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A LITTLE MISS NOBODY

BOOKS FOR GIRLS

By AMY BETH MARLOWE

12mo. Cloth. Illustrated.

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THE GIRLS OF HILLCREST FARM
Or The Secret of the Rocks
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Or With the Girls of Pinewood Hall
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(Other volumes in preparation)

GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK



"GOODNESS ME! YOU'RE A PERFECT MISS
NOBODY." *Frontispiece (Page 98).*

A LITTLE MISS NOBODY

OR

WITH THE GIRLS
OF PINWOOD HALL

BY

AMY BELL MARLOWE

AUTHOR OF
THE OLDEST OF FOUR, THE GIRLS OF HILLCREST
FARM, WYN'S CAMPING DAYS, ETC.

Illustrated

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
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CHAPTER I

MISS NOBODY FROM NOWHERE

The girls at Higbee School that term had a craze for marking everything they owned with their monograms. Such fads run through schools like the measles.

Their clothing, books, tennis rackets, school-bags—everything that was possible—blossomed with monograms, more or less ornate.

Of course, some girls' initials offered a wider scope than others' for the expression of artistic ideas; but there wasn't a girl in the whole school who couldn't do *something* with her initials, save Nancy.

"N. N." What could one do with "N. N."? It was simply impossible to invent an attractive-looking monogram with those letters.

"N. N.—Nancy Nelson—just Nobody from Nowhere," quoth Nancy to Miss Trigg, the teacher and school secretary who, despite her thick spectacles and angular figure, displayed more of a motherly interest in Nancy than anybody else at Higbee School.

Miss Prentice, the principal, never seemed to be interested in Nancy. The latter had nobody to "write home to," either good or bad about the school—so the principal did not have to worry about her. And it didn't matter whether Nancy's reports showed "improvement" or not—there was nobody to read them.

Miss Trigg was also a lonely person; perhaps that was why she showed some appreciation for "Miss Nobody from Nowhere." Sometimes in the long summer vacation she and Nancy were alone at the school. That drew the two together a little. But Miss Trigg was a spinster of very,

very uncertain age—saving that she couldn't be young!—and it was the more surprising that she seemed to understand something of what the sore-hearted young girl felt.

"The really great people of this world—the worth-while people—have almost all been known by one name. There were many Cæsars, but only one *Cæsar*, who crossed the Rubicon, and in his 'Commentaries' said: 'All Gaul is divided into three parts.' One never hears what Cleopatra's other name was," pursued Miss Trigg, with her queer smile. "Whether Isabella of Spain—the Isabella that made the voyages of Columbus possible—had another name, or not, we do not inquire. How many of us stop to think that the married name of the English Victoria—that great and good queen—was 'Victoria Wettin,' and that for the years of her widowhood she was in fact 'the Widow Wettin'?"

"The greatest king-maker the world ever saw—the man who turned all Europe topsy-turvy—was known only by one initial—and that your own, Nancy. Here! I will make you a more striking monogram than any of the other girls possess," and quickly, with a few skilful strokes of her pencil, Miss Trigg drew a single "N" surrounded by a neat, though inverted, laurel wreath.

"Now your monogram will not conflict with Napoleon's," she said, with one of her rare laughs; "but it is quite distinctive. It stands for 'Nancy.' Forget that 'Miss Nobody from Nowhere' chatter. You may be quite as important as any girl in the school—only you don't know it now."

That was what really troubled Nancy Nelson. She was too cheerful and hopeful to really care because she couldn't entwine the two initials of the only name she knew into an artistic bowknot! It was because "N. N." really meant nothing.

For Nancy didn't know whether the name belonged to her or not. She knew absolutely nothing about her identity—who she was, who her people had been—of course, it was safe to say she was an orphan—where she had lived before she came to the Higbee Endowed School when she was a little tot, who paid her tuition here, or what was to become of her when she was graduated.

And Nancy Nelson, now approaching the end of her last year at the school, was more and more persuaded that she should know something about herself—something more than Miss Prentice, or Miss Trigg could tell her.

Years before Nancy had listened to the story of her earlier life as it was whispered into her ear when she and Miss Trigg were alone together, just as though it was a story about some other little girl.

One September day, just after the fall term had opened, a gentleman brought a tiny, rosy-cheeked, much beruffled little girl to Miss Prentice and asked the principal of Higbee School to take charge of the little one for a term of years—to bring her up, in fact, as far as she could be brought up and taught at that institution.

This gentleman—who was a lawyer rather well known at that time in Malden, the small city in which the school was situated—could only say that the little girl's name was Nancy Nelson, that she had no parents nor other near relatives, and that he could assure the principal that the tuition and other bills would be paid regularly and that Nancy would have a small fund of spending money as she grew.

Who she really was, where she had lived, the reason for the mystery that surrounded the affair, the lawyer would not, or could not explain. He had left Malden soon afterward, but was established in Cincinnati—and he met all Nancy's bills promptly and asked each quarter-day after her health. But he showed no further interest in the little girl.

As for Nancy herself, she remembered nothing before her appearance at the school. And that was not strange. She was a kindergartner when Miss Prentice accepted the responsibility of training her—the very youngest and smallest girl who had ever come to Higbee School.

Miss Prentice was too firm a disciplinarian to be a very warm-hearted woman. Save for Miss Trigg's awkward attempts at motherliness, and the surreptitious hugs and kisses of certain womanly servants about the school who pitied the lonely child, Nancy Nelson had experienced little affection.

She was popular in a way with her fellow pupils, yet there had always been a barrier between her and the rest of the school. She was the refuge of the dull scholars, or of the little ones who needed help in their lessons; but Nancy never made a real *chum*.

It was not the girl's fault. She was heart-hungry for somebody to love, and somebody to love her. But circumstances seemed always to forbid.

A new girl was scarcely settled at Higbee before somebody pointed Nancy out to her as a girl who was "peculiar." Sometimes the story of Nancy's coming to the school, and of her circumstances, were sadly twisted. She was often looked upon as a combination of Cinderella and the Sleeping Princess.

However that might be, it set Nancy in a class by herself. Girls came and went at Higbee. Some took the entire course and were graduated. But none save Nancy remained at the school from year's end to year's end.

Miss Prentice saw to it that the girl had a sufficient supply of neat and serviceable dresses. She had all that she could possibly need, but little that she really *wanted*.

When her spending money was increased moderately, Nancy was able to buy herself the little trifles that persons like Miss Prentice never realize a girl's longing for. Nancy's private expenditures occasioned even Miss Trigg to say that she was "light-minded" and would never know how to spend money.

They did not take into consideration that Nancy had nobody to give her the little trifles so dear to every growing girl's heart. She never had a present. That is, nothing save some little things at Christmas from some of the smaller girls whom she had helped. Miss Prentice discouraged the giving of presents among the girls at Higbee. She said it occasioned jealousies, and "odious comparisons" of family wealth.

Miss Prentice was a very good teacher, and she exerted a careful oversight over both the

girls' health and conduct. Most of the girls had their particular friends, and even the few other orphans beside Nancy in the school had those who loved and cared for them.

But here was a heart-hungry girl with absolutely no apparent future. The end of her last year at Higbee was approaching and neither Nancy, nor Miss Trigg, nor Miss Prentice herself, knew the first thing about what was to "be done with her."

Curiosity about herself—who she was, what was in store for her, and all—sometimes scorched Nancy Nelson's mind like a devouring flame. She kept a deal of it to herself; it was making her a morose, secretive girl, instead of the open-hearted, frank character she was meant to be. Nancy's future as a girl and woman was in peril.

She scarcely believed that the name she was known by was her own. Some time before she had begun to refer to herself as "Miss Nobody from Nowhere." It was continually on her mind.

So Miss Trigg's suggestion about the monogram was not entirely satisfactory to Nancy. It is all right to have brave thoughts about doing great deeds in the future; but—supposing there *is* no future?

That's the way it looked to Nancy Nelson. June was approaching and all the other girls of the graduating class were exchanging stories of what they were to do, where they were to go, and all about their future lives. But Nancy couldn't tell a single thing that was going to happen to her after breakfast the day following graduation.

Of course, Miss Prentice was not bound to keep her a minute longer than her contract called for. Nothing had been said by the lawyer in whose hands Nancy's fate seemed to be, regarding his future intentions. He had acknowledged the school principal's last letter at Easter, and that was all.

A girl who has spent all her days—almost—in a boarding school must of necessity possess some small amount of independence, at least. Although very young, Nancy felt perfectly able to start out into the world alone and make her way.

Just *how* she should earn her living she did not know. But she had read story books. Sometimes girls of her age were able to help housewives do their work, or help take care of little children, or even be parcel-wrappers in big city stores.

Of course she could not remain at the school. There would be nothing for her to do here. And Miss Prentice carried her pupils no farther than the grammar grades.

Some of the other girls would begin in the autumn at other and more famous schools—college preparatory schools, and the like. Nancy loved books, and she hoped for a college education, too; dimly, in some way, she hoped to find means of preparing for college. But how? That was the problem.

One noon, as Nancy filed into the long, cool dining room, Miss Prentice, who often stood at the door to review the girls as they filed before her, tapped Nancy on the shoulder.

"My room after luncheon, Miss Nancy," said the principal, severely.

She always spoke severely, so this did not disturb the girl. But the latter was so anxious about her own affairs that she flushed deeply and only played with her food.

Both of these things did not trouble Nancy. In the first place, she was very pretty when she blushed, having an olive complexion and dark, crisp hair which she wore in two plaits down her back. And she was so plump that the loss of luncheon wasn't going to hurt her.

She was glad when the bell rang for the girls to rise and listen to Miss Trigg's murmured "thanks for meat." Then she ran eagerly over to the principal's cottage and found Miss Prentice waiting for her.

"I have heard from Mr. Gordon," began that lady.

"My guardian!" gasped Nancy, clasping her hands.

"I do not know that he *is* your guardian," responded Miss Prentice, with an admonitory look. "You must remember that he merely pays your fees here."

"Well!" breathed Nancy, trying to contain herself within bounds.

"He asks me to keep you here this summer as before," continued the principal.

"Oh!"

"He has made no other plans for tiding you over the summer," went on the very practical lady. "He objects to entering into arrangements with any other person for the brief time between your graduation here and your matriculation at Pinewood Hall in September—"

"Oh, Miss Prentice! Pinewood Hall!" cried Nancy, unable to restrain herself.

She knew all about Pinewood Hall. It was one of the most popular preparatory schools in the Middle West. Nancy had never even dreamed that she would be allowed to attend such a select institution.

"I do wish you would restrain yourself, Nancy," said the principal. "They will think at Pinewood that you have had no proper training here, at all."

"Oh, I beg pardon, Miss Prentice," cried the girl. "I really will try to be a credit to you if I go there."

"I hope so," observed the principal, grimly, and nodded as though she thought this terminated the interview.

"But, Miss Prentice! Is—is that all he says?" queried Nancy, anxiously.

"That you will remain here—if I agree, which I shall; Miss Trigg will look after you—until fall, when you will receive your transportation to Clintondale and will go there, prepared to continue your studies."

"And—noth—ing—more?" sighed Nancy, hopelessly.

"Indeed! What more could you wish?" demanded Miss Prentice, tartly. "It seems to me you are a very fortunate girl indeed. Pinewood! There isn't another girl in the class whose parents can afford to send her to such a fashionable preparatory institution."

"I know, Miss Prentice. I ought to be grateful, I suppose," admitted the girl, wearily. "But—but I *did* so hope Mr. Gordon would write something about me—about who I am—about what I am

going to be in life——”

“I declare!” snapped the principal. “I call this downright ingratitude, Nancy Nelson. Suppose I wrote what you say to Mr. Gordon? And he should in turn transmit my report to—to the people who furnish the money for all this——”

“That’s just it! that’s just it, Miss Prentice!” wailed the girl, suddenly bursting into tears. “*Who* furnishes the money? *Why* do they furnish it? Oh, dear! what have I done that I am treated like a colt to be broken instead of like a girl?”

Miss Prentice was silenced for the moment. She looked down upon the girl’s bowed head, and upon the young shoulders heaving with sobs, and a strange expression flitted for the moment across her grim face.

Perhaps never before had the principal of Higbee School looked into Nancy’s heart and seen the real tragedy of her young life.

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CHAPTER II

THE BOY IN THE MILLRACE

That summer was much like other summers in Malden. Nancy had been graduated with some honor; but there was nobody to rejoice with her over her success. The school had been crowded on the last day with friends and parents of the other girls; there was not a soul who more than perfunctorily wished Nancy Nelson “good luck.”

The neighborhood of Higbee School was very quiet a week after the term closed. The serving force was greatly reduced; most of the big house was closed, and all the cottages. Even Miss Prentice, four days after graduation, started for Europe with a party of teachers, and Miss Trigg and Nancy were left practically alone.

But the orphaned girl had something this summer on which to feed her imagination. She was going to Pinewood Hall. And Pinewood Hall was exclusive, and on the very top wave of popularity.

It cost a lot of money to go to that school, Miss Trigg had suggested to Miss Prentice to remind the lawyer that Nancy would need a more elaborate outfit of gowns, and Mr. Gordon had sent the extra money for that purpose without a word of objection.

The thought had taken root in Nancy’s mind at last that she must be somebody of importance. At least, she was an heiress. Whether she owned a single relative, or not, she commanded money. *That* was something.

Of course, the other girls at Higbee had always looked down upon her and considered her “a charity scholar;” but Nancy believed that at Pinewood Hall she could hold up her head with the best.

Nobody would know her there. She would begin a fresh page of her history. She would make the girls love her for herself; it would not matter there that she had no near relatives. Mr. Henry Gordon, her guardian, must know all about her, and with regard to this gentleman the girl had a very grave determination in her mind—a determination which she did not confide even to Miss Trigg.

Nancy Nelson meant to see and speak with the lawyer before she went to Pinewood Hall.

Whether he wanted to or not, Mr. Gordon must tell her something about herself. If she had relatives living she wanted to know, at least, *why* they were ashamed of her. Or, if she was merely the ward of an estate, she wanted to know what the estate was—and how big it was.

The girl had thought so much about her equivocal position that her future troubled her. If there was just enough money to give her a college education, she wanted to know it. If she must prepare herself for taking some place at the end of her schooldays in the work-a-day world, she wanted to know that, too.

These were practical thoughts for so young a girl; but Nancy Nelson *was* practical, despite her imagination.

She had already looked up Clintondale on the map, and upon the railroad time-table. It was half a day’s ride east of Malden, and Cincinnati was one of the points where she changed cars.

Although she had never traveled by train herself, Nancy had heard the other girls exchanging experiences, and she knew that she could get a “stop-over” from the conductor of the train.

She had seen one of Mr. Gordon’s letters which he had written Miss Prentice; the principal had shown it to her.

At that time the girl had memorized the street and number printed at the top of the lawyer’s stiffly-worded communication. She would never forget “No. 714 South Wall Street.”

That was the one secret Nancy Nelson kept hidden within her heart all that long summer while she waited with Miss Trigg, the secretary and general utility teacher, for the return of the principal of Higbee School and the beginning of her new life.

Miss Trigg tried to be nice to her; indeed, she *was* nice to her after a fashion. But Miss Trigg’s pleasures were between bookcovers; Nancy Nelson was too healthy a girl not to desire something of a more exciting nature than Roman history or higher mathematics on a long, hot summer afternoon.

That was why she stole away from the deeply absorbed Miss Trigg on one such occasion late

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in August, when they had ridden out to Granville Park to spend an hour or two in the open.

Granville Park bordered a good-sized pond, dammed at its lower end, where was an old mill site. An automobile road crossed the bridge that had been built here; but the mill had not been in commission for years. It was a quiet and picturesque spot.

Just above the millrace was a quiet pool under the bank where great, fragrant water-lilies floated upon the surface. Those lilies always attracted Nancy. She wished she were a boy. Boys could do so many things forbidden to girls!

She longed to strip off her shoes and stockings and wade into the black water to obtain some of the lilies. She had no idea that, just beyond the little patch of marine plants, the bottom of the pond fell away abruptly, and that a current tugged stoutly for the millrace.

On this particular day, when she had left Miss Trigg reading in her favorite summer-house high on the rocky hill, and Nancy had tripped lightly down to the path that skirted the pond's steep edge, there was a boy doing just what she had so wished to do herself.

He was a good-natured looking boy, with plump cheeks and a mass of light, curly hair that he probably hated, but Nancy thought it made him look "too cute for anything."

He might have been three years her senior, and was a strong, healthy-looking youth.

Nancy stopped in the fringe of bushes and watched him. She saw him pluck several of the long-stemmed beauties, and she wondered, if she showed herself when he came ashore, he would offer her some.

Then she became aware of several voices in the neighborhood—girls' voices. They seemed to be calling to the boy, for once he lifted his shining face and shouted something.

Nancy looked keenly in the direction his eyes took. Through the trees she saw that an automobile stood on the bridge—or right at its beginning. The boy belonged to the automobile party. They had spied the lilies, and he had come down to wade into the pond for them.

Of course he was getting them for the other girls—he would give none to Nancy.

She could see the chauffeur, in his duster and goggles, standing in the road, too. But the girls who chatted so gaily, and shouted to the boy in the water, she could not see at all, try her best.

The lad had now a great bunch of the water-lilies; but the girls above evidently wanted them all. They encouraged him to wade out farther; there were some fine ones on the outer edge of the patch.

"Don't be afraid!" Nancy heard one shrill-voiced girl call. "What's the matter, Bob? Is the water wet?"

"That's all right, Goosey!" said the boy. "But you know well enough I can't swim. And there's a hole here——"

"Oh!"

The boy, lilies and all, suddenly went under! His half-strangled cry did not reach the ears of those in the automobile. And it was evident that they could not see the lily patch very well, for they were laughing and chattering without an idea that the boy was in danger.

He came to the surface in a moment. Nancy had only sprung out upon the open path. But it was plain he had told the exact truth when he said he could not swim—and his mouth had been open when he went under that first time.

The boy uttered a sobbing cry and went down again. Nancy knew that the water must be already in his lungs. He was drowning—swiftly and surely—while the current bore him steadily toward the millrace.

How could she help him? Nancy could swim—and swim well. Miss Prentice did not neglect proper outdoor athletics for her girls. She engaged a swimming instructor at one of the big public baths in Malden for two afternoons a week all through the school year.

But the girl very well knew that she could not swim in the swift current of the race. She could not plunge in and aid the drowning boy.

Nor was there anything that she could fling to him—anything that would bear him up until help could come. The bank was so steep and high! For an instant Nancy could only scream, and her sturdy voice drowned immediately the chatter and laughter of the girls in the automobile.

She saw the chauffeur spring down the path toward the bank of the pond and she ran to meet him. For a second time the boy's head appeared above the surface. The hand gripping the great bunch of lilies beat the air; but Nancy saw that his eyes were wide open and that he seemed to have recovered his courage.

Although he could not fight the current, he was trying to get his breath without swallowing any more water.

"The boy'll drown!" gasped the chauffeur, white-faced and helpless.

Nancy could see the side of the automobile more clearly now. Lashed to the running-board was an extra tire, fully inflated. She seized the shaking man by the hand.

"Get a knife! get a knife!" she commanded. "Haven't you a knife?"

"Ye-yes," he gasped, fumbling in his pocket.

"Come on!" she ordered, and ran up the path to the road where the automobile stood.

He came, opening the knife as he ran. The girls in the car were shrieking now. Nancy did not even look at them; it is doubtful if they saw her. She pointed to the tire and the chauffeur understood.

He started to cut the lashings recklessly; but she stopped him with a cry. The stout cord was what she wanted. Quickly she looped it around the tire and he seized it and ran back to the pond's edge.

The imperiled boy was half-way through the race; the brown current curled about him, trying to bear him down.

With a shout the chauffeur threw the tire into the water ahead of the boy. The latter had sufficient presence of mind to seize it, and the chauffeur dragged him toward the bank.

But it was too steep, and the boy was too much exhausted to climb out without help.

"You'll—you'll have to help me!" gasped the boy in the water.

But the man could not both cling to the rope and lend the unfortunate victim of the accident a hand. Nor was there a tree or bush to which he might tie the rope.

The boy had hooked one arm over the improvised life-preserver. But his head had sunk low on his breast. He was almost completely exhausted, and the current, tugging at his legs, must soon sweep him from his insecure hold.

CHAPTER III

ON THE WAY TO PINWOOD

For half a minute Nancy Nelson had been inactive. Her quick mind had suggested the way the boy in the millrace might be saved; but the chauffeur of the automobile was the instrument by which the helpless victim's course down the current had been retarded.

But now it looked as though he would be lost, after all. Below the race the water was most boisterous—and there were many jagged rocks. If he was drawn through the race he would be seriously injured on the rocks, if not drowned.

The bright-minded girl saw all this in those few seconds. She scrambled down the steep bank, clutching at the chauffeur's ankle as she went.

"You'll have to hold both of us for a minute!" she cried.

"Go ahead! I understand!" he returned, swaying his body back as he clung to the stout cord, and digging his heels into the bank.

Nancy hung over the swift current and stretched her right hand down to the boy.

"Get hold! Grab me!" she called, gaspingly.

"I—I'll pull you in," he replied, in a strangled tone.

"Do what I tell you!" she cried, angrily.

She flung herself farther out just as his left arm was unhooked from the inflated tire. She seized his wrist; he had presence of mind enough to seize hers in return.

"Let go of the tire!" she sang out to the chauffeur, and he obeyed.

He was a strong young man. As the tire went whirling down the stream he drew them both up the bank—the girl first, clinging with desperation to the wrist of the half-drowned boy.

Wet, spattered, with mud, and exhausted, Nancy got a footing on firm ground once more. The chauffeur grabbed at the boy's other arm, and he was quickly lying on the bank, too.

"It—it almost got me!" gasped the boy.

His face was streaked with mud, and he was altogether a sorry spectacle. But through it all he had clung to the bunch of water-lilies.

"Here! Take 'em!" he panted, thrusting the blooms into Nancy's hand. "You—you're all right! Say! wha-what's your name——"

Nancy heard the other girls coming down the path now. The danger was over and she suddenly realized that she must look a perfect fright.

"N-never mind! Thanks!" she blurted out, and turning sharply, dashed into the cover of the thicket and was almost instantly out of sight—out of sound, as well.

But she was so excited that she did not think again how she looked until she appeared before Miss Trigg.

The short-sighted teacher looked up at her—stared, evidently without identifying her charge for the moment—and then gave voice.

"Nancy! Nancy Nelson! Whatever have you been doing to yourself?"

"I—I——"

Nancy had already heard the motor get under way. She knew that the boy and his friends were now out of hearing, or reach.

"Aren't these lilies pretty?" she asked, holding out the flowers as a peace-offering to Miss Trigg.

"*What?*" screamed the teacher, getting up nimbly, and backing away from the mud-bedaubed figure of the girl. "Your feet are wet! Did—did you *dare* get into such a mess, just to get those—those *weeds?*"

Nancy nodded. It was true. Her bedrabblement had been the forerunner of the gift of flowers from the boy.

"Well! of all things!" gasped Miss Trigg.

"I—I believe you've taken leave of your senses. Why—why, whatever will people think of you, going home? We—we can't ride in the car. They wouldn't let you get on. And I'd be ashamed to be seen with you."

"Oh! I'm sorry, Miss Trigg," murmured Nancy.

"Being sorry won't take the mud off that dress—or bring a new pair of stockings—or clean those boots. We've got to have a cab—a closed cab. I wouldn't go home with you in anything else."

"I—I'll go home alone, Miss Trigg," said the contrite girl.

"No! While Miss Prentice is away you shall never again be out of my sight in waking hours—no, Miss! And for a bunch of weeds!"

"Oh Miss Trigg! they are *so-o* pretty—"

"Don't you say another word!" commanded the teacher. "And you stand right here until I can signal a cab on the drive below. There, there's one now!"

The teacher burst through the bushes and waved madly to a taxi rolling slowly along the macadam below the hill. The driver saw her and stopped.

"Come!" spoke Miss Trigg. "Here! give me those—those *things*."

She snatched the lilies from Nancy's hand and flung them in the path. The girl looked back at them longingly; but she thought it best to trifle with the teacher no further.

So she followed slowly the gaunt, angry woman down the steep path, and only the memory of the boy's gift remained with her through the rest of the days of that last vacation at Higbee School.

Nancy was in disgrace with Miss Trigg, and was very lonely. She wondered who the boy was—and where he lived—and who the girls were with him—and if he had suffered any bad result from his adventure.

Above all, she wondered if she should ever see him again.

But that was not likely. Miss Prentice came home in a week, and in another week the school would open.

Mr. Gordon had sent the ticket for Nancy's fare to Clintondale. Her modest trunk was packed. Miss Prentice bade her a perfunctory good-bye. It was a cold farewell, indeed, to the only home the girl could remember and in which she had lived for at least three-quarters of her life.

But as the cab which was to take her to the railway station was about to start, Miss Trigg hurried out. She had scarcely recovered from the shock of Nancy's adventure at the millpond; but after all there was a spark of human feeling deep down in the teacher's heart.

"I—I hope you'll do well, Nancy," she stammered. "Do—*do* keep up well in your studies and be a credit to us. And for mercy's sake don't venture into a pond again after nasty weeds. It's not—not ladylike."

Nancy thought she was going to kiss her. But it had been a long time since Miss Trigg had kissed anybody, and it is doubtful if she really knew how. So she thought better of it, shook hands with Nancy in a mannish way, turned abruptly, and stalked back into the house.

The taxi rolled away, and Nancy winked back the tears. It was not hard. After all, the orphan girl was leaving nothing behind that she really *loved*.

CHAPTER IV

BEARDING THE LION

Nancy Nelson's hopes ran high. She was going out into a new world—the world of Pinewood Hall. The girls would all be strangers to her there; not one of them would know her history—or, rather, her lack of a history.

But as to the latter, the girl was determined to learn all there was to know about herself before she arrived at Pinewood.

In two hours the train would be in Cincinnati. She had but half an hour—or less—to wait for the train on the other road to Clintondale. But she had studied the time-table and she knew that, by waiting four hours in Cincinnati, she could get another train to her destination.

She was to telegraph back to Miss Prentice when she arrived at Cincinnati. At the same time she was supposed to telegraph ahead to the principal of Pinewood Hall,—Madame Schakael. This had all been arranged beforehand; Nancy had been thoroughly instructed by Miss Prentice.

But the girl had made up her mind not to send the dispatch on to Pinewood Hall until she was ready to leave Cincinnati. There should be no telegraphing back and forth between the two schoolmistresses if she could help it.

In the interim Nancy proposed to find Mr. Gordon's office and have the long-wished-for interview with the man whom she called her guardian. All the guardians she had ever read of seemed to have a much deeper interest in their wards than this lawyer had shown in her.

The cab driver checked her trunk and then spoke a word to the conductor of the train that would take the girl to Cincinnati. But Nancy felt quite independent and "grown up."

She asked the conductor about stopping over at the big city until the later train and he assured her that she would need no stop-over check for that. She spent a good part of the time until she got to Cincinnati inventing speeches which she would make to Mr. Gordon when she reached his office.

