiffly and properly as Billy would have tied his own necktie—two shades of ribbon, green and white, the colors of the North school.

"Well, it's perfectly dear of him, anyway," Sue said, as the girls shook with laughter. "Of course the bows *are* funny, but the boys have done the best they knew how, and it's a pretty compliment, *I* think."

A pretty compliment it was, elaborated upon in the sitting-room. Vases stood in every available corner and space, and the same bows ornamented each bouquet. The girls were eloquent in praise of them.

"Why didn't you try a four-in-hand on this one, Billy?" Sue asked, pointing to a carefully arranged effect of the "string-tie" variety. "Or a—what you call it—an Ascot! An Ascot would be stunning on those orchids."

A laugh went round the room in which Billy joined good naturedly.

"See what you fellows escape by not having a sister," he said, nodding toward McVickar and Billings. His tone was severe, but the loving look that shot from his [263] eyes to the dimpled face close to his own belied the words. Any fellow would have been proud to have had such a sister. Billy appreciated the fact.

"Anyway, I didn't tie the bows," he added. "McVickar did it. 'Fess up, old man. He's been at it all day—sluffed his classes to tie the bunch."

It was Sue's turn to become embarrassed.

"Really?" she said. "Well, they're perfectly lovely—and the idea's so new. I've never seen it used before. I think you should be congratulated, Mr. McVickar. It's a gift to be able to originate!"

Even Billy regarded Sue with admiration, but a knock at the door prevented further discussion.

"Pardon me," Billy said to Mrs. White on the way to open the door. "Surprising how many interruptions a fellow has in a place like this."

On the threshold stood a young man, groomed within an inch of his life; hair faultless; shoes immaculate; tie and scarf pin elaborate.

"Oh, a thousand pardons, Hemphill. Didn't dream you were entertaining. Just looking for a book—Calculus. Haven't seen it knocking about, have you? Fancied I left it here last night. No—No! Couldn't think of stopping. Oh, if you feel that way, old chap—"

Billy, by this time, had got the intruder inside the room and was presenting him to [264] the guests. Mr. Williams looked about with apparent embarrassment and took a seat by Blue Bonnet.

"Fear I'm intruding. Awful bore—fellows running in like this. Didn't dream Hemphill was entertaining. From Boston, I presume, Miss—beg pardon, didn't quite catch the name."

"Ashe," Blue Bonnet said, casting a rather amused glance at the young man's elaborate afternoon toilet.

"Miss Ashe. Not the Ashes of Beacon Street? They're relatives of mine—distant, of course."

"No. I'm from Texas."

"Texas! You're rather a long way from home, aren't you? Texas seems farther away to me than Paris. Great country that—Texas. Lots of cattle and Indians and—"

"I don't know about Indians. We have cattle—lots! And cowboys. Maybe you're thinking of cowboys?"

But cowboys were farthest from Mr. Williams' mind. Translated his thoughts ran something like this: "Mighty pretty girl, blooming as a rose. Wonder how many of us the chaperon's going to stand for. Plague take it, why didn't Stuart give me a show—needn't have tread on my heels this way."

But Stuart, at the door, stopping only a half moment for a lost overcoat—so he said —was being presented to the ladies. And in Stuart's wake came others. It was [265] amazing how many things had been lost oh the campus; or in Billy Hemphill and Hammie McVickar's rooms.

Mrs. White began to feel nervous. She was in a quandary. She could hardly take her charges away before tea, neither could she ask the young men to leave. She finally decided to settle down comfortably and close her eyes to any irregularities. After all there could be no real harm.

With the utmost cordiality Billy and his room-mate insisted upon their friends remaining to tea, and the men needed but little urging. They made themselves generally agreeable, assisting in the entertaining; passing tea and sandwiches with ease and aplomb.

Mr. Williams kept the seat next to Blue Bonnet and Hammie McVickar dropped down on the other side of her.

"First visit here?" Mr. Williams asked, trying to successfully balance his ice-cream and cake on one knee.

"Yes—that is, it's the first time I've been inside one of the buildings. I came to a ball game last autumn."

"Then you must have a look round before you go."

Blue Bonnet assured him of her willingness if Mrs. White and the others were agreeable.

"You have pleasant quarters here," she said, turning to Mr. McVickar. "If you were at Oxford you would call this room the 'sitter' and that the 'bedder,'" nodding toward the room where they had laid aside their coats. [266]

"Yes—those are the Oxford terms. Know anybody there?"

"Just one man. I've only met him. He's a friend of a friend of mine. He told me about some of the customs. They interested me very much."

Over in her corner, between young Billings and the interloper, Stuart, Sue was having a beautiful time. She had felt free, since it was Billy's party—hence Billy's ice-cream—to permit herself a second helping. Sue was in her element. Billy and her favorite ice-cream—all in one day! It was almost too much.

Annabel, as usual, was the centre of attraction. She was surrounded by a number of "searchers for lost articles," and Blue Bonnet, as she glanced in her direction, could imagine how the men were enjoying her pretty Southern drawl, her always witty remarks. Billy, with great self-sacrifice, devoted himself to Mrs. White, but his glance strayed often to Annabel. Mrs. White must have noticed the anxious glances, for she got up after she had finished her tea and insisted upon talking to Mr. McVickar for a while.

The hour sped all too soon. Before the girls realized it, they had seen the interesting sights of the campus; the big dining-room in Memorial Hall, where twelve hundred students assembled daily; Sanders Theatre and the Fogg Art Museum. [267]

"I'd love to come in here when the men were dining," Annabel remarked, gazing from the balcony down upon the dining-hall.

A quick glance passed between the men. They smiled in unison.

"What's the joke?" Annabel insisted.

"You'd have to come here at mealtime to find out," Billy informed her. "You see, we are a little averse to an audience, and the fellows act up considerably."

"What do they do?"

"Well," Hammie McVickar explained, "when any one enters this balcony every man down there begins pounding with his knife and fork, or anything that's handy, and raising such a din, that guests usually depart—quickly."

"I think that's very rude," Blue Bonnet said, and the men agreed with her politely.

"Wasn't it just like Billy to pick out the biggest bouquet for Mrs. White?" Sue whispered to Annabel, as they were finally leaving the campus. "She adores American beauties, too. Don't you really think he's a dear?"

"He's a diplomat, to say the least," Annabel replied, laughing. "And a charming host," she added, to palliate Sue's evident disappointment. "Perfectly charming." [268]

"I'm so glad you think so, Annabel, and—do you know—I've a feeling that he likes you awfully, dear. Not from anything he says—but—well, just the way he looks at you sometimes!"

"How absurd, Sue!" Annabel replied, as she hurried to catch up with the rest of the party; but her eyes sparkled and a beautiful flush crimsoned her lovely face.

After the lights were out that night, Blue Bonnet, with utter disregard of rules, slipped into Annabel's room to talk things over. It was an excellent opportunity, as Ruth had left in the afternoon for a week-end at home.

Sue had already arrived and was comfortably ensconced on the couch in bath-robe and slippers.

"Good!" she cried, drawing Blue Bonnet down beside her while Annabel stirred the fire. "Now, we'll have a regular old-fashioned gossip." The fire, after some coaxing, broke into a ruddy glow, and Annabel, dropping before it on the rug, took down her hair and began brushing it systematically. Annabel never, under any circumstances, neglected her hair. It was one of her chief attractions, and its soft, glossy texture testified to this regular treatment.

"My, but you're enterprising," Blue Bonnet said, as Annabel brushed diligently, counting each stroke. "I couldn't brush my hair that way every night if my life depended upon it. Don't you ever feel too tired to do it?" [269]

"Oh, yes—sometimes; but it doesn't pay to neglect it. Wasn't it glorious over at the college to-day? Didn't you just adore it?"

"Loved it!" Blue Bonnet said rapturously, while Sue clasped her arms about her knees and gazed into the fire dreamily. "I think it was perfectly dear of Sue's brother to have us; and weren't those nice men who drifted in? Do you think any of them had really lost anything?"

Annabel laughed.

"I told them that they ought to form a St. Anthony society. There's strength in union."

"Who's St. Anthony?"

"He's the saint that some people pray to when they've lost things. He helps find them."

"Annabel—that's sacrilegious!"

"I didn't mean it to be. The boys didn't take it that way, I'm sure."

"That Billings person was quite nice after all, wasn't he?" Sue wakened from her dream long enough to remark. "I rather liked him. He's awfully devoted to Billy. It was quite touching the way he talked about him."

Blue Bonnet and Annabel laughed outright.

Sue was indignant. [270]

"I don't see anything to laugh at. What's the matter with him?"

"Nothing. I think he's fine," Annabel answered. "And so clever! Just think of any one being discerning enough to find the way into Sue's good graces by the Billy route!"

Sue got up and drawing her bath-robe closer about her started for the door.

"I think I'll say good night," she said. "I have a Latin exam to-morrow and I've set my alarm for five-thirty."

But Annabel, intercepting, drew her to the hearth-rug and began humble apologies.

"Don't be silly, there's an old dear. I was only teasing—you know that. You're not going for an hour yet. Come to think of it, you'll not go at all; you'll sleep in Ruth's bed. We've loads to discuss, loads! We haven't mentioned Hammie McVickar or that Mr. what's his name—Stuart, wasn't it? or the refreshments. Come to think of it, Blue Bonnet's going to stay, too. We'll roll the couch over here by the fire and give her my down comfort—or my bed, if she prefers it."

An invitation that was accepted after some protest by both.

"But I've simply got to get up early, Annabel," Sue insisted. "I don't want to wake you and Blue Bonnet."

"I'm rising with the dawn myself, thank you, my dear," and in a whisper Annabel [271] sang:

"'There's going to be
There's going to be
There's going to be
A Physics test.
The girls will shiver round the hall,
Waiting for the bell to call
Them to the test.
And the greasy grinds will murmur:

"'Every little molecule has a magnet all its own,
Every little North Pole by its action may be known,
And every feeling
That comes stealing
'Round its being,
Must be revealing
Magnetic force lines,
In some appealing
Little action
All its own.'"

"And you won't be disturbing me in the least, Sue," Blue Bonnet said, "for I'm with you both. I want to have a little 'heart-to-heart' session with Mr. Emerson in the morning on his compensation article. I believe that I can do it justice now that the tea is over."

"But I must get my clock, Annabel. If it should go off at daylight, and Wee found me missing, there'd be trouble."

"All right, trot along, Sue; but come back instantly."

Is it necessary to add that, after talking until the wee small hours of morning, [272] daylight found three girls peacefully slumbering, utterly oblivious to the faithful

alarm which trilled forth its summons to unheeding ears?

It was Blue Bonnet who first opened her eyes to the broad sunlight, and sat up with a start. It took her a full minute to get her bearings: then she rushed to Annabel's bed and shook that young person roundly.

"Annabel! Annabel! Sue! For goodness' sake, get up! It's seven-thirty this minute. I hear the girls now, going to breakfast. How am I ever to get into my own room for my clothes? Oh, I never should have stayed here last night—I knew that I shouldn't all the time."

But Sue, sitting up in Ruth's bed, rubbed her eyes vigorously and poured oil on the troubled waters.

"Don't get so excited, Blue Bonnet. It's no killing matter to be late to breakfast. You'll only get a mark in the 'Doomsday Book;' and thank your lucky stars the girls *are* going down to breakfast. When they're all gone you can slip out easily."

"Yes—but oh, my Emerson!"

"Emerson isn't a patching to a Latin exam!"

"And the two couldn't match up with a Physics test!" Annabel groaned, putting on her clothes with eager haste. "I have a vision of the mark I'll get!"

She went to the door and took a sweeping glance down the hall. [273]

"Coast's clear," she announced. "Shoo—both of you."

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CHAPTER XVI [274]

ANTICIPATIONS

SPRING had come at last. In Woodford, up among the hills, the We Are Sevens—or "Sixes," in the absence of Blue Bonnet—were celebrating its advent with a riding party.

It was Saturday afternoon, as might be suspected from the leisurely way the girls rode through the woods, stopping often to admire the maples and elms and the beautiful chestnuts, just beginning to feel the thrill of life after their long winter nap.

"Seems to me those leaves grow greener while you wait," Kitty Clark said, reining her horse beside a chuckling brook and pointing to a near-by birch grove. "I feel just like this water. I want to run as fast as I can, calling, 'Spring is here! Spring is here!' Don't you perfectly love this odor of growing things? Listen to that phœbe! Doesn't it sound as if he were saying, 'Spring's come! Spring's come!'"

She was off her horse before the other girls had time to answer, climbing the steep sides of the glen in search of the first hepaticas.

"Here they are!" she called back joyfully a moment later. Under the lichen-plastered rocks, among the damp leaves, the delicate blossoms peeped forth shyly. Kitty fell upon her knees and buried her nose in the delicious fragrance. [275]

"Oh, the darlings!" Debby exclaimed, close behind. "Girls! Let's gather as many as we can find, and send a box of them to Blue Bonnet. Remember how she raved over them last year? She said they were almost as lovely as the blue bonnets that bloom in Texas about this time."

The suggestion met with instant approval, and for the next half hour six girls worked busily.

"Seems to me they're awfully early this year," Amanda said, searching under the mahogany colored leaves for the little furred heads. "I never knew them to come before April."

"Oh, you forget from year to year, Amanda," Kitty reminded. "Anyway, it's almost April. A week from to-day is the first. That's the day Blue Bonnet gets here. And, by the way, I have a letter from Blue Bonnet. It came just as I was leaving the house and I waited until we were all together to read it. Suppose we go up on the hill a little farther and get in a patch of sunshine. It's a trifle chilly in the shade, even if Mr. Phœbe does keep insisting that 'Spring's come!'"

"Humph! Short and sweet," Kitty commented, as she drew forth the letter. "Suppose it is because she will be with us so soon."

"Dearest Girls:—

[276]

"This is a joint letter to-day. I am so busy with exams this week that I can't do much letter writing. The tests have been something awful. The girls say they grow stiffer all the time—- but no matter! I daresay you have troubles in this line of your own.

"I have the pleasure to inform you, girls, that Uncle Cliff will be in Boston the first day of April, and that he has written me to invite the We Are Sevens to be his guests at the Copley Plaza for three days, beginning on that date. This means that we shall all return to Woodford together for the rest of my vacation. I hope nothing will prevent your acceptance. Grandmother and Aunt Lucinda have been included in the invitation, so you will be well chaperoned. Please answer as soon as possible, so that Uncle Cliff can make his reservations at the hotel. I know that we are going to have a splendid time. Bring your prettiest clothes, as there will be something doing every minute. I can hardly wait to see you all, and to have the 'Lambs' meet you.

"Hoping to hear from you very soon,
"I am, ever with dearest love,
Blue Bonnet."

There was an instant's silence after Kitty stopped reading, and then everybody broke forth at once.

"At the Copley Plaza! For three days! To visit Blue Bonnet!"

[277]

"Isn't it a blessing that our vacation begins on the first, too?" Debby said. "There ought not to be a thing to hinder our going."

"Nothing but—just one thing, Debby. It takes a lot of pretty clothes to stay in a place like the Copley Plaza. And those 'Lambs!' Blue Bonnet says they dress beautifully. Now, what have we got to wear in a crowd like that?"

"If they're going to like us just for our clothes, Kitty!" protested Amanda. "Besides, you have that new blue voile; you're a dream in it; and Sarah has her wine-colored henrietta. Maybe the rest of us could scrape up something; there's—let's see, four or five days yet."

"Maybe we could get something in Boston," Debby suggested. "Blue Bonnet says they have wonderful bargains. You know she got all her clothes for school ready made, and they were as stylish as could be."

"Perhaps we could; that's an idea, Debby," Kitty remarked thankfully. "It's time for spring clothes anyway. We shouldn't want Blue Bonnet to be ashamed of us."

Debby scoffed.

"Blue Bonnet wouldn't be ashamed of us—no matter what we wear. She's not that kind."

"But she'd like to be proud of us, nevertheless. Those 'Lambs' come from awfully rich families; they must, or they couldn't be in that school. It costs a small fortune to go there."

[278]

"Blue Bonnet says they are not a bit airy, though, Kitty; and you hardly ever hear a word about money. Blue Bonnet says Miss North is a regular stickler for simplicity, and that she's forever telling the girls where to place values in this world."

"Where does she place them—these values? What are values anyway?"

It was Sarah's turn to speak up quietly.