She filed the telegram to Miss Prentice as soon as she got off the train; then she checked her handbag at the parcel counter and walked out of the station.

Of course, she had no idea in which direction South Wall Street lay; but she knew a policeman when she saw one, and believed those minions of the law to be fountains of information.

She told the officer exactly what she wanted to do—to go to the lawyer's office and return to the station in time for the afternoon train to Clintondale.

"It's quite a little walk, Miss, and you might get turned around. Suppose I put you into a taxi and take the man's number, and he can bring you back, if you like?"

Nancy had some few dollars in her pocketbook; but she was careful to have the policeman

estimate the cost of her cab-ride, which he kindly did. She would have sufficient to pay for this, and a luncheon, as well, if she got back in season. So the girl bravely entered the taxi-cab and was whirled through the unfamiliar streets to the lawyer's office.

Then she began to quake. She was to beard a lion in his den—and she knew very little about lions!

Number 714 South Wall Street was a big office building; there were, too, taxis passing all the time; so Nancy paid off her chauffeur and entered the building with more boldness in her carriage than she really felt in her heart.

She was studying the building directory when the hall-man came to her assistance.

"Who are you looking for, Miss?" he asked.

"Mr. Henry Gordon."

"Gordon? Is that Gordon & Craig, architects?"

"Mr. Gordon is a lawyer."

"Oh! That's Mr. Gordon, of Ambrose, Necker & Boles. Twelve-forty-four. This way, Miss. Number 6—going up!"

She was hustled into the elevator with a crowd of other people and the car almost immediately began to ascend.

"Floor! Floor!" the boy who manipulated the lever kept calling, and the passengers began to thin out rapidly after the fourth floor was passed.

"What floor, Miss?" he snapped at her.

"Mr. Gordon," stammered Nancy, more than a little confused by the rush of it all. "Twelve-forty-four, the—the gentleman said."

"Twelfth! Here you are!" and the car stopped with a jerk while the boy opened the sliding door with a flourish.

"Forty-four, to the right!" advised the youth, and immediately the car shot up the well out of sight.

The clang of the cage-door echoed through the empty corridor. There were rows of doors, with ground-glass panes, all painted in black or gold with the name of firms, or with the single word, "*Private*."

For a minute Nancy hesitated. Somehow, her ears rang and she had to wink fast to keep back the tears. Yet it was merely nervousness. She knew of no reason why she should be frightened.

Surely her guardian must wish to see her! He probably was a very busy man—perhaps a man without a family. Maybe he lived at a hotel where he could not have his ward come to see him. That was why she had had to spend her vacations heretofore at Malden. Nancy thought of these things, and began to take courage.

She glanced along the corridor. "To the right," the elevator boy had said. She took a few uncertain steps and came opposite Room 1231. Room 1244 must be near.

She persevered, walking almost on tiptoe so as not to awaken the echoes of the lofty corridor, and quickly came before the door numbered 1244. Stenciled upon it was the firm name: "Ambrose, Necker & Boles, Attorneys."

There was nothing about Mr. Gordon. His name did not appear, and she was not sure now that she had reached the goal.

She turned the knob with a flutter at her heart, and stepped into the office. She found herself immediately in a sort of fenced-off stall, with a glass partition on one hand, through which she saw many desks and typewriter tables, at which a score of men and girls were busy.

Directly before her, however, was a gate in the railing and beside the gate—and evidently the Cerberus of the way—was a small, thin boy sitting at a small desk, with his legs wound around his chair legs like immature pythons with blue worsted bodies.

He was supposed to be doing something with a pile of papers and long envelopes; but the truth was he had rigged, with rubber bands, a closely-printed, "smootchy" looking paper-backed storybook before him on the desk, so that on the instant Nancy approached, the rubbers snapped the book back under the desk lid out of sight.

He looked up with little, red-lidded eyes, grinning queerly at her.

"Gee!" he gasped under his breath. "I thought it was the boss." Then aloud he demanded, with hauteur: "Who do you wish to see, lady?"

Now Nancy had not been used to being addressed in so cavalier a manner, and for a moment she did not know how to reply. But in that moment she took a mental picture of the boy that she was not likely to forget.



"What are you doing here? Have you run away?" _Page
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Besides being diminutive and fleshless, his features were very small and very, very sharp. The generous hand of Nature had sprinkled freckles across his nose. He had lost a front tooth, which fact made his smile perfectly "open."

His watery blue eyes twinkled with mischief. His grin wrinkled up his preternaturally old face in a most remarkable way. His shock of hair was flame-colored—and exactly matched the tie he wore.

"Say!" this youngster said. "You'll know me again; eh? My name's 'Scorch' O'Brien. What's yours?"

"I—I'm Nancy Nelson," confessed the girl, but beginning to smile at him now. He was too funny for anything. "And I've come to see Mr. Gordon."

"Not Old Gudgeon? He never had a lady come to see him before," announced the office boy, explosively. "Sure it's him you want?"

"Mr. Henry Gordon," declared Nancy, in some doubt.

"Henry is his front name," admitted Scorch, rumpling his red top-knot. "But I guess I'd better ask first if he'll have you in."

"Just tell him it's me, please," said Nancy, faintly.

"What did you say the name was, Miss?"

"Nancy Nelson. He'll know. I'm his ward."

"Aw, no! You ain't?"

"Yes, I am," said Nancy, nodding.

"Never knowed he had one. So he is yer gardeen?" grunted the red-haired boy, unwinding his legs.

The girl thought she had chatted quite enough with this very bold youth, so made no further reply.

"Ain't he the sly one?" proceeded "Scorch" O'Brien, shaking his head. "Him a gardeen—an' I never knowed it before."

Evidently the fact that anything of such moment had escaped him rased the temper of the boy. He went off muttering, and came back again, in a minute, grinning.

"Say! he must have robbed you of the estate. It sure scared him when I announced your name. Never seen him turn a hair before; but he wasn't looking for no 'Nancy Nelson' ter come up and confront him like this."

Nancy, rather offended at this "fresh" youth, swept by him through the gateway and approached the door to which she had seen the flame-haired "Scorch" go in his quest of Mr. Gordon.

Yes! "Mr. Henry Gordon" was painted upon the door. She opened it slowly and looked in.

There was a great, broad table-desk, piled high with books and papers—a veritable wilderness of books and papers. In a broad armchair, with his back to the door, sat "Old Gudgeon," as "Scorch" had disrespectfully called Mr. Henry Gordon.

He was as broad as his chair. Indeed, he seemed to have been forced into it between the arms, by hydraulic pressure. Nancy did not see how he ever *could* get out of it!

He had enormous shoulders, fairly "humped" with layers of fat. His head was thrust forward as he wrote, and his shaven neck was pink, and bare, and overlapped his collar in a most astonishing way.

"Ahem!" said Nancy, clearing her throat a little. She had come inside and closed the door, and it seemed that Mr. Gordon was giving her no attention.

Then she chanced to look up and, on the wall beyond the desk, was a broad mirror tilted so that the lawyer needed but to raise his eyes to see reflected in the glass all that went on behind him.

And in that glass Nancy got her first glimpse of Henry Gordon's face.

It was really something more than a glimpse. The lawyer was evidently staring at her—had been doing so for some seconds. His great, broad, unwrinkled countenance seemed to have paled on her first appearance, for now the color was washing back into it in a wave of faint pink—a ruddy hue that was natural to so full-bodied a man.

"Come here, girl!"

The voice that rumbled out of Mr. Gordon's throat was commensurate with his bulk. He slowly turned his chair upon its pivot. Trembling, Nancy made her way across the rug to the corner of his desk.

All of a sudden every bit of courage she had plucked up, was swept away. She felt a queer emptiness within her. And in her throat a lump had risen so big that she could not swallow.

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CHAPTER V

NANCY'S CURIOUS EXPERIENCE

Mr. Gordon's eyes were brown. They were heavy-lidded so that Nancy could see very little of their expression. He was a smoothly-shaven man and his thick lips seemed grim.

"You—you are the girl?" demanded the lawyer.

"Yes—yes, sir," she said. "I'm Nancy Nelson."

"What are you doing here? Have you run away?" he shot at her, accentuating the query with a pointed forefinger.

Afterward she realized that that impaling index finger was a gesture of habit—it was his way of "spearing" witnesses in court when they were under fire.

"No, sir," replied Nancy, with more confidence.

"How do you come here, then?"

"I am on my way to Clintondale."

"Clintondale?"

"Pinewood Hall, you know. There—there is a four-hour wait here at Cincinnati, you know."

"I did *not* know," he rumbled forth. Then, like a flash, he demanded: "Who sent you here?"

This question took the last breath of wind out of Nancy's sails. She had, through it all, believed that he might be glad to see her. But now she realized that the opposite was the truth.

"Nobody sent me," she stammered.

"Not the woman at the other school—Miss—Miss Prentice?"

"No, sir. She does not know. I—I just wanted to see you."

"What for?" he asked, in the same sudden, gruff way.

"I—I thought you might want to see *me*, too," she hedged. "You—you know guardians usually *do* want to see their wards."

"Ha! who told you that I was your guardian?"

"No—no one; but you are, sir?" she questioned, fearfully.

"No, Miss. I am not."

"Then—then you only *act* for my guardian?"

He looked straight at her, and steadily, for several moments, without speaking. Nancy could learn nothing from his expression.

"I do not know that, legally speaking or otherwise, you have a guardian," he finally said.

"But—but—"

"Money passes through my hands for your support and schooling. That is all I can tell you. I am *not* your guardian."

"Oh, but surely!" cried the greatly perturbed girl, "you know something about me?"

"I know what your teachers have reported. They say you are fairly intelligent, remarkably healthy, and quite obedient."

"Oh, sir!"

"I consider *this* a flagrant case of disobedience. Don't let it happen again," pursued Mr. Gordon, sternly.

"But, sir! I cannot help it," cried poor Nancy, the tears now beginning to flow. "I feel sometimes as though I couldn't *live* unless I learned something about myself—who I am—who my folks were—why I am being educated—who is paying for it, and all—"

"You would better smother your curiosity," interrupted Mr. Gordon, the fat fingers of one hand playing a noiseless tattoo upon the edge of his desk. "I can tell you nothing."

"You are forbidden to tell?" gasped the girl.

"I know nothing, therefore I cannot tell. You came to me anonymously—that is, your identity aside from the name you bear was unknown to me. The money which supports you comes to me anonymously."

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"Oh!" The girl's real pain and disappointment were evident even to the case-hardened lawyer. He was silent while she sobbed with her eyes against her coat-sleeve. But no change of expression came into the face that, for long years, he had trained to hide emotion before juries and witnesses.

"I might have refused the task set me years ago when—when I introduced you into Miss Prentice's school," he said, at last. "I might have gone to the authorities and handed you over to them—money and all. To what end? I was assured that no further money would be devoted to your up-keep and education. You would then have had no better chance than that of any foundling in a public charitable institution. Not so nice; eh?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl again, looking at him now through her tears.

"So I accepted the responsibility—as I accept many responsibilities in the way of business. It is nothing personal to me. I am paid a certain sum for handling the money devoted to your support. That is all."

The girl asked a strange question—strange for one so young, at least. The thought had stabbed her like a knife:

"What would you do if I should die? How would you tell those—those who send the money?"

If the lawyer hesitated it was but for a moment. And his huge face was a veritable mask.

"I should advertise in the personal column of a certain metropolitan newspaper—that is all," he declared.

"Then—then I'm just nobody, after all?" sighed the girl, wiping her eyes.

"Why—why—I wouldn't say that!" and for the first time a little human note came into Mr. Gordon's voice, and his pink face seemed to become less grim.

"But that's what I *am*—Miss Nobody from Nowhere. I had no friends at Higbee School because of it; I'll have no standing at Pinewood Hall, either."

"Nonsense! nonsense!" ejaculated Mr. Gordon, tapping his desk again.

"Girls who have homes—and folks—don't want to associate with girls who come from nowhere and don't know anything about themselves."

"Well, well! That's a thought that had never entered my mind," said the lawyer, more to himself than to Nancy.

"You see how it is, sir. I thought there might be an estate, maybe. I thought maybe that, as so much money was being spent for me—I might be of some importance somewhere——"

"Ha!" exclaimed the lawyer, still staring at her.

"But now you say there's nobody—and nothing. Just money comes—comes out of the air for me. And you pass it on. Oh, dear me! it's very mysterious, sir."

He said nothing, but still looked at her.

"And you're not even my guardian! I hoped when I went to Pinewood and the girls began to get curious, I could talk about you," confessed Nancy, plaintively. "I thought maybe, if you even weren't married——"

"Ahem! I am *not* married," said the lawyer, quickly.

"But, then, if you were truly my guardian, I might come and see you once—or you could come to the school and see me," pursued the girl, wistfully. "But now—now there's nothing—absolutely nothing."

"Now there's nothing," repeated Mr. Gordon, uncompromisingly.

"And the girls at Pinewood Hall will be just like those at Higbee," sighed Nancy.

"How's that?" demanded Mr. Gordon.

"They won't want to associate with me—much. Their mothers won't let them invite me home. For I am a nobody. I heard one lady tell Miss Prentice once that one never knew what might happen if one allowed one's girls to associate with girls who had no family. Of course not. I couldn't blame 'em."

"Ha!" ejaculated Mr. Gordon again.

"You see, my people might have been dreadful criminals—or something," went on Nancy. "It might all come out some day,—and then nice people wouldn't want their girls to have been associated with me."

"Ha!" repeated the lawyer.

"You see how it is; don't you?" explained Nancy, softly. "Miss Prentice would not let the girls write home about me. And when they learned last June that I was going to Pinewood they all thought my folks must really be rich. So *that* was all right.

"But I thought if I could see you, you would tell me all there was to know about myself—and my people; and that maybe I could talk about my guardian and make it all right with those new girls."

"I've told you all I know," said Mr. Gordon, almost sullenly, it seemed.

"Well, then, I—I guess I'll be going," said Nancy, faintly, and turning from the desk. "I—I'm sorry I bothered you, sir."

"Where are you going?" demanded the lawyer.

"Why—why, to Clintondale, sir."

"Ha! I'll make sure that you get on the right train, at any rate," he said, and pressed a button under the edge of his desk. "Have you had your luncheon?"

"No, sir. Not yet."

He plucked a ten-dollar note out of his vest pocket and thrust it into her hand. "Get your luncheon." The door opened and the red-headed boy looked in. "Pay for 'Scorch's' luncheon, too."

"Ye-es, sir," said Nancy, faintly.

"Scorch!" commanded Mr. Gordon.

"Yessir!" snapped the office boy.

"It's about your lunch hour?"

"Yessir!"

"Take—take Miss Nancy Nelson to Arrandale's. Afterward take her to the station and put her aboard the right train for Clintondale. Understand?"

"Yessir!"

Mr. Gordon wheeled back to his desk. He did not even say good-bye to Nancy as Scorch held the door open for her to pass out.

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CHAPTER VI

THE UNRIVALED SCORCH

"Say! ain't Old Gudgeon a good one?" murmured the red-headed boy, as he followed Nancy to the gate.

She did not answer. That lump had come back into her throat and she was industriously swallowing it. It seemed to her just then as though it would never be possible for her to eat luncheon at Arrandale's,—wherever that might be.

Scorch caught up his cap and hustled her out of the gate, and out of the main office door, and whistled shrilly to an elevator that was just shooting down.

"Come on, Nancy!" he said, with immense patronage. "We'll have a swell dinner and it takes time to do it. When does your train get away?"

She managed to tell him.

"Golly! we are all right, then. We can talk over the eats, an' you can tell me your troubles and I'll relate the story of my life to you—eh?"

The girl tried to smile at him, for she realized that his chatter was kept up partly for the purpose of covering her disappointment. But Nancy was no baby-girl; by the time the elevator reached the lower floor of the building she had winked back her tears and the ache had gone out of her throat.

"This way, Nancy," said her conductor, cheerfully rushing her through the revolving door to the sidewalk. "There's Arrandale's over yonder. If I'd known I was going to eat at such a swell place to-day I'd have worn my glad rags—good duds, you know."

"You—you look all right," returned Nancy, smiling, for the red-headed boy did indeed have a neat appearance. Somebody took pains to make him spruce when he started for the office in the morning. "I guess you've got some folks?" she questioned.

"Sure. My mother scrubs out the offices. That's how I come by my job. My big sister keeps house for us, an' the kids are in school. Yes! there's folks enough belonging to me. But my father is dead."

"I—I don't know anything about my father or mother—or any of my folks."

"No! Don't old Gordon know?"

"He says not."

"And he's your guardeen?"

Nancy was silent for a moment. But she was a perfectly honest girl and she knew she was allowing Scorch to gain a wrong impression.

"He—he isn't my guardian," she blurted out as they crossed the street.

"Hey? I thought you said he was!"

"And I thought so, then. This is the first time I ever saw him. He says he is not my guardian and that he doesn't know anything about me. He only has money sent to him to spend for me."

"You don't mean it?" cried Scorch, his eyes twinkling. "That's like a story; ain't it? You're the mysterious heiress who doesn't know who she is. That's great!"

"Do you think so?" demanded Nancy, rather warmly. "Well, let me tell you it isn't nice at all."

"Why not?" demanded the romance-loving youth.

"Why.... The girls at school think it's so odd. I'm just Miss Nobody from Nowhere. And they've all got folks."

"Gee!" observed Scorch, getting a new idea of the situation.

They reached the door of the fashionable restaurant and Scorch led the way in with characteristic *sang froid*. He would have approached a king or an emperor with perfect ease. Nothing ever "feazed" him, as he was wont to boast.

The head-waiter looked a little askance at the red-headed office boy; but Nancy, in her neat outfit, reassured him, and he led them to a table and drew out the chair for the girl.

"Bring us a couple of time-tables so we can pick our eats," ordered Scorch.

"Hush!" commanded Nancy, blushing a little. "Other people will hear you."

"That's what I talk for," declared the unabashed boy.

"Well, now you're going to be a real nice boy while you're with me; aren't you? They might take you for my brother, and I wouldn't want to be ashamed of your manners."

"That's a hot one!" observed Scorch, admiringly. "You're not so slow after all, Nancy."

"Miss Nancy, please," corrected the girl, smiling at him.

"Say! but you are particular."

"I believe you know how to conduct yourself much better than you appear," said the girl, looking at him seriously.

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"Discovered!" mocked the red-haired one, grinning. "But it's hard work to be proper."

"Why?"

"Because of my hair."

"Your hair?"

"Yep."

"I don't see what—what light-colored hair has to do with your manners," confessed Nancy.

"Light-colored—I like that!" exclaimed Scorch. "Trying to let me down easy—eh?"

"We-ell—"

"It's red. Say! nobody's ever let me forget it since I could creep," declared the boy. "I useter lick all the boys I could at Number Six school, an' those that I couldn't lick I threw stones at. For calling my hair out o' name, I mean."

"I suppose being red-headed *is* hard," commented Nancy.

"Say! bein' an heiress without no folks ain't in it with being a carrot-top," said Scorch, grinning.

"Don't you think so?"

"The folks in the office began getting fresh right away," went on the boy, earnestly. "Some of the girls that run the typewriters was as bad as the Willy-boys, too. They'd come up and try warming their hands over my head, an' all those back-number jokes.

"So I had ter give 'em better than they sent, or they'd have put it all over me. Men that come in to see the boss, or Old Gordon, or the others, see my fiery top-knot, and they try to crack jokes on me. So I have to crack a few.

"So that's why I act so fresh. Natcherly I'm as tame as though I wore a velvet jacket and curls; it's just havin' to defend myself, that's made me what I am," declared Scorch, shaking his head, mournfully, as he prepared to eat his soup with much gusto.

"Oh, don't!" begged Nancy. "Don't make so much noise."

"That's so! I was thinkin' I was at Joe's, where I us'ly feeds," and the boy proceeded to use his spoon with a proper regard for the niceties of the table.

"There! I knew very well you knew how," said Nancy.

"But it hurts!" exclaimed Scorch, with a wicked grin.

"And that is never your real name?" asked Nancy, after a moment.

"Scorch'?"

"Yes. It refers to your hair, I suppose."

"You're a clairvoyant, lady," said the boy. "I gotter real, sure-'nuff name. But I forget it. My mother don't even remember it any more. But 'Scorch' don't just mean my color. It's because I'm some scorcher," proceeded the boy, with pride.

"There weren't any kids my size or age could outrun me at school—nix! and I won a medal when I worked for the District Telegraph Company. I was the one fast kid that ever rushed flimsies."

"What's *that*?" demanded Nancy, in wonder.

"Carried telegrams. But I couldn't stop there. The other kids pounded the life pretty near out of me," he said, with perfect seriousness.

"Oh! why were they so mean?"

"'Cause I set 'em all a pace that they couldn't keep up with. So they fired me out of the union, and then the boss fired me because I was always all marred up from fighting the other kids. So I come to work at that law shop."

Under advice from the knowing Scorch, Nancy had ordered the very nicest little luncheon she had ever eaten. And the boy gave evidence of enjoying it even more than she did.

Indeed, her appetite was soon satisfied; but Scorch kept her answering questions about herself; and soon she found that she was being quite as confidential with this red-headed office boy as she ever had been with anybody in her life.

"Say! did it ever strike you that Old Gordon might be stringing you?" demanded Scorch.

His slang puzzled the girl not a little; but the red-headed one explained:

"Suppose he *did* know all about you and your folks—only he didn't want to tell?"

"But *why*?"

"Oh, ain't you green?" demanded Scorch. "Don't you see he might be making money out of you? Mebbe there's a pile of money, and he's using only a little for you and putting the rest of it in his pocket?"

"Oh, I don't believe Mr. Gordon would do such an awful thing," gasped Nancy, shaking her head vigorously.

"Well, they do it to heiresses in stories," returned Scorch, doggedly. "And worse."

"But I don't believe it."

"That's all right—that's all right," said the boy. "You're not supposed to believe it. You're the heroine; they never believe anything but what's all nice and proper," urged Scorch. "You lemme alone. I'm goin' to watch Gordon. If he's up to something foxy, I'll find it out. Then I'll write to you. Say! where's this jail they're goin' to put you in?"

"It's no jail," laughed Nancy, immensely amused, after all, by this romantic and slangy youth. "It's a beautiful school. It's Pinewood Hall. It's at Clintondale, on Clinton River. And it's very select."

"It's what?"

"Select. It costs a lot of money to go there. The girls are very nice."

"All right. You can get a letter, just the same; can't you?"

"Why—I suppose so. I—I never *did* receive a letter—not one."

"All right. You'll get one from me," promised Scorch, with assurance. "If I find out anything about Old Gordon that looks like we was on his trail, I'll let you know."

"That's very nice of you," replied Nancy, demurely, but quite amused. "Now, have you

finished, Scorch?"

"Full up," declared the youngster. "The gangplank's ashore and we're ready to sail—if we ain't overloaded," and he got up from his chair with apparent difficulty.

Nancy had paid the bill and tipped the waiter. She had a good bit of the ten dollars left to slip back in her pocketbook; but she reserved a crisp dollar-bill where it would be handy.

They had plenty of time to walk to the station, and Nancy was glad to do this. Besides, Scorch declared he needed the exercise.

The red-headed boy was a mixture of good-heartedness and mischievousness that both delighted Nancy and horrified her. He was saucy to policemen, truckmen, and anybody who undertook to treat him carelessly on the street. But he aided his charge very carefully over all the crossings, and once ran back into the middle of the street and held up traffic to pick up an old woman's parcel.

They came to the station, got Nancy's bag, and Scorch insisted upon taking her to the very step of the car. When she shook hands with him Nancy had the banknote ready and she left it in his hand.

Before she got up the steps, however, he ran back, pushed aside the brakeman, and reached her.

"Say! you can't do that," he gasped, his face as red as his hair.

"Do what?" demanded the girl.

"You can't tip *me*. Say! I ain't the waiter—nor the janitor of the flat. I'm the hero—and the heroine never tips the hero—nix on that!"

The next moment he had thrust the dollar-bill into her hand, jumped down to the platform, and scuttled through the crowd, leaving Nancy with the feeling that she had offended a friend.

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CHAPTER VII

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

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When the train pulled out of the station Nancy Nelson noticed for the first time that the sky had become overcast and the clouds threatened rain. Scorch O'Brien, the odd new friend she had made, was so sprightly a soul that she really had not observed the change in the weather.

"Oh! I'd like to have a brother like him," she thought. "I don't care if he *is* slangy—and fresh. I guess he wouldn't be so if—as he says—everybody didn't try to poke fun at his red hair. And how homely he is!"

She smiled happily over some of Scorch's sayings and his impish doings; so they were some miles on the journey before she began to look about the car.

Her ticket had called for a chair in the parlor-car; and she immediately discovered that she was not the only girl who seemed to be traveling alone.

At least there were half a dozen girls not far from her own age who were chattering together some distance forward of her seat. When the conductor came along he smiled down upon Nancy and asked, as he punched her ticket:

"You going to Pinewood, too?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your first term there?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Then you don't know these other girls?" and he nodded to the group further up the car.

"No, sir. Are *they* going there, too?" asked Nancy, eagerly.

"Yes. I've been carrying a lot of them to Clintondale this week. The Hall opens day after tomorrow. Anybody to meet you, Miss?"

"I telegraphed on from Cincinnati," said Nancy.

"That's all right, then. One of the 'bus men will be on the lookout for you."

"But are those all new girls, too?" asked Nancy, earnestly, as the conductor was about to pass on.

"No. But most of them have been there only one term. That tall girl is named Montgomery. Her father's a State Senator—guess you've heard of Senator Montgomery? Go up and speak to them," and the conductor passed on.

But Nancy did not have the courage to take his advice. She, however, observed the girls with renewed interest.

The tall one—the Montgomery girl—was very richly dressed, and she seemed to think a good deal of what she wore. She was always arranging her gown, and looking in the glass to see if her hat was on straight—and occasionally Nancy caught her powdering her nose.

There was a black-haired girl, too, with very sharp eyes and a lean face, who laughed whenever the Montgomery girl said anything supposed to be funny, and seemed to ape the Senator's daughter in other ways, too. The other girls called her "Cora."

Once Nancy went forward to get a drink of water. She passed the group of her future schoolmates slowly, hoping that some of them would speak to her. But none did, and when she came back down the aisle, the tall girl eyed her with disdain.

Nancy flushed and hurried by; but not too quickly to hear the Montgomery girl say:

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"Trying to butt in, I guess."

The girl called Cora laughed shrilly.

"I guess I'm not going to like *those* girls," sighed Nancy. And then she shivered as she thought of how mean they might be if they ever found out that she was "Miss Nobody from Nowhere."

The rain began to slant across the open fields and trace a pattern upon the broad, thick, glass beside her so that she could no longer see out. Besides, it was growing dark early.

The train passed through towns that seemed all gloomy, smoky brick buildings, or shanties clinging like goats to the sides of high bluffs. A pall of dun vapor hung over these towns, and the lonely Nancy was glad when the train did not stop.

Sometimes they dashed into a tunnel, and a cloud of stifling smoke wrapped the cars about and the cinders rattled against the ventilators and roof.

On and on swept the train, and at last the brakeman, as they left one station, announced:

"Next stop Clintondale!"

Nancy began to gather her things together and put on her coat long before the train slowed down. Then the other girls got ready leisurely, still chatting.

The rain beat harder against the window. It was after seven o'clock. They passed a block-tower with its lights and semaphore. Then the grinding brakes warned her that her destination was at hand.

The end of the wet platform flashed into view. There were dazzling lights, rumbling hand-trucks, and people running about.

As she came to the door of the car—she did not go out by the one chosen by the Senator's daughter and her friends—the roar of voices burst upon her ear:

"Clinton Hotel! This way!"

"Pinewood Hall! This is the 'bus for the school! Pinewood Hall!"

"Carriage, Miss! Private carriage, Miss!"

"Pinewood Hall! Pinewood Hall!"

"Clinton House! Come on, here, you that want the hotel."

"'Bus for Pinewood. That you, Miss Briggs? Going with me? Where's yer check?"

"This way for the school. Pinewood Hall! Hi, there, Jim! Found that other one? Miss Nelson! Miss Nelson! Who's seen Miss Nelson?"

Suddenly Nancy realized that the big man in front of her was roaring her name in stentorian tones.

"Oh, oh!" she gasped. "I'm Miss Nelson."

"All right. Here she is, Jim! Right this way to the 'bus. Where's your check, Miss? All right. Have the trunk and bag up some time to-night—if they are here."

"They should have come on the earlier train," explained Nancy.

"All right. Then you'll git 'em on this load. There's the 'bus, Miss. Yes! there's room for you in there."

The omnibus was backed up against the platform under the hood of the station. There was a crowd of laughing, chattering girls before her in the vehicle.

"Now, Jim! you can't put another livin' soul in this 'bus—you know you can't," cried one, to the driver.

"Boss says so, Miss," growled Jim.

"What do you think we are—sardines? Oh! my foot!" shrieked another girl.

"And she's a greeny, too. Any of you ever see her before?" demanded one of the girls nearest the half-closed door.

"Say! what's your name?" asked another girl, leaning out to speak to Nancy.

Nancy told her.

"She's green—what did I tell you? And we're all sophs here. Say, Freshie! don't you know you don't belong in here?"

"She'll have to ride with you, Jim, on the front seat."

"Now! you know what the Madame would say to *that*, Miss," growled Jim.

"Here!" interposed Nancy herself. "I don't want to ride with you any more than you seem to want me. But it's raining, and I don't propose to get wet," and she sturdily shouldered her way past the driver and into the 'bus between the knees of the girls on either hand.

"I can stand," she said, grimly.

"But don't stand on my foot, please, Miss!" snapped a girl she was crowding. "Haven't you any feet of your own?"

"Oh, cracky, Bertha! you know she's got to stand somewhere. And your feet——"

"Ouch! who are *you* shoving?"

"Step forward, please!"

"Plenty of room up front!"

"Why, Belle Macdonald's piled her bags up in the corner and has gone to sleep on 'em!" shrieked somebody from ahead, as the 'bus lurched forward.

Nancy was confused, hurt, and ashamed. The horse splashed through the puddles and the 'bus plunged and shook over the cobbles.

There were few street lights, and such as there were were dim and wavering in the mist and falling rain. She could see nothing of Clintondale, except that huge trees lined the streets.

The girls were cross, or loud. Not one spoke to her kindly. She was shaken about by the 'bus, and scolded by those whom she was forced to trample upon when she lost her footing.

The new girl from Higbee was much depressed. All her pride and satisfaction in being sent to such a popular school as Pinewood had oozed away.

Her experience with Mr. Gordon added to her unhappiness. She had learned nothing by going to him. He had even called her disobedient.

If these girls were a sample of Pinewood Hall pupils, Nancy knew that she had a hard row to

hoe ahead of her. And she had not liked the appearance of those other girls in the train, either.

It was a hopeless outlook. She would have cried—only she was ashamed to do so in the sight of these sharp-tongued, quarreling sophomores. Poor Nancy Nelson's introduction to Pinewood Hall seemed a most unfortunate one.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MADAME

The omnibus lurched through a wide gateway where two huge stone pillars almost hid a tiny lodge, the latter aglow with lamplight. Pinewood had once been a famous private estate, and a Vice-president of the United States had lived in it.

But for many years it had been a girls' school, and Madame Schakael had come from Germany to be its principal. As a little girl she had attended the school herself, Nancy knew, and she had afterward—after being an instructor in college—married a German professor and gone to his country.

He was now dead and Madame had come back to her native land and to her much beloved preparatory school.

The door of the lodge opened and Nancy saw a very neat looking woman with a dark dress and gingham apron standing in the doorway. She waved a hand and her cheerful voice reached the ears of the wrangling girls in the 'bus.

"Welcome, young ladies! Are you all right? Are there any new ones there?"

"We're all sophs but one greeny," called one of the girls. "Glad to see you, Jessie Pease."

"Thank you, Miss. The new one is to go to the Madame at once. That is the order. Let her go before supper."

The driver snapped his whip and the 'bus rumbled on. The drive was winding and the trees soon hid the lighted lodge.

But other bright lamps began to appear ahead. By stooping, as she clung to one of the handstraps, Nancy was able to descry the outlines of several big buildings—or a huge building with several wings; she did not know which it was, and did not feel like inquiring.

Indeed, after entering the 'bus she had not spoken to the girls at all. Some of them had thrown a question at her now and then, but it had been either an impudent or an unkind one, and she had grimly held her tongue.

At last the 'bus stopped at the foot of a wide flight of steps. A great awning of glass and iron sheltered the porch and steps. Under this burned a bright light, and within the building Nancy could see a great hall with two staircases rising out of it.

This was indeed a very different place from Higbee School, with its cottages and one small recitation hall.

"Come on! You get out first, Greeny," commanded one girl. "You were the last sardine shoved into this awful box. Move; can't you?"

Nancy rescued her bag from under their feet and staggered out of the door of the 'bus. The other girls piled after her.

There were very few on the porch to receive them; boisterousness would not have been allowed here. But there were lights in a long room at one side—Nancy could see them shining through the windows—and a rattle of china and glass, and loud talking and laughter, pointed the way to the dining room.

"But you're on starvation diet, Greeny," said one of the girls, with a malicious laugh. "No dinner for you till you've seen the Madame."

At that moment considerable disturbance was raised over the fact that the 'bus was driving off with one of the girls still in it.

"Let Belle Macdonald out! I told you she was asleep in there," cried one of the sophs, running after the driver through the puddles.

He pulled up and they managed to rouse Miss Macdonald, who was a fat girl with innumerable bags and parcels. She staggered out of the 'bus, dropping sundry of her impedimenta, sleepy and yawning.

"I don't care, girls. I was up all last night at a party at home, and I haven't slept much for a week," she said, heavily. "Come on, Judy. You bring part of my things; will you?"

"Come on in to dinner," said the girl who helped the sleepy one.

"Believe *me!* I'd be asleep in a minute. I'm going to tumble into bed. Anybody know if Judy and I have got the same old hole-in-the-wall to sleep in?"

"Go up and grab it, anyhow," advised her chum. "I'll bring the rest of these things when I come. And don't fall down in one of the corridors and go fast asleep, Belle, for I'll never be able to drag you off to bed."

They trooped away, leaving Nancy and her bag practically alone on the porch. Nancy had never realized that girls could be so hateful.

But she forgot that these were all sophomores, and the second-year girls and freshmen at Pinewood Hall were as far apart as the poles.

The new girl went timidly into the hall. The chime of distant laughter still came from the room

where the new arrivals were eating their evening meal, evidently under little discipline on this first night.

There seemed to be no real "greeny" but herself about. She saw several girls pass and repass at the far end of the hall, and others mounted the staircases; but at first nobody spoke to Nancy.

She was not naturally a timid girl; but all this was strange to her. She faced a row of closed doors upon the side of the corridor opposite the dining place. One of these might be the door of the principal's office; but which one Nancy could not guess.

For five minutes she waited. Then suddenly she was aware of a tall and very dark girl coming down one of the great staircases.

This newcomer must have been eighteen or nineteen—a "big girl" indeed in Nancy's eyes. And such a pretty girl! The "greeny" had never in her life seen so pretty a girl before.

She was dark, her eyes were black, her hair was banded about her head, and her lips were so red that they might have been painted. But her color was natural—cheeks as well as lips. A flashing, cheerful countenance she turned on Nancy, and she said, before she reached the foot of the stairs:

"You're a new girl, I am sure. Hasn't anybody spoken to you? Where do you want to go?"

The mere tone of this girl's voice seemed to change the atmosphere that had so depressed Nancy. That lump was in her throat again, but she could smile at the serene beauty.

"I was told to see Madame Schakael—before having dinner. But I don't know where to find her," confessed Nancy.

"Oh, that's easy," cried the other girl. "I'll show you. What is your name, please?"

Nancy told her.

"I am Corinne Pevay," said the other, pronouncing her name in the French manner. "I am a senior. I hope you will be happy here, Nancy Nelson."

"Thank you!" gasped the younger girl, having hard work now to keep from crying. The kind word moved her more than the neglect of the other girls.

Corinne led the way to one of the doors and opened it composedly. Through a richly furnished anteroom she preceded the new girl and knocked lightly upon another door.

"Enter!" responded a pleasant voice.

Corinne turned the knob, looked in, said "Good-evening!" brightly, and then stood aside for Nancy to pass her.

"Another newcomer, Madame—Nancy Nelson."

"Come in, too, Corinne," said the pleasant voice.

Nancy passed through and saw the owner of the voice. She was a little lady—a veritable doll-like person. She sat on a high chair at a desk-table, with her tiny feet upon a hassock, for they could not reach the floor.

"Come hither, Nancy Nelson. You are the girl of whom my good friend, Miss Prentice, of the Higbee School, wrote me? I am glad to see you, child," declared Madame Schakael.

Her hair was a silvery gray, but there was a lot of it, and her complexion was as rosy as Nancy's own. She must have passed the half-century mark some time before, but the principal of Pinewood Hall betrayed few marks of the years in her face.

She had shrewd gray eyes, however, and rather heavy brows. Nancy thought at once that no girl would undertake to take advantage of Madame Schakael, despite her diminutive size. Those eyes could see right through shams, and her lips were firm.

She took Nancy's hand and drew the girl around to her side. There she studied the newcomer's face earnestly, and in silence.

"We have here one of the sensitive ones, Corinne," she said, at last, speaking to the senior instead of to Nancy. "But she is 'true blue.' She will make a fine Pinewood girl—yes, yes!"

"We will try to make her happy here—though she does not look entirely happy now," and Madame laughed in a quick, low way that pleased the new girl vastly.

"Ah! there she smiles. Nancy Nelson, you look much prettier when you smile—cultivate smiling, therefore. That must be your first lesson here at Pinewood Hall.

"Happiness is born of making other people happy. See if you can't do someone a good turn every day. You'll get along splendidly that way, Nancy.

"Now, as for the lessons—you stood well in your classes at Higbee. You will find it no harder to stand well here, I am sure. I shall expect to hear good reports of you. Classes begin day after to-morrow.

"Meanwhile, make yourself at home about the Hall; learn your way about; get acquainted—especially with the members of your own class. I shall put Nancy Nelson on your side of the Hall, Corinne—the West Side."

"Then I'll take her right up and show her the room. What is it to be, Madame?" asked Corinne, cheerfully.

The principal ran through several pages of a ledger before replying.

"Number 30, West."

"She's chummed with Miss Rathmore, then," said the older girl, quickly.

"Yes. I must break up that clique. Put her with Miss Rathmore. And do see that the child has some dinner; she must be hungry," said the Madame, laughing again.

Then she once more shook Nancy's hand.

"Go with Corinne, dear. If you want to know anything, ask her. Read the rules of the Hall, which you will find framed in your room. If you obey them cheerfully, you can't go far wrong. Good-night, Nancy Nelson! and I hope you will sleep well your first night at Pinewood Hall."

CHAPTER IX

CORA RATHMORE

Nancy followed the senior out of the principal's presence, feeling much encouraged. Madame Schakael was so different from Miss Prentice, the principal of the school at which Nancy had lived so many years.

"Isn't she just the sweetest woman you ever met?" demanded Corinne, enthusiastically.

"She is lovely," responded Nancy.

"But she is firm. Don't try to take any advantage of her," laughed the senior. "You will find that she is only doll-like in appearance. She is a very scholarly woman, and she believes strongly in discipline. But she gets effects without dealing out much punishment. You'll learn."

"I hope I won't need to learn her stern side," said Nancy, smiling.

"Well, you seem a sensible kid," said the older girl, patting her on the shoulder. "Come on, now, and have your dinner. Then I'll take you up into our side of the hall."

"I hope I am not taking up your time too much, Miss—Miss Pevay," said Nancy.

"Not at all," laughed the senior. "What is the good of being boss of a 'side' if one has no responsibilities? It's an honor to be captain of the West Side of Pinewood Hall."

"Oh! it must be," agreed Nancy, who thought this beautiful girl a very great person indeed.

They came to the long room in which the tables were set. There were only a few girls in the room. Nancy at once saw the Montgomery girl and her friends at one table, but was glad that Miss Pevay did not approach them.

Indeed, Corinne took her to one of the senior tables where two or three of the older pupils of Pinewood were grouped.

"Here's a little 'greeny' who has come among us hungry," laughed the senior, urging Nancy into a chair and beckoning to one of the waitresses.

The other big girls were kind to the newcomer; but they had interests of their own and what they chatted about was all "Greek" to Nancy Nelson. So she gave her strict attention to the food.

The dinner was nicely served and was much better than the food usually put on the table at Higbee School. By this time Nancy *was* hungry, and she did full justice to the repast. Meanwhile an occasional brisk fire of conversation between Corinne and her friends penetrated to Nancy's rather confused understanding.

"Are all the nice boys back at Clinton Academy this half, do you know, Corinne?"

"Don't ask me! I can't keep run of *all* Dr. Dudley's boys," laughed Miss Pevay.

"Well, I hope Bob Endress has come. He's certainly one nice boy," cried another of the seniors.

"Why! he's only a child!" drawled another young lady. "If he is back this fall it is only to begin his junior year."

"I don't care," said Corinne. "He really *is* a nice boy. I agree with Mary."

"Say! the Montgomery girl told me Bob came near being drowned this summer. What do you know about that?"

"Oh, Carrie!"

"She had all the details, so I guess it's so. He is some sort of a distant relative of hers——"

"I'd want the relationship to be mighty distant if I were Bob," laughed the girl named Mary.

"Quite so," said the teller of the tale. "However, he went automobiling with the Montgomerys through to Chicago. And on the road he fell into some pond, or river, and he can't swim——"

"But he can skate—beautifully," sighed Corinne. "I hope there'll be good skating this winter on Clinton River."

"Me, too! And me! Oh, I adore skating!" were the chorused exclamations from the group.

Corinne now noted that Nancy had finished.

"Come! I've got to stow little 'greeny' away for the night," she said, pinching Nancy's plump cheek. "Come on, kid! It'll soon be bedtime for first-readers."

Nancy did not mind this playful reference to her juvenile state, it was said so pleasantly. She followed Corinne docilely up the broad flight into the west wing of the great building. Once it had been a private residence; but it was big enough to be called a castle.

The rooms on the lower floor had not been much changed when Pinewood Hall became a preparatory school for girls. But above the first story the old partitions had been ripped out and the floors cut up on each side of the main stairways into a single broad, T-shaped corridor and many reasonably spacious bedrooms and studies.

One walked out of the corridor into the studies; the bedrooms were back of these dens, with broad windows, overlooking the beautiful grounds.

On the first dormitory floor were the instructors' rooms, for the most part. One lady teacher only slept on the second floor; above, the seniors and juniors governed their own dormitories. By the time the girls came to their last two years at Pinewood Hall, Madame Schakael believed that they should be governed by honor solely.

The freshies were paired on the first dormitory floor—two girls in each apartment. Number 30, Nancy found, was upon one of the "arms" of the corridor, and a good way from any of the teachers' studies, and from the main stairway.

When Corinne and Nancy came to Number 30 there was nobody in the study or bedroom. The older girl snapped on the electric lights by pushing a button in the wall beside the entrance door.

"Rathmore is your chum," said Corinne, lightly. "I hope you two girls will get on well together. I like to have all the chums live together without friction—for it is easier for me, and easier for the teachers.

"Now, Cora Rathmore has been here half a term already. Some of your class came in last spring so as to take up certain studies to fit them for the beginning of the fall work. I presume, from what Madame Schakael says, that your school was a pretty good one, and that you were brought along farther in your primary and grammar studies than some of the others.

"However, Rathmore knows her way about. She—she's not a bad sort; but she and some of her friends last spring made the former West Side captain considerable trouble.

"So those girls who were bothersome," pursued Corinne, "can't room together again this half. There! that is your side of the room. That's your bed, and your cupboard and locker, and your dressing table. Keep everything neat, Nancy. That's the first commandment at Pinewood Hall. And the other commandments you can read on that framed list," and she pointed to a brief schedule of rules and duties hanging on the wall of the study.

Then the senior put her arm around the new girl and gave her a resounding kiss upon her plump cheek.

"You're a nice little thing, I believe. Good-night!" she said, and ran out of the room.

But she left Nancy Nelson feeling almost as though she had deliberately deceived the senior. Would Corinne Pevay have been so friendly—and kissed her—if she had been aware that Nancy was just "Miss Nobody from Nowhere?"

After a little, however, the new girl opened her handbag and took out her toilet articles and her, nightgown, robe, and slippers. She arranged the brushes, and other things on the dressing table, and hung her robe and gown in their proper place.

It was now nearly nine o'clock. She understood that, during term time, at least, the freshman class were to be in bed at nine; and even the seniors must have their lights out at ten o'clock.

She read the list of rules through carefully. They did not seem hard, or arbitrary. Miss Prentice had been strict, indeed. To Nancy these "commandments" seemed easily kept.

There were two small desks in the room. Nancy examined the one upon her own side of the study and found only stationery, blank books, pencils, and pen and ink. There were no books.

But she ventured to look in the other desk, which was not locked, and saw that here were several text-books, evidently to be studied by the freshmen this first year.

In each book was written the name of Cora Rathmore. It was an erect, angular handwriting, and somehow Nancy drew from it that she would not like the owner of the books.

And yet she wanted to like her. Nancy longed for a real chum. She wished that her suspicions might prove to be unfounded, and that her roommate might be a jolly, open-hearted girl who would like her, and—

"Well! perhaps you don't know that that is *my* desk?" snapped a voice suddenly, behind her.

Nancy dropped the book, startled. She wheeled to see confronting her, just within the room, the black-eyed, thin-faced girl who had seemed on the train to be Grace Montgomery's chief friend.

"Well! haven't you got anything to say?" demanded the sharp-voiced girl.

"Why, I wondered what our books were going to be like——"

"Now you know. Keep out of my desk hereafter," interposed the other girl. "And please to inform me what you're doing in here, anyway?"

"Why, I—I have been chummed with you—if you are Cora Rathmore," said Nancy.

"*You?*" shrieked the other. "No! it's not so! I won't have it! I was just going to get my books and go to Grace's room——"

"Oh, I know nothing about *that*," said Nancy, hastily. "I only know that Miss Pevay brought me to this room and said I must chum with the girl who was here."

"It's not so! I don't believe you!" cried Cora. "And that stuck-up thing,—that French-Canadian smartie!—just did it to be mean. I'm going to Madame——"

Nancy really hoped she would. She hoped with all her heart that it would prove a mistake that Cora Rathmore was chummed with her. She knew very well now that her suspicions had justification in fact. This girl was a most unpleasant roommate.

At that moment the door banged open and another girl came flying in.

"Oh, Cora! have you found out? We can't do it?"

"Found out what?" snapped Cora.

"We can't pick our rooms as we did last spring. Grace has been sent clear over into the other corridor, and is paired with a greeny——Say, who's *this*?"

"Oh, I don't know!" said Cora, sullenly sitting down. "It's just too mean! I've got to stop here, I suppose."

"And they've taken Belle from me and given me Annie Gibbons," cried the visitor. "And Annie snores—horridly!"

"It's a hateful place," snarled Cora Rathmore.

"I wish my folks hadn't sent me here," groaned the other.

"I'd run away—for half a cent," declared the Rathmore girl.

"Where would you run to?" demanded her friend.

"Anywhere. To the city. I don't care. Pinewood Hall isn't going to be any fun at all, if we can't pair off as we choose."

"Who's your chum?" asked the visitor again, eyeing Nancy, who had returned to her own side of the room and had turned her back to them.

"Oh, I don't know. Some *nobody*, of course!"

The words cut Nancy to the heart. The very phrase, uttered by chance, was the one she had feared most in coming to Pinewood Hall.

"Oh," thought she, "if they say that of me already, what *will* they say when they find that I

CHAPTER X

"WHO IS SHE, ANYWAY?"

The curfew bell sent the younger girls to their rooms a few moments later; but Cora Rathmore went to bed without speaking to her roommate. And Nancy felt too unhappy herself to try to overcome the other girl's reticence.

The girl from Higbee School had had so many adventures that day that she could not at once go to sleep. She lay awake a long time after Cora's heavy and regular breathing assured her that her companion in Number 30 was in the land of dreams.

She heard the gong at ten which demanded silence and "lights out" of the girls on the upper dormitory floors. Then a list-slipped teacher went through the corridor. After that she went to sleep.

But her own dreams were not very restful. She was hiding something all night long from some creature that had a hundred eyes!

In the morning, when she awoke, she knew that what she had been trying to hide—what she *must* hide, indeed—was the knowledge that she was "Miss Nobody" from all these eager, inquisitive, perhaps heartless girls.

Nancy had been in the habit of rising early, and she was up and dressed before rising bell at seven. When Cora rolled over sleepily and blinked about the sun-flooded room, she saw Nancy tying her hair-ribbon, being otherwise completely dressed, and she whined:

"Well! I sha'n't like *you*, Miss. I can see that, plainly. You don't know enough to lie abed and let a fellow sleep."

"I am sure *I* did not wake you," replied Nancy, composedly. "It was the gong."

"Bah!" grumbled Cora, crawling out of bed.

Nancy had read over the rules again and she knew that from rising bell until breakfast at half-past seven she was free to do as she chose. So, not caring to listen to her roommate's ill-natured remarks, she slipped out and found her way downstairs and out of the building.

It was a clear, warm September morning. The leaves on the distant maples had only just begun to turn. The lawns before Pinewood Hall were beautiful. Behind and on both sides of the great main building was the grove of huge pine trees that gave the place its name.

Beautifully smooth, pebbled paths led through this grove in several directions. Nancy chanced upon one that led to the gymnasium and swimming pool. There were tennis and basketball courts, and other means of athletic enjoyment.

Down the easy slope, from the top of the knoll where the gym. stood, flowed the wide, quiet Clinton River, with a pennant snapping in the morning breeze on the staff a-top the school boathouse.

"Oh, this is the most beautiful place!" thought Nancy. "What a perfectly lovely time I should have here if only the girls liked me. I must *make* them like me. That's what I've got to do."

She saw only two or three other girls about the grounds, and those at a distance. As she ran back to the main building, however, that structure began to hum with life. More than anything else did Pinewood Hall remind Nancy of a great beehive.

Many of the bedroom windows were wide open now; the more or less tousled heads of girls in all stages of dressing appeared, and disappeared again, at these windows. They called back and forth to each other; laughter rang happily from many of the dormitories; the waking life of the great school seemed, to the lonely girl, very charming indeed.

Why, among all these girls there must be some who would be friendly! This thought helped Nancy a great deal. She entered the building and joined the beginning of the line at the breakfast-room door, much encouraged.

"Look at these hungry young ones," exclaimed Corinne Pevay, coming down the broad stair from the West Side, like a queen descending to give audience to her subjects.

"Morning, Corinne! Morning, Miss Pevay!" were the cries of greeting.

"Good morning, little myrtle-blossoms! Let me tell you mommer's plan!" sing-songed the older girl. "'Do some good to all the folkses'—Hullo, Carrie!"

"Good-morn-ing-Car-rie!" sang the crowd of girls at the dining-room door as the captain of the East Side of the Hall appeared—Carrie Littlefield.

There was a burst of laughter, and Corinne held up her hand admonishingly.

"Not so much racket, children!" she said. "There! the gate is opened, and you can all go in to pasture. Little lambkins!"

Nancy was carried on by the line to the open door. The pleasant-faced woman who had stood in the doorway of the lodge the evening before, was here, and she tapped Nancy on the shoulder.

"Go to the lower tables, my dear. You are a new girl, and all your class will be down there. What is your name?"

"Nancy Nelson."

"Yes, indeed. Your trunk and bag are here. Between eight and nine you may come to the trunk

room in the basement and show me which of your possessions you wish carried to your room. Where is your room?"

"Number 30," replied Nancy.

"East or West?"

"West, ma'am."

"I am Jessie Pease," said the good woman, smiling kindly on the orphan. "If you need anything, my dear, come to Jessie; she's the big sister of all you girls," and she patted Nancy on the head as the girl, her heart warmed suddenly, went to her place at the end of the room.

The girls of her class—the incoming class of new girls, or freshmen—took places at the table as they chose. There were no more than a score as yet. Some had already formed groups of acquaintanceship. Some few, like Nancy, were alone; but Nancy did not feel that she could force her company on any one of these other lonesome souls. She must wait for them to speak first to her.

The sophomores filled their tables nearby, chattering and laughing. They looked with much amusement at the freshmen, but some of the teachers were in the room now and the second-year girls thought it best not to "rig" their juniors openly.

Nancy, however, saw several of the girls who had ridden in the 'bus with her from the station the night before. Last to arrive in the soph. group was the fat girl—Belle Macdonald. She was a pretty girl, but she was yawning still and her hair had been given only "a lick and a promise," while her frock was not neat.

In the middle of breakfast Carrie Littlefield, the captain of the East Side, walked slowly along the soph. tables and stopped behind Belle. Some of the girls began to giggle; the fat one looked a little scared, and for the moment seemed to lose a very hearty appetite.

Carrie wrote something on a pad, tore off the paper, and thrust it into Belle's hand. Then she went along the row gravely, plainly eyeing those girls who belonged to her own half of the school.

"Nasty thing!" Nancy heard somebody whispering shrilly. "I bet she gave Belle all morning in her room—and lessons don't begin until to-morrow."

This was Cora Rathmore. Nancy's roommate had come in at the very last minute and taken a seat not far from her. Cora, having been a month and a half at Pinewood in the spring, knew about the running of the school.

The two captains—"monitors" they might be called—made it one of their duties to see that the girls came to table in the morning in neat array. Later they took a trip through the rooms to see that beds were properly stripped, windows open for airing, nightclothes hung away, and everything neat and tidy.