"I believe I know," she said. "That's one of father's hobbies. It means getting a true estimate of life. We should value things that are worth while, like education and refinement, honesty and courage. It's very vulgar to put value on money; gentle birth and good breeding count for much more."

"I guess our grandsires could measure up with anybody's," Amanda said proudly. "We're every one eligible to the Daughters of the Revolution."

"What's the matter with the We Are Sevens?" Kitty shouted, and the rest took up the cry:

"Who's all right? We're all right!"

Down the hill they ran merrily, and scrambled into saddles for a wild gallop home. Such news was too good to keep, and before the evening was half spent, arrangements were completed for the coming event, and a letter posted to Blue

Bonnet.

And in Boston a young girl awaited the first of April with joy that knew no bounds. [279]

"Only two days more until Uncle Cliff comes, now, Joy," she said, tearing a leaf off from the calendar. "Seems to me I just can't wait. I never was so anxious to see him in my life."

Joy smiled sympathetically.

"It will be lovely," she said. "And you have planned so many things to do, Blue Bonnet. I've been wondering if your uncle will wish to keep all these engagements."

Blue Bonnet turned toward Joy quickly.

"You don't know Uncle Cliff," she said gaily. "He'll have the time of his life. He wrote me that three days were at my disposal; to fill them any way I chose. Want to hear the program?"

"Love to," Joy answered.

"Well, Uncle Cliff gets here the morning of the first; that's Friday."

She went to her desk and taking out an engagement book, began turning the leaves hastily.

"Arrives at eight-fifteen. That ought to get him up here about nine, at the very latest."

"Oh, let the poor man get his breakfast first."

"He'll have that on the train, thank you. Then let me see; yes—here: Nine o'clock, visit with Uncle Cliff. Ten, shopping. Eleven o'clock, hospital. I have a little plan about that. One, luncheon. Two o'clock, matinee—or something; haven't planned that [280] yet. Five, meet Aunt Lucinda and the girls from Woodford. Eight, theatre—"

"Mercy, Blue Bonnet, what a mad scramble! And after a five days' journey across the continent I should think your uncle would be dead!"

"I hadn't thought of that," Blue Bonnet said, contritely. "Perhaps we *had* better cut out the matinee. I shouldn't wonder if we had. It would be hard on Grandmother, too. But you have to do a lot, Joy! Three days slip away before you know it. Now that brings us up to Saturday, doesn't it? Saturday; let me see. Here it is! Saturday, A. M.: Nine o'clock, shopping. Have a little plan about that, too, if Uncle Cliff's willing; know he will be. One, lunch. Two, motor ride. Six o'clock, dinner for the Lambs and the We Are Sevens. You're in on that, too, Joy; you and Mrs. White. Eight, theatre. Sunday. Eleven o'clock, church at Trinity; hope the Bishop preaches. Two o'clock, visit with relatives. Seven, tea—at relatives, probably. Monday morning—Woodford. Sounds fascinating, doesn't it?"

"Alluring, Blue Bonnet. I hope you'll have a happy time."

"I shall, I'm sure, Joy. I've got to run up-stairs now a minute to talk things over with Carita. Carita goes with me to Woodford for the rest of the vacation."

"Begins to look like a holiday," Blue Bonnet thought as she went through the halls [281] and noticed the trunks at each door. "Wonder if Carita is packing."

But Carita was not packing. She was sitting listlessly in a chair by the window, looking a bit forlorn.

"What's the matter, Carita?" Blue Bonnet inquired.

"Nothing."

"Nothing? You look as if you had the blues."

"No—only—"

"Only what?"

Tears welled in Carita's eyes.

"Only what, dear?" Blue Bonnet's arms were round her.

"I reckon it's just a touch of homesickness. It's seeing the girls packing to go home. I want so to see mother—and Baby Joe. They says he's so darling now. Oh, my arms just ache to hold him sometimes, Blue Bonnet—and—and—Texas is so far away, isn't it?"

The tears were coming in a flood now, and Blue Bonnet got out her handkerchief to stop the flow.

"There! there!" she said. "Just think what a good time we're going to have with Uncle Cliff; and it's only a little while until the tenth of June. Why, the time will just

fly after Easter, and—oh, my dear, be thankful that you have a mother to go to —suppose—"

But Carita had turned suddenly and gathered Blue Bonnet in a loving embrace. [282]

"How selfish I am," she said, between sobs. "I didn't think, Blue Bonnet—really, I didn't."

"Of course you didn't. And I didn't mean to remind you; it just slipped out. Sometimes it does, when I see girls crying for their mothers and I remember that I shall—never—have mine. Now, don't cry—please don't. Where's Mary?"

Through her tears Carita smiled.

"She and Peg—Jerusha Austin are down in the office. Fraulein is after them again. Last night, when the trunks were brought up, Mary and Peggy waited until the lights were out and then they fixed up a tick-tack. They hid in the trunks and worked the thing for almost an hour. It was awfully spooky—nearly scared Fraulein to death. She's just furious at both of them."

"How did she find them?"

"Oh, Mary got the giggles! Mary would laugh at her own funeral. Peggy was so cross at her. Fraulein traced the giggles to Mary's trunk."

At that instant the door opened and Mary came in, followed by Peggy.

"What did you get this time, Mary?" Carita asked.

Mary, laughed sheepishly.

"You talk as if I'd been sentenced," she said, smiling, and showing every one of her beautiful teeth. [283]

"Weren't you?"

"No, not this time. Miss North was so disgusted she didn't do a thing. She made us feel as if we were infants; said she thought smothering in a trunk for an hour was punishment enough for anybody. She just talked!"

"And—*talked*!" Peggy added.

"She said that we'd so wrecked Fraulein's nerves—Peg and I—that Fraulein was leaving the school—wasn't coming back after Easter."

"Really? Is that true, Peggy?"

"That we've wrecked her nerves? Hardly. That's just letting her down easy. Miss North's dead tired of her, herself."

"Who's going to take her place?"

"Miss North didn't take us into her confidence," Mary said flippantly. "But I shouldn't wonder if Joy Cross substituted until they get somebody. Joy's a whiz in German. She's had us two or three times lately when Fraulein was having one of her tantrums—beg pardon, nervous break-ups."

Blue Bonnet rose to go.

"Wait a minute, Blue Bonnet," Carita said. "I've some news for you. What do you think! Knight Judson's coming to Boston; my cousin, you know. He's coming with your Uncle Cliff. I've just had a letter."

"Knight Judson! What for?" [284]

"He's always wanted to come, and now he has the opportunity. He's been wild to study engineering, saved his money for it for a long time. Well—he had a chance to come on and do a little work at the Massachusetts Tech. It's awfully late in the year, of course, to enter, but he wants to look up a lot of things and be ready to start in the fall. I'm so anxious to see him. He'll have so much news from home."

"And Sandy? Why didn't he come, too?"

"He will, next year."

"It will be fine to see Knight again," Blue Bonnet said. "Alec will be delighted to know he's coming. They were great friends in Texas."

"Yes, Knight is going to Washington first, then on to Woodford for a few days, with Alec."

"How splendid! Oh, Carita, everything is going so beautifully that it almost makes me afraid. I feel as if the fairies had given me three wishes and they had all come true. I don't know whether I can walk down-stairs or not. I feel like taking a flying leap."

"Take the banister," Mary suggested. "It's safer, and heaps more fun. I tried it yesterday."

Blue Bonnet looked properly shocked.

"Fortunate you didn't run into any one," she remarked.

"But I did! A nice lady who was trying to find Madam de Cartier. We fell—all in a heap!" [285]

The morning of the first of April broke clear and calm.

"Even the weather is on my side," Blue Bonnet said. "I ought to be the very happiest girl in the world—and I am!"

It was a busy time at the school; a general breaking up for spring vacation. In the halls girls scurried in every direction and hasty good-bys were said; trunks were carried out noisily by careless expressmen to the vans that stood waiting outside.

"Terribly exciting, isn't it?" Sue said, passing Blue Bonnet in the hall shortly after breakfast. "I'm so glad Annabel and I are staying over until Monday. Has your uncle arrived yet?"

"I'm just watching for him. He should be here in about ten minutes. I'm keeping my eye on the front door—oh, Sue, there's a ring now; perhaps it's he! It is! It is!"

And the next moment Blue Bonnet was folded in her uncle's arms.

"Uncle Cliff! dear Uncle Cliff!" she cried, rapturously, while she led him toward the reception-room, holding to his arm tightly as if by some chance he might escape. "How ever did you get up here so soon? It's only a quarter to nine, now."

"Taxi, Honey. And the train was on time, fortunately. Come over to the light and let me have a look at you. Why, child, how you have grown! And what's this—long dresses! Honey, Honey, where's Uncle Cliff's little girl?" [286]

There was a note in the man's voice that struck deep at the girl's heart.

"Here she is," she cried, snuggling into the warm embrace again. "She'll never be anything but a little girl to you—never! That's proper length—just a speck below my shoe-tops. Will you sit here a minute while I find Carita? Poor Carita has been a little homesick the last few days. It's seeing the girls start for home, I reckon."

She was away in a trice, bringing back Carita, who welcomed Uncle Cliff with almost as much enthusiasm as Blue Bonnet had.

"Now the plans, Honey. What are they?" Mr. Ashe said, looking at his watch. "Have you had breakfast?"

"Uncle Cliff! An hour ago."

"Well, I haven't. Suppose you get your things together—both of you—and come over to the hotel with me right away. The taxi is waiting."

It didn't take the girls long to get their suitcases and run back to Mr. Ashe.

"All ready?" he inquired.

"Just as soon as we say good-by to Miss North."

At the hotel Blue Bonnet and Carita found themselves in the daintiest suite of rooms imaginable.

"I will come for you in twenty minutes," Mr. Ashe said. "Then we will go down to breakfast. I have a suspicion that you could eat another bite if you tried, while we talk over the plans. Suppose you have them all settled, Honey?" [287]

"Yes, I have, Uncle Cliff. It's going to be very strenuous, too, I'm afraid. I hope you aren't awfully, *awfully* tired."

At which Uncle Cliff smiled one of his tender, adoring smiles, and patted Blue Bonnet's shoulder affectionately.

"I think I shall be equal to the demand," he said, and was off.

In the dining-room a cosy table was found for three. Many a head turned in passing to gaze at the little party, who, oblivious to time or surroundings, chatted merrily.

It was after they had left the dining-room, that Blue Bonnet, pausing at her uncle's door, asked Carita if she would mind going on to their rooms for just a minute: she had something she must say to Uncle Cliff alone—a secret.

"It's this, Uncle Cliff," she said, when the door had closed, "I want to talk something over with you before Aunt Lucinda comes. You see, I'm not quite sure she'd approve of it, and I want so much to do it. That is—I want to, if we can—without hurting anybody's feelings."

"All right, Honey. What is it?"

[288] She was holding on to Uncle Cliff's coat lapels now, and looking up into his face with the childish trust and confidence she had shown since babyhood, and the man's arm went round her as of old, protectingly.

"You see, it's this way, Uncle Cliff. There's that dinner for the Lambs and the We Are Sevens to-morrow night. Every single one of the Lambs ordered a new gown to wear. I didn't want them to—but they would do it—and—I'm afraid it's going to make the We Are Sevens sort of uncomfortable. So I was thinking, Uncle Cliff—I was *wishing* that—we—you and I, maybe—could have a little shopping expedition to-morrow morning and—"

She stopped short, not knowing how to go on without putting herself in the wrong light.

"You understand—don't you, Uncle Cliff? It isn't that I'd be ashamed of the girls; you know that. Their clothes are all right—only I know how girls feel not to be dressed quite like others. It makes them awkward and ill at ease, and—"

Mr. Ashe bent over and imprinted a kiss on the brown head, and for a moment his eyes were suspiciously bright.

"I understand perfectly, Honey," he said.

"But just how could we do it, Uncle Cliff—get them some pretty things without making them think—that—that their things weren't right,—good enough, you know? It's an awfully delicate matter."

"SHE WAS HOLDING ON TO UNCLE CLIFF'S COAT LAPELS."

[289] "So it is, Honey, but I think we can find a way. Was it some pretty frocks you wanted to give them?"

"Oh, if I only *could*, Uncle Cliff. Gowns and slippers to match, and I'd thought of some pretty evening wraps, too. You see, we're going to the theatre, and supper afterward, and the Lambs have such pretty ones. We could afford it, couldn't we? There's no one to spend money on but poor little me."

Mr. Ashe laughed as he smoothed out a pucker in his niece's brow.

"I don't think you need worry about the expense," he said. "You are very fortunate in that respect, Blue Bonnet, and you know I always approve of spending money where it means happiness. Do you need a new frock, too,—and Carita, perhaps?"

"We could each use one," Blue Bonnet answered, "though I suppose Aunt Lucinda wouldn't exactly think *I* needed it."

"This isn't Aunt Lucinda's affair," Mr. Ashe replied quickly. "It's mine, Honey. How would this do? We'll take the We Are Sevens shopping with us to-morrow morning and when you and Carita have selected your gowns I will suggest that the others [290] select too—a little gift from me—or from you, if you think best."

Blue Bonnet clapped her hands with delight.

"The very thing," she cried. "Then they can't think it was planned. They'll be so delighted. Oh, Uncle Cliff, you are so dear, *so dear*!" The last dear was emphasized with a resounding kiss. "I'm so happy; *so happy* that it seems as if I couldn't stand it. Isn't this a beautiful old world? Now, we must hurry. I want to get you out to the hospital to see Gabriel the very first thing."

Blue Bonnet had explained at breakfast all about Gabriel, and Uncle Cliff had said little. But he was ready for further investigation.

"I'm not sure that I like the idea of you going about these hospitals, Honey—especially where patients are tubercular. You can contract these things, you know."

Blue Bonnet laughed her scorn.

"How perfectly ridiculous! I'm as healthy as ever I can be. Why, look at me! I've put on eight pounds in three months. That's the very worst of boarding-school—- it's bound to make you fat. Poor Wee Watts is discouraged to death."

At the hospital, although it was not visiting hour, they were allowed to see Gabriel.

"He's not been so well the past week," Miss Warren, the nurse, said. "I think it is the confinement. It is beginning to tell upon him. He ought to be out in the country in [291] the sunshine."

Blue Bonnet sat down on the bed and took hold of the little hand. It was hot and feverish.

"What's the matter, Gabriel?" she said. "This won't do. You promised me that you would get well."

"I will," the child maintained stoutly. "There ain't nothing the matter." The bright eyes flashed a smile.

"We're twins,—me and her," Gabriel announced, directing his remarks to Mr. Ashe. "Our birthdays are the same."

"So I understand."

"Are you her father?"

"Yes, and her uncle, too."

Gabriel seemed mystified.

"You see, I haven't any father—or mother either, Gabriel. My uncle has to be both," Blue Bonnet explained.

"That's like me, too. I'm a orphant!"

Blue Bonnet caught her breath quickly. To be an orphan—and ill; desperately poor, too! The world wasn't such a cheerful place after all.

"I lent the soldiers to another feller," Gabriel said presently. "He's sicker than I am."

"Then you shall have some more, Gabriel. It was fine of you to be so unselfish."

"I wasn't. They made me!"

The nurse started to explain. Gabriel interrupted. [292]

"I want my own—they can fight like—I didn't say it, did I? I told you I wouldn't never again, Miss Warren."

Miss Warren's brow cleared.

"These children have some street expressions that are hard to break," she said. "Gabriel is trying very hard to be a gentleman. He got so excited over the soldiers, Miss Ashe, that we had to take them away."

"*She* says—" Gabriel began, pointing to Blue Bonnet, "she says you got ponies where you live, an' you can ride 'em. Can you?"

Mr. Ashe smiled.

"Yes. Lots of them. Would you like to ride a pony, Gabriel?"

"Bet yer!"

Mr. Ashe rose and took the nurse to one side.

"Just how ill is this child?" he asked, much moved. "Is there any chance for his recovery?"

"Yes—yes, indeed, under the right conditions. He has tuberculosis of the knee. If only a home could be found for him in the country! He's an unusually bright child, and so lovable. I feel sure that he must come from excellent Jewish people, though he was brought here from the tenement district a few months ago—just after his mother died."

"And you think he'd have a chance in the country?" [293]

"I'm very sure of it, sir."