Of course, the maids made beds, swept and dusted dormitories, and all that; but each girl was supposed to attend to her own personal belongings; slovenliness was frowned upon throughout the school.

Nancy learned much that first forenoon at Pinewood. She did not talk much with any of the girls—either of her own class or older. But she heard a good deal, and kept her eyes and ears open.

She remembered what the lodgekeeper's wife had told her, and she found her way to Jessie Pease's room in the basement. There was a crowd of girls there already. They were laughing, and joking, and teasing the good woman, who seemed, as she said, to be a "big sister" to them all. Nobody called her "Mrs. Pease;" she insisted upon their treating her as though she really were their older sister.

Yet there was a way with Jessie Pease that kept even the rudest girl within bounds. They did not seek to take advantage of her—at least, if any of them tried to do so, they did not succeed.

"Now, you know very well, Elsie Spear," the good woman was saying, shaking her head, "that you cannot wear such things here at Pinewood. Your mother, I am sure, would not have allowed you to put a bun like that in your trunk had she known it!"

"Well, my hats won't stay on without it," complained Elsie. "And anyway, mother's maid packed my trunk."

"Your mother's maid evidently does not know the rules of Pinewood Hall," said Jessie Pease, severely. "If your hats do not stay on without all that fluff, I'll find you a cap to wear," and she laughed.

There were other contraband things, too. Each girl had to give up her keys and allow the woman to unpack her trunks. Such clothing and other possessions as were allowable, or necessary, were placed to one side for transportation to the owner's dormitory.

Some girls had whole trays full of gay banners, pictures, photographs, and the other "litter" that delight the heart of a boarding-school miss when she can decorate her dressing-case and wall. Of course, the freshies only had their home pictures and little silver or glass keepsakes and toilet sets.

"Now, my plump little pigeon," said Jessie Pease to Nancy, as she laid out the school dresses which Miss Prentice had bought for her with the money Mr. Gordon had supplied, "you seem nicely fixed for wearing apparel—and such plain, serviceable things, too. Not many of my girls come here so very sensibly supplied.

"And now, where are the pretty things—in your bag?"

"My old clothes are in the bag, please," replied Nancy, bashfully.

"Oh! but where are the pictures of the folks at home? And the little knickknacks they gave you when you came away?" said Jessie Pease, her fair face all one big smile.

"There—there aren't any folks, please," stammered Nancy.

"What, dear?" gasped the woman, sitting straighter on her knees and staring at her.

"I am an orphan, and I have no friends, ma'am," stammered Nancy, in so low a voice that nobody else could hear.

"You poor girl!" cried the woman, her smile fading, but love and welcome still shining in her big, brown eyes.

She stretched forth her arms and—somehow—Nancy found herself in the tight circle, with her head down in the curve of Jessie Pease's motherly neck.

"How long ago did you lose them, dear?" asked the good woman.

"Oh, a very long, long time ago," sobbed Nancy. "I was too little to remember—much."

"And you've missed 'em ever since—you've just been *honin'* for a mother, I know," said the woman, crooningly, and patting Nancy's shoulder.

"There, there, child! It'll all be strange to you here for a while; but when you can't stand it any more—when it does seem as though you'd *got* to be mothered—you come down to the lodge to Jessie Pease. Remember, now! You will surely come?"

"I will," promised Nancy.

"Now wipe your eyes and laugh!" commanded Jessie Pease. "Why, Pinewood Hall is the finest place in the world for girls—especially for those that are like you. Here's a great, big family of sisters and cousins ready waiting for you. Get acquainted!"

But that seemed easier said than done. Nancy was not by nature gloomy nor reticent; but it was unfortunate that she had been paired with Cora Rathmore.

From the very first day the black-eyed girl tried to make it as unpleasant as possible for Nancy. Cora had plenty of acquaintances. They were always running into the room. But Cora never introduced any to her roommate.

Cora was one of those girls who have many, many decorations for her room. Her dressing-case was stacked with photographs and all around and above it the wall was decorated with banners, and funny or pretty pictures, school pennants and the like.

On the other side of the room Nancy's wall and bureau were bare of any adornment. Her toilet set had been selected by Miss Prentice and was more useful than decorative. Nothing Nancy wore was frivolous. The other girls therefore set her down as "odd."

"Why, she hasn't a single picture on her bureau," said one girl who was visiting Cora. "Don't you suppose she has any folks?"

"Maybe they're so ugly they're afraid of breaking the camera if they pose for a picture," giggled another light-minded girl.

"Well," drawled Belle Macdonald, who was one of Cora's sophomore friends, "even an orphan usually has pictures of the folks she's lost. And this Nelson girl hasn't told anything about herself; has she?"

"She hasn't told *me*, that's sure," snapped Cora. "She's a nobody, I believe. I don't believe she belongs in this school with decent girls."

"Oh, Cora! what do you mean?" gasped one of her hearers.

"Well, Pinewood is supposed to be a school for well-connected girls. I know *my* mother would never have let me come had she supposed I was to be paired with a little Miss Nobody."

"We ought to have our choice," sighed another of the girls.

"And Grace and I were going to have *such* fun this half," declared Cora.

One of the others giggled. "That's why you weren't allowed to be with Montgomery," she remarked. "I heard Corinne talking about it."

"Oh, that Canuck! I hate her," said Cora, speaking thus disrespectfully about the West Side captain.

"Well, if any of us was in her place, I reckon we'd be strict, too. It means something to be captain of a side at Pinewood Hall," said Belle, who, having been at the school longer than the others, had imbibed some of that loyalty which is bound to impregnate the atmosphere of a boarding school.

"A fine chance Montgomery, or Cora, would have to be captain," giggled another.

"Yes! and who is going to be leader of the freshman class?" demanded Cora. "The big girls have got something to say about that, I suppose?"

"Some of the teachers will have," laughed Belle. "You'll find that out. Who are you rooting for, Cora?"

"Grace, of course! Why, her father's a senator, and she's got lots of money. She's influential. She ought to be class president."

"All right; but the election isn't allowed until just before Christmas. It will be the most popular girl then, you'll find. And she'll have to be popular with the teachers as well as with you girls."

This conversation in Number 30, West Side, occurred something like a fortnight after school had opened. The girls were all at work by that time—those who *would* work, at least.

Because she was so much alone, perhaps, Nancy Nelson's record was all the better. But she did not sulk in her room.

Indeed, Cora had so much company—girls who usually ignored Nancy altogether—that the orphan was glad to get out when they appeared. And her refuge was the gym. There she became acquainted with the more athletic girls of the school.

They found—even the sophs and juniors—that Nancy could play tennis and other games. She swam like a fish, too, and was eager to learn to row. The captain of the crew, the coach of the basketball team, and others of the older girls, began to pay some attention to Nancy.

But with her own class she had not become popular. Nancy really had little more than a speaking acquaintance with any other freshman.

Not being included in the group of girls who so often came to see Cora Rathmore in Number 30, Nancy was debarred from other groups, too. Nobody came to see her in the room, and she was invited nowhere—perhaps because the other girls thought she must be "in" with the clique to which Cora belonged.

At the head of this party of freshmen was the very proud girl named Grace Montgomery, whom Cora indefatigably aped. Girls who were proud of their parents' money, or who catered to

such girls because they were so much better off than their mates, for the most part made up this clique.

There was not more than a score of them; but they clung together and were an influence in the class, although altogether there were nearly a hundred freshmen.

As the days went by the lessons became harder and the teachers more strict. Nancy found that it was very hard to be put out of her own room in study time because of the chattering of other girls, many of whom, it seemed, did not care how they stood in their classes.

"Really, I cannot hear myself think!" Nancy gasped one day when she had sat with her elbows on her desk, her hands clasped over her ears, trying to give all her attention to the text-book before her.

For half an hour there had been noise enough in Number 30 to drive a deaf and dumb person distracted.

"Well, if you don't like it, you can get out!" snapped Cora, when Nancy complained. "You're not wanted here, anyway."

"But I have as much right here as you have—and a better right than your friends," said Nancy, for once aroused.

"I don't think a girl like you has any business in the school at all," cried Cora, angrily. "Who knows anything about you? Goodness me! you're a perfect Miss Nobody—I can't find a living soul that knows anything about you. I don't even know if your folks are respectable. I've written home to my folks about it—that's what *I* have done," pursued the angry girl. "I'm going to find out if we girls who come from nice families have got to mix up with mere nobodies!"

CHAPTER XI

ON CLINTON RIVER

This was not the only unpleasant discussion Nancy Nelson had with her ill-tempered roommate. But it was one of those that hurt Nancy the most.

Whenever Cora hinted at the other girl's lack of friends and relatives—at the mystery which seemed to surround her private life—Nancy could no longer talk. Sometimes she cried; but not often where her roommate could see her.

There was a scrub crew for the eight-oared shell. Nancy made that, and Carrie Littlefield, who was the captain of the school crew, praised her work.

The athletic instructor, Miss Etching, praised Nancy for her swimming and general athletic work. There wasn't a freshie or soph who could stand against her on the tennis court. She had learned to play basketball, and played it well. The coach had her eye on Nancy for one of the best teams in the school.

On the other hand the girl from Higbee School stood well in her classes, and she had no black marks against her. No teacher had been forced to admonish Nancy, and Corinne Pevay had a cheerful word for her and a smile whenever Nancy crossed her path.

And yet the girl could not be happy. Her own mates—the freshmen—seemed afraid of her. Or, at least, some of them did. And if Nancy was to have chums she must find them, of course, in her own class.

For the first few weeks of a school year the new girls gradually get settled—both in their studies and in their friendships. Had Nancy by good chance been paired with a different girl—with a girl who had not already formed her own associates—matters might have gone along much more smoothly.

But Cora disliked her from the start. And the black-eyed girl was sharp enough to see that accusing Nancy of being "a nobody" for some reason hurt her roommate more than anything else.

Therefore, being of a malicious disposition, Cora continued to harp upon this, until she had spread through the school the suspicion that Nancy had come to Pinewood Hall under unusual circumstances. Nobody knew where she had come from. She never spoke of her people, nor of where she had lived.

And, of course, this was quite true. Nancy did not want to tell about her life at Higbee School. Fortunately no girl from Higbee had ever come to Pinewood Hall before, and the girl thought that her secret was safe.

Cora and her friends might suspect, but they really knew nothing about Nancy's past life. Already some of the girls had received boxes from home—those delightful surprise boxes that give such a zest to boarding-school life. Nancy never received a letter, even.

So, Nancy could not be very happy at Pinewood Hall.

Other girls went around in recreation hours with their arms about each other's waists, chattering with all the cheerfulness of blackbirds. They had "secrets" together and whispered about them in corners. There were little, harmless gatherings in the dormitories, sometimes after curfew; but Nancy had no part in these girlish dissipations.

Perhaps it was her own fault. But the girl, who felt herself ostracized, feared a rebuff. As Madame Schakael had said to Corinne, Nancy was one of the sensitive ones. And the sensitive girl at boarding school is bound to have a hard time unless she very quickly makes a lasting

friendship, or becomes a popular member of some group of her schoolfellows right at the start.

When she felt very lonely in Number 30, or when Cora's friends made it impossible for her to study, Nancy sought comfort—such as it was—in the gym., or in taking long walks by the river.

The Pinewood estate was a large one and she did not have to go out of bounds to get plenty of walking exercise. Furthermore, as soon as the frost came, all the athletic girls were anxious about the ice.

Clinton River was a quiet, if broad, stream and before the last of October the edges and the quiet pools inshore were skimmed over. Nancy, who loved skating, and had bought a beautiful pair of skates the year before with her own pocket-money, watched the forming ice almost daily.

"Great times on the river when it once freezes over," she heard one girl say. "And I bet the boys at the Academy are watching just as closely as we are."

Clinton Academy, Nancy had learned, was only a mile away. She had even seen its towers, from a distance. And some of Dr. Dudley's boys had passed the lodge one day when Nancy was down there visiting Jessie Pease.

For the girl had occasionally taken advantage of the invitation the lodgekeeper's wife had extended to her, and had visited her in the neat little cottage. Mrs. Pease frequently got some of the younger girls together in her kitchen on rainy days, and let them pull taffy and pop corn, and otherwise enjoy themselves.

Yet, once away from the presence of the kind-hearted matron, Nancy found herself no closer to her schoolmates than before.

November brought dark nights and black frost. Clintondale was well up toward the Great Lakes and sometimes the winter arrives early in that part of the country.

It did so this year—the first of Nancy Nelson's sojourn at Pinewood Hall. One morning Nancy got up while it was still dark, slipping out to the bathroom as noiselessly as a little gray ghost—her robe was of that modest color. There she swiftly made her toilet and then as quietly dressed in Number 30.

She had learned to do all this without rousing Cora, for her roommate was very unpleasant indeed if she woke up in the morning and found Nancy stirring about the room. No matter if the rising bell had rung, Cora always accused Nancy, on these occasions, of deliberately spoiling her morning nap. Cora was a sleepy-head in the morning, and always appeared to "get out of bed on the wrong side."

However, Nancy left Number 30 without disturbing her roommate on this morning and, well wrapped up against the biting cold, slipped downstairs and out of one of the rear doors. The front door of Pinewood Hall had not been unchained at that hour.

She was the first girl out and it was an hour yet to breakfast time. She ran straight through the pine woods at the back, passing the gymnasium and frozen courts, and so down to the river.

A pale moon still hung low on the horizon. The river seemed as black as ink and not a ripple appeared upon its surface.

"Oh, dear! it's not frozen at all," was Nancy's, first thought.

And then she saw the sheen of the moonlight across the black surface.

"That never is water in the world!" she gasped, and half running, half sliding, descended the steep bank to the verge of the river.

The wide expanse of the stream proved to be sheathed entirely in black, new ice.

Nancy uttered a cry of delight and touched it with one strongly-shod foot, and then the other. It rang under her heel—there was not a single crack of protest. It bore her weight as firmly as a rock.

Breathlessly Nancy tried it farther out. The keen frost of a single night had chained the river firmly. She slid a little way. Then she ran for momentum, and slid smoothly, well balanced from her hips, with her feet wide spread. Her red lips opened with a sigh of delight. Her eyes sparkled and the hair was tossed back from under her woolen cap.

"Great! Great!" she cried aloud, when she came to a stop.

She went back down the slide. Her boots rang on the ice as though it were steel. Again and again she slid until there was a well-defined path upon the ice—a path at least ten yards long.

But the horizon grew rosy-red and the dropping moon paled into insignificance. This warned her that the breakfast call would soon sound and she left the ice reluctantly and ran back to the hall.

Before she reached the kitchens the sun popped up and she ran in the path made by its glowing rays across the frozen fields.

It was so cold that the early rising girls were hugging the radiators in the big hall when Nancy came in from the rear, all in a delightful glow. Some of them nodded to her. One girl even said:

"You've got luck to go out for your constitutional a morning like this, Miss Nelson."

But to Nancy's ear it seemed as though the girl said it in a patronizing way. She was a junior. Nobody else spoke to the freshman. So Nancy had the secret of the frozen river to herself. She meant to go skating that day if she could.

Every morning the girls of Pinewood Hall took their places after breakfast—class by class—in the hall which balanced the dining room in the other wing of the big house. A brief service of a devotional character always began the real work of the day. Usually Madame Schakael presided at these exercises. And sometimes she had that to say before dismissing the girls that showed them that she had a keen oversight of the school's manners and morals.

"I know," she said, on this morning, standing upon the footstool which was always kept behind the desk-pulpit for her; "I know that many of you have been watching and waiting, with great eagerness, for the skating season to set in. Jack Frost, young ladies, seldom disappoints us here at Pinewood Hall. The river is frozen over."

Here her remarks were punctuated by applause, and some suppressed "Oh, goodies!" The Madame smiled indulgently at this enthusiasm.

"Our rules regarding the sport are pretty well understood, I believe. No skating save during certain designated hours, and never unless Mr. Pease, or the under gardener, is at the boathouse. Bounds extend from the railroad bridge up the river toward town, to the Big Bend half a mile below our boathouse. The girl who skates out of bounds—they are plain enough—will not skate again for a month. Don't forget that, girls.

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"And now, for the rule that has always been in force at Pinewood," pursued the Madame, more earnestly, "and the one to which I must demand perfect obedience.

"No girl is to try the ice by herself. No venturesome one must go down there and try the ice without Mr. Pease, or Samuel, being on hand. Remember!

"And," said Madame Schakael, slowly, "I hear that there has already been somebody on the ice this morning. Whether it was one of you girls, or not, we do not know. But when Mr. Pease came to report to me that the ice was safe for skating he informed me that somebody had been sliding down there, early as it was when he reached the river.

"If any girl has broken our ironclad rule on this point, I want to know it. I expect to see that girl at once after prayers. Of course, if nobody here is guilty we must believe that some passer-by ventured down upon the river while crossing Pinewood estate.

"Now, young ladies, I need say nothing more on this subject, I believe. After recitations to-day, those who wish may enjoy the pleasure and exercise of ice-skating. The boathouse will be warmed. Samuel will be there to sharpen skates for those who wish. And he can supply you with extra straps or other appliances. You understand that he makes a little extra money that way, and I approve of it."

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Then she touched the rising bell, and instantly the girls arose and a bustle of low converse and the rustle of dresses and clack of shoes on the polished floor made up the usual confusion of sounds as the girls separated for their classrooms. Nearly four hundred girls manage to make considerable noise.

Nancy went immediately to the Madame's office. It was the first time she had ever been called there; it was the first time, indeed, that she had ever been accused of any kind of a fault since arriving at the school.

So she did not feel very happy. She had not known of the rule which Madame Schakael had said was so well understood. She had not meant to break the law.

But she could see very clearly that the rule was a just one. She had no business to venture on the ice without asking permission. And her heart throbbed and her face flushed and paled by turns as she waited for the principal to appear.

But when Madame Schakael entered the anteroom she was not alone. Nancy, from within, heard another voice—a shrill and unpleasant voice which she very well knew.

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"Well, I don't care what you say, Madame, it *was* her. There's no other girl in the whole school who gets up so early and disturbs us other girls—so now! She's stirring around half the night, I declare! And she was the *only* girl out of doors this morning so early."

"And she is your roommate; is she, Miss Rathmore?" interrupted the Madame's smooth, low voice.

"Well! I never wanted her! I wrote home and told my mother she was a nobody——"

"Your mother was kind enough to write to me on the subject," said the principal of Pinewood Hall. "But I could not allow any change in the dormitory arrangements for the inconsequential reasons given. Nancy Nelson is quite the same as any other girl at the Hall. I wish to hear nothing more on *that* topic, Cora.

"But this other matter, of course, is different. If a rule has been broken of course I must take cognizance of it. And I feel sure that if your roommate was the person on the ice this morning, she will report the fact to me herself——"

She pushed the office door wide open. Nancy had listened to this conversation perforce. There had been no escape for her.

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"Ah! As I expected," said the doll-like little woman, smiling calmly at Nancy. "You see how mistaken one may be, Cora? Nancy is here ahead of us."

Cora Rathmore shrank back from the door with a very red face. Nancy's eyes flashed as she looked at her ill-natured roommate. She realized well enough that Cora had deliberately—and without sufficient evidence herself—tried to get her into trouble with the principal.

Cora was not easily embarrassed, however. In a moment she shot the other girl a scornful glance and, without a word to Madame Schakael, walked out of the office. It really did seem as though it was Nancy who had done the wrong, instead of her roommate.

"You are here to see me, Miss Nelson?" asked the Madame, briskly, ignoring the other girl and her report.

"Yes, Madame."

"Because of what I said at prayers?"

"Yes, Madame."

"You are a new girl. Did you not know of the rule that all girls must keep off the river until it is pronounced safe by Mr. Pease?"

"I did not know of the rule. And I did not think that I was doing wrong when I went on the ice this morning," returned Nancy, quietly.

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"I believe you, Miss Nelson. You are excused. Don't do it again. I can't afford to have any of my girls drowned—especially one who stands as well as you do in the weekly reports," and the little woman patted her on her cheek and smiled.

"You may go skating this afternoon, if you wish, and if you are perfect in your recitations, as I suppose you will be," continued Madame Schakael. "Wait, my dear! Here are two letters for you. They are both from Mr. Henry Gordon's office, and I presume they are from him. I make it a rule never to open letters from the parents or guardians of my girls; other letters, you understand, must be scrutinized unless the correspondence has already been arranged for."

She passed the wondering Nancy two businesslike looking envelopes with the card printed in the corner of "Ambrose, Necker & Boles."

"Thank you, Madame," said the girl, and hurried away to her first class with the letters fairly burning a hole in her pocket.

There would be no opportunity before the first intermission—at 10:30 o'clock—to look at their contents.

CHAPTER XII

THE FIRST ADVANCE

Madame Schakael had prophesied that Nancy would be perfect in her recitations that day, and so there would be no doubt of her being able to go skating on the river. But with the unexpected letters from Mr. Gordon's office unopened, it seemed hardly probable that Nancy would pull through the day without a reprimand.

"What *is* the matter with you, Miss Nelson?" demanded one of the teachers sharply, when Nancy had made an unusually brainless answer to a very simple question.

Nancy came out of her haze with a sharp shock.

"Why—why, Miss Maybrick, I know very much better than that," she admitted.

"Where is your mind, then, Miss?"

"I—I—"

Nancy was usually frankness personified, and she blurted it out now:

"I'm wondering what is in the two letters I have in my pocket, Miss Maybrick."

"Where did you get them?" demanded the suspicious teacher.

"Madame Schakael gave them to me. I suppose they are from my guar——" No! she could not claim Henry Gordon as her guardian. "From the gentleman who pays my bills here," she added, in a lower voice.

"Well, for mercy's sake go to your seat and read them," said the instructor, but more mildly. "They may be important. And having mastered their contents, please try to master the lesson."

Nancy did as she was bid. With trembling fingers she opened one of the envelopes. They both were typewritten as to address; but one seemed addressed by an amateur in the art of typewriting. Nancy opened the other first.

The enclosure was a slip of paper on which was written in a hurried scrawl:

"You may need something extra. This is for your own use.—H. GORDON."

And wrapped in this paper was a crisp twenty-dollar bill!

Nancy had scarcely spent a penny of her carefully hoarded pocket money since coming to Pinewood Hall. Indeed, she had found no opportunity for using it.

There had been plenty of secret "spreads" and "fudge orgies" in other rooms. Cora had been to a lot of them, and had always slipped back into Number 30 without being caught by any prowling teacher.

But of course Nancy had been invited to contribute to none of these, and she was a particularly healthy girl with a particularly healthy appetite: so she did not crave "sponge cake and pickles," or other combinations of forbidden fruits supposed to be the boarding-school misses' extreme delight.

Mr. Gordon had sent the banknote to her without any more feeling, seemingly, than he would have had in throwing a bone to a dog. Yet, it might be his way of showing her sympathy. Nancy slipped it back in the envelope and picked up the second letter.

And before she opened this she believed she knew what it contained. She had not forgotten "Scorch" O'Brien. Scorch had promised to watch "Old Gordon" and write to her. He had used one of the office envelopes and had stolen a minute when some typewriter was not in use.

Madame Schakael thought both letters were from Mr. Gordon. Nancy was too curious as to what Scorch had written to deny herself the reading of the contraband epistle.

It was much blotted and the scrawl characteristic of an office boy's chirography proved that his terms at public school had not done Scorch much good. This was the letter:

"NANCY NELSON,
Dear Miss:

I guess you haven't forgotten Scorch O'Brien. That's me. I said I'd rite if I got a line on Old Gordon, that he was doing you queer. I bet he is, but I don't know nothing for sure yet. I put a twist on him this morning and I see a letter now in the male-basket for you, so I says to myself, 'Scorch, what you said took like vaccination.' Ouch! me arm hurts yet!

Well, I says to Old G., says I, 'What's come of the girl what blew me to lunch at the Arrandale? She was some swell little dame, she was.'

Says he, 'Mind your own business, Scorch. That's a good motto for you to paste up over your desk.'

'Nix,' says I. 'If I didn't mind everybody else's biz in this office the whole joint would go to grass.' And that's right. 'That girl's just the same as in jail at that boarding-school,' says I. 'Have you forgotten her?'

'How'd I remember?' says he, looking sort of queer.

'Come across with a piece of change for her,' says me—I'm practerkal, I be. Money always comes in handy; now, don't it? Write an' tell me if he took my tip. And no more now, from,

"Yours respectfully,

"SCORCH O'BRIEN."

It was Scorch all over—that letter! Nancy Nelson came near laughing right out in the classroom; but she could cram both letters into her pocket and go on with her studies with a more composed mind. 116

Scorch was evidently her friend. And eminently practical, as he declared. Nothing could be more practical than that twenty-dollar bill. And the red-haired Irish boy had put it into Mr. Gordon's mind to send her this substantial tip.

She took the twenty-dollar bill out and looked at it again. It was very real.

Cora Rathmore sat behind her in this class. Nancy happened to turn about as she slipped the banknote out of sight again, and she saw that her roommate was looking hard at her. Nancy turned away herself. She was angrier with Cora than she had ever been before since the opening of Pinewood Hall.

Jennie Bruce, one of the girls of her class whom Nancy admired the most, leaned over and whispered to her:

"Goodness me! but you are the wealthy girl. Was that real money, or just stage money?"

Jennie was a thin, snappy girl, with dancing eyes, a continual smile, and as elusive as a drop of mercury. She just couldn't keep still, and she was always getting minor marks in deportment because her sense of fun was sure to bubble over at inopportune times. 117

"I—I guess it's real money," whispered Nancy, although talking during lessons was frowned on by all the instructors.

But Nancy was only too glad when Jennie Bruce spoke to her. She was just a little afraid of Jennie's sharp tongue; and yet she had never been the butt of any of the harum-scarum's jokes. Perhaps Jennie had spared Nancy because the latter was so much alone. The fun-loving one was not cruel.

"Twen-ty-dol-lars," whispered Jennie, with big eyes. "You certainly are rich. What a lot of pickles that would buy!" and she grinned.

Nancy smiled. She knew that Jennie was only in fun when she suggested such an expenditure. But the thought smote the lonely girl's mind that by the spending of this money in "treating" she might gain a certain popularity among the other girls.

Really, that was what made Grace Montgomery so popular. She had more money to spend than almost any other girl in the school—in the freshman class, at least. Nancy asked herself seriously if she should strive to make friendships through such a channel.

Young as she was, the girl had serious thoughts at times, and this was one of the times. She hid the money in the bosom of her dress and at recess said nothing about it, although she saw several of the girls whispering and pointing her out. 118

But the most surprising thing that happened was Cora coming to her almost as soon as they were released from the classrooms for a short run in the basement recreation room.

"I suppose you think I'm a mean thing," said the black-eyed girl, glancing at Nancy askance.

"I'll leave it for you to say," returned Nancy. "If I had run to Madame Schakael with a story about you—"

"How do you know I went to her?" snapped Cora. "She asked me where you were. You slipped into her office so quick that she thought you were trying to get out of it, of course. She knew all the time that you were the girl who had been on the ice."

Now, Nancy did not believe this at all; but she said nothing to show Cora that she distrusted her first friendly (?) advance.