Mr. Ashe turned away abruptly. Before his eyes swept a vision of the Blue Bonnet ranch—its vast roaming acres; its clear beautiful skies and warm sunshine; of old, lonely Benita, and Uncle Joe. There was ample room *there*—room that shamed him when he looked at this pitiful wasted bit of humanity dying for the need of what it offered.

He went back to the little cot and touched Blue Bonnet's arm lightly.

"Come, Honey," he said. "I think it's time we were going. We'll see Gabriel again."

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CHAPTER XVII [294]

THE GATHERING OF THE CLANS

"Blue Bonnet! Do you really truly mean it?"

Kitty Clark stood before a pile of fluffy, shimmering gowns at Hollander's, her hands clasped ecstatically, her face wreathed in smiles.

"Girls!" she cried, "Sarah! Amanda! Did you hear what Blue Bonnet said? We are each to choose a gown—a dinner gown and a party coat; gifts from Mr. Ashe. Did you ever hear of anything so splendid in your lives? Just fancy being able to *choose* what one really wants, and not something that will 'do nicely!' A party coat, too, Blue Bonnet? You're sure you're not mistaken? Why, it will cost a fearful lot for six of us!"

"I don't think you need worry about that, Kitty Kat. Uncle Cliff isn't minding the price. Just choose something pretty and becoming. Carita and I are to select, too. Come on, girls!"

"But, Blue Bonnet!" it was practical Sarah who spoke, "we mustn't be extravagant just because your uncle has been so good. Didn't he put a limit on the price?"

"No, he did not, Sarah. Uncle Cliff doesn't put a limit on what he gives. He said to get what you each liked. You'd better get busy. Kitty's going to have the pick if you don't." [295]

Kitty was already holding up the daintiest blue embroidered chiffon.

"Isn't this perfectly exquisite?" she said, catching Blue Bonnet's glance. The saleswoman came forward with a pale green messaline.

"The young lady could wear either of these, with her hair," she remarked.

"Put one of them on, Kitty," Blue Bonnet suggested. "One could hardly choose, they are both so dear. The blue one is simpler, I think, and blue is your color."

Kitty emerged presently from the dressing-room in the blue gown. The girls exclaimed in a breath. Kitty looked charming. The saleswoman selected a blue velvet wrap of a darker shade and threw it over Kitty's shoulders. The effect was enchanting.

"Kitty!" Blue Bonnet cried, "that's simply stunning! Wait a minute—keep it on until I get Grandmother and Uncle Cliff."

Grandmother and Uncle Cliff beheld the transformation in silence for a minute. Grandmother spoke first.

"It is very beautiful, Kitty—very—but I fear—Is it not a little old for you, dear?"

Kitty looked her disappointment, and the saleswoman came to the rescue. [296]

"The gown is one of our young girl models, madam, and really very simple. The coat is not elaborate either. Indeed it is very plain—as coats go now. I think the young lady could scarcely make a mistake in choosing them."

Mr. Ashe smiled his approval.

"You like them, Kitty?" he asked.

"Oh, Mr. Ashe, I perfectly adore them!"

"Then if Mrs. Clyde thinks them suitable, take them, by all means."

Mrs. Clyde hesitated. She wished that her daughter had not selected this hour to attend to business matters. She would have liked her approval.

"I wish your Aunt Lucinda might see them first, dear," she said to Blue Bonnet. "I hardly feel capable of choosing for Kitty."

"But Aunt Lucinda said she couldn't possibly get through with her affairs before lunch, Grandmother—you remember hearing her say that, don't you? Well, you see we've got to choose quickly, because the girls want to wear the gowns to the dinner to-night, and if there are any alterations it couldn't be managed. Anyway, Grandmother, I *know* they're all right. They aren't a speck more elaborate than the girls at Miss North's wear. Please let Kitty have them."

And Mrs. Clyde, under pressure of the argument and the moment, capitulated. [297]

Kitty moved off toward the dressing-room in a transport of happiness, and the other girls in turn made their selections. Debby found a rose-colored dress that suited her admirably; Sarah, after much deliberation, chose a substantial afternoon gown that would serve for dinner and party also; a gown that would have pleased Aunt Lucinda down to the ground. Amanda made her selection after the order of Kitty's; a white embroidered swiss over a pink slip, with a wrap that blended, and yet appeared substantial; while Susy and Ruth, showing extremely good judgment, abided by Mrs. Clyde's decision, and selected simple sheer white organdies with charming sashes, and girlish looking coats of dark red broadcloth.

Carita and Blue Bonnet waited until all the others had been supplied. Then Blue Bonnet found a little frock of pale pink crepe de chine; something she had long wanted; and Carita cast her lot with Ruth and Susy, selecting an organdy not unlike theirs, and a coat of blue broadcloth.

It was a happy party that filed out of the store an hour later, after all accessories to the costumes had been found and purchased.

Luncheon was a merry feast, enjoyed at the Touraine; as was also the motor ride in the afternoon. But the real joy of the day came with the dinner in the evening. The [298] table, according to Blue Bonnet's instructions, had been laid in the Palm Room. Miss Clyde much preferred a private dining-room; but Blue Bonnet had insisted that half the fun was in seeing the life at the hotel, and Miss Clyde finally withdrew her objections.

Mr. Ashe sat at the head of the table with Mrs. Clyde at his right and Mrs. White at his left. At the opposite end sat Miss Clyde, and the Lambs and the We Are Sevens alternated about the board. Annabel Jackson had Kitty Clark under her wing; while Sue Hemphill entertained Amanda. An arrangement which proved entirely satisfactory, judging from the merriment that came from their respective quarters.

Blue Bonnet, glancing at her guests, indulged in the utmost satisfaction. The Lambs were charming in the new gowns; but, thanks to Uncle Cliff, not a whit more so than her beloved We Are Sevens—a fact which the Lambs themselves appreciated. Joy Cross, between Blue Bonnet and kind-hearted Wee Watts, looked very happy.

The place cards caused great amusement; and it is safe to say that each one found its way into a memory book for future reference and pleasure. Patty Paine, gifted in art, had painted them charmingly, while Angela Dare, despite her scorn for mere "doggerel," had penned a verse suitable to each guest. Jokes and jests were the order of the evening. Each girl had been asked to bring her best story, and consequently [299] there were no lapses into silence or stupid pauses during courses.

"It has been the most wonderful success, Blue Bonnet," Annabel whispered, as the party left the table. "And I *did so* enjoy Kitty Clark. I couldn't keep my eyes off her."

"I'm so glad, Annabel," Blue Bonnet answered, giving the hand in her own a squeeze. "We must hurry a bit now. We're going to the Plymouth to see 'Pomander

Walk.' They say it's dear."

The play came up to expectations. The girls enjoyed it hugely. Enjoyed it just as they enjoyed the supper at the Touraine later—with the enthusiasm of youth and good health.

"Uncle Cliff," Blue Bonnet said, when they were finally back at the hotel, and she was saying good night at his own door, "I believe this has been the very happiest day of my life. I can't begin to thank you for it; you've been so good—and so generous. Wasn't it splendid the way the girls took to the dresses—and Aunt Lucinda having that appointment just at that hour? It seemed almost as if—as if the fairies had had a hand in it all, didn't it? We couldn't have arranged it better if we'd tried. But I'm afraid I did Aunt Lucinda an injustice. She didn't mind about our getting the girls the dresses at all. I believe she liked it. She said it was a great privilege to be able to [300] give so much happiness."

And stooping to kiss Blue Bonnet, Mr. Ashe asked:

"You were satisfied, then, Honey? It went off as well as you had expected? You are quite content?"

Blue Bonnet hesitated before she replied.

"What is it, Honey? Speak up. Have we left something undone?"

"There's just one thing, Uncle Cliff. I'm almost ashamed to mention it in the face of all you've done to-day—but—it's about Gabriel. If we could only do something for the poor little fellow. Oh, Uncle Cliff, you can't think how it hurts me to see him fading away in that place, when—when there's sunshine going to waste on the Blue Bonnet ranch, and ponies eating their heads off in the stables."

"I thought of that, too, Honey, and—I wasn't going to tell you to-night, Blue Bonnet—you've had enough excitement for one day; but Miss Clyde went to see Gabriel this morning—that was her business engagement—and we're going to take the little chap to Woodford with his nurse for a while. Miss Clyde thinks that she can find a boarding-place. When he gets stronger we'll get him down to the ranch; down into God's own country, Honey, where people have to look in the dictionary to find out [301] what 'tuberculosis' means. There! there! I knew I shouldn't have told you to-night. You're all worn out. Come, come, Honey! the girls are waiting for you."

But Blue Bonnet, arms about her uncle's neck, was sobbing out the gladness of her heart.

It was on the way back to the hotel from church the next day that Blue Bonnet, lagging a bit behind Grandmother and Aunt Lucinda, said to Kitty:

"I don't know whether you girls will enjoy the visit we have to pay to the relatives to-day very much or not. It won't be exciting, but Grandmother and Aunt Lucinda would be hurt if we didn't go."

"I think it's about time we were considering somebody besides ourselves after all that's been done for us," Kitty replied. "I shall love to go, myself. I met your Cousin Tracy once in Woodford and I liked him ever so much."

And the others, whether out of courtesy or not, echoed Kitty's sentiments.

But the afternoon proved far from stupid. Cousin Tracy went to great lengths to be entertaining, and Cousin Honora and Cousin Augusta were so hospitable in their quaint surroundings that Kitty whispered to Blue Bonnet:

"I feel as if they had stepped out of a book—Cranford,—or something!" An announcement that Blue Bonnet scarcely knew whether to take as a compliment or [302] not. She recalled the refinement of the Cranford family, but to be so far behind the time in this day and generation.

Kitty saw the puzzled expression and qualified the remark instantly.

"I mean they are so aristocratic—there is such an atmosphere about them."

It was quite eight o'clock when Andrews, the man-servant who had been with Miss Augusta for so many years, came into the library and lighted the tall candlesticks on the bookcases; stirred the fire and made the table ready for the large tray that, laden with cake and sandwiches, followed immediately. Miss Honora poured the tea, and the girls passed the refreshments.

It was all delightfully cosy, and the Boston relatives enjoyed the girls' breezy chatter; and the schoolgirl experiences, which were highly entertaining.

"And have you initiated the Spanish costume at Miss North's yet, Blue Bonnet?"

Cousin Tracy asked.

The faintest pink crept into Blue Bonnet's cheeks as she remembered Cousin Tracy's introduction to the costume. She laughed gaily as she answered:

"I haven't worn it myself; but some of the girls have. It makes a fine fancy dress costume. I believe Carita had it last at a Freshman party. She was a picture in it, too." [303]

Ten o'clock came before any one realized it. The girls had been interested in Cousin Tracy's specimens and stories; and Grandmother and Aunt Lucinda had enjoyed a visit with the relatives whom they saw too infrequently.

"Girls, it's almost over," Kitty exclaimed disconsolately, as she put her things in her bag that night at the hotel. "I wish it were just beginning."

She looked about the pretty suite which she and Amanda had occupied jointly.

"I don't know how I'm going to give up all this elegance and come down to earth, and Woodford again. Oh, dear—a little touch of high life is awfully unsettling!"

"I don't feel that way at all," Amanda declared. "It will give me something to think about for weeks to come. Kitty, how are we ever going to pay Mr. Ashe and Blue Bonnet for all they have done?"

"They don't want any pay," Blue Bonnet said, entering the room at that moment. "Uncle Cliff says he has had a beautiful time, and—well, I reckon you all know how I've enjoyed it. Could I help you pack? My trunk went from the school yesterday and my bag's all ready."

"No, I think not, thank you—unless you would be good enough to fold this dress and party coat, Blue Bonnet. I want to keep them as fresh as possible until Mother sees them. They *are* such loves!" [304]

Kitty produced the box in which they had been sent home, and in another moment they were skillfully laid away between tissue paper.

"My, but you do that cleverly," Kitty said, as she watched Blue Bonnet's nimble fingers. "It almost makes one wish for an Aunt Lucinda. She taught you a great deal about neatness, didn't she?"

"She certainly did! I've learned a lot at school, too. Our bureau drawers are inspected regularly. If any one thinks boarding-school is all fun, they're mistaken. You're trained from the ground up!"

Woodford had put on her finest spring array for the return of her children, and Blue Bonnet thought the quaint old village had never looked half so lovely as they drove up the quiet street through the avenue of elms. Denham, with Solomon at his heels, was waiting at the station. Solomon wagged his joy at seeing his mistress, and Blue Bonnet was no less enthusiastic in her greeting.

"I see that you take good care of him, Denham," she said, nodding toward the dog affectionately. "And Chula? Is she up from pasture waiting for me?"

"She is, Miss Blue Bonnet," the old coachman answered cheerfully. "An' right skittish, too. I don't think she's had a saddle to her back since you last rode her. I meant to give her a run yesterday, but Darrell's boy was late getting her in. Think you'd better let me try her out, Miss, before you mount." [305]

"Thank you, Denham, but Chula is as safe as a lamb. I'll take her out this afternoon and give her a taste of what's before her for the next week. I'll put her through her paces. Don't worry!"

But the afternoon was so full of a number of things that Chula stood in her stall indulging in an extra supply of oats which Blue Bonnet had insisted upon in honor of her home-coming.

"She's had poor food all winter, Denham," she said. "Just hay and stuff. Feed her up a bit, and I'll give her a run the first thing in the morning."

But in the morning Alec arrived with Knight Judson, and in the rush of things Chula was again neglected.

It was the third morning after Blue Bonnet's arrival that Chula was at last brought round to the side door. There was to be a riding party; a scamper through the woods with lunch in the hills afterward.

"Hold her a minute, please, Denham," Blue Bonnet called from her bedroom window, which overlooked the side driveway. "I'll be down in two seconds."

At that moment Alec and Knight rode up, and Alec, dismounting, threw Chula's bridle over his arm. Chula gave her head a toss and shied away.

"There, girl!" Alec rubbed her nose and spoke kindly. "What's up? Too much high living?" [306]

"That's it exactly, sir," Denham said, touching his hat respectfully. "I wanted Miss Blue Bonnet to let me give her a turn before she mounted, but she thinks she can manage her. She's just feelin' her oats, sir. She'll settle down after the first mile or two."

But Chula did not settle down after the first mile; nor the second.

"Better let me give her a run," Alec insisted, but Blue Bonnet refused.

After the first five miles Chula began to lose the restlessness that had taken possession of her. Some one in the party suggested that the horses be let out a bit, and they were off in a bunch, Chula well in the lead.

"I don't like the way that mare is acting," Alec said to Knight. "Veer round to the left of Blue Bonnet and keep pretty close to her for a while. I'll take the other side."

Knight urged the big grey horse he was riding and caught up with Blue Bonnet; but Chula, taking the grey's speed for a challenge, shot forth in a wild run.

It took a moment or two for the rest of the party to grasp the fact that Chula, gentle, docile Chula, was in earnest; that she was really running away.

There was a shriek from Debby, which did not help matters in the least, and a horrified groan from the rest of the We Are Sevens. Knight Judson, thoroughly alarmed, took up the chase; but his horse, big and clumsy, was no mate for Chula, who was running at breakneck speed. [307]

Alec took in the situation at a glance. He feared to catch up with Blue Bonnet, lest Chula should take Victor's presence as a further invitation to contest; and yet, it seemed the only thing to do. Blue Bonnet was in a fair way to lose control of the animal at any moment. He raced on at top speed. Fortunately they were on a rising piece of ground, and Alec could see that Chula was pretty well winded.

"Hold tight, Blue Bonnet," he called, as he came up behind her. "You're all right! I'm close behind you. Keep up your nerve!"

Whether it was the welcome sound of Alec's voice in such close proximity, or utter exhaustion, Blue Bonnet could scarcely have said, herself; but loosening her feet from the stirrups as if by magic, she swayed forward in the saddle, and in another instant lay an unconscious heap in the road.

Alec was at her side in a moment: lowering her head, rubbing her hands, and calling upon Knight to run to the brook for water.

"She's only fainted, I'm sure," he said in response to Knight's look of distress. "I don't believe she's hurt a bit. The mare was only playing; but, by George, wait till I catch her! I'll teach her how to run away in the future!" [308]

Alec's face was white with anxiety and anger, and his jaw set with determination that boded no good for Chula.

Blue Bonnet stirred presently; opened her eyes. The sight of Alec and Knight bending over her in the road bewildered her. Then she remembered, and a look of horror came into her eyes. She sat up frantically.

"Chula!" she cried, scanning the road eagerly. "Where is she? Alec, catch her! Catch her quickly! If she goes home without me it will frighten Grandmother to death."

Knight was off in a twinkling, coming back in a few minutes leading Chula by her bridle.

"Little devil!" he said, laughing. "She was browsing up there on the hillside as peaceful as a lamb. Weren't you, old girl?"

But Alec, still white with anger, jumped to his feet and snatching Chula's bridle from Knight's hands, struck the mare a stinging blow with his whip across her shoulder.

Blue Bonnet was up and at Chula's side instantly. She wrenched the whip from Alec's hand and her voice quivered with passion.

"How dare you strike my horse, Alec Trent! How dare you!"

Her arms were round Chula's neck instantly; her fingers caressing the ugly mark that was beginning to show deep in the sorrel shoulder. [309]

For a moment Alec gazed at Blue Bonnet, dumb with amazement. Then he took a step toward her apologetically.

"I beg your pardon," he said slowly. "I beg your pardon, Blue Bonnet. Not for striking Chula. She needed what I gave her; but for losing my temper. I'm sorry."

Blue Bonnet, still trying to smooth out the mark on Chula's shoulder, answered not a word. There was an awkward silence for a moment, and then she suggested that the party move on.

"Will you lend me your hand, Knight?" she said. "I don't believe I can mount alone this time."

There was a protest from all the young people.

"Blue Bonnet! You're surely not going to ride Chula again to-day! You can't! You're all unstrung! She may run again; you really must not."

"Your hand, please, Knight," Blue Bonnet insisted calmly.

Alec stepped forward and took Chula's bridle. At his touch the mare shied, almost jerking the reins from his hands.

Blue Bonnet snatched the bridle and turned on Alec.

"Will you leave my horse alone, please?" she said angrily. "You see, she hates your touch!"

It was Kitty who strove to heal the breach. [310]

"Don't be ridiculous, Blue Bonnet! Chula got just what was coming to her. She might have killed you; throwing you like that—"

"She didn't throw me, Kitty Clark! You don't know what you're talking about! Knight, are you going to help me, or not? If you aren't, I can mount from that log over there."

Knight came forward hesitatingly.

"Really," he said, "I think you are very unwise, Blue Bonnet. The mare is excited yet; she might—"

"You don't understand, Knight. There is a reason why I *must* ride Chula—*now, this very minute*. I am not at all nervous—see?"

She held out a cool, steady hand and Knight took it for an instant in his own.

"You're game, all right," he answered. "Here goes, then."

He lifted her into the saddle and she took up the reins firmly. For the second time she had conquered an abiding fear.

The remainder of the ride was a sad failure. Blue Bonnet felt it as she tried to entertain Knight, who kept close to her side. Alec rode with Kitty; but his eyes scarcely left Chula, who was behaving quite decently now that her frolic was over.

Kitty tried to interest Alec with stories of her Boston trip; the dinner for the Lambs; the gay theatre party; but all she got for her effort was a mere occasional, "You don't say," or "That was fine, now, wasn't it?" [311]

Finally, in exasperation, Kitty rebelled.

"Forget it, Alec," she said. "That was only one of Blue Bonnet's flashes. She adores Chula, and she knew she was only playing. You did give the horse a bad cut, though. She needed it, nevertheless. I don't see how Blue Bonnet ever escaped breaking her neck, falling like that!"

To all of which Alec made no answer, except to suggest that they ride on and select a place for lunch.

The picnic, which had promised so much, was also a dire failure. In the first place it was a trifle early for a picnic. There was chill in the air, though the sun shone brightly.

Blue Bonnet ate her sandwiches and talked to Knight merrily; but never once did her glance meet Alec's, or her conversation lead in his direction.

As the party reached town and the girls took their respective roads home, Blue Bonnet found herself for the first time alone with Alec. Knight had gone ahead with Kitty and Amanda. Alec drew up beside her and for a moment they rode in silence.

"Were you hurt, Blue Bonnet?" he asked.

"Not in the least, thank you," she replied indifferently.

"I hope you aren't going to be angry. I did exactly what I would have done to Victor, or any other beast that acted that way." [312]

"We'll drop the matter," Blue Bonnet said coolly. "But there's one thing—I hope you won't feel it your duty to tell Aunt Lucinda about what happened and spoil my vacation. It would put a ban on Chula forever more. My falling was my own fault; not hers. I slipped off in preference to—perhaps—being dragged."

All at once the light began to dawn upon Alec. He remembered the fear that had so long obsessed Blue Bonnet; the fear of being dragged.

The horses were walking now, and Alec leaned over and put his hand on the pummel of Chula's saddle; presently it slipped down in a caress on the mare's shoulder.

"I beg your pardon, Chula girl," he said. "I was pretty hard on you, wasn't I? Are you ready to forgive me?"

And whether it was because at that moment Mrs. Clyde's comfortable barn hove in sight, or in response to Alec's pleading, Chula gave a low whinny, and her mistress, looking into Alec's face which was lifted for her approval, smiled.

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CHAPTER XVIII

[313]

KITTY'S COTILLION

"THAT was plucky—Blue Bonnet's riding the mare home yesterday," Alec remarked at the breakfast-table next morning.

"What was that?" asked the General.

Alec explained.

"It was plucky," Knight remarked. "She's a true Texan, all right. What got into the mare? Only playing, wasn't she?"

"I suppose she was," Alec answered, deep in thought. "But it was a serious business, just the same. When Blue Bonnet fell I scarcely knew whether I'd pick her up whole. Not having a scratch is marvelous."

"She says she has a guardian angel," Knight said, laughing. "Jove, she must have. Only a kind and interested fate saved her yesterday. Well, what's the program to-day?"

Alec came out of his reverie.

"To-day? Nothing in particular. There's the party at the Clarks' to-night. Blue Bonnet's honor, I believe—and yours."

"I'm at the young ladies' disposal," Knight said. [314]

It was late afternoon when Alec, coming in with Knight from a ride, suggested a call at Mrs. Clyde's.

"This is about the tea hour," he said. "I'm not particularly long on tea, but I must pay my respects to Miss Clyde and her mother."

Tea *was* in order when the boys were ushered into Mrs. Clyde's comfortable sitting-room. Blue Bonnet was helping herself to a second cup.

"Just in time," she said gaily, bestowing a handshake on Knight, and nodding at Alec.

Alec felt the omission.

"Not wholly forgiven yet," he thought, as he turned his attention to Miss Lucinda. "'Fraid that cut on Chula must be looming large to-day."

That was exactly the trouble. Denham had noticed the mark when the horse had been turned over to him the afternoon before, and, alarmed for Blue Bonnet's safety, remarked about it to Miss Lucinda. The situation had been awkward. Blue Bonnet was forced to explain; which she did with as much credit to Chula as possible.

"Do you mean to say that Chula ran away with you?" Miss Clyde had asked.

"She was only playing, Aunt Lucinda." Blue Bonnet carefully guarded the fact of her fall. "She felt so good after the long winter at pasture. She didn't mean a bit of harm. I'm sure she didn't."

But Aunt Lucinda was far from satisfied, and at her first opportunity questioned [315]

Alec.

"Don't you think Chula is a bit wild for Blue Bonnet after being out all winter?" she asked.

Alec glanced at Blue Bonnet in surprise.

"Oh, scarcely wild, Miss Clyde. She was a little frisky yesterday from having been in the stable a few days on extra rations. I think the little run we gave her took away some of her surplus energy. I daresay Blue Bonnet will have to prod her to make her move in a day or two."

"Going to stand for that, Blue Bonnet?" Knight asked. "I can't imagine a Texas girl riding anything that had to be prodded. By the way, Kitty tells me that Sarah has become quite expert in the art of riding: asks at the livery stable for 'a horse with some go in him,' and has tried out the best of them."

"Good for Sarah!" Blue Bonnet exclaimed, grateful to Knight for so tactfully diverting the subject. "That reminds me of the day she first rode Comanche at the ranch. The girls made such fun of her, but she stayed with him gloriously. That was Sarah's first experience with a horse with 'go' in him."

Blue Bonnet laughed at the recollection.

"See you and Carita to-night at Kitty's, I suppose," Alec said as he and Knight were leaving a little later. "May we stop and take you over?"

"Thank you—yes," Blue Bonnet answered, looking more at Knight than at Alec. "I [316] reckon Delia will resign in your favor. She's been my duenna for some time now."

Over at Doctor Clark's great excitement prevailed. Kitty, with the aid of Amanda and Debby, was changing the entire landscape of the Clark domain. Furniture was carted out wholesale. Canvas had been laid in the large double parlors for dancing, and the hall and library reveled in cosy corners and tête-à-têtes. Out on the broad veranda, although the season was yet so young, comfortable nooks braved the chill atmosphere, and Japanese lanterns gave an air of festivity.

Kitty was giving a cotillion, an event of some importance in Woodford. Kitty's two cousins from Medford, Jack and Ferren Allen—Amherst men home for vacation—had come over to help with arrangements and make themselves generally agreeable at the party.

"What am I to do with this, Kitty?" Jack asked, lifting a table. "Amanda says it stays here. Is that right?"

"In other words, I'm not to be depended upon," Amanda said, laughing. "I told him that table was for the favors, and had to stay where it was."

"That's true, Jack," Kitty called from the porch, where she and Ferren were struggling with rugs and Indian blankets. "Amanda's perfectly dependable. That's her [317] one accomplishment—making the truth go as far as possible!"

"See?" Amanda retorted, making a little *moue*. "Next time you'll take orders direct, and save time, won't you? Isn't it a lark, getting ready for a party? Oh, would you please straighten out these chairs? They have to go all round the room—so! Then perhaps you'd help Debby with the favors. They are in that box by the window. Kitty got the sweetest things in Boston. I do hope some nice man will present me with a pink fan. I'm pining for one for my new gown."

"I shall try to remember," Jack promised humbly. "Pink, did you say?"

At last everything was in place. Kitty gave a parting glance at the rooms. They must have fulfilled every requirement from the satisfied look on her face.

"Boys," she called to her cousins, who were finishing a hasty lunch in the dining-room, "you'll have to hurry. It's a quarter past seven this blessed minute. How long does it take you to get into evening clothes?"

"Not as long as it takes you by an hour," Ferren called back. "We'll go up to dress at eight, and then hang round for you."

"Don't you ever think it! I dress like chain lightning. Come on, Amanda, we'll show them how long it takes us."

Amanda, living near, had brought her clothes over, intending to dress with Kitty [318] and stay all night. The girls scrambled through a half dozen things forgotten at the last minute, and then proceeded to dress with haste. But, sure enough, at a quarter past eight, Ferren, true to his word, emerged immaculate from his bedroom, and commenced beating a tattoo on Kitty's door.

"Go away!" Kitty called. "We're all ready. We're just resting a minute."

But Ferren, laughing scornfully, kept up the noise until the girls appeared.

Kitty opened the door and gave him a push.

"Go away now. You see we *are* dressed! We only have to put on a few touches; Amanda's flowers and—"

"I know those touches, Kitty. Come along!"

In the front parlor Doctor Clark stood waiting to receive the guests with his daughter. Mrs. Clark, being an invalid, found herself unequal to such occasions.

"Oh, Father, you look—just lovely!" Kitty said, smiling up to him and noting every detail of his correct evening dress. "Only—just a minute; it's your tie! There! Isn't he splendid, Amelia? My, but this is an occasion! I do hope everybody will have a good time. There's Blue Bonnet. I hear her voice. She's early, isn't she? Amanda, take a peek at the favors, will you, and tell Sarah not to get them mixed. I have explained it [319] all to her a dozen times, but when one doesn't dance, one is apt to bungle."

It had fallen to Sarah's lot to preside at the favor table; a treat she was looking forward to with no little pleasure. It was nice to be taking part, even if one couldn't dance.

Blue Bonnet was looking her best in the pink gown purchased for the dinner the week before. She was very attractive as she entered the room between Alec and Knight, whose glances followed her approvingly.

"Some party, Miss Clark!" Alec said, bowing before that young lady in his best military form. "I was just telling Knight that he was in luck to be introduced to society under such favorable circumstances."

"I'm certainly in luck to be here," Knight said. "May I see your program, Kitty?"

"We haven't any programs, Knight. This is to be a cotillion. The *girls* get a chance to bestow favors. See that table where Sarah is sitting? Come over and I'll explain."

Which she did, a little to Knight's bewilderment.

The rooms began to fill up. On the up-stairs landing violins squeaked in the tuning. Ferren, who was to lead the cotillion with Kitty, chose six couples for the first figure, and the dance began.

Alec and Knight both stood before Blue Bonnet. "I suppose you are going to say [320] 'how happy I'd be with either,' aren't you?" Knight said laughing.

Blue Bonnet paused only a second.

"Since Knight is the guest of honor I think I'd best dance with him," she said.

But Alec, nothing daunted, brought her his first favor.

"You can't resist this vanity box, Blue Bonnet," he said, smiling broadly.

Blue Bonnet accepted the favor, but after a couple of turns through the rooms, she stopped.

"Want to sit it out?" Alec asked.

"If you please—I think I should rather."

They found a seat in one of the cosy corners. Alec strove to be entertaining. Suddenly, in the midst of the conversation, he broke off abruptly:

"I say, Blue Bonnet! You're not vexed still about that Chula affair, are you?"

"No; certainly not."

"You're awfully quiet!"

"I just happen to feel quiet, I reckon."

"Sorry to miss this two-step. We won't have many more dances."

"Oh, there'll be lots of parties."

"Yes, I daresay—but not for me."

"Why?"

"Because—I leave in the morning."

"In the morning?"

"My holiday is over. I'm only here at all through a special dispensation of [321] Providence. I ought to be at school this minute, grinding like the mischief. Our exams begin the last Monday in April, and they're no joke."

In her keen disappointment Blue Bonnet forgot her small grievance.

"Why, that's perfectly outrageous! The very idea, only three days!"

"But they've been such bully days! It's been so pleasant to see Judson again. He'll be here. He's going to stay on for a week with Grandfather."

"And when will you get another holiday?"

"Two years from next June, if I'm lucky."

"How do you mean, lucky?"

"If I pass the examinations and make the Point. If I do, I enter the twelfth of June for two years."

"Why, it's just like having a sentence! Why didn't you stay at the ranch? One can do as one pleases there, at any rate."

A half wistful expression crept into Alec's eyes.

"That's true," he said. "I loved the ranch life, but—you see—Grandfather had chosen the army for me, and when the appointment came, I knew what a disappointment it would be to him if I didn't make a try at it. It's all right though. I like it. There's a fascination about it. Think you don't want to finish this dance?"

Blue Bonnet rose, but just as they moved off the music stopped. [322]

For the next two or three dances Blue Bonnet saw nothing at all of Alec. She looked about the room once or twice for him, but he was nowhere to be seen.

"Where's Alec?" she inquired of Knight when he came up to her for a dance. "He seems to have disappeared."

"I saw him on the veranda talking with Kitty a minute ago," Knight said, peering in that direction. "Don't believe he's dancing much."

Blue Bonnet watched her opportunity and carried her next favor to Alec; but Kitty was ahead of her. The rest of the evening was spoilt for her. She had hurt Alec; and Alec was going away to-morrow—for two years! Two years seemed an eternity.

Some one announced supper, and Blue Bonnet and Knight wended their way toward the dining-room. Kitty came into view at the same moment. Alec and her cousin Ferren were both claiming her company for refreshments.

"Go get Debby, Ferren," Blue Bonnet heard Kitty say. "I'm taking care of Alec to-night. He's going away to-morrow and we sha'n't see him again for ages." Then, spying Blue Bonnet and Carita, she, called:

"Come over here, girls, Alec has heaps to say to you. Did you know he was going away to-morrow, Blue Bonnet? I never was so surprised in my life! I tell him I think it's right horrid of him and such a scarcity of boys in Woodford." [323]

For a few minutes the conversation was lively. Knight took the opportunity to tease Kitty about Sandy, the young Texan who had found her so attractive the summer before.

Blue Bonnet tried to appear interested. She smiled and answered questions in monosyllables. She wondered afterwards if she had smiled in the right place: her thoughts had been miles away from Sandy and Kitty—from her surroundings. She was wondering how she could make Alec understand that she was sorry for having been so disagreeable; that she should miss him terribly during the rest of the vacation. She had turned the matter over in her mind for the twentieth time without coming to any definite conclusion when Alec began saying good-by.