"Anyway," said the black-eyed one, "she *did* ask me about you, and if you were out early, as usual. Oh! you can't fool the Madame."

"I shouldn't want to try," observed Nancy, quietly.

"Well! if you didn't act so offish we girls would like to be friends with you," said Cora, tucking her arm into Nancy's. "Going skating this afternoon?" 119

This was the first time any girl at Pinewood Hall had ever walked in a "chummy" manner with Nancy. But to tell the truth, Nancy was not sure whether this overture towards peace on the part of her roommate really meant anything or not.

There were lots of the girls whom she thought she would like better than Cora—or her friends. There was the lively Jennie Bruce, for instance. Nancy often watched her flitting back and forth, from group to group, being "hail-fellow-well-met" with them all. Jennie made friends without putting forth any effort, it seemed.

"Oh, I wish I had Jennie for a roommate," thought Nancy Nelson. "I really would be happy then, I do believe."

But this day seemed not to be a bad one for Nancy, after all. Cora waited for her, with her skates, after recitations were over, and they joined a party of Cora's chums on the way to the river.

Grace Montgomery was not among these; Grace never had a word for Nancy, so the younger girl kept away from the senator's daughter.

But the river was broad, and the ice was like glass, and in the exhilaration of the sport Nancy forgot snubs and back-biting, and all the ill-natured slights under which she had suffered since becoming a dweller in Number 30, West Side, Pinewood Hall. 120

She noted one thing that afternoon. Few of the girls skated toward the railroad bridge; but most of them to the school bounds in the other direction. The reason for skating down the river instead of up Nancy did not at first understand. Then she heard some of Cora's friends talking

and laughing about it.

"Guess the old doctor has a grouch again. Isn't that mean? There isn't a boy in sight."

"Not one!"

"Isn't it horrid of him?" cried another.

"I'll wager the old doctor has a channel sawed through the ice at the bend here before he lets the boys out," declared a third.

"I *did* want so to see Bob Endress," Grace Montgomery complained. "I want him to bring a lot of nice boys home from the Academy at the holidays, so as to have them at my party."

It struck Nancy that she had heard this Bob Endress spoken of before; but she had no idea that there was any reason why *she* should be interested in him.

The girls came in from the ice half an hour before supper, cold, tired, but merry. Nancy ran up to tidy her hair and wash. She found two of Cora's chief chums in Number 30; but Cora herself chanced to be out.

These girls did not even notice Nancy when she came in. But that was not strange. Often a dozen would come and go at Number 30 without once speaking to the quiet little girl who occupied one-half of the dormitory.

"Well, you take it from me," one was saying to the other while Nancy brushed her hair, "she's got to do her share. It looks to me as though she was sponging."

"Oh, do you think so?"

"Everybody else has put up for a fudge party, or something of the kind, while she hasn't done a thing."

"Maybe she hasn't the money?"

"Then she shouldn't be in on all the other girls' good times. And she wouldn't be if she didn't toady so to Grace."

"Ah, now——"

"That's right. Lou would have left her out of the pound party last week, only of course Grace demanded to look over the list of invited guests."

"Well! I *do* think Grace takes too much upon herself sometimes."

"She's going to be class president. Voting comes just before the Christmas holidays, and when we come back we'll know who gets the chair. Madame doesn't allow the freshies to organize until then. Well! Cora's got to do different."

"Mamie Beasley says she isn't going to invite her to her tea on Friday. And, you know, the teachers approve of afternoon teas. It makes for sociability, they say."

"But Cora——"

"Hush-up!" commanded another. "Want everybody to hear you?" and she motioned toward Nancy. The latter saw her in the glass.

So the two went out. Nancy wondered if Cora was so popular, after all. If it *was* Cora of whom the two were speaking.

She noted, however, that for a day or two Cora remained in her room, and few of her friends visited her. This suited Nancy very well, even if she did not like her roommate. The dormitory was quieter and one could study.

"My mother's just as mean as she can be!" blurted out Cora one day when she and Nancy were alone. "She won't give me another cent of pocket-money until the week we go home for Christmas. And I spent all my allowance right away when school opened. Did you, Nancy?"

"Did I what?" asked Nancy, looking up from her book.

"Have you spent all your allowance?"

"No-o," said Nancy slowly, not quite sure that she *had* an allowance, Mr. Gordon gave her money so irregularly.

"Lucky girl! And I promised I'd give the crowd a big blow-out here next week. I sent to mother for the money, and told her about it, and she won't even send me another box of goodies."

"That is too bad," observed Nancy, with a faint smile.

"Isn't it?" exclaimed Cora. "And they'll all say Number 30 is so mean! I hate to have our room get *that* name."

This was the first time that Nancy had supposed Cora cared anything for the reputation of the room. Certainly, she had never before appeared to consider that Nancy and she had anything in common.

"You see, we're just freshmen, and the sophs criticise us so. I got acquainted with Belle Macdonald and some of those other girls away back last spring. They expect us freshies to treat them if we want their friendship."

"I don't think that friendships bought in that way last; do you?" asked Nancy.

"Say! how do you expect to get popular in a school like this?" demanded Cora, in disgust.

"I—I don't know," sighed Nancy.

"How is it Grace is so popular?" cried Cora Rathmore. "Why, she's always doing something to get the other girls interested. She's going to be our class president."

Nancy said nothing. She wondered if Grace Montgomery, after all, was quite as popular as Cora thought.

"I tell you what," said the black-eyed girl, suddenly, "let's have a party in here, anyway?"

"Why, I—I don't know anything about giving a party," confessed Nancy. "And I'm afraid the girls wouldn't come."

"Sure they will—in a minute!" declared Cora, confidently. "All I've got to do is to tell 'em. You see, I've been making friends in Pinewood Hall, while you've been 'boning.' Some of them think you are too stiff."

"I don't mean to be," protested Nancy, shaking her head.

"Well, here's a chance for you to show 'em. You say you've got some money left?"

"Oh, yes."

"How much?" asked Cora, bluntly.

"Well—I've got more than twenty dollars," confessed Nancy.

"Crickey-me!" gasped Cora. "Twenty dollars? Why, we'd give the dandiest kind of a spread—salad, and ice cream, and cakes—Oh, crickey-me! that would be great."

"But what would Corinne say?" blurted out Nancy.

"Hah! those big girls have after-lights-out spreads, too. That Canuck won't dare say a word."

"But some of the teachers——"

"You needn't borrow trouble," said Cora. "Of course, if you don't want to do it——"

"I—I——"

"Sure, you understand that I'll pay my half," went on Cora, eagerly. "All you got to do is to lend me the money until Christmas time."

"Oh, that's not it!" cried Nancy, who was naturally a generous-hearted girl.

"Then you're in for it?"

"If—if you think the other girls will like it?"

"Sure they will!" cried Cora. "Hurrah! Now, you leave it to me. I'll tell Grace first of all, and we'll pick out a nice crowd. Why, with twenty dollars we can have at least twenty girls."

Nancy began to enthuse a little herself. She longed so to be friendly with her own class, especially. There was Jennie Bruce, the fun-loving girl, and several others whom she particularly liked. Of course, they would all have to be domiciled in the West Side. No girl could cross from one side of the Hall to the other after curfew without being observed.

And the spread which Cora planned was not to begin until all the lights were out and the teacher, whose turn it was to be on that night, had gone her rounds to see that all the dormitories were quiet.

"We'll take a night when Maybrick is on, if we can," said Cora. "She goes to bed to sleep! No prowling around for her after she has once decided that all the chickens are on the roost."

And Nancy, with a suspicion deep in her mind that it was all wrong, and yet willing to suffer much for the sake of gaining "popularity," so-called, allowed Cora to go ahead with the preparations for the coming surreptitious feast.

CHAPTER XIII

IT PROVES DISASTROUS

Nancy might have given too much thought and time to the coming "midnight spread," and neglected her lessons a bit had Cora Rathmore not taken the entire arrangements for the affair into her own hands. Cora did not seem to mind getting only "fair" marked on her weekly reports. She just shrugged her shoulders and said:

"I should worry!"

But before Nancy plucked up the courage to say anything about who was to be invited she found that Cora had already seen to that—Cora and Grace Montgomery.

"I'd like to have Jennie Bruce come," Nancy suggested timidly one day.

"Goodness! why didn't you say so before?" snapped Cora.

"Why? Won't there be room for her?"

"We've made up the whole list, and the girls have been invited. We couldn't squeeze in another girl."

"Why—why, who made up the list?"

"Grace and I. Here it is," and Cora snapped a paper upon Nancy's desk.

Nancy read it over without comment. There wasn't a girl invited to the party at Number 30, West Side, whom Nancy liked any better than she did Cora herself! She began to doubt if the coming entertainment was going to be a success—as far as she was concerned—after all.

The girls ran in to see Cora again. Even Grace appeared in Number 30. But none of them spoke more than perfunctorily to Nancy, and the lonely girl felt herself as much "out of it" as ever.

But she had one enjoyment now that made up for many previous lonely hours at the school. She could skate!

Clinton River remained frozen over; the ice grew thicker and the lodgekeeper and Samuel reported each morning that it was perfectly safe.

The boys from the Academy, too, appeared. Nancy was not much interested in them—only curious. Even the girls of her own class seemed to be very desirous of making acquaintances among the Academy boys.

"You see," Jennie Bruce told her, "after the holidays we have entertainments at the Hall, and Dr. Dudley lets his boys give a minstrel show. We each have a dance during the winter—one at the Academy and one at the Hall; and if you know some of the boys beforehand it's lots easier to get partners at the dance."

"I'd just as lief dance with another girl, I think," said Nancy, timidly.

"Pshaw! that's no fun," returned Jennie.

"I never *did* dance with a boy," admitted Nancy. "Where—where I lived only the girls danced together."

"Where was that?" demanded Jennie.

"At school," said Nancy, blushing, and sorry she had said so much now.

"Oh! a 'kid' school?" laughed Jennie.

"Well—yes."

"Where was it?"

"It—it was a long way from here," responded Nancy, slowly.

She couldn't bear to tell even Jennie—with whom she so desired to be friends—where Higbee School was located. Of course, Jennie noticed this point of mystery, and she looked at Nancy curiously. The latter couldn't find another word to say.

She skated off by herself. The ringing ice was delightful. Nancy skated as well as any boy, while she was naturally—being a girl—more graceful in her motions.

She sped like a dart across the river, came around in a great curve, like a bird tacking against a stiff breeze, and then started back "on the roll."

Hands in her jersey pockets, her skates tapping the ice firmly as she bore her weight first on one, then on the other foot, Nancy seemed fairly to float over the frozen river.

She saw a group of girls and boys standing about where the Hall boundary was; but she did not recognize any of them until she was rolling past. Then she heard Grace Montgomery's shrill voice:

"Oh, she's only showing off. Her name's Nelson. Cora knows all about her."

"No, I don't," snapped Cora Rathmore's voice. "But she's chummed on me."

Nancy heard no more. She didn't want to. She realized that, after all, behind her back these girls were speaking just as unkindly of her as ever.

Suddenly she realized that the group had broken up. At least, one of the boys had darted out of it and was racing down toward her.

"What's the matter with you, Bob?" she heard Grace call after the boy.

"Say! I know that girl," a cheerful voice declared, and the next moment the speaker, bending low, and racing like a dart, reached Nancy's side.

"Hold on! Don't you remember me?" he exclaimed.

Nancy looked at him, startled. His plump, rosy, smiling face instantly reflected an image in her memory.

"I'm Bob Endress," he said. "But if it hadn't been for you I wouldn't have had any name at all—or anything else in life. Don't you remember?"

It was the boy who had been saved from the millrace that August afternoon. Of course Nancy couldn't have forgotten him. But she was so confused she did not know what to say for the moment.

"You haven't forgotten throwing that tire to me?" he cried. "Why! that was the smartest thing! The chauffeur would never have thought of it. And Grace and those other girls would have been about as much use as so many mice. You were as good as a boy, *you* were. I'd have been drowned."

"I—I'm glad you weren't," she gasped.

"Then you remember me?"

"Oh, yes. I couldn't forget your face."

"Well!" he cried, "I never did expect to see you around this part of the country. But I told father I wanted to go back there to Malden next summer and see if I couldn't come across you. And my mother wrote to a friend there about you, too. We all wanted to know who you were."

"I—I am Nancy Nelson," said the girl, timidly.

"Sure! Grace, or somebody, was just speaking of you," said the boy. "You see, I was motoring through that country on the way to Chicago, in Senator Montgomery's car. That was a pretty spot at that old mill and the girls saw the lilies. So I had to wade in for them—like a chump," and he laughed.

"It *was* dangerous, I suppose," confessed Nancy. "But I often longed to wade in myself for them."

"And you got them anyway!" he cried, bursting into another laugh. "Grace and the others were sore about it. They had to wait until we got to the next town before we found any more lilies. Then I got a boat and went after them."

Nancy had stopped skating, and she and the boy stood side by side, talking. What the Montgomery girl and her friends would think about this Nancy did not at the time imagine.

"But it's funny Grace didn't recognize you," said Bob, suddenly.

"No. In the confusion they wouldn't have noticed me very closely," Nancy replied.

"Well! I don't see how Grace could have missed knowing such a jolly girl as you."

His boyish, outspoken opinion amused Nancy. Although Bob was at least three years her senior she soon became self-possessed. Girls are that way—usually.

"You're a dandy skater," said Bob. "Will you skate with me?"

"Oh, yes; if you want me to," replied Nancy.

She had never skated with a boy before. They crossed hands and started off on the long roll. Nancy was just as sturdy on her skates as the boy. It was delightful to cross the ice so easily, yet swiftly, and feel that one's partner was perfectly secure, too.

And Bob Endress was such a nice boy. Nancy decided that her first good opinion of him, formed when she had seen him wading in the millpond after water-lilies, was correct. He was gentlemanly, frank, and as jolly as could be.

She remembered very well now that she had heard various other girls at Pinewood Hall talk of Bob Endress. He was some distant connection of the haughty Grace Montgomery.

And he had left Grace and all those other girls in a minute to renew his odd acquaintance with Nancy.

The latter could not fail to feel a glow all through her at this thought. She had all the

aspirations of other girls. She wanted to be liked by people—even by boys. And Bob was evidently a great favorite with her schoolmates.

Round and round the course they skated. It seemed to Nancy as though she never would tire with such a partner. And she forgot that the girls Bob had deserted might be offended with her. For once—a tiny, short hour—Nancy Nelson was perfectly happy.

Until the distant chime in the tower of Pinewood Hall warned the girls that they must go in, Nancy and Bob skimmed over the ice to the envy of less accomplished skaters. Nancy came back to the boathouse all in a glow, after promising to meet Bob the next afternoon on the river.

There were Grace Montgomery and Cora, and Belle Macdonald, and the others of their clique, taking off their skates. Nancy felt so happy that she would have made friends, just then, with almost anyone.

She flung off her skates and smiled at the other girls. She smiled at Samuel when she asked him, to sharpen them against the next afternoon, and tipped him for his trouble.

But whereas the under gardener smiled in return and praised her skating, the girls stared at her as though she were a complete stranger. Grace turned her back contemptuously. Cora scowled blackly.

And when she was back in Number 30, West Side, making ready for supper, her roommate came in noisily, tossed her skates on the floor, and burst out with:

"Well! you're a nice girl, *you* are!"

"What's the matter now?" asked Nancy, with more courage than usual.

"I should think you'd ask!"

"I *do* ask," said Nancy.

"Well, you've just about spoiled my—our—party."

"How?"

"You know well enough," snapped Cora.

"I do not," declared Nancy. "I have done nothing."

"Oh, no! Just walking off with Bob Endress and keeping him all the afternoon. Why, Grace is his cousin—and she'll never forgive you."

It was on the tip of Nancy's tongue to say she didn't care; but instead she remained silent.

"I had the hardest work to coax her to come to-night," went on Cora.

This was the evening marked for the spread in Number 30.

"I do not see that I have done anything to you girls," said Nancy, with some warmth. "I happened to know Bob Endress—"

"How did *you* come to know Bob? He never said anything about it," snapped Cora.

"Well, I can assure you we were acquainted."

"It's certainly very strange," said the other girl, suspiciously.

"I don't see that it is anybody's business but our own," Nancy Nelson returned, with growing confidence. "And I did not mean to offend either you or Miss Montgomery."

"It's very strange."

"Not at all."

"Well, I don't know how you will explain it to Grace."

"I don't have to," said Nancy, and now she *was* getting angry.

"Let me tell you, Miss, you will have to," cried Cora, more snappishly than ever.

"I do not see why."

"Let me tell you Grace Montgomery is the most influential and popular girl in our class. You'll find that out if you continue to offend her."

"I don't see how I have offended her; nor do I see how I can pacify her if she is angry with me," returned Nancy, doggedly.

"You'd better let Bob Endress alone, then," cried Cora.

"Why! how meanly you talk," said Nancy, fairly white now with anger.

"Well! there's something very strange about how you took him right away from us—"

"If you don't stop talking like that," Nancy answered, her eyes blazing, "I shall not speak to you at all."

"Well, you've got to explain to Grace, then."

"I will explain nothing to her."

"Then you mean to spoil our party to-night?"

"No. It isn't *my* party, that is evident. I'll go into some other room while you are holding it, if that's what you want."

Cora looked at her askance. Nancy had never shown any temper before since the term had opened. Cora did not really know whether her roommate would do as she said, or not.

"Oh, we're not dying to have you in here. You can go to Number 38. You know both of the girls from there will be here."

"That's what I'll do, then," answered Nancy, firmly.

"I'll tell Grace," said Cora, rather uncertainly. "Then she'll be sure and come. Oh, she *is* mad."

"I hope she will remain mad with me as long as we are both at Pinewood!" cried Nancy, desperately, and then she ran out of the room to hide the tears of anger and disappointment which she could no longer keep back.

HEAPS OF TROUBLE

Nancy wept as she had never wept since coming to Pinewood Hall. But she was weeping as much for rage as for sorrow. Cora's insulting words, and her cruelty, had lashed Nancy's indignation to the boiling point.

She *could* spoil all their fun on this evening. She knew where all the goodies were hidden. Most of them were in her closet, and in Cora's. And her money had paid for every scrap that had been smuggled in from the Clintondale caterer's and from the delicatessen store and grocery.

She could not only stop the girls from having the spread in Number 30; but she could stop their having it at all.

However, the heat of her passion was soon over. She bathed her eyes and flushed face and went down to supper without seeing Cora again.

She did not sit near the Montgomery clique at table, anyway; but she heard them talking and laughing during the meal, and afterward some of them passed where Nancy sat and looked at her oddly.

None of them spoke to her. All of a sudden they had dropped her again and she was just as friendless as she had been before Cora Rathmore suggested the secret supper.

When she went back to Number 30, however, Cora followed her.

"Now, I want to know just what you mean to do, Miss?" she said, standing inside the door and scowling at Nancy.

"What about?"

"About the supper to-night."

"You certainly don't need *me* at the supper," observed Nancy, quietly.

"I should hope not! But we don't propose to have you run to the teachers and give our secrets away."

Nancy started up from her chair and advanced a step toward her tormentor. She really had it in her mind to box Cora's ears—and the black-eyed girl knew it.

"Don't you dare touch me!" she cried, shrinking back.

"Then don't you dare suggest that I'd be a telltale," warned Nancy. "I leave that to you."

"Oh, you do!"

Nancy was silent, and Cora calmed down.

"Then you'll go out for the evening?" she asked, at last.

"Gladly," said Nancy.

"Mabel and Hilary say you can stay in 38."

"Very well."

"And of course you are not going to be mean about your share of the goodies?" asked Cora, slyly.

Nancy wanted to say that it seemed to her *all* the goodies were hers. But she only tossed Cora the key of her closet.

"I hope you'll have a good time," she said, in a low voice. "But if I were you, Cora, and had treated anybody as meanly as you have me, I could *never* have a good time."

"Pooh!" replied Cora, insolently. Such considerations made no impression on her. She only thought that Nancy was "too easy for anything," and laughed and joked about her to Grace Montgomery.

Nancy would not cry before her roommate. She spent the evening as usual in apparently close application to the lessons for the next day; scarcely a word was said in Number 30 until curfew at nine. The other girls kept entirely away from the room that evening. Going back and forth might have drawn the suspicion of Miss Maybrick to that particular dormitory.

At bedtime the two girls occupying Number 30 undressed and got into bed as usual. The electric lights went out on that floor. The corridors were lighted only by caged gas jets, turned low. In each room was a candle in an ample stick. The girls had to use these if they needed to move about in the night, and all the after-hour spreads were illuminated by candles, each girl participating bringing her own taper to the feast.

The hour between nine and ten dragged by drearily enough. Especially was this so for Nancy. She lay wide awake, with swollen, feverish eyes, and waited for the ten o'clock gong.

At that hour the lights on the upper floors were out and, a little later, Miss Maybrick's soft footfall sounded in the corridor. Occasionally the teacher turned a knob and looked into a study. The draperies between studies and bedrooms had to be left open so that the teacher could cast the ray of her electric hand-lamp right in upon the pillows of the two beds.

And if there was not the proper number of heads on those pillows, an investigation was sure to follow!

Miss Maybrick was known to be a sound sleeper, however. It was pretty safe for the girls to have their "orgies" on the nights this particular instructor was on duty.

Miss Maybrick went past and, in a moment, Cora slipped out of bed and to the door. In the moonlight Nancy saw her crouched beside the door, reach up and turn the knob, open the portal a little way, and listen.

The rustle of the teacher's skirts was lost in the distance. She had already been upon the upper floors; and now her inspection was over. The soft closing of her own door, which was right at the head of the stairway, came to the ears of the listening girls.

Almost immediately there was a rustling and whispering in the corridor. Cora threw the door of Number 30 open. Somebody giggled.

"Come on!" whispered Cora, sharply.

Nancy, feeling that it was all wrong and that no good would come of it, slid out of bed, sought her slippers with her bare toes, wriggled her feet into them, and seized her gray robe.

She darted out of Number 30 before any of the visitors arrived, and went to the nearest bathroom. There she waited until she was pretty sure the twenty girls had gathered to enjoy their stolen fun.

Number 38 was just across in the other short corridor. Nancy ran there, sobbing quietly to herself. Just before she opened the door somebody grabbed her arm.

Oh! how frightened she was for the moment. She was sure a lurking teacher had found her out of her room.

"Hush! don't be a dunce! It's only me," said a kind, if sharp, voice.

"Jennie Bruce!"

"Of course it is. Who did you think I was—your grandmother's ghost?" giggled Jennie, pinching her.

"Oh, oh!" panted Nancy.

"You're scared to death. What's the matter?"

"You were going into Number 38?"

"Yes," admitted Nancy.

"Well, come into my room. It's Number 40. I'm chummed with a girl who has gone to that party."

"You—you know about it, then?" stammered Nancy.

"I should say I did."

"And your roommate was invited—and not *you*?"

"Grace and her crowd aren't in love with me," remarked Jennie.

"Oh!"

"And I reckon they are not overpoweringly fond of *you*?" suggested Jennie.

Nancy could not speak then. Jennie put her arm over her shoulder.

"Come on into *my* bed, Nancy," she said. "Sally will wake us up when she comes back from the spread. I think Cora and that Montgomery girl have treated you just as meanly as they could."

Nancy still sobbed. Jennie opened the door of Number 40 and drew her inside.

"Don't you let them see that you care," commanded Jennie.

"I—I don't care a—about *them*," sobbed Nancy. "It's—it's because I haven't a friend in the world."

"Oh, don't say that, honey," urged the other girl, still holding Nancy in her arms after they had discarded their robes and crept between the sheets.

"It—it is so," sobbed Nancy.

"You mean you haven't made friends here at Pinewood?"

"I haven't made friends anywhere," said Nancy.

"Why—why—Surely you have some folks—some relatives—?"

Nancy's naturally frank nature overpowered her caution here. Jennie Bruce was the first girl who had ever seemed to care about Nancy's troubles. She did not seem curious—only kind. The lonely girl did the very thing which her caution all the time had warned her would be disastrous.

She opened her heart to Jennie Bruce.

"Do you know who I am?" she demanded of the surprised Jennie.

"Why—what do you mean? Of course you are Nancy Nelson."

"I don't even know if I have a right to that name."

"Mercy!"

"It's the only name I know. It seems to be the only name anybody who knows about me, knows."

"Then it's yours."

"How do I know *that*?" queried Nancy, bitterly. "I'm just a little Miss Nobody."

"Goodness me! but that *does* sound romantic," whispered Jennie.

"Romantic!" cried Nancy, with scorn. "It's nothing of the kind. You're as bad as Scorch."

"As bad as *who*?"

"Scorch O'Brien," replied Nancy.

"Well, for goodness sake! if that doesn't sound interesting," cried Jenny. "Who is Scorch O'Brien? What a perfectly ridiculous name! Why 'Scorch'?"

"He's red-headed," explained Nancy, doubtful now. She saw that she had got herself to a point where she must tell it all—every bit of her story—if she wished to keep Jennie's friendship.

"Bully! Scorch O'Brien is fine," laughed Jennie. "Let's hear all about you, Nancy Nelson. I bet you've got lots of the queerest friends, only you don't know it. I—I've got nothing but brothers, and sisters, and cousins, and all that sort of trash. The Bruces hold most all the political offices in the town where I come from. You couldn't throw a stone anywhere in Hollyburg without hitting one of the family."

"But just think! You've got no folks to bother you. There are no teasing cousins. You haven't got to 'be nice' to relatives that you fairly can't help hating!"

"Oh, I believe you've got it *good*, Nancy Nelson; only you don't know it!"

So, thus encouraged, and lying in Jennie's warm embrace, Nancy whispered the full and particular account of the little, unknown girl who had been brought to Higbee School, far away in Malden, nearly ten years before.

She told Jennie about Miss Prentice and about the long, tedious vacations with Miss Trigg, even down to the last one when she had helped save Bob Endress—then a perfect stranger to her—from the millpond.

"And he knew you right away on the ice to-day? I saw him! Good for you! He's the most popular boy in Clinton Academy," declared Jennie with conviction.

"But I don't care anything about *that*," said Nancy, honestly. "I want the girls to like me. And I know if they learn that I am just a nobody—"

"What nonsense! You may be a great heiress. Why! maybe you belong to royalty—"

"In America!" ejaculated Nancy, the practical.

"Well! they could have brought you over the ocean."

"I haven't heard of any of the royal families of Europe advertising for a lost princess," Nancy said, in better humor now. "And I know I don't look like the Turks, or the Chinese, or Hindoos, or anything like that. I guess I'm an American, all right."

"But you must have somebody very rich belonging to you," cried Jennie.

"I don't know."

"Then that Mr. Gordon must know more about you than he will tell."

"I—I am almost tempted to believe so," admitted Nancy.

"I believe it!"

"Scorch says so."

"That boy is all right," declared Jennie. "I'd like to know him."

"But I don't see how Mr. Gordon is to be made to tell what he knows—if he *does* know more than he has admitted about me," sighed Nancy.