"I'm going to turn Blue Bonnet and Carita over to Knight's care," she heard him saying. "I have to get out early in the morning and there are a few things to be done yet to-night. It's been a great old party, Kitty. If I make the Point you'll have to come down to some of the dances next winter. Good-by. See you all again one of these days, I suppose."

"You'll see us all to-morrow morning at the station," Kitty answered, looking straight at Blue Bonnet, hoping she would acquiesce, but Blue Bonnet in her surprise could scarcely find voice to speak. [324]

It was not until she was in the privacy of her own room that Blue Bonnet confided her disappointment to Carita.

"I've been perfectly horrid to Alec," she confessed. "I've been angry at him ever since he struck Chula yesterday. I don't know why—Chula did act badly. Perhaps it was because I was so horribly upset. I was so frightened—oh, you can't think how frightened! And now he's going away—for two years—and he'll never know how sorry I am."

"Why didn't you tell him?" Carita asked.

"I wanted to, but I couldn't get a chance. He seemed so terribly interested in Kitty. I couldn't get near him—alone."

"Why don't you write him a note, Blue Bonnet? Write and tell him that you *were* angry, but that you're all over it now."

"A note? I hadn't thought of that. How could I get a note to him? He leaves so early in the morning."

"Write it now and we'll skip out and put it under his front door. We can slip down-stairs—no one will hear us, and—"

"Carita! You don't know what you are talking about. It's twenty minutes after [325] twelve this instant. Don't you ever think you could get out of this house without Aunt Lucinda's knowing it. She sleeps with one eye open. No—that won't do. Can't you think of something else?"

"Yes—" Carita answered after a moment. "You write the note. I always wake early in the morning—I got the habit in Texas and it seems to stay with me. I'll get up and take it over early—very early, and give it to the maid—or—I could send it by Denham, couldn't I? He's always up by six o'clock."

"Of course—the very thing! You're sure you don't mind? You'll be awfully sleepy in the morning."

"I'd love to do it," Carita answered, truthfully. To be of service to Blue Bonnet constituted her greatest happiness. "Hurry up and write it!"

For the next ten minutes Blue Bonnet's pen scratched away busily. There must have been some difficulty in writing the note, for several attempts went the way of the waste basket. Finally it was done. Blue Bonnet read it through three times, then slipped it into an envelope and laid it on the table beside the bed.

"There it is," she said, eying it with misgivings. "I hope it's all right, and I haven't been too awfully humble. I don't suppose he cares a rap, anyway—as long as—"

She stopped abruptly. She was going to say "as long as Kitty Clark was around," [326] but she couldn't bring herself to it.

Carita was up with the larks the next morning and slipping down-stairs quietly, so that she did not even waken Blue Bonnet, found Denham and gave him the note.

"It's for Mr. Alec, Denham," she said, "and it's very, *very* important. Please take it over immediately and give it to the cook. Tell her to give it to Mr. Alec the first thing when he comes down to breakfast. And, Denham, please impress upon her how important it is. She might mislay it or something."

Denham promised faithfully, and a few hours later at the station Blue Bonnet was rewarded by a cordial handshake from Alec.

"I got the note all right, Blue Bonnet. It was good of you to send it over—makes my going away a lot easier. Hope you have a jolly good vacation. Put Judson through his paces, won't you? Good-by. Send along some of those fine letters of yours and tell me all the news."

He was off, and Blue Bonnet watched the long train vanish into a black speck.

"Come along, Solomon," she said with a faint sigh, after Alec's last salute had been lost to view, "there's no use moping here."

She left the girls at the first corner and turned into a little lane that led to the [327] Widow Patten's cottage. The Widow Patten was a unique figure in the village. Small of stature, cheery of countenance, charitable by nature, she mothered the town. Fate had not been kind to Mrs. Patten, but she cherished no resentment; it had left her a pair of willing hands, and indomitable courage to face emergencies.

"Seems to me if I'd had to endure all that the Widow Patten has, I'd have given up long ago," more than one neighbor said, beholding her sorrows and cares; but the Widow Patten *never* gave up. "The way will open," was one of her favorite sayings, and nine times out of ten it did. It had opened up opportunely when Miss Clyde asked her to take little Gabriel and his nurse from the city hospital. The pantry had been deplorably bare, and the very substantial check that preceded the invalid's coming had been a godsend.

Blue Bonnet opened the white picket gate and walked up the path bordered with old-fashioned flags that led to Mrs. Patten's front door. She knocked softly.

Mrs. Patten was not long in answering. She flung back the door with a gesture that bespoke hospitality.

"Why, it's Miss Blue Bonnet," she said, smiling a welcome. "Come right in. S'pose you want to see Gabriel. He's out in the orchard with Miss Warren. They're both [328]

crazy 'bout the fruit blooms and the sunshine."

She led the way through a spotless kitchen, and Blue Bonnet stopped at the door to catch a glimpse of Gabriel's ecstatic face. The child was propped with soft, comfortable pillows in a wheel chair. It was the first time Blue Bonnet had seen him out of bed, and the sight of his crutches gave her a start.

"So you arrived safely?" she said, shaking hands with Miss Warren and dropping down beside Gabriel.

Gabriel removed his eyes from a robin in the peach-tree long enough to say "good morning" at his nurse's request. Then he spied Solomon.

"A dog!" he cried delightedly, as if wonders were multiplying too rapidly to be true.

Blue Bonnet took Solomon by the collar and pulled him closer to the boy. "Pet him," she said, "he won't hurt you." But at Solomon's friendly approach the child shrank away in terror.

"Gabriel has never known much about dogs," Miss Warren explained. "And just think, Miss Ashe, he's never seen a robin before! That's why he forgot to speak to you; he was entranced."

Entranced he was. The trees in bloom; the soft fragrant air swaying the leaves gently; the singing birds; Mrs. Patten's lazy yellow cat drowsing in the sunshine; the chickens cackling in the tiny barnyard, opened up a panorama before the child's [329] wondering eyes that could scarcely be eclipsed by heaven itself. Only one who has lain for months in a hospital ward with blank walls and a sea of sick faces, could have appreciated the vision.

"'Tain't any better than this, is it—the place where we're goin'?"

"Well—" Blue Bonnet paused a moment before answering. She wondered if anything *could* be better than Woodford in the spring. She had grown to love it very dearly herself.

"There's the pony," she said at last. "You haven't forgotten about him, have you? And there are great stretches of land to gallop over as soon as you are well enough—and there's Uncle Cliff, and Uncle Joe and Benita. Benita adores little boys. Just wait until you hear some of her stories and taste her cookies."

"Stories 'bout Injuns and soldiers?"

"Yes, some."

Gabriel heaved a sigh of content and his head dropped back on the pillows contentedly.

"Guess it'll suit me all right," he said, "specially the pony. What you s'pose he looks like?"

"I shouldn't wonder if he was a bay—or perhaps brown; and not so very high. Just high enough for a little boy to climb on easily. Were you ever on a pony?"

"Gee—no! Wish I could see him right now!" [330]

"Would you like to see my pony?"

Gabriel's eyes brightened.

"Bet yer!" he said. "Could I get on him?"

"Maybe. I'll see."

"Can you get him now?"

"I reckon I could—yes."

She was back in a short time on Chula; Knight Judson with her on Victor. They hitched the horses round at the back of the little house so that Gabriel might get a good view of them.

"Gee! Oh, I wish—Couldn't I get on one of 'em? Just a minute?"

Miss Warren looked alarmed.

"Not to-day, dear. You aren't nearly strong enough. I couldn't think of letting you."

"Not if I lifted him very carefully and held him, Miss Warren?" Knight asked.

Gabriel's eyes plead with her.

"Knight would be very careful," Blue Bonnet urged.

All three turned and looked at the child. His cheeks had flushed scarlet; his eyes were as brilliant as stars, his little thin arms outstretched toward Chula with the

wildest anticipation.

"Just for a minute then, if Mr. Judson will be very careful."

Knight already had the child in his arms and was lifting him with the greatest tenderness. Gabriel sank into the saddle and reached for the lines with a chuckle of delight. [331]

"Git ap!" he said, "git ap!"

Knight patted Chula's shoulder and spoke quietly.

"Careful, old girl. This is a little sick boy you have on your back; no capers to-day."

"Couldn't he just walk round a minute?" Gabriel begged.

Knight looked at Miss Warren.

"If Mr. Judson takes you round *once* will you get off willingly, Gabriel?"

Gabriel promised with a quick nod.

Around they went once—so carefully; Blue Bonnet leading Chula, and Knight holding the child in the saddle. When they came back to the place where they had started, Gabriel put his arms round Knight's neck and the tired body sank into the strong arms willingly. Knight carried him to the chair and Gabriel snuggled into the pillows exhausted.

"He will be all right presently," Miss Warren promised, noting Blue Bonnet's and Knight's alarm. "He has no reserve strength yet—but it will come; here, in this sunshine."

Miss Warren went into the house for a glass of milk for Gabriel, and Blue Bonnet, dropping down beside him, rubbed his colorless little hands. For a moment the eyelids fluttered weakly; then they opened slowly and the eyes smiled.

"It was fine!" he said, almost in a whisper. "Fine! Say, bring him again to-morrow, will you?" [332]

Blue Bonnet promised, and as she mounted Chula a few minutes later, a weak voice called:

"To-morrow! Don't forget—you promised!"

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CHAPTER XIX [333]

A SURPRISE PARTY

THE We Are Sevens, meeting for the first time in several months for the transaction of business, had selected Mrs. Clyde's orchard as the best possible place to hold council.

"You can't sit under fruit-trees in bloom every day in the year," Debby had insisted. "I'm for that bench under the peach-tree, myself."

The orchard was alluring. A delicious fragrance filled the air. The peach-trees were crowded with bloom, and the pear-trees threatened every moment to outrival their neighbors in gorgeous blossom. Out in the lawn crocuses lifted their heads; daffodils and hyacinths breathed forth their sweetness, and in the elms, birds twittered and sang of spring as they built their nests.

Sarah had brought her sewing, which she pursued diligently. Kitty had a book to read to the girls if they ever stopped talking long enough to listen; and Amanda swayed back and forth in the hammock lazily. Knight Judson, strolling by, thought it a very attractive group, and hoped the girls would see fit to invite him in.

Blue Bonnet, glancing down the road, spied him, and with a smile beckoned to him. [334]

"Sit down," she said, making room for him on the bench beside her. "This is a club meeting, but we're almost through. Love to have you stay to lunch, if you can stand so many girls all at once. I'm going to see if Katie will give it to us out here. We can use that rustic table over there."

"Lovely!" the girls cried in a breath. "Make Knight carry out the chairs."

"Knight's awfully obliging, isn't he?" Kitty Clark said from her cushion, as she watched his long limbs disappear in the doorway. "And so terribly good looking! How

do you suppose he ever got such adorable manners on a Texas range? I noticed them the first time I ever met him. He's really polished, *I* should say."

"It's a good thing Blue Bonnet didn't hear you say that," Amanda said, "and—why, Kitty—don't you see Carita? You ought to know that Texas people are the most courteous in the world after last summer. I think you owe Carita an apology."

Kitty hastened to make amends.

"Don't bother," Carita said generously. "I know how you feel about it. One doesn't have much society where we live in Texas; but it doesn't matter—if one is *born* a gentleman."

Blue Bonnet came out of the house with a tea-cloth, followed by Knight and Delia [335] with the chairs.

"There's gingerbread!" Debby announced, sniffing. "My, doesn't it smell good!"

"Yes, and little hot biscuits with orange marmalade," Blue Bonnet added. "Cold ham and hot chocolate, too. Katie's an old dear, isn't she?"

It was a merry party, and Knight seemed quite at home, even if he was the only man in sight. He admitted that he had never been so popular in his life, and was enjoying the novelty.

"Girls," Amanda said, when the meal was nearly finished. "I have something to propose. You needn't go away, Knight. Maybe you can help us. Blue Bonnet doesn't know anything about it—but—we're going to have a party, and it's to be for Mr. Ashe."

"For Uncle Cliff!" Blue Bonnet said, amazed. "What kind of a party?"

"That's to be decided," Amanda continued. "*I'm* in favor of having it to-morrow night, if we can get ready. It's to be a surprise party—that is, Mr. Ashe isn't to know a thing about it. He's been so perfectly angelic to all of us that we thought it would be nice to show him our appreciation if we could. Do you think he'd like it, Blue Bonnet? That is, if we could get all our parents to come?"

"I think he'd adore it. Where are you going to have it?" [336]

"We haven't decided yet. Where do you think would be the nicest place? You can come to our house—"

"Why not have it here?" Blue Bonnet interrupted. "I know Grandmother wouldn't mind. In fact, I think she'd love it. I'll go ask her."

She was off before the girls could remonstrate and back again with the welcome news that Aunt Lucinda and Grandmother thought it was the proper place to have it.

"All right," the girls agreed, "only—there's one thing we insist upon, Blue Bonnet, *we* furnish the refreshments. We're going to make them. It won't be hard, dividing it between us."

"May I turn the ice-cream freezer?" Knight inquired. "I'm quite expert at it."

"You certainly may," Kitty replied. "I engage you right now, and you may report at my house any time before noon to-morrow."

"And when Kitty's through with you, you can come over to our house and help stir cakes. I'm down for angel food, and I loathe beating up the eggs," Amanda said.

Knight promised solemnly.

"What am I going to furnish?" Blue Bonnet inquired. "Is there any other way you shine in the culinary line, Knight?"

"You furnish the house and the guest of honor! Isn't that enough for one person, I [337] should like to know?" Kitty said. "Seems to me you ought to be satisfied. If I could bring out an Uncle Cliff I should consider that I had done all the community could ask of me."

"That's right, Kitty Kat. Not many people *can* produce an Uncle Cliff. But as an especial favor might I contribute candy? I should like to have some claim to Knight's society to-morrow. If he's not utterly worn out with you and Amanda he could help me boil sugar."

"Candy's my specialty," Knight declared. "I could come over to-night and we'll make up a lot. I'll show you a Spanish pinoche that's great."

"Thank you, I know that pinoche—it's a Texas product; but you may come over just the same."

The arrangements were soon completed. Blue Bonnet was to waylay Mr. Ashe and not let him escape next day until the party was over.

"That will be easy," she remarked. "You couldn't drive Uncle Cliff away until my vacation is over. He'll be on hand, don't worry." But great was her alarm next morning when, coming down to breakfast she found Mr. Ashe's bag, packed and ready for traveling, in the front hall.

"Where's Uncle Cliff?" she said, rushing into the dining-room greatly excited.

[338] "Here, Honey. Why, what's the matter? You look as if something dreadful were about to happen."

"What's your bag doing in the hall, Uncle Cliff?"

"Business, Honey, business. I have to run up to Boston for a day or two."

"To-day? Oh, Uncle Cliff, not to-day! You can't—possibly. We need you here. We've just *got* to have you. You said you would stay with me *two whole weeks*. How can you leave me a single minute when we've been separated all these months?"

"But I'll be back to-morrow, Honey."

"Yes—but to-morrow isn't to-day! I specially need you to-day."

"Very well then, I'll go to-night. What did you want to do to-day?"

"Ever so many things. There's the visit to Gabriel; and the ride out to the farm; and —oh, heaps of things. And to-night—if you'll just stay over *to-night*, Uncle Cliff, I'll try to spare you to-morrow. Really, I will. Please."

Her arms were about his neck; her head against his cheek.

"I'm sorry, Blue Bonnet, but I must go this time. I'll be back in a day or two. Why, here, here, Honey! What's this?"

[339] Two big, bright tears had splashed down upon his cheeks, and he raised his eyes to behold a very doleful Blue Bonnet.

"Nothing—only—I'm so frightfully disappointed. Uncle Cliff, I need you to-night. I want you!"

"I didn't suppose it was as serious as all that, Blue Bonnet. Dry those tears. I'll stay, of course."

That evening when the guests had all gathered, and Uncle Cliff had been informed as to the significance of the occasion, Blue Bonnet whispered in his ear:

"Wouldn't it have been perfectly dreadful if you had gone away this morning, with all these kind people waiting to do you honor? Why, the We Are Sevens would never have got over it."