"Neither do I—yet," said Jennie. "But we'll think about it. Maybe that Scorch will find out something."

"But—really—Mr. Gordon is very kind to me. See how much money he gives me."

"And perhaps that is only a tithe of what he steals from you."

"You're as bad as Scorch," declared Nancy.

"Well—of course—maybe he is telling the truth, too," said Jennie. "And twenty dollars at one clip I—Whew!"

Nancy did not tell her that the twenty dollars had paid for the supper Grace and Cora and their friends were enjoying in Number 30 at that very moment.

"But I tell you what," said Jennie, after a bit, and speaking reflectively.

"Yes?"

"Just give Bob Endress the tip to say nothing to the other girls about how he first met you."

"Oh!"

"Don't you see? If Cora and Grace find out where you lived before you came to Pinewood Hall, they'll maybe learn all about you. And perhaps, that *would* be bad," said Jennie, slowly.

"Then you see it too?" asked Nancy, sadly. "They'll be very sure I am a nobody then."

"It's a shame how girls will talk," admitted Jennie Bruce. "Especially that kind of girls."

"I wish I had *you* for a friend, Jennie," said Nancy, in a whisper.

"Why! you have!" cried the other. "I've always wanted to know you better. But the girls think you are offish."

"I don't mean to be."

"No, I see," returned Jennie. "But I understand you now. I wish you were in this room instead of Sally."

"And if you only were in Number 30, instead of Cora," spoke Nancy, out loud.

And upon the very echo of these words, a clear voice demanded:

"And will you tell me, Miss Nelson, how it is that *you* are not in Number 30—your proper dormitory—at this hour of the night?"

Both girls sat up in bed as though worked with the same spring. They could not speak. Madame Schakael stood in the doorway.

CHAPTER XV

A GREAT DEAL HAPPENS

The Madame's doll-like figure has been mentioned before in these chronicles. But to Nancy Nelson's excited imagination the principal of Pinewood Hall at this juncture seemed to swell—expand—develop—and actually fill the doorway of Number 40, West Side, with her unexpected presence!

Nancy couldn't speak for the moment. Even the lively Jennie Bruce's gayety was stifled in her throat.

"I hope you are not stricken dumb, Nancy," suggested the Madame, in the same low voice.

"Oh, Madame! forgive me!" gasped the culprit at last, and slipped out of bed.

"Where are your robe and slippers?"

"Right here, Madame," answered the frightened freshman, getting into them in a hurry.

"Well! stand there. Tell me why you are in the wrong room?"

"Oh, it isn't Jennie's fault—'deed it isn't, Madame!" gasped Nancy.

"I am not going to eat you, child," said the principal of the school, with some exasperation. "Having broken a rule, please stand up properly and answer my questions."

"How came you here, Nancy Nelson?"

"Jennie—Jennie found me crying in the hall."

"What for?"

"I—I felt bad."

"You were ill?"

"Oh, no, ma'am," Nancy hastened to say. "I was not ill at all. Only I was—was lonely—and—and sorry—and—"

"Not altogether clear, Nancy," said the Madame; but her voice was lower and softer. "Tell me why you were crying in the hall?"

But now Nancy had begun to get a grip upon herself. She realized the position she was in. If she obeyed Madame Schakael's order she must "tell on" the girls then holding their orgie in Number 30.

"Do you hear me, Nancy?" asked Madame Schakael, firmly.

"Yes, Madame," whispered the girl.

"Can't you answer me?"

"No—no, Madame."

"Why not?"

Nancy was silent for fully a minute, the Madame waiting without a sign of irritation.

"That—that, too, I cannot answer," said the miserable girl, at last.

"Do you realize what such a refusal means, Nancy?"

"You—you will have to punish me."

"Seriously."

"Yes, Madame; seriously."

"And your record to date has been quite the best of any girl of your class."

Nancy locked her hands together and gazed at the principal. But she could say nothing.

"You say Jennie Bruce is not to blame?" asked Madame Schakael, after another minute of silence.

"Oh, no, Madame!"

"Oh, dear me!" cried the other girl, "You just don't understand, Madame—"

Nancy made a pleading gesture to stop her newly-made friend. Madame held up her hand, too.

"I believe what Nancy Nelson says, Miss Bruce," she observed, gravely. "You shall not be punished."

"I don't care for that!" cried the impulsive Jennie. "But Nancy ought not to be punished, either."

"Will you let *me* be the judge of that, Jennie?" asked the Madame, softly.

Jennie was abashed.

"Nancy is out of her room out of hours. That is a fault—a serious fault. You both know that?"

"Yes, Madame," said the stiff-lipped Nancy, while Jennie began to sob.

"I notice that Jennie's roommate is not here. When she returns, Nancy, you may go back to your own room. And I shall deal out the same sort of punishment to Sally that I do to you, Nancy.

"And that is," pursued Madame Schakael, slowly, "that you will be denied recreation, save that which is a part of the school curriculum, until the Christmas recess."

Nancy said nothing. But she fully understood what it meant. No outdoor runs alone, no skating, nothing save the exercises prescribed by the physical instructor.

"You may wait for Sally's return. And you are both forbidden to speak of this visit," the principal said, and withdrew from the room as softly as she had entered it.

"Oh, dear me!" gasped Nancy, "she will catch them all in Number 30."

"And serve 'em right," said Jennie.

They waited, expecting to see Jennie's roommate coming back in a hurry. But there was no disturbance. The clock at the foot of the main staircases had long since struck eleven. Now it tolled midnight.

Soon there were creaking of doors, faint rustlings in the corridors, giggling half-suppressed, and then the door of Number 40 opened again softly.

"Oh, gee!" exclaimed Sally. "Is she *here*?"

"Yes, she is," replied Jenny, tartly. "What have you got to say against it?"

"Oh, you needn't be so short, Jennie Bruce," said Sally.

She slipped out of her wrapper and into her bed. Nancy got up, kissed Jennie warmly, and left the room silently. When she got back to Number 30 Cora was alone. All traces of the spread were hidden.

Cora said never a word; neither did Nancy. But she wondered much. Madame Schakael, she believed, had not hunted out the mystery of *her* being with Jennie Bruce. Would she and Sally be the only ones punished for this affair?

Morning came and with it the usual assembly in the hall for prayers after breakfast. From the platform Madame Schakael read, without a word of explanation, the names of every girl who had attended Cora's spread—save Cora herself—and ordered that they be deprived of recreation, as had Nancy, "for being out of their dormitories after hours." The blow fell like a thunderclap upon the culprits.

When they filed out of the hall to go to first recitation not one of the girls who had been at Number 30 the night before but scowled deadly hatred at poor Nancy.

It would have been useless for Nancy to point out that she, too, had received the same punishment. Circumstances were against the girl who had practically been turned out of her own room while the party was having a glorious time eating salad, macaroons, ice cream, and various other indigestible combinations of "sweeties."

Cora Rathmore had escaped. How? Her mates did not stop to investigate *that* mystery.

If Cora could have explained she did not set about it. Instead, in first recitation, where she sat behind Nancy, she poked her in the back with a needle-like forefinger and hissed:

"You're a nice one; aren't you?"

Nancy merely gave her a look, but made no reply.

"Don't play the innocent. We all know that you went to the Madame and so got square with us."

"I—did—not!" declared Nancy, sternly.

"Miss Nelson!" exclaimed Miss Maybrick, suddenly.

Nancy whirled around, "eyes front."

"Demerit—talking in class," said the teacher.

That was the first time such a thing had happened to Nancy. It did seem as though everything bad was tumbling on top of her at once. She would not look around again when Cora poked her, but kept at her books—or appeared to!

What little joy she had had in school heretofore was all gone now. Lessons dragged; she thought the instructors all looked at her suspiciously.

Just the recreation room in the basement between lessons, or a demure walk with Miss Etching, the physical instructor, over the snowy lawns and wood paths about Pinewood. Extra gym work was denied her, and when the other girls ran with their skates to the river after release from studies, she could only go to Number 30 and mope.

Nancy could not see Bob Endress again. *That* was something beside a mere provocation of spirit. The girl felt that it was serious.

As Jennie had suggested, she wished to warn Bob to say nothing about where he had met her before. Of course, Grace Montgomery could not see the boy, either. But Cora was free to pump Bob, and Nancy was sure her roommate would worm out of him the whole story of how he had first met Nancy.

"He's been looking for you," whispered Jennie to Nancy at supper, the first night following the imposition of the punishment. "I saw him skating with Corinne and some of the other big girls. I don't know whether he saw Cora, or not."

"Oh, dear, Jennie!" cried Nancy. "I wish you would warn him."

"I?" exclaimed the other. "I never was introduced to him."

"Oh!"

"But that wouldn't make any difference," declared the fun-loving girl, with a smile. "I'm not afraid of boys; they don't bite."

"He's a real nice boy, I believe," said Nancy.

"So they all say."

"And he'd understand, I am sure," continued Nancy. "If he was only warned what harm his telling might do me——"

"Leave it to me!" cried Jennie. "I'll skate with him to-morrow—if he's on the ice."

Nancy's life in the school was made far more miserable now by Cora Rathmore and her friends. All these girls, who had enjoyed the spread bought with Nancy's money, but who had been punished by the principal, were determined to look upon Nancy as guilty of "telling on them."

Nor did they give her any chance to answer the charge. Cora would not even speak to her in their room. If any of the other girls came in, Cora said:

"Oh, come over to your room. We can't talk here, where there is a telltale around."

This was said *at* Nancy; but none of them actually addressed her. Besides, Cora began to hint that she knew something against Nancy that she was keeping in reserve.

"Oh, yes! she holds her head up awful proud," Cora observed in Nancy's hearing. "But you just wait!"

"Wait for what, Cora?" asked one of the girls.

"Wait till I get a letter. I'll know all about Miss Telltale soon."

And after that Nancy's worst fears were realized by the news that Jennie Bruce brought her. Jennie had managed to see and have a private interview with Bob Endress.

"And of course, he's managed to do it," grumbled Jennie.

"Done what? Oh! done what?" cried Nancy, clasping her hands.

"Well, Cora wormed something out of him. He told her how you were the girl who saved him from drowning last summer."

"Then it'll all come out!" groaned Nancy.

"That's according. Cora knows where you lived before you came to Pinewood to school."

"And she'll write to Malden. I believe she *has* done so."

"But perhaps whoever she knows there won't know you."

"But they'll learn about Higbee School, and then they can trace me to it. I know if anybody wrote to Miss Prentice she'd tell all about me. She'd think it her duty."

"Mean old thing!" declared Jennie.

"Oh, Jennie! it's going to be awful hard," said poor Nancy. "You'd better not be too friendly with me. The girls are all bound to look down on me."

"Don't be so foolish! Of course they won't."

But Nancy shook her head. She had been all through the same trouble so many times before. With every incoming class of new girls at Higbee School it had been the same. She had been "the girl of mystery."

"If you could only make that old lawyer tell the truth about you, Nance!" exclaimed Jennie.

"But perhaps he *is* telling the truth."

"Not much, he isn't."

"Why, you're as bad as Scorch O'Brien," declared Nancy, with half a smile.

"That boy's got some brains, all right," observed Jennie, quickly. "It does not sound reasonable that, during all these years, Mr. Gordon would not have probed into the matter and learned something about your real antecedents."

Nancy shook her head, slowly. "It may all be true. Maybe it is just kind-heartedness that has kept him acting as intermediary between the persons who furnish money for my education, and

myself."

"And why does he tip you so generously?"

"Oh—er—Well, I don't know."

"Is that out of his own pocket, do you think?" asked the shrewd Jennie.

"Well—"

"Does this 'Old Gordon,' as your friend Scorch calls him, really seem like a man given to outbursts of charity, Nance?"

"Why—why, I never saw him but once," replied Nancy.

"But did he impress you as being of a philanthropic nature?" urged her friend.

"No-oo."

"I thought not," observed Jennie. "Just because Scorch reminded him of your existence wasn't likely to make him send you money. I bet he handles plenty more belonging to you that you never see."

"But see to what an expensive school he has sent me!" cried Nancy.

"Maybe he was obliged to do so. Perhaps he only does just what he is told to do, after all. There may be somebody behind Mr. Gordon, who is watching both him and you."

"My goodness! You make it all more mysterious than it was before," sighed Nancy. "Just the same, if these girls learn all about me they'll spread it around that I'm just a foundling, and that nobody knows anything about me. It is going to be dreadfully hard."

"Now, you pluck up your spirit, Nance Nelson!" commanded Jennie Bruce. "Don't be so milk-and-watery. You're just as good as they are."

"I don't know. At least, my folks may not have been as good as *their* folks."

"Well, I'd never let 'em guess it," cried Jennie. "You're scared before you are hurt, Nance; that's what is the matter with you."

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CHAPTER XVI

IT COMES TO A HEAD

Jennie Bruce was just as full of good humor as she could be. She may have lacked reverence for teachers, precedent, the dignity of the seniors, and honored custom; but nobody with a normal mind could really be angry with her.

Her deportment marks were dreadfully low; but she was quick at her studies and was really too kind-hearted to *mean* to bother the teachers.

She managed to get in and out of a dozen scrapes a day. Yet the rollicking good-nature of the girl, and her frank honesty did much to save her from serious punishment.

Jennie went on her care-free way, assured in her own mind that certain of the rules of Pinewood Hall were only made to be broken. If a thought came to her in class, or a desire to communicate with another scholar, she could no more resist the temptation than she could fly.

"Miss Bruce! half an hour this afternoon on grammar rules for talking!"

"Oh, Miss Maybrick! I'm so sorry. I didn't think."

"Learn to think, then."

"Jennie, if you *must* make such faces, please do so out of the view of your classmates, I beg." This from gentle Miss Meader.

"I—I was just trying how it felt to be strangled with a cord. It says here the *Thuggee* did it in India as a religious practice."

"That's enough, Jennie!" as a giggle arose from the roomful of girls. "Your excuses are worse than your sins."

And her thirst for knowledge! Of course, it was a desire for information that was by no possibility of any value to either herself or the class.

"Is this sentence good English, Miss Halliday?" asked Jennie, after scribbling industriously for some minutes, and then reading from her paper: "'A girl was criticised by her teacher for the use of the word 'that,' but it was proved that that 'that' that that girl used was that 'that' that that girl should have used.' Is that right?"

"That is perfectly correct, Jennie," said the English teacher, grimly, when the class had come to order, "but *you* are altogether wrong. You may show me that sentence written plainly forty times when you come to the class to-morrow."

"Zowie!" murmured Jennie in Nancy's ear as they were excused. "I bet she thought that hurt."

But the ingenious Jennie had recourse to a typewriter in one of the offices which the girls could use if they wished. She put in forty slips of tissue paper, with carbon sheets between each two, and wrote the troublesome sentence on all forty slips at once!

"You know very well this was not what I meant when I gave you the task, Jennie," commented Miss Halliday, yet having hard work not to smile.

"You particularly said to write it plainly," returned the demure Jennie. "And what could be plainer than typewriting?"

These jokes, and their like, made her beloved by a certain number of the girls, amused the others, and sometimes bothered her teachers a good deal.

But there was not a girl in all Pinewood Hall who would have been of such help to Nancy

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Nelson at this juncture as Jennie Bruce.

When Jennie was out of the building in recreation time, Nancy either kept close in Number 30, or crept away to some empty office and coned her lesson books industriously.

When Jennie was at hand Nancy began to see that she need fear little trouble from the Montgomery clique. They were all afraid of Jennie's sharp tongue. And after Cora had tried to be nasty to Nancy before a crowd a couple of times, and Jennie had turned the laugh against her, Nancy's enemies learned better.

But one noon Grace Montgomery received a letter which, after reading, she passed around among her particular friends. It was eagerly read, especially by Cora Rathmore.

That young lady immediately walked over to Nancy, who was sitting alone reading, and she shook the letter in the surprised girl's face.

"Now I've got you, Miss!" she fairly hissed.

Nancy looked up, startled, but could not speak.

"Now we know where you came from, and what and who you are, Nancy Nelson!" pursued Cora. "A girl like you—a nobody—a foundling—Oh! I'll see if I have got to associate with such *scum!*"

She wheeled sharply away, and had Nancy recovered her powers of speech she would have had no time to reply to this tirade.

But Nancy could not have spoken just then to save her life! The blow had fallen at last. All she had feared since coming to Pinewood Hall was now about to be realized.

In some way Grace Montgomery had learned the particulars of her early life at Higbee School, though Cora might not have found it out, and Grace had put the letter into the hands of Nancy's roommate.

What Cora would first do poor Nancy did not know. There would be some terrible "blowup" the girl was sure. The story would spread all over the school. All the girls must know that she was a mere nobody, apparently dependent upon charity for her education and even for her food.

Oh! if she could only escape from it all—run away from Pinewood—go somewhere so far, or so hidden, that none of these proud girls coming from rich families could ever find and taunt her with her own miserable story.

Yes, Nancy thought earnestly that afternoon of running away. Any existence, it seemed to her then, would be better than suffering the unkind looks and the doubtful whispers of her school companions.

Nancy was not afraid of ordinary things. The possibility of hunger and cold did not daunt her. She knew that, if she left the school secretly, and ran away and found a place to work, she might often be in need. But if she could only go where people would not ask questions!

She was quite as old as Scorch O'Brien, she thought. And see how independent that flame-haired youngster was! Nancy knew she could take care of herself alone in the city as well as Scorch. She had enough money left to get her to Cincinnati, and something over.

How she got through her lessons after dinner she never knew; but she did, somehow. Then she crept up to her dormitory and to her delight found it empty. She gathered together a few of her simplest possessions and crammed them into her handbag. She took only those things that would not be at once missed. She touched nothing on her bureau.

When she had locked the bag she opened the window and peered out. It was already growing dark; but far away, on the frozen river, she could hear the ring of skates and the silvery shouts of laughter from the girls.

Nobody stirred in the pinewood, nor in the shrubbery closer to the Hall. Nancy waited for a minute to see if she was observed, and then she tossed the bag into the middle of a clump of bushes not far from her window.

She believed nobody had seen her. She closed the sash and picked up her cap and coat. She rolled these into as small and compact a bundle as possible and then left the room quietly.

Corinne Pevay was coming through the corridor.

"Hullo, Nancy Nelson!" she said, cheerfully, putting her hand upon the younger girl's shoulder. "What did you want to be such a perfect little brick for?"

"I—I don't know what you mean?" quoth Nancy, shrinking under the senior's touch.

"Why, if you'd told Madame Schakael all about it the other night when she caught you in Number 40, do you suppose she would have punished you so harshly?"

"I—I couldn't tell on them," murmured Nancy, trying to hide her bundle.

"No. But what good did it do to try and save girls like Montgomery? They blame you, just the same."

Nancy nodded, but said nothing.

"But I know that you didn't tell on them; and so does Jennie Bruce. Madame Schakael learned the names of the culprits by going from door to door and finding out who were absent from their rooms. She did not have to go to Number 30 at all. And you got no thanks for trying to shield them."

Nancy continued silent.

"And one of them told *me*," said Corinne, pointedly, "that *you* paid for all those goodies they gorged themselves on; yet they froze you out of the party. Is that right?"

"Oh, I—I'd rather not say, Miss Pevay," stammered Nancy.

"Humph! Well, you're a funny kid," said the senior, leaving her. "You'll never get along in this girls' menagerie if you let 'em walk all over you."

Nancy had been afraid that Corinne would go to the lower floor with her. But when the bigger girl left her, she slipped down the stairs like a streak and ran for the rear door of the West Side.

She saw nobody. The lower corridors seemed empty. She reached the unlocked door and had her hand upon the knob. Indeed, she turned the knob and pulled the door toward her.

The cold evening air blew in upon her face. It was the Breath of the Wide World—that world

that lay before her if she left the shelter of Pinewood Hall and the bitterness of her life here.

And then, for the first time, a thought struck her. She had been forbidden to leave the building, save at stated times with the physical instructor, until the Christmas holidays, which were three weeks away.

Madame Schakael had bound her, on her honor, to remain a prisoner in the Hall until the ban of displeasure should be lifted. She had tacitly promised to obey, and therefore the Madame had set no spy upon Nancy's footsteps. There was no watching of the girls suffering under punishment. That was not the system of Pinewood Hall and its mistress.

How could Nancy break her word to Madame Schakael? Never had the Madame spoken otherwise than kindly to her. Even when she meted out punishment to her, Nancy knew that the punishment was just. The Madame could have done no less.

The principal had not even urged Nancy to report her schoolmates on the night of the party at Number 30, West Side. She had accepted her statement, as far as it went, as perfectly honest, too. She had not punished Jennie Bruce.

"Why, I *can't* run away and make Madame Schakael trouble!" gasped Nancy, closing the door again softly and crouching there in the dark hallway. "Mr. Gordon might make her trouble. Besides—I've promised."

The girl was much shaken by her fear of what cruelty Cora Rathmore and Grace Montgomery would mete out to her. Yet she could not play what seemed to her mind a "mean trick" upon the doll-like principal who had been so kind to her.

"Oh, dear me! I can't go—I can't go!" moaned Nancy Nelson. "It wouldn't be right. Madame Schakael said I wasn't to go out—"

And then she remembered the bag she had tossed out of the window. She must have that bag back, if she wasn't going away. If it remained there over night perhaps Mr. Pease, or Samuel, would find it.

And then the story would all come out, and her position in the school would be worse!

But Nancy knew that she had no right to leave the building at this particular time. That was the plain understanding, that recreation hours should be spent within the Hall, unless Miss Etching invited her to join a walking party.

The physical instructor was now down on the ice with the girls. Nancy might have asked one of the other teachers for permission to step out for just a minute; but that would entail much explanation.

The brush clump into which she had thrown her bag was around the farther corner of the wing. And just then she heard laughing and talking as the first group from the river approached the Hall.

Ah! there was Jennie. Nancy identified her jolly laugh and chatter immediately. She could trust Jennie. Jennie would slip around the house and bring in the fatal bag secretly, and keep still about it.

So Nancy kept back in the dark hall and let the troop of laughing girls pass her without saying a word. Jennie came last and Nancy seized her arm.

"Goodness to gracious and eight hands around!" gasped Jennie. "How you startled me. Is it you, Nancy?"

"Hush! Yes."

"Well, what's the matter? Whose old cat is dead now?" demanded Jennie, in an equally low voice.

"I—I threw my bag out of the window, Jennie. Will you get it?" whispered the excited girl.

"Your bag?"

"Yes, yes!"

"What under the sun did you do it for?"

"I—I can't tell you here," whispered Nancy.

"What have you got *there*?" demanded Jennie, suddenly, pulling at the bundle under the other girl's arm.

"My—my coat."

"And your hat?"

"Ye—yes."

"Oh, you little chump! You are starting to run away!"

"No, I'm not."

"But you thought of it?"

"Oh, Jennie! I don't see how I *can* stay here. Cora and Grace know everything."

"I know it—nasty cats! But I'd face 'em. There's nothing to be ashamed of," declared Jennie. But she said it a little weakly. She knew that many of the girls would be just foolish enough to follow the lead of the Montgomery girl and Cora Rathmore.

"I—I've *got* to face 'em, I suppose," murmured Nancy. "I just thought that I couldn't run away."

"Huh! why not?" asked her friend, curiously.

"Because Madame Schakael put me on my honor not to leave the Hall in recreation hours without permission."

"Oh! goodness!" gasped Jennie. Then she burst out laughing, rocking herself to and fro, doubled up in the darkness of the hallway.

"What a delightful kid you are, Nance!" she cried, at last. "And you threw your handbag, all packed, out of the window?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll go get it. But you certainly *will* be the death of me!" cried Jennie, and opened the door again.

"Oh! I'll thank you so much," whispered Nancy.

"Go on upstairs and put that coat and hat away," ordered Jennie, with sudden gruffness. "You're no more fit to roam this wild desert of boarding-school life alone than a baby in long clothes! Run, now!" and Jennie darted out of the door.

But it was easier to say than to do! When Nancy stole back into the main hall there were a dozen girls, at least, gathered there waiting for the supper gong. And among them were some of those who had, all the time, treated Nancy with the least consideration.

Nancy dropped her gaze, so as not to see their unpleasant looks, and stole toward the stairway with her bundle. But suddenly Cora's sharp voice halted her. She had not seen Cora at first.

"Yes! there she goes up to our room. *That's* the girl *I* have to room with. But I'm going to tell Madame Schakael right now that I sha'n't do so any longer."

Nancy's head came up and she flushed and paled. The lash of Cora's words roused her temper as it had been roused once before. Yet all she said in reply to the cruel speech was:

"Why can't you let me alone, Cora Rathmore?"

"I'll let you alone!" repeated Cora, with a shrill laugh. "I guess I will. And every other *nice* girl will let you alone, Miss Nelson. Don't be afraid that you'll be worried by friends here. We all know what you are now."

Nancy had reached the foot of the stairs and was starting up. She whirled suddenly to face her tormentor. The coat and cap fell from her grasp. She clenched her hands tightly and cried:

"Then what *am* I, Cora? What have I done that makes me so bad in your eyes? What have you got against me?"

"You're a nobody. You came from a charity school. The woman who is principal doesn't know where you came from. Your parents may be in jail for all anybody knows," returned Cora.

"You haven't any people, and you stayed in that Higbee School at Maiden all the year round—vacations and all. The girls didn't like you there any more than they do here.

"Ha! Miss Nobody from No-place-at-all! that's what you are!" sneered Nancy's roommate. "How do you expect the nice girls here at Pinewood Hall will want to associate with you?"

"And let me tell you, Miss, that *I* refuse to room with you another day. I shall tell Madame Schakael so right now!" concluded Cora, her face very red and her black eyes flashing angrily.

CHAPTER XVII

A RIFT IN THE CLOUDS

None of the other girls had taken part in this discussion; but they all chanced to be members of the party that had partaken of the famous spread in Number 30 when Nancy's money paid for the goodies out of the enjoyment of which she had been crowded.

They were all, save Cora, paying the price, like Nancy, of being found out of their rooms after curfew by the principal of Pinewood Hall. All had suffered alike. Cora had been the only one to escape.

As it chanced, Cora had *not* been out of her room. The girls were not punished for eating ice cream and macaroons in secret, and none of them had been questioned about the incident save Nancy herself.

They had all, however, urged by Cora and Grace Montgomery, been sure that Nancy had "got even" by reporting them to the teachers. Maybe, if Cora had not so urged this—had not been so confident of Nancy's crime, in fact—the other girls might have stopped to think that *she* was being punished equally with themselves, and that only Cora had escaped.

Just the same, some of them might on this evening have taken Nancy's part had not Cora Rathmore made so much of the report upon Nancy's character that Grace Montgomery had received from a friend in Malden.

Nobody had seen the letter (which came under cover for Grace from her sister at home, and was therefore not examined by Madame Schakael) save Grace herself and Cora. The latter had flown into a passion immediately, and had declared that she would no longer remain in the same room with a "charity foundling."