"Neither should I, Honey," Mr. Ashe said. "I feel quite like a debutante. This is the first time a party ever was given in my honor. I assure you I am deeply indebted to the We Are Sevens."

"It's a 'get acquainted' affair, Mr. Ashe," Kitty said, coming up behind him and insisting upon his meeting everybody at once. "This is my father, Doctor Clark—think you've met before; and this is Amanda's mother: she's dying to thank you for all the lovely things you've done for us. Aren't you, Mrs. Parker?"

Mrs. Parker, a timid little woman, put out her hand and tried to express her
[340] appreciation, but the words were slow in coming. Mr. Ashe saw her difficulty, and in a moment had put her at ease by assuring her that the pleasure of knowing the We Are Sevens had more than compensated for what little he had done.

"But it hasn't been a little, Mr. Ashe," Mrs. Parker insisted. "It has been a very great deal. The Texas trip was wonderful. Amanda will never forget it—never! She talks about it every day, and her descriptions of the Blue Bonnet ranch are so vivid that I almost feel as if I had seen it."

Blue Bonnet ranch opened up a score of possibilities, and Mr. Ashe and Mrs. Parker were soon chatting like old friends.

"I don't wonder that the girls are enthusiastic about Mr. Ashe," she said to her husband later in the evening. "I had a perfectly delightful visit with him. He's as plain as can be! Nobody would dream he had so much money."

Nor was Mrs. Parker the only one who found Mr. Ashe delightful. Mr. Blake and his wife; Debby's parents; Doctor Clark, all enjoyed talking with the man who had on several occasions played the fairy godfather to their children.

It was a most informal gathering. The guests chatted in groups or found places at card tables, which had been prepared for those who preferred a rubber of whist. The dining-room was very attractive with its wealth of fruit blossoms. Mrs. Parker, sitting
at one end of the table, poured coffee, while Debby's mother at the other served [341]

chocolate. An atmosphere of hospitality and kindliness prevailed. It was Knight who at an opportune time proposed a toast to the guest of honor, and Mr. Ashe responded in a fitting manner. Altogether the evening was pronounced a great success.

"Don't you think it would be lovely to end the party with a Virginia reel?" Kitty suggested to Blue Bonnet, who instantly favored the idea. The older guests protested that a Virginia reel was a part of youth, and not of middle age; but the young people insisted, and two lines were drawn up on either side of the parlor for the dance, while Blue Bonnet furnished the music. Kitty led with Mr. Ashe. He bowed with old-fashioned courtesy to the little butterfly partner, who proceeded to lead him a merry chase down the middle and back again; hurrying him through the steps in true twentieth-century fashion.

"Wasn't it a fine party, Uncle Cliff?" Blue Bonnet inquired after the last guest had gone, and she sat down breathless in her favorite chair to talk things over.

"Splendid, Honey! I'm very grateful to the We Are Sevens."

"Oh, you needn't be. They adored doing it. They admire you terribly, Uncle Cliff, terribly!"

Mr. Ashe smiled—a little tender smile—as his eyes rested on Blue Bonnet's happy face.

"Society has never been much in my line, Honey; but I've enjoyed to-night more [342] than I can tell you. It was very pleasant to be so nicely entertained. I hardly realize what a lonely life I lead until I get in the midst of so much merriment. It does one good to let down the bars and loosen up the reins occasionally. I've almost made up my mind to turn the ranch over to Uncle Joe next winter and take a house in Boston. Would you like that, Blue Bonnet? Or, if you are still in school, I might manage to exist in a hotel until you finish. I know that you can't desert Grandmother for the ranch again."

Mrs. Clyde cast a grateful glance in Mr. Ashe's direction.

"I feel it is a great deal to ask," she said, "but—it would be very hard to give Blue Bonnet up—now."

Blue Bonnet was out of her chair instantly and on her uncle's knee.

"Uncle Cliff!" she gasped, "do you really truly mean it? A home in Boston?"

"I really truly mean it, Honey. Life's too short for these long separations."

Round his neck, in a close embrace, went Blue Bonnet's arms, and her face glowed with joy.

"But we're not going to give up the ranch altogether, Uncle Cliff? We couldn't, you know!"

"No, not altogether, Honey. I reckon the summers will find us there pretty [343] regularly; and there's Gabriel now, remember. We can't desert the little fellow when he needs us so."

"We wouldn't desert the Blue Bonnet ranch anyway—under any circumstances. We'll just be commuters, and sort of vibrate between our old home and the new—then we'll all be happy."

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CHAPTER XX

[344]

THE JUNIOR SPREAD

Blue Bonnet, after her week at Woodford, found it difficult to accustom herself to the strict discipline, the regular hours, the stated duties that awaited her at school.

"I feel as if I'd been sailing in an airship and had just got back to earth," she said to Annabel Jackson who was diligently pursuing a French lesson. "How *can* you dig in that way, Annabel, after all the exciting times you had at home? I can't! I'd like to drop this old geometry into the Red Sea."

"I've *got* to dig," Annabel replied complacently. "It isn't such an easy thing to graduate from Miss North's as some people think. I've earned every inch of the little sheepskin I'll carry home next June, I can tell you—if I'm lucky enough to get it."

Blue Bonnet stifled a yawn.

"Oh, you'll get it, Annabel. You're a shark at lessons. What are you going to do next year?"

Annabel looked out of the window dreamily.

"I don't know yet. Mother has given me the choice between a year's travel and a college course. Father wants me to come home and renew my acquaintance with the family. I think—perhaps—I'll take his advice. This is the fourth year I've been away. A long time, isn't it?" [345]

"Indeed it is! Will you go into society? Have a coming-out party and all that?"

"I hardly think so. In the South we don't come out; we grow out! I can't remember when I went to my first party; along with my dolls, I reckon."

"I suppose that's why you are always so at ease in company. You aren't the least bit self conscious."

Annabel closed her book and stealing over to Blue Bonnet put an arm about her lovingly.

"Flatterer!" she said.

"No such thing. I never flatter. I admire you awfully! You know I do."

"Thank you, Blue Bonnet. I believe you mean it. You're the most truthful person I know. Now! There's a compliment for you."

Arm in arm the girls left the study hall where they had lingered over their books after class had been dismissed. This friendship, which had promised so much in the beginning, grew steadily. Annabel loved the sincere, upright Western girl; and Blue Bonnet had found all the sweet fine qualities that abounded in Annabel's nature. There are moments, living as intimately as boarding-school girls live, when the mask [346] that hides selfishness, hypocrisy and petty jealousy, slips away, revealing the true nature. To Blue Bonnet's somewhat critical eye, Annabel had measured up under all circumstances; and Annabel had found Blue Bonnet as fair and loyal, as honest and just, as was possible in this world where human frailties so often tip the scale in the balance.

At the top of the stairs the girls paused.

"Are you busy for the next half hour, Blue Bonnet?" Annabel asked.

"No, not very. Why?"

"I thought maybe you'd run over some accompaniments for me. Miss North has insisted upon my singing Sunday night when she has that little tea for the illustrious Alfred Noyes, who is going to read some of his poems to us."

"Of course. I'd love to."

Annabel had a splendid voice; one that might have given her fame had she chosen to cultivate it for a profession. It was a deep rich mezzo-soprano, and under Mrs. White's training she had acquired good enunciation, poise and taste.

Blue Bonnet opened the music and ran her fingers lightly over the keys. She had a soft, velvety touch that made her accompaniments a delight. She was in great demand among the girls who sang, and she specially loved to play for Annabel.

"Annabel has something—I don't know what—" she once said to Mrs. White; and [347] Mrs. White had finished the sentence for her.

"Temperament, my dear; a gift of the gods! Annabel is naturally emotional. It is her Southern heritage. When she sings she *feels*; that is what you recognize and can't explain."

Blue Bonnet was strongly akin to Annabel in the qualities that made for success in music and a strong affinity strengthened the friendship. They were alike—and yet vastly different. Annabel was emotional without being impulsive; her emotions were well concealed, veiled from the public eye, while Blue Bonnet's rose and fell like a tide; completely submerging her at times—often embarrassing her. Blue Bonnet was sunny and optimistic; Annabel had a little pessimistic streak in her that was often mistaken for contrariness, and she lacked the spontaneity that was Blue Bonnet's chief charm. Blue Bonnet could laugh and cry in a breath. When Annabel wept there was a deluge; it took days to get back to the old light-heartedness.

"Let's have a game of tennis," Blue Bonnet suggested when they had finished practising. "I've got to exercise. If I keep on gaining weight I'll be able to wear Wee's clothes without the slightest difficulty."

Annabel, who inclined to physical laziness, scorned exercise always.

"Oh, Blue Bonnet, you know I loathe it! Get Patty—she's so expert it makes it worth [348]

while to play. I'm no match for you."

Blue Bonnet glanced at Annabel's tiny hands and feet, and laughed.

"You weren't made for athletics, Annabel. You're put up wrong—architecturally."

"Praise be!"

At the foot of the stairs the girls separated. Blue Bonnet was off for her game of tennis and Annabel for a walk in the Park.

"See you later," Blue Bonnet called. "If you love me awfully you might make me a cup of tea when I get in. I'll be ravenous! Take a look in my shirtwaist box. I think you'll find some crackers and ginger snaps in the right-hand corner. Good-by!"

Annabel promised, and an hour later when Blue Bonnet returned, flushed and radiant after a stiff game with Patty, she found the kettle boiling and a general air of domesticity reigning in her friend's comfortable quarters. Annabel nodded from the depths of a chair and went on with instructions to Ruth, who was changing pictures on the wall.

"Cleaning?" Blue Bonnet asked, throwing down her racket and dropping in a heap on the couch. "Whew! I gave Patty a run to-day. What's the matter with the Princess Louise?"

"Ruth had her between that Madonna and the Princeton chap and it got on my [349]
nerves," Annabel complained. "The frames screamed at each other, anyway. I can't stand gold and ebony and oak in a medley. A little lower, Ruth. You know it must be on a level with your eyes. That's better! She'll be happier there and so shall I. I'm terribly fussy. I feel about pictures as I do about books. They have a right to an environment. I couldn't any more stand Shakespeare up beside a best seller than I could fly. How did your game come out?"

Blue Bonnet's eyes danced.

"I beat Patty all hollow—six love!"

"Six love! Really? Why, that's splendid! Keep on and you'll make a record."

"I expect to."

Blue Bonnet drank her tea hastily and began making apologies.

"Sorry to have to run," she said, gathering up her belongings, "but I've an important engagement."

"Junior spread committee, I suppose," Annabel ventured, but Blue Bonnet was already out of the door and on her way to Wee Watts' room.

Wee was cross. Blue Bonnet scented trouble in the atmosphere instantly.

"We've waited this meeting for you twenty minutes, Blue Bonnet, and it's very important. We've decided on a play and you have the leading part."

"I—a leading part? How ridiculous! I never acted in my life." [350]

"Then it's time you began. You don't know what you've missed. You play Oonah, an Irish girl who comes under the spell of the fairies. It's a perfectly sweet part—you'll love it! There are a lot of good parts, and we're wild to begin rehearsals. Isn't it a shame that Angela is a Senior? There's a wonderful part that she could do—a young poet called Aillel, who makes a great sacrifice."

"Wouldn't Sue do?"

"Oh, not at all! It takes a very stunning, tall person—"

"Thanks awfully for the compliment!" came from Sue's quarter.

"Sue! You know I didn't mean anything. It takes a rather masculine person. I think Helen Renwick, perhaps—"

"Much obliged, Wee. I adore that type, you know." This from Helen, who prided herself on her femininity.

Wee threw down the book impatiently.

"You'd better choose another class president," she said. "I'm ready to resign. If any of you think my job's fun, you're welcome to try it!"

Blue Bonnet strove to heal the breach.

"Nobody's angry, Wee—stop it! There couldn't any one take your place. You're doing the best you can for all of us—we know that. Sue and Helen were only joking." [351]

"Sue hasn't anything to grumble about," Wee insisted. "She has a perfectly dear

comedy part: a deaf old lady who's always hearing things wrong. *I* think it's great."

Sue from her corner grinned, and whispered something to Helen; but she wafted a kiss in Wee's direction and Wee brightened.

"Now we're all agreed, are we, that this play is what we want to present?" the president said, rapping for order. "Shall we vote on it?"

A hearty affirmative settled the matter.

"Very well. The duty of making it the best ever given in the school rests with the cast. I am at your service at all times. We shall now adjourn to meet to-morrow afternoon at five o'clock and continue the arrangements."

The next three weeks were the busiest that Blue Bonnet had known since her entrance to the school. Lessons grew in length and importance. There were endless themes to write in English; mathematics became more and more enigmatical; music more difficult. In addition to this were rehearsals for the play.

"I feel as if I were being driven," Blue Bonnet said one day to Sue Hemphill, disconsolately. "Would you mind hearing me say my lines, Sue? I think I almost have them. I'll begin at my second entrance. I'm sure I know up to there perfectly. I don't [352] know what ever made me take this part. I'm sure to forget at a critical moment."

But whatever Blue Bonnet's doubts may have been, the rest of the cast had no fears for their star. For them she shone brilliantly, and promised, so Wee declared,—and Wee's judgment was never questioned,—to be the "hit" of the evening.

The days leading up to the performance were strenuous indeed. All the Juniors had been pressed into service. They scurried through halls; darted in and out of rooms laden with draperies, gowns and furniture, mum as sphinxes, spry as crickets.

The day of the Junior spread dawned at last. A wonderful day the first week in May. The gymnasium had been transformed into a bower of beauty. Pine-trees—huge banks of them—concealed the walls, giving an idea of a forest with marvelous effect. Wondrous fountains, constructed in a day, bubbled and sang; flowers bloomed in profusion; and the long table with its festive decorations, sparkling glass and silver, bespoke a welcome to all beholders.

But it was in the dressing-rooms, behind the scenes and in the wings, that the greatest excitement prevailed. The smell of powder and cold cream filled the air. Sue Hemphill, completely covered with a gingham apron from head to foot, was in her [353] element "making up."

"Don't wiggle so, Blue Bonnet," she commanded, as that young person squirmed under the rigorous treatment she was receiving. "I'll have you looking like a Chinaman in a minute if you don't hold still. I've got to take that eyebrow off—it slants too much. There—that's better! Isn't it, Wee? Wait a minute."

She stood at a distance and contemplated Blue Bonnet thoughtfully.

"You have to study your subjects," she said finally, "to get good results. You're not red enough yet, Blue Bonnet. You can stand a lot of color."

Blue Bonnet protested.

"It isn't necessary that I should look like a house afire, is it? I'm not going to have another bit, Sue, and you needn't insist. Uncle Cliff would have a fit if he could see me; and Aunt Lucinda! mercy, she'd think I was disgraced forever. Ugh! I think I look a fright!"

She held the mirror up to her face and frowned into it impatiently.

Sue explained.

"But you've *got* to do it, Blue Bonnet. Why, you'd look ghastly behind the footlights without any color. Come now—please. Wet your lips and put them out—so! There, that's fine. Wee, turn up the lights on the stage and take a look at Blue Bonnet. Go to [354] the back of the room. See if you think she's made up too much."

"Perfectly lovely!" Wee called a moment later. "You're just b-e-a-utiful! Your best friends will never know you." Which very doubtful compliment went unnoticed in the general rush and excitement.

"Now, do be careful," Sue cautioned as Blue Bonnet gave her seat to Helen Renwick, who stood patiently waiting, cold creamed to the proper consistency. "And don't, under *any* circumstances, use your handkerchief. You'll look like a painted sunset at close range if you do. Grease paint's terribly smeary. Please be careful, won't you?"

Blue Bonnet passed out into the wings where Wee was giving instructions right and left.

"Oh, Wee," she said, "I'm scared to death! I believe I'm threatened with stage fright. Do you know how it comes on? Feel my hands."

She laid an icy lump in Wee's warm palm tremblingly.

"Absurd!" Wee said. "Did you think you caught it—like measles or chicken-pox?"

"I think it's caught *me*, Wee. I feel so sort of choky—and queer."

"You'll get over it. Don't worry. You look too sweet for words. Take a peek at the stage. It's a dream."

[355] It was a pretty setting. Along the light green walls were white curtained windows in whose boxes grew bright, red roses, and swinging from the dimly lighted ceiling was the green and yellow shamrock presented by a former class. The stage represented a simple room in an Irish peasant's cottage, with its brick fireplace and high cupboards. Blue Bonnet was exclaiming over its loveliness when a voice at the centre entrance interrupted her.

"Wee!" it called excitedly. "You're wanted in Clare Peters' dressing-room instantly. They've sent her the wrong wig. It should be grey, and its blond and curly—imagine! —Clare's frantic."

Wee and Blue Bonnet both hastened to the dressing-room. Clare Peters, a somewhat spoiled, flighty girl, accustomed to having her way in most things, stood before the mirror in tears.

"I can't do a thing with it," she said. "I told that stupid man at the costumer's that it had to be grey—I—"

"Go for Sue Hemphill," Wee commanded, and Blue Bonnet fled in haste.

With extraordinary skill Sue fitted the offending wig to Clare's head; gave the curls a twist; treated them to a liberal dose of talcum powder and left Clare happy and satisfied.

"My, but she's a wonder!" commented the leader of the fairies, who had watched the operation in amazement. "Sue certainly is a whiz!"

[356] In another moment the cast had been called together for final instructions. When all were gathered Wee laid down the law. The fairies were not to talk in the wings. All were to keep an eye on the prompter, and Blue Bonnet was especially informed that if the wind apparatus got on a rampage, as it did at the dress rehearsal, and drowned what she was saying at her first entrance, she was to raise her voice and compete with the elements, if need be.

Then there was a rush for the closed doors of the gymnasium, behind which the Juniors sang their song of welcome to the waiting Seniors; and the Seniors responded in fitting style.

As the doors were opened, and the Seniors beheld for the first time the fruits of the Juniors' long endeavors there were exclamations of surprise and delight; and after respects had been paid to the receiving line which included, besides the Junior officers, Miss North and Professor Howe, seats were hastily drawn to the front of the room for the best possible view of the stage; the curtain rolled up, and the play was on!

Perhaps no one in the cast felt the fear that possessed Blue Bonnet as she watched the curtain go up and realized that in a few moments she must face the audience beyond. Her heart beat like a trip hammer; her teeth chattered as if with chill, and Wee Watts, alarmed for her star,—the real shining light of the play,—rubbed the cold hands in an agony of apprehension and spoke comforting words.

"SHE WAS OONAH, THE BEWITCHING LITTLE IRISH MAIDEN."

"Blue Bonnet—you mustn't go to pieces like this—it's dreadful! Try to calm yourself and think of your lines. You'll be all right in a minute—just as soon as you're on the stage. I know you're going to do well. This awful nervousness is a part of the game—it's the artistic temperament."

And so it proved. Blue Bonnet had scarcely spoken her first line before fear fled to the winds. Her own personality fell from her like a mantle. She was Oonah, the bewitching little Irish maiden, on her way from Dublin to make her home with her grandmother in the country. In her hand she held the "twig of thorn," which, having been plucked on the first day of spring, had thrown her under the spell of the fairies. Around her shoulders she wore the peasant's cape with its quaint, becoming hood, and as she threw it off there was a smothered exclamation from the audience, for the vision was one of startling loveliness. Her hair was caught loosely and hung in many ringlets; her eyes were large and luminous with the excitement of the moment, and her pretty brogue—slaved over for weeks—captivated all listeners.

Blue Bonnet, quite unaware of her triumph, was overwhelmed at the end of the performance to hear her name called uproariously from the audience and fled to the far end of the wings, from which she was rescued unceremoniously by two insistent fairies, who brought her to the footlights to acknowledge the tribute of friends and admirers.

But it was after the play, when the teachers had left the room, and the chairs had been drawn around the table that the real fun of the evening began. It was then that the presidents of the two classes made speeches that were masterpieces of diplomatic art, and the Seniors contributed their share of entertainment with rare stunts. The eccentricities of teachers were taken off in a way that convulsed the entire gathering; the Junior class song was sung for the first time, and midnight crept on without any one dreaming of its approach until faithful John, the janitor, announced it from the door exactly on the stroke of twelve.

With sighs and regrets that anything so altogether heavenly as a "spread" should have an end, the girls moved out of the old gymnasium sorrowfully, realizing that one of their happiest evenings had passed into history.

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CHAPTER XXI

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THE LAMBS' FROLIC

SCHOOL-DAYS cannot last forever. The fact was borne in on Annabel Jackson as she sat in her room one afternoon shortly before Commencement. It wasn't going to be such an easy thing to tear up root and leave Miss North's after four years as she had imagined. How was she ever going to get along without the girls? There was Sue—dear old, impulsive, warm-hearted Sue, companion in so many escapades. And Ruth, and Wee Watts—Blue Bonnet, too! The parting was going to be especially hard with Blue Bonnet. *She* would in all probability disappear on the Texas ranch, and except for an occasional Christmas greeting or birthday card, pass out of her life altogether.

There were the teachers also,—Mrs. White and Professor Howe and Madam de Cartier—and, yes—even Miss North, austere and dignified and unapproachable as she was, would be missed out of the little world; a world she had grown to love very dearly, despite its limitations, its frequent vexations.

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"Mercy! you look as if you'd lost your last friend, Annabel," Ruth Biddle commented from her seat by the window, where she was doing her best to stop a runner in a silk stocking.

"I have, I'm afraid—or will," Annabel answered dolefully. "Do you realize that in just fifteen days we shall be saying good-by to these old walls, forever—you and I? I didn't think it was going to be so hard, Ruth. Doesn't it break you all up when you think of it? Do you relish the idea of other girls having this room next year—hanging their things in our closets; planning feasts and frolics behind barred doors while we pass on to the ranks of 'young women?' The idea doesn't appeal to me as much as I thought it was going to."

Ruth bit off her thread and regarded the room a moment in silence.

"Wonder where they'll keep their provisions," she said, eyes toward the box couch which had secluded many a staple article. "Do you suppose they'll find the refrigerator, and know enough to make black curtains for the transoms?"

A gleam shot from Annabel's roguish eyes to Ruth's.

"Let's put them on," she said. "Write a letter and will them our secrets. We can hide it in the refrigerator."

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The refrigerator—a loose brick discovered one day just under the window on the outside wall—had proved a boon to Annabel and Ruth. By the least bit of digging from the inside a passage had been made, large enough to accommodate a bottle of milk, a pint of ice cream or any other delicacy that required cold storage. It had been necessary to cut the wall paper, and the plastering, of course,—a daring thing to do, but the girls had felt no great qualm of conscience.

An elaborate calendar covered the aperture. It had been observed many times by visitors that the calendar hung low, but Annabel was always quick to remark that there was no other place, the room, being full to overflowing with pictures, pennants, etc. A truth which could not be gainsaid.

"Splendid!" Ruth cried, with more enthusiasm than she was wont to show, and got out paper and pencil immediately.

"Better get ink, Ruth. Who ever heard of a last will and testament being written in pencil? Here! let me do it."

For a minute Annabel scratched away busily, and this is what Ruth read over her shoulder:

"TO THE NEXT OCCUPANTS OF THIS ROOM
"GREETINGS!

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"To you, whoever you may be (we hope the best ever), Ruth Biddle of Scranton, Pennsylvania, and Annabel Jackson of Nashville, Tennessee, former occupants, do bequeath our good will, our confidence, our social standing (which is thrown in gratis along with the most expensive room in the school), and do entrust to your everlasting protection such of our possessions as you may find useful and necessary. The black cloths, which you will find in this secret hiding-place, fit the transoms over the door and in the bathroom. The candles you will find convenient for midnight feasts and orgies; the refrigerator indispensable for cold storage; the box couch excellent for provisions, such as Nabiscos, crackers and cookies. To you also we do bequeath the residue of our estate: the wicker tea-table; the picture of the Queen Louise; the china

cat on the mantel-piece, which has proved an invaluable mascot. This together with our best wishes, congratulations, and the hope that you will continue to dispense hospitality and radiate good cheer and comfort from these portals.

"Signed:

"Witnessed by:"

"You don't mean to say you're going to give your tea-table to utter strangers, do you, Annabel?" Ruth asked in surprise.

"I don't mean to pay storage or freight on it. Certainly I'm going to leave it."

"And the Queen Louise? I thought you adored her!" [363]

"I did once, but she makes me so nervous, eternally coming down those stairs, gazing off into the distance as if she were treading on air. I'm getting terribly tired of her."

"And the cat? You remember the day you bought that, Annabel? You were about the most homesick person in Boston. You said it looked like your own 'Lady Jane Grey' at home, and you cuddled it half the night. I don't see how you can part with it."

"Oh, it goes with the room," Annabel answered indifferently. "You know yourself it's kept away mice. We've never had *one*, and look at Wee Watts' room, and the sky parlor—"

A knock interrupted further history.

Blue Bonnet put her head inside.

"Girls!" she said excitedly, "we're going to get our three days' cut, and oh, guess what's happened! Patty Paine's mother's here—we just left her down in the reception-room, and she's invited us all—the Lambs—down to her summer home in Maine at a place called Sargentville. They have a cottage there, and she's going down and will take us, and Miss North says we can go."

Annabel pulled Blue Bonnet into the room and looked at her skeptically.

"Really, Blue Bonnet? Do you mean it?"

"Of course I mean it. And Annabel—isn't it too splendid?—every one of the Lambs [364] has brought her average up to eighty, so we can all go! We are to leave Friday and get back early Monday morning. Patty's perfectly wild about it, and her mother's a dear."

Blue Bonnet hurried off to bear the good tidings, but the news had preceded her. In Patty's room a group of girls chatted excitedly.

"Oh, Blue Bonnet, have you heard the news? We're to go—"

"I should say I have," Blue Bonnet interrupted. "I came to tell you."

"Well, Angela got ahead of you. Come in. Patty will be up in a minute. She and her mother are making arrangements with Miss North. Isn't it too utterly splendid?"

"And Fairview Cottage is the most ideal spot in the world," Angela put in dreamily. "I'm so glad that it is full moon time. There's a place around Sargentville called Caterpillar Hill, with the most fascinating road winding up to it. I loved it so that I wrote an ode to it last year when I visited Patty."

"Will the family all be there?" Sue inquired.

"I fancy not," Angela said. Being Patty's room-mate, she was well up on the Paine affairs. "Mrs. Paine is going down to open the cottage for the summer. The servants all went yesterday. Patty says she's going to try to get the boys to come up over [365] Sunday, but she isn't at all sure they can—they're at Yale, you know."

"The boys" were Patty's two brothers, who were studying law at Yale.

"Isn't Sargentville the place where Ben Billings' family have a summer home?" Sue inquired quite casually; but the remark brought a laugh. Ben Billings, despite his very ordinary name, and Sue's particular aversion to it, had sailed into her ken with meteor-like brilliancy. She had changed her opinion of him since the visit to Harvard, and was the object of considerable teasing. Such rhymes as the following had found their way to her desk and room often:

"Her home is in the Middle West;
But what's the difference, pray,
With Harvard, dear old Harvard,

Scarce five miles away?"

"Yes, of course they have," Angela answered. "Ben was there last summer. He was awfully attentive to me. We went rowing together no end of times. Their home is only a stone's throw from Fairview. You must be awfully nice to Mrs. Paine, Sue; maybe she'll ask you to remain on—over into the summer."

Angela thoroughly enjoyed seeing the color mount Sue's cheeks, as Sue adroitly changed the subject.

[366] The girls found Sargentville all that Angela's highly colored imagination had pictured it. Miss North permitted the girls to leave Boston on Thursday night, so, arriving at Sargentville early Friday morning, they had three full days at their disposal. And days filled to the brim they were!

The first great treat was Fairview itself. Just why it was called a cottage, baffled Blue Bonnet's Western conception of that title.

"Why, it's almost a mansion!" she whispered to Annabel, with whom she occupied a charming room. "One almost gets lost in it. I didn't know that Patty was so rich."

It spoke well for Patty—indeed for Miss North's school—that none of the girls knew. Patty was simplicity itself, as was also her mother.

The first afternoon was taken up with a riding party. Fairview stables held the best saddlers in the country, and the girls had great fun choosing mounts. All the horses were reputed to be safe and gentle, and the party started off in high spirits. The country roads proved delightful, winding through woods and abandoned farms. Haunted houses abounded; and Patty had many a tale to tell of the forlorn places where wells had fallen in, windows were smashed, and a general air of desolation prevailed.

[367] The second day, Angela's favorite spot, Caterpillar Hill, was chosen for a moonlight picnic. The girls started early to catch the sunset from the summit which was, according to tradition, well worth the climb. Slowly, majestically, the great red ball dropped behind the Camden hills, leaving a trail of splendor behind; and in the little village of Belfast lights glimmered and flickered.

"Seems almost as if they were saying, 'Come down! Come down!' as they wink up at us," Blue Bonnet said, watching them, quite fascinated. "Look, Angela!"

But Angela heard not. The islands with the many light-houses, like great protecting eyes, held no charm. Nature was inspiring her, as always with the poet's vision. Lost to her companions she dreamed on in utter oblivion.

"Will some one kindly bring Angela back to earth," Sue said. "Ask her if she'd exchange that view for the sight of a ham sandwich. I'm starving."

Sunday, too, was a day of peaceful, beautiful experiences. It was just as well that Patty could not prevail upon her brothers to leave Yale for the week-end, as she had hoped, for the girls' time together was growing so short that they begrudged every moment that separated them. Boys, naturally, were a diversion.

[368] "We're going to sail through the islands to-day," Patty announced at breakfast. "At noon we'll stop somewhere and cook lunch. There are lots of lovely places. We might have a little service, too. I think Miss North would like it. Angela can read the prayers and the lesson for the day and we'll sing our favorite hymns. And then I thought it would be nice, if we have time, to have a sort of farewell meeting of the Lambs—we won't be together much longer, you know."

Something rose in Patty's throat that prevented further speech, and her eyes filled suspiciously.

There was an awed silence for a moment, and then it was Blue Bonnet who spoke:

"I don't believe any of us could stand a *last* meeting, Patty. I hoped we wouldn't have any."

"But there's business," Sue insisted.

"Our vows and pledges for time to come," Wee supplemented.

"I move we write them and have them recorded, by our secretary, on the books," Annabel suggested. "I'm with Blue Bonnet. It's going to wrench my very soul to give up the Lambs. Oh, girls, I love you all so much, and maybe I'll never see any of you again after this year."

At this there was a general breakdown. Handkerchiefs played a more important part at the morning meal than the delicious bacon and fresh rolls that graced the table.

It was Wee Watts as usual who saved the day.

"Mercy on us, Annabel," she said with scorn, though the twitching of her lips belied her bravado, "any one would think we were all going to pass away, or go to live in a [369] foreign country. *I'm* not. Indeed I have plans for visiting Nashville in the near future —to show the natives what a real Yankee looks like."

That night seven happy girls reviewed the day with pleasure. The sail through the islands had been a joy—the dinner a delight; the service a benediction that would long linger in the minds of all present. It had been such fun to cook the meal—fry the bacon on the end of a forked twig over the glowing camp fire; to tramp through the purple fields of rhodora, gather the low pink mounds of sheep laurel; to quaff great breaths of the fragrant sea air.

There had been just a suggestion of a Lambs' meeting, too. The song of the Lambs had been sung with much enthusiasm and feeling, and many injunctions passed on to the Junior part of the assemblage for use during the next year. There was a wild enthusiastic cheer for Sargentville; an equally ecstatic one for Mrs. Paine and Fairview, and then the little company pulled for shore to pack their several belongings and make ready for the boat which left at sunrise the next morning.

The days which preceded Commencement were happy ones for Blue Bonnet. While she shared in a measure Annabel's depression at parting from friends, her association with the school had not been of such duration that it made her absolutely [370] unhappy to leave it. The bright, sunny days had brought many pleasures. Among them were visits with her grandmother, who, now that the weather was seasonable, made frequent trips to Boston. There was a possibility of a separation from Blue Bonnet in the future, and Mrs. Clyde wished to be near her as much as possible.

"You have quite decided to go back to the ranch with Uncle Cliff for the summer, dear?" she asked Blue Bonnet one afternoon. It was Friday, and Blue Bonnet was spending the week-end with her family; Uncle Cliff was still in Boston. Aunt Lucinda had taken out her sewing and there was a very homey atmosphere—even in the garish hotel room—conducive to a confidential chat.

Blue Bonnet did not answer for a minute.