Without stopping to think, these other girls were carried away by Cora's eloquence. When Nancy turned to face them from the lower stair of the flight leading up to the West Side dormitories, she was like a sheep cornered by a pack of dogs.

The shrill voice of the angry Cora carried much farther than she had intended, however. Suddenly, at the top of the flight, appeared Corinne Pevay, captain of the West Side.

"What is the trouble, *mes enfants*?" she demanded. "Why all the outburst of variegated sounds, Cora? Is it a convention of the Freshman Calliope Society; or merely a discussion of the question: Votes for Women?"

Cora had become silent instantly. Nancy was winking back her tears, and would not turn around. The other girls did not feel called upon to speak.

"Silence was her answer; Low she bowed her head!" chanted Corinne, in a sing-song tone. "It sounded like a washerwomen's convention, and now it has suddenly changed to a Quaker meeting. Come! what's the trouble?" and she spoke more sharply as she began to descend the stairs.

"None of your business, Miss!" snapped the black-eyed girl, made even angrier at this interruption.

"Wrong Cora—wrong. It *is* my business. Somebody will call me to account for it if you West Side infants raise ructions in the main hall. You know that. So, out with the difficulty."

Cora still remained scornfully silent.

"It is about Nancy, here, again, I suppose," said Corinne, finally reaching Nancy's side, and resting one hand lightly on the latter's shoulders. "You girls seem unable to annoy anybody else but Nancy Nelson. And if I were she"—she was coolly looking around the group and soon identified them as the party that had been punished with Nancy over Number 30's spread—"I never would stand it.

"She is too easy.... That is what is the matter with her. When Madame Schakael found her in Jennie's room that night she ought to have told just how she had been crowded out of her own room—and after paying for all the goodies you girls stuffed yourselves with, too!

"Why, I'd be ashamed! She took her punishment and never said a word. Jennie can prove *that*. And all you little fools have laid your punishment to *her*. And after eating her spread—"

"That isn't so!" snapped Cora, in a rage.

"What isn't so?"

"She knows she's going to be paid back for what she spent on the supper," declared Cora.

"Good! I hope she will be paid back. But you can't pay her back for the mean way you have treated her," declared the senior, with some warmth.

"I don't want to! I don't want to!" almost screamed Cora. "Do you think I am going to have anything to do with a girl who doesn't even know who she *is*?"

"What do you mean, Cora?" asked Corinne, quickly.

"That girl," cried Cora, pointing a quivering finger at the silent Nancy, "was just found by somebody when she was a baby and was sent to a charity school—the Higbee Endowment School in Maiden, it's called.

"She's a foundling. Her parents deserted her—or they were sent to jail—and other people sent this girl to school. She knows it's so! She daren't say it isn't!" continued the enraged Cora.

"She's just a little Miss Nobody. If such girls as she, without family or friends, are going to come to Pinewood Hall, I am sure *my* mother won't want me to stay here. And one thing I *am* very sure of," pursued Cora. "I will *not* remain in Number 30 with this—this nameless girl that no one knows anything about."

"Quite so, Miss Rathmore," observed a quiet voice behind the excited Cora. "What you say is emphatic, at least; and it really seems to be in earnest. Therefore, it shall have my respectful consideration."

A horrified silence fell upon the group of girls at the foot of the stairs.

"Miss Pevay," said the Madame, calmly, "bring Nancy Nelson and Cora Rathmore to my office at once. What is that on the floor?"

The little lady pointed to Nancy's coat and cap. Nancy, with dry lips, told her.

"Have you been out without permission at this hour, Nancy?" asked the Madame.

"No, Madame."

"Bring the coat and cap. At once!" commanded the Madame, and led the way into her own suite of offices.

Like three prisoners bound for the stake, the three girls followed. Even Corinne felt that she had done wrong in allowing this squabble to continue in the public hall.

The other girls did not even dare whisper at first after the Madame and the three girls were behind the closed door of the Madame's anteroom. It was seldom that the principal of Pinewood Hall took the punishment, or interrogation, of offenders into her own hands. When she did it was a solemn moment for all concerned.

And the girls gathered at the bottom of the West Side stairway felt this solemnity. They whispered together fearfully until suddenly Jennie Bruce burst in from outdoors.

"Hullo, girls! what's gone wrong?" she demanded, swinging a small bag in her hand.

"You may well say 'What's gone wrong?'" declared Judy Craig, Belle Macdonald's chum. "The Madame caught poor Cora in an awful stew—"

"Huh!" grunted Jennie. "Only Cora? Well! she can stand it, I guess."

"Well, I don't know but she's right," wheezed Belle, who was also of the party. "They ought not to let such girls into a school like Pinewood Hall."

"Hul-*lo!*," exclaimed Jennie, suddenly interested. "Who's been treading on *your* tootsies, Belle?"

"Why, it's that Nelson girl," snapped Judy.

"And what's Nancy been doing?"

"Well, it's what she *is*," exclaimed another, eagerly. "You are pretty thick with her, Jen. Do you know who she is?"

Jennie nodded.

"You don't!"

"I know just as much about her as she knows about herself," declared Jennie, with gravity.

"And that's just nothing," cried Judy, with a little laugh. "That's what Cora says."

"And who told Cora?" asked Jennie.

"Grace. And Grace knows!"

"And who told Chicken-Little-Ducky-Lucky-Goosy-Poosy-Montgomery that the sky had fallen?" demanded the sarcastic Jennie.

"Did you know that Nancy Nelson came here from a charity school, and that she has no folks?" asked Belle Macdonald, with considerable bitterness.

"Yes," said Jennie, nodding.

"Well! what do you suppose your mother would say if she knew you were familiar with such a

girl?"

Jennie suddenly became grave. "She'd say," declared the fun-loving girl, her voice shaking a little, "she'd say: 'That's a good girl, Jennie. She's an orphan—be kind to her.'"

"Oh, rats!" cried Judy. "She doesn't even know she's an orphan. Cora says she believes Nancy's parents are in jail."

"Maybe Cora has a wider acquaintance among jails than the rest of us," said Jennie airily, preparing to go upstairs.

"And what was Nancy doing with her hat and coat at this hour?" put in another girl, craftily. "The Madame noticed that right away."

"The Madame!" gasped Jennie, stopping instantly.

"Oh, they've all gone into the office," said Belle, eagerly.

"Who—all?"

"Corinne and Cora and Nancy."

"They've caught Nancy because she was going to run away?" cried Jennie.

"Run away?" repeated the other girls in chorus.

The angry Jennie shook the bag in their faces.

"Do you know what *this* is?" she demanded. "Do you know what you girls by your meanness almost drove Nancy Nelson to?"

"I'll tell you! She knows you all dislike her—hate her, in fact. She is so unhappy here that she was going to run away from Pinewood Hall and get work somewhere—that is what she was going to do.

"She packed this bag and tossed it out of the window, and then she ran down to the door intending to slip away. But she remembered that she had been forbidden to leave the building at this time of day, and that Madame Schakael had trusted her.

"So Nance wouldn't break her word, and I found her crying in the back hall there, and told her I would bring back her bag. That's the truth! You girls have driven her to all that.

"And now," continued the wrathful Jennie, "I'm going in there to tell Madame Schakael all about it. You girls don't want to associate with Nancy because she is an orphan and has no home? Well, *I* don't want to associate with *you* because you are all too mean to bother with! There now!"

And the excited Jennie came down the steps, strode across the hall and entered the anteroom of the principal's office, closing the door with a bang.

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CHAPTER XVIII

BETTER TIMES

It was seldom that Madame Schakael seemed so stern as on this occasion. She perched herself upon her cushioned chair behind the desk table in her inner office, while the three girls—the senior and the two freshmen—lined up before her.

"Now, Corinne, tell me all about it," was her command to the older girl.

"I am not sure that I *can* tell you all, Madame," said Corinne, slowly. "For I did not hear it all." But the black-eyed Cora was getting back her courage now, and she suddenly burst out:

"*I* can tell you, Madame!"

"Perhaps—as it was your voice which I first heard—you had better tell me your side of it, Miss Rathmore," agreed the principal.

"There's only one side to it, Madame!" exclaimed Cora. "I was just telling those girls—and Miss Pevay, who interfered——"

"Corinne is the captain of the West Side. You belong on the West Side. By no possibility could your captain have interfered if you chose the public hall for any discussion," said the Madame, with sudden sharpness. "I want all you freshmen to understand that: The school captains must be respected and obeyed."

"Well—I—I didn't mean to be disrespectful," murmured Cora, suddenly abashed.

"Perhaps not. But, Miss Rathmore, I fancy you will have to watch yourself closely to correct a tendency in that direction," observed the Madame, drily. "Now, you may continue your statement."

Cora was quite put out for the moment. She had taken her first plunge into the matter, had been brought up short, and now scarcely knew how to carry on the attack on Nancy which had seemed so easy the minute before.

"Well—well—I—I——"

"Why do you stammer so, Miss Rathmore?" asked the principal. "Is it a fact that that which seemed so desirable to say just now appears to you in another light when you have taken time to think it over?"

Stung by this suggestion Cora threw all caution to the winds. Her black eyes flashed once more. She even stamped her foot as she pointed her finger at Nancy.

"I tell you what it is, Madame Schakael!" she cried. "I won't stay in the same dormitory with that girl another day. If you make me I'll write home to my mother."

"And your reasons?" asked Madame Schakael, quite calmly.

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"She is a perfect nobody!" gasped Cora. "She came here from a charity school. She's never lived anywhere else but at that school. She doesn't know a living thing about herself—who she is, what her folks were, why they abandoned her——"

Possibly Madame Schakael said something. But, if so, neither of the three heard what it was. Yet Cora suddenly stopped in her tirade—stricken dumb by the expression on the principal's countenance.

The little lady's face was ablaze with emotion. She raised a warning hand and it seemed as though, for a moment, she could not herself speak.

"Girl! Who has dared tell you such perfectly ridiculous things? What is the meaning of this wrangle in Pinewood Hall? I am amazed—perfectly amazed—that a girl under my charge should express herself so cruelly and rudely, as well as in so nonsensical a manner.

"To put you right, first of all, Miss Rathmore, Miss Nelson's position in life is entirely different from what you seem to suspect. She is an orphan. I understand; but Mr. Henry Gordon has a careful oversight of her welfare, and he pays for her education out of funds in his hands for that purpose, and I am instructed to let her want for nothing. She is not at all the friendless object of charity that you have evidently been led to believe.

"The Higbee Endowment School in which Miss Nelson has been educated is by no means a charitable institution. It is a much better school than the one in which you were taught previous to coming to Pinewood, Miss Rathmore; I can accept pupils from Higbee into my freshman classes without any special preparation.

"I had no idea that girls under my charge would be so cruel as you seem to be toward Nancy Nelson. Corinne! what does it mean?"

"I'm afraid I have let it go too far, Madame," responded the senior, gravely. "But you know, these freshmen have got to learn to fight their own battles. *I* had to when I came."

"Yes, yes; that is all right," said the principal, waving her hand. "But remember, Corinne, I mentioned to you when Nancy Nelson came that she was one of the sensitive kind."

"And for that very reason the sensitive girls are hard to shake into their places," declared the captain of the West Side. "And then, she roomed with Cora, here, and I thought she was one of that crowd."

"I guess my crowd is just as good as yours!" ejaculated Cora, plucking up the remnants of her courage.

"In my opinion, Madame Schakael," continued Corinne, ignoring Cora, "I'd give this Rathmore girl another roommate. It would be a kindness to Nancy."

At the moment Jennie Bruce entered with more abruptness than good manners. But Jennie was excited.

"Oh, Madame Schakael! don't punish her any more!" she cried, running to Nancy and throwing her arms about her.

Necessarily she dropped the bag. The Madame pointed to it.

"What is this, Miss Bruce?" she demanded.

"Let me tell you!" cried Jennie. "That's what I came in for, Madame. These horrid girls—Rathmore and her tribe—have just hounded Nancy so that she wanted to run away."

"Run away?" gasped the principal. "From Pinewood?"

"Yes, Madame! But then she remembered she was on honor to stay indoors; so even after throwing her bag out of the window, she gave up the intention. And let me tell you," added Jennie, storming with anger, "if this stuck-up, silly Cora Rathmore doesn't want to room with Nancy, I do!"

The excited girl turned to the sobbing Nancy and took her in her arms again.

"Don't you mind what the others say to you, Nance!" she cried. "I'll stick to you, you bet! And maybe some time we can solve the mystery," she added, in a whisper, "and find out who you are. *Then* we'll make 'em all sorry they treated you so," for it seemed to be a foregone conclusion with Jennie that Nancy would prove to be a very great person indeed if her identity were once discovered.

"Dear, dear me!" exclaimed Madame Schakael, softly. But she really smiled upon the excited Jennie. "I shall have to write to your mother, Miss Bruce, after all, that you seem hopeless. You never *will* be able to restrain those over-abundant spirits of yours.

"But, my dear, I shall never have to tell that you are unkind. You have solved this little problem, I believe. It would be undeserved punishment to keep Miss Nelson in the room with Miss Rathmore any longer. In fact, I believe that the punishment meted out to Miss Nelson already, and by myself, has been too heavy.

"Two things shall be changed; Nancy Nelson is released from the order to remain indoors in recreation hours. Furthermore, she shall have a new roommate."

She turned suddenly to the sullen Cora.

"Miss Rathmore! You have revealed yourself to us all in a light which, to say the least, is not a happy one. I will remove you from Number 30, West Side. Indeed, it would be an imposition upon Miss Nelson to keep you there. How do you suppose your present chum in Number 40 would welcome Miss Rathmore, Jennie?" she added.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Jennie, her eyes twinkling. "Sally is one of Cora's crowd; but I haven't anything against Sally, so I wouldn't wish Cora on her."

"That will do! that will do, Jennie! I did not ask you to be quite so frank," said the Madame, quickly. "What do you say, Corinne?"

"It's a good idea, Madame," returned the captain, with a sigh.

"Very well, then; because Miss Nelson deserves a more pleasant and agreeable roommate, you may change places with Jennie Bruce, Miss Rathmore."

"I don't care how you put it, Madame!" exclaimed Cora, with a toss of her head. "I am glad to get out of Number 30. And, however you may put it, Nancy Nelson *is* a nobody——"

"You will lose *your* recreation hours until the Christmas holiday, Miss Rathmore," declared the Madame, rapping on her desk with a pencil. "And don't let me hear any more of this back-biting and unkindness in the freshman class. Understand? You are all four excused."

They obeyed the little woman who—by turns—could be so stern and yet so kind. Cora Rathmore flashed out in the lead and, crying with shame and anger, ran upstairs without speaking to her chums at the foot of the flight.

Corinne came out of the anteroom with an arm around the waist of each of the smaller girls. Quite a number of the West Side girls were either coming down the stairs, or had already gathered to wait for the doors to open into the dining room.

"I want you girlies to know," said the captain, cheerfully, "that we've got two perfect little bricks in this class of greenies at Pinewood Hall. And one of 'em's named Jennie Bruce and the other's named Nancy Nelson.

"I prophesy, too," pursued the beauty of the school, "that Jennie and Nancy are going to be the most notorious female Damon-and-Pythias combination we have ever had at Pinewood.

"Now, run along, you two children," she added, giving Jennie and Nancy a little shove each, "and get your eyes cooled off and wash your dirty little hands for supper. Hurry up!"

And did Nancy and Jennie care what the girls said to them now? Not a bit of it!

They went up the stairs and through the long corridor with their arms around each other. And Jennie insisted upon taking Nancy to her room to fix up for supper.

"We'll only run across Cora in Number 30—and I don't want to have to slap her face!" declared the still wrathful Jennie.

"Then I'll help you pack up your things to bring to Number 30," said Nancy.

"Oh, not before supper, Nance!" cried Jennie, in horror. "I could go out and bite a piece off the stone step, and swallow it right down, I'm so hungry."

For the first time since she had come to Pinewood Hall, Nancy Nelson went down to supper with her arm around another girl's waist, and another girl's arm around hers.

Jennie Bruce boldly sat beside her, too, although she belonged at another table. And they whispered together, and giggled, and were even reproved by one of the teachers—which was likewise a new experience for Nancy, and perhaps did her no particular harm.

"Ah-ha, Miss Mousie!" said Corinne, pausing by the new chums as she made her tour of inspection, and pinching Nancy's ear; "I see now I shall have both you and Bruce to watch. But don't you two go too far."

Really, a brand new existence had opened for Nancy. Jennie's ready championship of her did much to influence the opinion of the other girls; and the story Grace Montgomery and Cora Rathmore spread regarding Nancy fell rather flat.

The Montgomery clique, after all, embraced only a very few of the freshman class and some half dozen or more sophs. The latter had no influence at all in Nancy's class for, naturally, it was "war to the knife" between the freshies and the class immediately above them in the school.

Corinne, too, after the grand explosion in which the Madame herself had taken part, saw to it more particularly that the Montgomery crowd did not "pick on" Nancy. If Jennie was about, however, that was sufficient. Jennie Bruce would fight for her friend at the least provocation.

Yet, after all, Nancy was not entirely easy in her mind. That the story of her being a "mere nobody" had failed to make her ostracised by the better class of Pinewood Hall girls, was a delightful fact.

Yet the story was true. Nancy *was* nobody; as the Montgomery and Cora said, her parents *might* be people of no morals nor breeding. There *might* be some great shame connected with herself and her family.

The mystery of it all made Nancy very unhappy at times; but not so unhappy as before. Now she had a close friend with whom she could discuss the secret; and Jennie Bruce was just as deeply interested in Nancy's affairs as was Nancy herself.

"Some day it will come all right, Nance," the former assured her roommate. "Maybe you and I will find out the truth. Perhaps that O'Brien boy will help. I have great faith in Scorch, and I want to meet him."

"Oh! do you suppose you and I could go to Cincinnati together!" gasped Nancy.

"Goody! It would be great!"

"And then you could see Scorch."

"And I want to see that Mr. Gordon. I bet that lawyer knows more about you than he is willing to tell."

"But perhaps he is doing his best for me, after all," concluded Nancy, with a sigh.

Number 30, West Side, began to get a new reputation after Jennie came to it. In the first place, Jennie was one of those girls who bring from home to boarding school countless mementoes of their home life and of their family and friends.

Jennie's photographs and funny pictures, and pennants, and all the other "litter" that a schoolgirl loves spilled over from her own bureau to Nancy's, and not only was Jennie's side of the den decorated, but there was plenty to decorate Nancy's side.

No longer was Nancy's dressing-case the most plainly furnished in the school. There were bows of ribbon, and bright calendar pictures, and photo-frames, and numberless other little keepsakes tacked to the wall on Nancy's side.

Jessie Pease put her head into Number 30 a day or two after Jennie's arrival, and exclaimed with delight:

"Ah-ha! now the dear bairn's got a homey looking room, thanks be! It's made my heart ache to see how barren the walls were. You're a good girl, Janie Bruce, if you *do* make me a world of trouble."

"Trouble! Trouble!" shouted Jennie. "How dare you say such a thing?" and then she danced around the good soul, clapping her hands and singing:

"Pease Porridge hot—pease porridge cold—
Pease porridge in the pot, nine days old!
Some like it hot—some like it cold—
But Jessie Pease of Pinewood never will be old!"

"Bless ye, Janie," said the good Scotchwoman, "I hope I'll never be any older than the youngest bairn who comes here to school." 197

"Sure! you're a regular kid!" declared Jennie, hugging her.

"My usefulness here will be all forbye when I can't be a lassie wi' other lassies," declared the lodgekeeper's wife, kissing both Jennie and Nancy and then going her way.

The pleasure of having Jennie Bruce in Number 30 instead of Cora Rathmore was no small thing to Nancy. In Jennie's society she began to expand. She became, indeed, quite a different creature from the quiet, almost speechless girl who had heretofore crept about Pinewood Hall.

Girls of her own class, who had scarcely noticed Nancy before, suddenly found that she was a bright and cheerful body when once she was included in a group of her mates.

She had made a splendid mark in classes, and stood equally high in such athletics as Miss Etching encouraged. And on the ice she had shown herself to be the equal of many of the older girls.

Now, with the ban lifted from her recreation hours, Nancy could go on the river again. And skating was one of her favorite sports.

The weather had remained cold all this time and, when it snowed at all, there had been a high wind which blew the snow (for the most part) off the ice and so did not put a veto on skating. 198

Clinton River was frozen nearly a foot in depth. The ice harvest had begun, and it was not yet Christmas. But where the men cut for the huge icebarns was beyond Dr. Dudley's Academy, and so did not trouble the girls of Pinewood Hall who desired to skate. Nor did it trouble the boys from the Academy, either; they were all glad to move up river for their ice sports.

Hockey was a favorite game of the boys, and Nancy one afternoon watched a match game between the crack team of the Academy and one made up of lads from Clintondale. Bob Endress captained the school team and, Nancy thought, covered himself with glory.

To Nancy's secret disappointment Bob only bowed to her. He never skated with her again, although she saw him with Grace Montgomery and her friends.

Nancy wasn't particularly enamored of boys; Jennie liked them better than Nancy did, and was frank to say so, for Jennie was somewhat of a tomboy and always played with her brothers and their friends when she was at home.

Bob Endress, however, had seemed to Nancy to be a particularly nice boy. And they had had a secret understanding together before Grace and Cora had found out about Higbee School. 199

Nancy said nothing to Jennie about it; but she wondered if Bob felt as the Montgomery clique did about her—that she was a mere nobody and was really beneath his notice.

Of course, Nancy was only a young girl—in her first year at Pinewood Hall; and Bob Endress was quite three years her senior. Even Corinne Pevay and Carrie Littlefield showed interest in Bob, although he was only a junior at Dr. Dudley's school.

The girls had so many interests among themselves on the ice, however, that they did not seek the boys' society. Besides, this was not altogether approved. Miss Etching was usually with the girls in the afternoon, while one of the instructors from the Academy skated with the boys.

Grace Montgomery made a great matter of Bob's being her cousin. It was known to Miss Etching that the Senator and his wife approved of the intimacy of their daughter with the boy. Naturally Grace's friends attracted Bob's friends—and there you have it!

The many girls of Pinewood Hall, however, who found delight in skating for the sake of the sport itself, welcomed Nancy as one of their own. They found she could skate splendidly with a partner, that she could cut figure eights, could do the "long roll," and otherwise give a good account of herself on the ice. 200

So when it was suggested that there should be a skating contest on the river one evening just previous to the Christmas holidays, Nancy was urged to participate. Of course, the older girls expected to carry off the palm. Corinne Pevay came from Canada, and one or two other girls lived well up toward the line. So their winters were long and they were proficient in every winter sport before they came to Pinewood.

But Jennie urged Nancy to do her best in the long races.

"That's where you will have 'em, Nance," she declared. "Half of these big girls lose their breath after a little run."

So Nancy entered for the two-mile race, which was the "big number" on the hastily-made-up program. The boys had helped them set stakes, the distance being ten laps around the course.

Although the moon was small, the stars were brilliant and on the ice everything was as plain as day. Miss Maybrick and Miss Meader helped the physical instructor; and those girls who did not take part in the "ice carnival," as they laughingly called it, came down to the river to see the races.

Each class rooted for their own champions. Corinne and Carrie were of course favorites of the seniors; but the juniors were sure they had a champion in one of their number, and even the sophs shouted for Judy Craig and were willing to back her even against the Canadian senior who had, as Jennie Bruce declared, "been born on skates." 201

"But just the same," said Nancy's roommate, "you stand a good chance in the straightaway races and in the two-mile. Don't you lose courage, Nance. I've watched you and I say that the freshies can afford to cheer for you, just as the sophs are rooting for Judy."

So Nancy went down to the ice that evening very much encouraged—and more excited than she had ever been since coming to Pinewood Hall.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RACES

The straightaway races came first. Corinne, in her cherry-colored sweater and black cap and black, short skirt, looked startlingly pretty. And how she could skate—for a little way!

Between posts the Canadian senior carried off all honors—beating every other girl easily.

And she could do fancy “stunts” like a boy—whirling on one skate after a running start, cutting the double-eight, spinning like a top—oh, a whole lot of things that Nancy, or any other younger girl, had never attempted.

Yet when they lined up for the second race—one lap around the course—Nancy, who chanced to stand next to Corinne, knew that the captain of the West Side was breathing too heavily for a girl just entering a trial of speed.

“She’s not going to win this time,” thought Nancy, and looked down the line of contestants. Cora Rathmore was near the far end. “I hope *she* won’t be the lucky one,” thought Nancy.

Nancy was scarcely ready at the start. She “got off” badly. But to her surprise she found herself keeping well up with the bigger girls. And she did not have to exert herself much, either.

Corinne began to laugh, and Nancy passed her.

“Go on, Nancy, for the honor of our side!” gasped the Canadian. “I’m out of this race.”

Spurred by her words Nancy “let out a link,” as Jennie Bruce would have said. She found that there were other contestants that she could easily pass. When they turned the stake only Cora, Carrie Littlefield, Judy Craig, and one or two others were ahead.

To skate rapidly one should not use a “rolling” stroke; and Nancy saw that Carrie, the biggest girl ahead, was striking out too widely. She dashed from side to side of the course, taking up more than her just share, indeed, and covering more ice than was necessary.

Nancy took short, quick strokes. Her method was a bit jerky, perhaps, and lacked grace; but she was going straight down the stretch to the “home” stake, and before they had covered half the distance Nancy passed Carrie, and then Judy Craig.

But there was Cora Rathmore, her oldtime roommate and enemy, right ahead. Cora seemed to deliberately block her way, for occasionally she threw a glance behind her, and changed her course as Nancy tried to slip by.

The race was not between Cora and Nancy. There were two older girls ahead and it would have been hardly possible, at this stage of the contest, for either of the freshmen to overtake the leaders.

But it was evident that the Rathmore girl did not intend to let Nancy pass her. Once again the latter tried to turn out; and then, seeing that Cora flung herself that way, Nancy struck into a wide curve that should have taken her completely around Cora.

But as Nancy struck her left skate upon the ice again, something clashed with it, checked her course abruptly and, if she had not flung herself sideways upon the ice, and slid, she might have wrenched her foot badly.

“Oh! oh!” shrieked Jennie. “Nancy’s been thrown!”

But her friend picked herself up at once, and with a laugh skated on after the other contestants. One of the first-class girls won.

“How did you come to fall?” demanded Jennie, with lively interest.

“Oh, it must have been a twig sticking up in the ice,” declared Cora, before Nancy could reply. “You can’t see them at night.”

“Was that it, Nance?” demanded Jennie, suspiciously.

“It—it must have been,” admitted Nancy. But in her heart of hearts Nancy knew that she had stumbled over the toe of Cora Rathmore’s skate. The girl had deliberately thrown her.

It made no difference in the result of the race. Nancy could not have won, she knew. But it warned her to look out for Cora Rathmore if she raced again with her.

Nancy rested after that, refusing to enter any of the minor contests until the long race—the *pièce de résistance* of the evening—was called.

This was the endurance test that Miss Etching was anxious to have go off well. The physical instructor of Pinewood Hall had an object in putting her girls against a two-mile skate. More than Jennie Bruce had noted the fact that many of the best skaters among the juniors and seniors lacked “wind.”