"I *think* so, Grandmother," she said presently. "It seems almost as if I should. Uncle Cliff needs me—and there's Gabriel, too! I should like to get him started in his new quarters. Do you know what Uncle Cliff is doing? Having a sleeping-porch built for him. We're going to bring him up outdoors. Doctor Clark says we won't know him in a year. The change has been perfectly wonderful in the little time he has been in Woodford. I had a letter from Miss Warren yesterday. She says he's crazy over the little Shetland pony Uncle Cliff bought for him—that he has a short ride every [371] morning. Knight Judson has been spending a week-end with the General and he's been awfully kind to Gabriel. The pony? Oh, we were a little afraid to trust Gabriel to a Texas mustang yet, so Uncle Cliff found this little fellow. We're going to ship him ahead of our departure, so as to be at the ranch ready for Gabriel."

"Gabriel is a very lucky boy," Mrs. Clyde said. "A *very* lucky boy."

"Oh, I don't know, Grandmother. He *is*—of course. But we're lucky, too—Uncle Cliff and I. You can't think what company he'll be to us. It's going to keep us from growing selfish and self-centred to have him. You know I've always wanted an orphan asylum all my own. This is just a starter."

Grandmother smiled into the enthusiastic young face.

"Do you ever look ahead into the future, Blue Bonnet, and plan your life a little?" Aunt Lucinda asked. "It seems to me that you are old enough now. Your mother was but a year older when she married."

"And you want me to think about—that—too?" Blue Bonnet asked mischievously.

"No; not yet. You are younger for your years than your mother was, and times have changed; but there is a forward movement all over the world to-day—onward and upward. I should like to feel that with the many blessings meted out to you, you could [372] find your place in the world's work—become an avenue for good. I wish that you might have a definite purpose and work to an end. That is the only way to accomplish anything."

Blue Bonnet's face was shining as she answered:

"That's just exactly the way *I* feel, Aunt Lucinda. For that reason I should like to come back here to school next year and be near Miss North. She has promised to let me do settlement work—to have a day each month at Dennison House—and Uncle Cliff has already put aside some money for my use. Gabriel isn't the only forlorn child in the world. Perhaps in the years to come he and I may be able to relieve others in distress—help make the world a little easier for those less fortunate than ourselves. That's what I *want* to do. That's what I *will* do!"

For a moment Miss Clyde's face softened into something very like tenderness. She

would have considered it extremely bad form to have shown how much Blue Bonnet's words touched her, or to have revealed the pride she felt; but Grandmother, leaning forward, pressed a kiss on the sweet face upturned to her own.

"That's my dear girl," she said, "my own dear Blue Bonnet! It is exactly what your mother would have wished—would have done, with your opportunity."

[373] At the school the days flew along at an astonishing pace. Commencement—that event long looked forward to—was now in sight. Excitement was in the air. Rooms began to have a deserted appearance as one after another of the little things that had adorned the walls were packed or stored.

"Commencement is a good deal like a funeral, isn't it?" Blue Bonnet said to Joy Cross, who, true to prediction, had taken Fraulein's place in the German department, and with satisfaction.

"It isn't as cheerful as it might be," Joy answered, checking off an examination paper. "It is hard for the girls who aren't coming back. I hear that Annabel is positively sick over it. I had no idea she was so fond of the school."

"Oh, it isn't altogether the school—it's the girls. Annabel is so loyal and she gives so much of herself in her friendships."

Joy folded up her papers and put away some books. Then she came over to Blue Bonnet and slipped her hand in hers shyly.

"There's something I want very much to say to you, Blue Bonnet," she began. "I hardly know where to commence. It's this—principally: I want to thank *you* for the position that has been offered me in this school next year."

Blue Bonnet looked incredulous.

"Thank—me," she stammered. "Why, me?"

[374] "Because without you I never should have had it. You helped me find it—and myself, Blue Bonnet. You remember the trouble we had—" A deep crimson for a moment dyed Joy's face, but her voice never faltered, nor did her eyes leave Blue Bonnet's. "Up to that time no one ever understood me—I think I didn't understand myself—quite. And you were kind to me—you tried to help me—make the girls like me. I can never forget it—never! Any more than I can repay you."

For answer Blue Bonnet threw her arms round her room-mate and gave her a warm embrace.

"I couldn't have done anything else, Joy, and have been human, so don't give me too much credit—please. I don't deserve any."

They both laughed. Blue Bonnet seemed quite inadequate to the occasion.

"And you're going to teach German? How perfectly splendid!"

"Yes; and that isn't all. Miss North is taking me to Dresden with her for the summer. I am to go into a German family to perfect my accent, where I shall not hear a word of English until next September."

"Joy!"

[375] "Isn't it wonderful? Oh, Blue Bonnet, I don't know how all these things have come to me. They are so much more than I deserve; but I shall try hard to be worthy and to do Miss North credit. You have no idea how I long to make it up to her."

This was a long speech for quiet Joy, and it was a good thing for both girls that Carita appeared at that moment, for the flood gates were opened and a deluge threatened.

In Carita's wake followed Mary and Peggy.

"Mary wants you to come down-stairs and meet her mother, Blue Bonnet," Carita said. "She came for Commencement. Peggy's mother will be here to-morrow. Oh, dear, I wish Texas wasn't so far off."

It was but a few days before the closing of school and the halls and corridors were filled with strange faces.

"Annabel's mother is here too," Mary said, leading the way down-stairs. "She's b-e-a-utiful. Annabel looks just like her."

A fact Blue Bonnet found to be true a moment later, when she was presented by the radiant and altogether happy Annabel.

There was a half hour's chat, and then Blue Bonnet ran up to her room again. She closed the door softly and going over to the window stood for a moment looking out over her favorite view. Her eyes were full of tears.

"No, you won't—you just sha'n't cry!" she said to herself after a moment's struggle for self-control. The sight of so many girls had awakened all the old longings. "You've got the *best Uncle* that ever was born into the world—*the best Grandmother—the best Aunt*! You haven't any right to feel sorry for yourself;" and fleeing as if from wrath to come, she ran hastily across the hall and burst into Sue's room, where a crowd of girls were holding high carnival. [376]

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CHAPTER XXII [377]

COMMENCEMENT

COMMENCEMENT week had come at last with all its attendant flurry and excitement. There was perpetual movement in the halls—girls flew in every direction; teachers looked tired and careworn.

In Annabel Jackson's room Blue Bonnet sat running ribbons in Annabel's underwear—every Junior was waiting on her Senior hand and foot these days; it was a special privilege and one much coveted by adoring satellites.

"There," she said, tying the last bow with care. "That's ready. I'm just going to draw the water for Annabel's bath, Sue; she'll be up in a second. Suppose you pick up the room a bit. Looks like a cyclone had struck it. Annabel can't dress in such a muss."

Annabel herself came in at that moment, her cheeks pink with excitement, her face radiant with pleasure.

"My, but I'm late! Do you think I can dress in six minutes? It lacks just that much of twelve o'clock and some of the boys have arrived already. I saw Mr. Billings pacing the floor in the living-room, Sue. Why don't you go down if you're ready? Blue Bonnet will help me." [378]

It was the day of the Senior dance. A gala day at Miss North's. Sue and Blue Bonnet had both been invited to the dance—an almost unheard of privilege. Sue had been thus favored because her brother Billy was to be Annabel's guest, and Blue Bonnet, because Annabel had begged Miss North, almost on her hands and knees to grant her this one last request.

It was a long established custom for the young men to arrive at noon, pay their respects to teachers and the girls who had invited them and remain on for a concert, tea, or whatever had been planned for their entertainment. At five o'clock they left to dress for the dinner which preceded the dance.

Annabel lost no time with her toilet. In ten minutes she was dressed, with Blue Bonnet's help, and as sweet a vision as youth, good health and beauty could produce.

Blue Bonnet stood before her enraptured.

"Your gown is perfect, Annabel," she said, giving an extra pat here and there, or trying to, between Annabel's quick movements. "I doubt if you'll look a speck prettier to-night in your white lace. Pink certainly is your color. You had it on the first time I saw you. I remember writing Uncle Cliff about you."

They started for the living-room. Along the halls girls waited in groups to catch a glimpse of their favorites. Heads craned from doors and exclamations of approval passed from lip to lip: [379]

"Oh, aren't they lovely! The two prettiest girls in school! What a love of a gown Annabel's got! Isn't Blue Bonnet a dream?"

At the top of the stairs wedged in, obstructing the passage, sat Carita and Mary. They fell upon Annabel and Blue Bonnet regardless of their finery.

"A kiss! A kiss!" they cried. "You've got to pay toll!" A forfeit willingly given.

"I can hardly wait until five o'clock," Mary said. "I'm dying to get Annabel's flowers for her." But the hands of the hall clock pointed to half after five before the guests had left, and Mary and Carita were free to slip down-stairs from Fifth Avenue and across the hall to where the long boxes were piled high beside the mail bag. Through the pile the girls searched, and suddenly Mary, with a cry of satisfaction, snatched her Senior's box and ran back up-stairs to number fifteen, with mad delight.

"Here they are, Annabel! Your flowers! Quick, the scissors!" She waved the long box triumphantly. "I knew he wouldn't forget. Oh, the beauties—roses! Roses!"

In another second Carita burst into the room and presented Blue Bonnet with *two* boxes, and close on her heels came Peggy with Sue's flowers.

The next half hour was a mad scramble. Afternoon frocks were changed for [380] evening gowns. The younger girls were shooed from the room amid murmurs of protest, while a happy babble streamed on from the lips of the participants of the great event.

The Senior dance! Who that has felt its thrills can ever forget it! Who that has known its long anticipated joy can ever obliterate it from memory!

"Bring your clothes in here, Blue Bonnet, and I'll fasten you up," Annabel said, "and you can help me. We won't have many more of these occasions, will we?"

"No; but we're not going to talk about that now," Blue Bonnet said, flying into her room for her gown.

Ruth, dressing early, had gone down-stairs, and Blue Bonnet and Annabel chatted merrily.

"I like your Mr. Judson, awfully, Blue Bonnet," Annabel said, as she polished her nails vigorously. "He's terribly good looking! I don't know why—but I adore dark men. I suppose I should like blonds—"

"Why *my* Mr. Judson?" Blue Bonnet interrupted. "He's Carita's cousin—that's why I asked him to-night. I was awfully disappointed that Alec Trent couldn't come."

Annabel gave a little low laugh.

"He's the one you're sort of a sister to, isn't he? Well—he's very nice, but I should [381] choose Mr. Judson for a life study—I *think*. There's something sort of splendid and inspiring about him. He's so frank and unusual."

"He's just Western—that's all," Blue Bonnet said with a degree of satisfaction. "Would you wear these gold beads or the corals, Annabel?"

"The corals, by all means, with that white gown. And put one of those pink roses in your hair—there, low, like that. My, but you're sweet. I love you in that gown!"

"This gown is a little gift from Uncle Cliff. We went shopping the other day all by ourselves. I wanted to pick up a few little things for the girls and to get you a graduation present. By the way, I believe I'll give it to you now—I'll run get it. Maybe you might like to wear it to-night."

She brought back a small velvet jewel case which she put in Annabel's hands. Annabel gave a cry of delight when she opened it.

"Blue Bonnet! How perfectly darling of you! Oh, isn't it exquisite!"

In the case reposed a little brooch—a circlet of pearls.

"I'm so glad you like it, Annabel. I love the sentiment of it. It's a friendship circle—never ending—never beginning, see?"

She held the pin in her hand and traced the circle with her finger. "I feel that way [382] about our friendship—it never seemed to begin—it just *was*, from the start—and I hope it will never end!"

"Blue Bonnet! Stop! You're going to make me cry—and I can't now. I haven't time. You know I haven't a particle of sense when I get started."

She made a little dab at her eyes and took the pin from Blue Bonnet.

"I shall wear it always, *always*," she managed to say as she pinned it in the lace of her gown, "and I'll thank you for it properly at another time."

At ten o'clock that night, three very tired but wide-awake little Freshmen, who had watched the dance from the gymnasium balcony, climbed the flight of stairs leading to Fifth Avenue, bearing in their arms three bouquets. After the first few dances the girls had thrown the flowers to their outstretched hands and they had been cherished as valuable possessions.

"I'm going to sprinkle these roses and leave them in Annabel's bathtub," Mary said, stifling a tell-tale yawn.

"And I'll do the same with Blue Bonnet's," Carita said, following the suggestion.

She entered Blue Bonnet's room and after attending to the flowers, set the place to rights; turned down Blue Bonnet's bed neatly, and finding paper and pencil busied herself for a moment with a note which she pinned to Blue Bonnet's pillow. It read: [383]

"Dearest Blue Bonnet:—Thank you so much for letting me help you all

day, and for taking care of the flowers. I have had a beautiful time. You were the prettiest girl in the room to-night. Wasn't it sweet of Alec to send those flowers all the way from Washington? I think he has forgiven you for what happened in Woodford. Good night. Sweet dreams. CARITA."

The rest of the week passed in a dream to Blue Bonnet. Two things, however, stood out vividly in her memory: Annabel's program, which had been brilliantly sung to an enthusiastic audience, and Miss North's last talk to the girls in the living-room. Perhaps it was the glow of pride on Uncle Cliff's face as she took her place at the piano to play Annabel's accompaniments—the look of satisfaction on Aunt Lucinda's —that stamped the afternoon so indelibly on her mind; perhaps it was a little self satisfaction—for Blue Bonnet was altogether human. At any rate, she felt sure that she would always recall the day with happiness.

Miss North's talk had been helpful—her text inspiring. Blue Bonnet copied the text in her memory book with many notations—all the amplifications she could remember:

"The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts. Guard them [384] accordingly."

Then there was the eventful afternoon when the Seniors took the straw ride into the country and built a bonfire upon which to burn the books they hated most. Blue Bonnet had helped Annabel select a much thumbed Cicero (there had been some difficulty in choosing), longing with all her heart for the day when her own Geometry could be added to the funeral pyre.

The last day—in after years Blue Bonnet disliked to recall that last day, it was so fraught with sadness—she had packed for Carita; helped Mary Boyd; given Peggy a lift with her things, which were piled in an indiscriminate heap for one big leap into a waiting trunk, and had put her own clothes and belongings in readiness for the long journey to Texas on the morrow. She had spent a half hour with Grandmother and Aunt Lucinda, who were remaining in Boston to see her off. There had been a visit to Mrs. White—she could not be forgotten, whatever else was left undone. How often in lonely and discouraged moments Mrs. White had filled the place almost of a mother. Blue Bonnet felt an unbounded regard for her, as well as gratitude.

After all was done she wandered into Annabel's room for a last chat. Others had been of the same mind evidently, for Sue was perched on Annabel's trunk; Wee [385] occupied a comfortable chair; Patty and Angela squatted on the floor. It was a crowd whose drooping spirits even Wee Watts failed to arouse.

Blue Bonnet sank down beside Patty and heaved a sigh. The room was bare and gloomy. The Queen Louise, the china cat, the calendar under the window, alone spoke of a past fading into oblivion.

"Aren't you going to take 'Louise' and the cat, Annabel?" Blue Bonnet asked.

Annabel shook her head.

"Why not?"

"They're willed. We're going to pass them on to the next crowd—the girls who have this room."

Ruth and Annabel exchanged a look. Their minds reverted to the calendar that hung low beneath the window, on which was written—in so fine a hand as to be almost illegible:

"Look behind this calendar. 'A word to the wise is sufficient.'"

Blue Bonnet tried to say something, but the words stuck in her throat. She gave one despairing glance about the room, her eyes sweeping the almost deserted quarters, and rising she made straight for the door.

Wee and Patty, Sue and Angela followed silently. At her own door Blue Bonnet [386] paused and held out her hand.

"I reckon I'll say good-by, girls," she said. "Carita and I are going over to the hotel to spend the night with Grandmother and Aunt Lucinda. Hope to see *you* next year, Sue, and you too, Wee." To Angela and Patty there were promises and instructions about writing. When the girls had passed on to their rooms Blue Bonnet turned and went back to Annabel. She opened the door softly. Annabel was sitting by the window where the girls had left her. Her head was buried in her hands and when she lifted it Blue Bonnet saw that her eyes were full of tears. She got up and came toward Blue Bonnet with outstretched arms.

"Is it good-by, Blue Bonnet?" she said.

"Not good-by, Annabel," Blue Bonnet answered bravely. "Not *good-by*—it's just *—auf wiedersehen*."

THE END.

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