It was hard for the instructor to watch all the girls closely enough to be sure that they dressed properly even in the gym work. She had warned them to dress loosely under their warm sweaters for the ice, too; for in skating every muscle in the body needs free play.

But certain girls, like Grace Montgomery among the freshmen, and the dressier girls of the older classes, gabbled a deal more than was good for them about their “figures,” and studied the fashion-plates too much.

But there were the warm dressing rooms in the boathouse for the girls to change in, and those who entered for the ten-lap race took advantage of these rooms to lay aside any garment that trammelled their movements. They all realized that it was an endurance test.

Thirty-eight girls were called by Miss Etching to line up for the long race. Some of them, of course, didn’t have a ghost of a show for honors in the trial of speed and endurance; but they wanted to show what they could do.

Jennie Bruce herself was one of the contestants; but, as she told Nancy, she didn't expect to go half the distance. Some of the seniors who were in earnest remarked that they didn't see the use in letting the "greenies" clutter up the ice. But Miss Etching had announced it as a free-for-all race and the big girls could not freeze out the contestants from the younger classes.

Indeed, the classes were each backing their own champions. The seniors were strongly for Corinne Pevay, who had recovered her breath and promised to bring home the prize. Carrie Littlefield was a favorite with the class that would graduate the next June from Pinewood Hall, too.

The juniors had half a dozen girls who all believed they could bear off the palm. Judy Craig was being "rooted" for by the sophomores. Of course, none of the three upper classes believed that a freshman had a chance; but Grace Montgomery had reserved herself all the evening for this contest, and now her friends were noisily declaring that she could win "if she tried."

"She'd better try, then," observed Jennie, with a laugh. "And try mighty hard, too. Some of those big girls have raced before and they have trained several terms under Miss Etching."

"You're not loyal to the class," declared Cora Rathmore, sharply.

"I should worry! I'd like to see a freshman win; but Grace hasn't a chance."

"She'll show you," cried Sally, Jennie's former roommate. "Grace Montgomery is a splendid skater. And you've never seen her really let herself out."

"Say! she 'lets herself out' every time she speaks," growled Jennie. "We all know what she is—bluff and bluster!"

"Is that so, Miss Smartie!" exclaimed Cora Rathmore, standing up for the girl she toadied to. "Let me tell you that Grace is the most popular girl in our class. Wait till we have election for class president."

"I'm waiting," remarked Jennie, calmly. "But what will *that* have to do with Grace Montgomery?"

"You'll find out then how popular she is."

"I will, and so will she," chuckled Jennie, suddenly all a-smile.

"You don't believe she will have the most votes?"

"Not, unless she puts them all in herself," laughed Jennie. "Why! if Grace had a chance to be class president I'd go into sackcloth and ashes during the rest of the year."

"You wait and see!" snapped Cora.

In her heart Jennie believed that the only girl among the freshmen entries who had the least chance to win the long race was Nancy. But she knew that this wasn't the time to begin "rooting" for her friend.

Indeed, the best way to do was to cheer for all the freshies entered until they showed—within the first few laps—what they could do. And to this method Jennie,—a leader among the younger girls,—clung.

At the starting shot—for Miss Etching was not afraid of a pistol and used it to start the race—the thirty-eight girls got away from the line without much confusion. The best skaters were quickly in the lead, so that there was little entanglement at the first stake. By that time the girls were strung out for some yards.

Rounding the home stake for the first time, the seniors and juniors, with Judy Craig and—to Jennie's surprise—Grace Montgomery and Cora, were in the lead. Nancy was trailing them easily, but it worried Jennie.

The latter lost her head and did all her best work—put out every bit of strength she had—in the second lap. She passed Nancy and many of the other girls belonging to the freshies and sophs; but she could not reach Grace and Cora. Judy Craig fell back, however.

At the beginning of the third lap more than half the girls dropped out. The leaders were so far ahead it was useless for them to continue. And their dropping out cleared the course for the real contestants.

Jennie fell back in that third lap, and Nancy passed her, still skating easily, and about half a lap behind the leaders.

"Oh, dear, Nance! Do hurry up and beat them," gasped Jennie. "I'd hate to see Grace—or Cora—carry off the glory for our class."

Nancy did not speak; she only smiled. She saved her breath—as Jennie might better have done.

For, at the beginning of the fourth lap, both of the girls who called themselves leaders of the freshmen class began to fall back, although they still struggled. The race was not half over and only ten girls remained in it. Jennie fairly fell to the ice, and sat there, panting. But she cheered Nancy when her chum passed her on the next—the fifth—round.

"Go it, old 'slow but sure!'" she cried. "You're going to make your mark, I see."

It was only a few minutes later that Nancy, without increasing her speed, was right on the heels of Grace and Cora.

Ahead of these two freshmen were only two seniors, four juniors, and one soph. The leading girls—three of them—were more than half a lap ahead of Nancy; the others were strung out along the course.

Grace and Cora saw Nancy creeping up on them. They were losing ground steadily, and there was no "spurt" in them. Cora, indeed, was crying with vexation and nervousness.

"She's going to pass us, Grace—the nasty thing!" she panted.

"Keep up, Cora!" begged her friend, and deliberately crossed in front of Nancy at the post, to keep her back.

Nancy lost stroke a little. They came down the course toward the home stake on this—the fifth—lap. Miss Etching skated slowly forward to eye the line of struggling girls. She had personally taken several of the younger contestants out of the race because she saw that they were doing too much.

Nancy tried to shoot ahead of her two classmates again. Grace and Cora almost collided in their attempt to balk Nancy.

But the physical instructor saw them.

"Miss Montgomery! Miss Rathmore! Out of the race!" she commanded, in a tone that was heard by most of the spectators gathered near.

"And just as I was getting my second wind!" cried Grace, angrily, as she came down to her waiting friends.

"I put you out for fouling," declared Miss Etching, firmly. "Miss Rathmore, too. You are traitors to your class. Miss Nelson has a chance to make a record for you and you deliberately tried to keep her back. She is the freshest girl on the ice at this moment," declared the teacher, with enthusiasm.

But Nancy did not hear this. She had rounded the stake in the wake of the older girls, and kept "plugging along" as though tireless. She was doing her part as usual—faithfully but not brilliantly—and had no idea that she was in danger of making a record for the freshman class.

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CHAPTER XX

THE FRESHMAN ELECTION

The night was cold, but delightful. Nancy Nelson had never felt so sure upon her skates, or so able to keep up her steady stroke for a long distance, as she did now.

The struggle earlier in the evening had seemed to put the right temper into her muscles. Having been relieved by Miss Etching of the two girls—her own classmates—who had attempted to retard her progress, Nancy kept on and on, seeing the distance between herself and the leaders in the race diminishing—by no effort of her own, it seemed—and just enjoying herself.

She skated past Judy Craig, and saw that that eager sophomore was sobbing for breath, and could hardly stand. Nancy felt little weariness and still enjoyed the pace. She had not spurted in the beginning and waited for that wonderful "second wind" that is the help of all long-distance racers, before increasing her first easy pace.

Now she increased her stroke for a second time, and almost at once flashed past two of the older girls. One of them was a senior.

The crowd began to shout for her when Nancy came around the home stake now. Jennie Bruce led the freshmen rooters, and the volume of sound they made showed that there were few "dyed-in-the-wool" Montgomeryites, after all.

Nancy Nelson, the single remaining freshman on the ice, was the hope of the class. Corinne and Carrie and one of the juniors were still struggling far ahead; but the school as a whole soon began to be more deeply interested in the progress of Nancy than in the struggle of the leading girls.

"That little Nelson is making them all look sick," declared the stout soph, Belle Macdonald. "I hated to see our Judy drop out; but I'd rather see a freshman win over those juniors and seniors, if a sophomore can't do it."

"Pah!" exclaimed Cora Rathmore, "Nelson hasn't a chance with that Canuck. None of us had."

"Nancy is skating easier than all of them," observed one of the other girls.

"Wouldn't it be odd if a freshman *should* win?" cried Sally.

"It wouldn't be funny at all if that Nancy Nelson won," snapped Cora. "That nobody!"

"There'd be no living with her at all, then," added Grace Montgomery.

"Hurrah for Nance!" shouted Jennie Bruce, when the contestants swung past the home stake again. "She's going to win!"

The racers began their eighth lap. Not until now had Jennie really believed her own statement—that Nancy had a chance to win. But it actually began to look so.

They came around again. Carrie had dropped far behind Corinne and the junior. Nancy was swinging along, hands clasped behind her back, taking each stroke firmly—rolling just a little, indeed—and seemingly almost as fresh as when she began.

"Bully for you, Nancy Nelson!" many of the freshies cried. "Show 'em what you can do! Don't give up, Nancy!"

But Nancy had no intention of giving up. She believed she could keep on to the end, and without reducing speed. And on the ninth lap she passed Carrie.

Only two were ahead of her now. As she swung down the home-stretch behind the senior and junior, Nancy's mates began to shout like mad girls:

"Come on! Come on! Don't let 'em freeze you out, Nancy Nelson!"

"You're going to beat, Nance!" cried Jennie Bruce, fairly jumping up and down. "Show 'em what you can do!"

There was only one more lap—one-fifth of a mile. Nancy drew in a long breath as she rounded the stake, and looked ahead. Corinne and her nearest antagonist had spurted a little; but Nancy put her head down, and darted up the course at a speed which equalled what the other girls had done at their best.

It was really wonderful how swiftly the freshman overtook her older rivals. Nancy skated more swiftly than she had in that first dash of the evening.

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There was nobody to shut her off now. Cora was not here to foil or trip her. Corinne and the junior played fair.

Before the older girls reached the rounding stake, Nancy flashed past them. The junior spurred, came even with Nancy for a moment at and turn, and then dropped back, to become a bad third in the race. She could never recover after that spurt.

But the French-Canadian girl held on grimly. Slowly she crept up on the freshman. The seniors shouted for their champion; but the rest of the school was calling Nancy home!

"Oh, Nancy! Oh, Nancy! Come on!"

Nancy heard Jennie Bruce's voice above all the turmoil ahead. Her eyes had begun to water, and the white, badly cut-up ice of the straight course seemed to waver before her.

At her ear she could hear Corinne's labored breathing. The ring of her rival's skates rasped upon the younger girl's nerves, too.

She was under a great strain now. Another full lap would have been more than she could have skated without a breakdown. It was being pressed so close and hard that was wearing Nancy down. She was not used to such contests.

But her roommate's cracked voice, shouting again and again for her, kept Nancy to the mark. Corinne should *not* pass her!

She flung herself forward against the wind and worked with teeth that sank into her lip and drew the blood! On—on—on—

She felt something against her hands—against her breast—she was tangled up in it! Something had fouled her, and she had failed, for Corinne swept by at that moment.

And then the girls caught her—Jennie and many of her own class, as well as some of the older girls. They were cheering her, and praising her work—for it was the tape she had run against.

The race was finished and Nancy had won!

Three-quarters of the school were on the ice. Something like three hundred girls can make a lot of noise!

And there was only a tiny group that broke away from the main body and went home in the sulks because Nancy had won the race. Of course this was the Montgomery clique.

"I can tell you right now who *won't* be president of our class," whispered Jennie to Cora Rathmore before the latter got away in Grace Montgomery's train.

"I suppose you think Nancy Nelson will!" snapped Cora.

It was the first time the idea had come into Jennie's mind.

It was only three days before the breaking up for the holidays. Everybody was so enthusiastic about Nancy, that Jennie's work was half done for her.

To see the quietest girl in the school, yet the one who stood highest in her own class, praised and fêted by the seniors, made Nancy's fellow-classmates consider her of more importance than ever before.

So Jennie's work was easy. She went among the freshies and whispered—first to one alone, then to two together, then to little groups. And the burden of her tale was always the same:

"The Madame will stand for her—you see! She's the best little sport there is in the class. She's scarcely had a mark against her, yet she's no goody-goody.

"See how she stood for those other girls who treated her so meanly—and never opened her mouth. Why, the Madame could have burned her at the stake and Nance would never have said a word to incriminate that Montgomery crowd.

"And there won't be a teacher to object. She's on all their good books. Me? Of course I've an axe to grind," and Jennie laughed. "She's my roommate, and if she gets the 'high hat' I'll hope to bask in her reflected glory."

Jennie Bruce was an excellent politician. Had it lain with the girls alone, lively Jennie might have been president of the freshman class herself. But the girls knew that the Madame would never allow it. Jennie's record for the weeks she had been a student at Pinewood Hall precluded such an honor.

The day before the break-up the members of the freshman class voted for president. Each girl sealed her vote in an envelope and the numbered envelopes were passed into the Madame's office.

At supper that night, at the time when the school captains marched around the room "to inspect the girls' hair-ribbons," as Jennie said, Corinne brought a high, old-fashioned, much dented beaver hat in her hand.



NANCY FLASHED PAST THEM. Page 215.

That didn't tell the eager freshmen anything, for both the principal candidates for president of the class had been from the girls rooming on the West Side, and therefore were under Corinne's jurisdiction.

Grace Montgomery's friends began to cheer for her. The friends of the other candidates—and there were several—kept still.

"Wait!" advised Jennie, in a stage whisper. "We can afford to yell all the louder a little later—maybe."

But Corinne tantalized the smaller girls by walking all around the tables the first time without putting the tall hat on any girl's head. Once or twice she hesitated behind a girl's chair; but that only made the others laugh, for they knew that *those* particular girls had had no chance of election anyway.

"Come on!" shouted Cora. "You might as well bring it over here where it belongs," and she put an arm over the blushing Grace's shoulders.

But Grace did her blushing for nothing. Corinne crossed the room swiftly, came straight to the corner where Jennie sat, and—

Drew the hat firmly down over Nancy Nelson's ears!

Nancy could scarcely believe it. She—Miss Nobody from Nowhere—the most popular girl in her class? It was like a dream—only, as she admitted to Jennie, laughing, it was a dreadfully noisy dream!

Corinne could scarcely command silence long enough to read the result of the balloting. Nancy had received nearly one-half of the freshman vote. Grace Montgomery had mustered only eight ballots, while the remainder were scattered among half a dozen other candidates.

The disappointed girls, all but Grace, cheered Nancy, too—and hugged her, and made her march ahead of the class, all around the big dining room, and then into the hall, which was given up to the use of the freshman class for that particular evening.

There the complete organization of the class was arranged, and Nancy presided with pretty dignity, and even Grace Montgomery and her friends had to acknowledge the leadership of the girl whom they had so ill-treated for the past weeks.

Many of the girls went home the next day for the ten days' vacation. Those who lived at a distance, however, remained at Pinewood. So Nancy was not alone over the short vacation as she went to be at Higbee School.

Jennie lived not far from Cincinnati, and she couldn't remain away from home at Christmas.

"I wish you were going with me, you dear old thing!" she said to Nancy, hugging her. "You wait till I tell mother about you! You shall go home with me at Easter—if that Old Gordon will let you; and if you like it at my home we'll have you part of the long vacation, too."

"And I'm going to get my big brother, John, to take me into the city while I'm home, and I'm going to see Scorch. Just think! Maybe we can find out all about what Mr. Gordon is hiding from you."

"If he is hiding anything, Jennie," said Nancy, shaking her head.

And yet, after all the wonderful things that had happened to her of late, Nancy could almost believe that even the mystery of her identity might in time be solved.

CHAPTER XXI

SENATOR MONTGOMERY

But Jennie Bruce came back to Pinewood Hall after the holidays with no news of importance for her roommate and chum.

"I saw that red-headed boy," she said. "My goodness me, Nance! what a freak he is," and Jennie burst into laughter at the remembrance of Scorch O'Brien. "John and I took him to luncheon and John couldn't eat for laughing at him."

"I think Scorch is real nice," said Nancy, smiling reflectively.

"Oh, he's strong for *you*, all right," admitted Jennie, nodding. "He thinks you are about the only girl who ever came into his sweet young life——"

"What nonsense!" said Nancy, blushing, but smiling, too.

"All right. He's willing to go to desperate lengths to help you, just the same," and Jennie smiled in remembrance of the red-haired youth's enthusiasm.

"I guess it's mostly talk. Scorch dearly loves to talk," said Nancy.

"He wanted John to help him rob 'Old Gordon's' private safe," laughed Jennie. "He says he believes there are papers in that safe that would explain all about you. He wanted John to stay over that night and stand watch while he, Scorch, opened the safe with something he called a jimmy!"

"The ridiculous boy!" said Nancy.

"But I tell you!" exclaimed Jennie, "John works for a man who knows your Mr. Gordon. John is going to get Mr. Pennywell to find out—if he can—from Mr. Gordon if he really knows more about your folks than he is willing to tell you. Mr. Pennywell is a client—and a good client—of your Mr. Gordon. Hateful old thing!"

"But perhaps he *isn't* hateful," Nancy objected, shaking her head.

"I bet he is. Scorch says he is hiding something. That boy is bright."

"Really brilliant—when it comes to his hair," suggested Nancy, laughing.

But there were so many other things to take up the thoughts of the two chums after this brief separation, that the mystery about Nancy figured little in their activities for a time.

Nancy's new dignity as president of the class bore heavily upon her at first, for she feared that she would not discharge her duty to the other freshmen in a proper way.

The Montgomery clique was of course a continual thorn in her side. It never numbered, however, more than eight or ten girls of that class. Grace made many of her friends in the sophomore class.

The teachers, however, were decidedly in favor of Nancy. She gained the head of her classes in most studies, and did not slight lessons to join in the fun of the other girls. Yet she was no prig—no matter what Grace and Cora said.

A rather solemn thought had come to the girl on the night of that day when she had started to run away from Pinewood Hall. Suppose she should, suddenly and without warning, be thrown upon her own resources?

Most girls of Nancy's age do not think of such unpleasant things. Nor, in many cases, could such an unhappy turn of circumstances affect them.

Yet it might happen at any time to Nancy. That was the way she felt about it.

Suppose the mysterious fountain from which, through the channel of Mr. Gordon, flowed the money to support her, suddenly should dry up?

She could be pretty sure that Mr. Gordon would not go on supporting her and paying for her schooling, and all. No, indeed! He had not struck Nancy in her single interview with him as being that sort of a man.

So with this thought hovering in the background Nancy made the most of her opportunities as the days passed. She was determined to learn everything Pinewood Hall and its mistress and instructors had to teach her.

She learned to be an expert typewriter before Easter, and improved her spelling immensely. Other girls had the same opportunity, if they cared to exercise it; for there were plenty of machines they could learn on as Nancy did. But few of the girls at Pinewood Hall cared to take "extras." Most of their parents were very well-to-do, and why should they exert themselves to merely practical things?

Nancy took up stenography with gentle Miss Meader, too. The latter acted as the Madame's secretary, so she had practical use for shorthand. She and Nancy corresponded daily in the "pothooks," as Jennie Bruce called the stenographic signs.

Nevertheless, Nancy managed to cram into her waking hours an immense amount of fun as well as lessons. The Madame did not believe that all work was good for Jill, any more than it is good for Jack.

When the snow came there was sleigh-riding, class parties being made up while the moon was big, the girls going off in great "barges," which would hold from forty to sixty of them, and stopping at a certain country tavern, of which Madame Schakael approved, where hot oyster stews were served.

Then, before Lent, there was the big dance of the year, when the girls of Pinewood Hall and the boys of the Clinton Academy mingled under the shrewd eyes of their respective heads.

Dr. Dudley was a solemn, long-faced, stiff-looking old gentleman, with a great mop of sandy hair brushed off his high brow, who never looked really dressed unless he had on a tall hat and

a frock coat. In dancing pumps and a white waistcoat and tail coat he looked rather ridiculous.

And when he led out Madame Schakael—who looked like a sweet-faced French doll—for the grand march, they really did look funny together.

But it was no stiff and formal ball after the “heads” of the two schools were off the floor. The boys and girls had a most delightful time—even Nancy enjoyed it, although she, like most of the freshmen, played wallflower a good part of the time.

Nancy saw Bob Endress, but merely to bow to. He seemed always to have his “hands full” with the older girls, or with Grace Montgomery and her satellites. But Nancy’s mind lingered upon boys very little. She danced with other girls and had quite as good a time, she was sure, as she should have had had Bob Endress danced every number with her.

So passed the winter and the spring, and the Easter holidays came. Nancy had received a very prettily-worded invitation from Jennie’s mother to spend these with them.

It was the first invitation of the kind Nancy Nelson had ever received, so you can imagine how overjoyed she was. Madame Schakael approved. Then it was necessary to get Mr. Gordon’s permission.

Nancy had thanked Mr. Gordon for the twenty-dollar bill he had sent her, but had not heard personally from him in reply. She had broken an understood rule, too, to write twice to Scorch O’Brien—just little notes thanking him for remembering her.

By the way, the twenty dollars that had been lent to Cora Rathmore to pay for the famous supper in Number 30 when Nancy had been frozen out, had never been returned, either completely, or in part. Cora Rathmore seemed to have forgotten her debt to Nancy when she returned from her holiday at Christmas time.

Corinne suspected that Nancy had not been repaid; but nobody else really knew anything about it—not even Jennie. Nancy would not talk about it when some of the girls became curious.

She had not needed the money for anything. At New Year’s Mr. Gordon had sent her a ten-dollar note, but through Madame Schakael. When she asked him if she could go home with Jennie Bruce over Easter, he sent her at once another twenty dollars and his permission—the latter just as short as it could be written.

Scorch evidently watched the mail basket on Mr. Gordon’s desk with the eye of an eagle. A second letter with the card of the law firm upon it was put into Nancy’s hand almost in the same mail with Mr. Gordon’s letter. Such letters passed through the Madame’s hands without being opened. It was a secret that troubled Nancy sometimes; yet she could not “give Scorch away.” This was Scorch’s letter:

“DEAR MISS NANCY:

“I see Old Gordon has risked another perfectly good yellow-back in the mail. He’ll ruin the morals of the mail clerks (I rote that word ‘mail’ wrong before) if he keeps on. Know how I seen the yellow-back in the letter? I punched a hole with a pin in the crease of the envelope at each end. Squeeze the sides of the envelope together a little and then squint through from one hole to the other. That’s an old one.

I want you to know I’m on the job. That Jennie girl you sent to me is some peach; but she ain’t in your class for looks, just the same. Her brother is a pretty good feller, too; but we couldn’t get together on any scheme for jolting what you want to know out of Old Gordon. The time will come, just the same. When it does, I’m little Johnny On-the-Spot—don’t forget that.

So no more at present, from

“Yours very respectfully,

“SCORCH O’BRIEN.”

There was not time to answer Scorch at once; but when Nancy was at Jennie’s home the girls wrote to the office boy of Ambrose, Necker & Boles and invited him to come out to see them. But Scorch was bashful and did not come; so Nancy returned to Pinewood without seeing her champion.

A great many things happened after that spring vacation—the last half of Nancy’s freshman term—which might be told about; but we may only relate a few of them.

Her record was splendid. Her government of her class satisfied everybody but the Montgomery faction. Grace and Cora did all they safely could throughout the term to trouble Nancy. Sometimes they succeeded; but she had learned not to “carry her heart on her sleeve.”

Corinne, Carrie, and the rest of the seniors were all in a flutter because of approaching graduation. The other girls—junior, sophomore, and freshman—often discussed eagerly what the summer vacation had in store for them.

For the first time in her young life, Nancy Nelson looked forward, too, to the summer with delight. She was going home with Jennie just as soon as school closed—that is, unless Mr. Gordon should object. And it was not believed that he would.

Jennie’s parents and brothers and sisters were just as well pleased with the quiet little orphan as Jennie herself had been. They were glad to have her in their big house between terms.

So June approached, and the yearly exams, and other finishing work, loomed ahead.

Pinewood Hall was a beautiful place now. The park was in its very best condition. Mr. Pease and Samuel, and their helpers, made every path straight and clean, raked the groves of all rubbish, and the two horse mowers and the roller were at work on the lawns, making them like velvet carpets.

Nancy came out of Jessie Pease’s cottage one day to see a handsome man in a gray suit, with gray spats, and gray hair, and even a gray silk shirt, walking slowly up the drive toward the Hall. In the shade of the trees (it was a hot day) he removed his gray, broad-brimmed hat. And out of that hat fell his handkerchief.

When Nancy, hastening, picked up this article, she found that it was silk, with a gray border, too, and an initial in one corner. The initial was “M.”

"You dropped this, sir, I think," she said, timidly, coming abreast of the stranger.

He turned to look at her. He had heavy, smoothly-shaven jowls and not a very healthy complexion. His eyes were little, and green. Nancy had expected to see a very handsome, noble-looking old gentleman. Instead, she saw a very sly-looking man, with something mean and furtive in his manner, despite his fine build and immaculate dress.

"Ah! thank you, thank you, my pretty miss," he said, accepting the handkerchief. "It is a very warm day."

"Yes, sir," responded Nancy, politely.

"And you, I suppose, go to school here at Pinewood?"

"Oh, yes."

"A beautiful place! A very beautiful place," said the stranger. "You may be acquainted with a girl named Montgomery, now?"

"Yes, sir," said Nancy, with gravity.

"Now, where might she be found at this hour?"

Nancy chanced to have seen Grace and some of her satellites sitting in a pergola on a mound not far away. She pointed out the path to the stranger.

"Thank you—thank you, my dear," said the gray man, and insisted upon shaking hands with her.

Indeed, he looked curiously after her as she passed on. Then, as he turned to follow the path pointed out to him, he shook his head, saying, under his breath:

"Strange! Familiar, somehow. Looks familiar——"

A cry warned him that he was seen. Flying down from the pergola came Grace, with Cora close behind her.

"Oh, Father! you dear! I'm so glad to see you!" exclaimed Grace.

"So unexpected, dear Senator Montgomery," said Cora, in quite a grown-up way.

The Senator welcomed them; but he looked again after the retreating Nancy.

"Who is that pretty girl, Grace?" he asked, pointing out the object of his interest.

"Pretty girl, indeed!" ejaculated Cora, under her breath.

"Why it's nobody but that Nelson—Nancy Nelson. A mere nobody."

"What name did you say?" demanded the senator, his green eyes very bright for a moment, and a little color coming into his face.

"Nancy Nelson."

"Who is she?"

"That's what we all ask," remarked his daughter, with an unpleasant laugh.

"Why do you say that, Grace?"

"Why, she's a nobody. She's got no friends, and no home—it's a disgrace to have her here at Pinewood. I wish you'd say something to the Madame about her."

"They tried to make *me* room with her," said Cora Rathmore, boldly; "but I wouldn't stand for that long."

The Senator looked grave. "Come, tell me all about Nancy Nelson," he enjoined them, and sat down on a neighboring bench to listen.

Grace and Cora told their highly-colored version of the story circulated about Nancy during the first few weeks of her sojourn at Pinewood Hall.

"And do tell Madame Schakael what you think of her letting such a girl into the school," begged Grace, as the Senator arose and started towards the Hall again.

He did not say that he would. But to himself the Senator muttered, with puckered brow and half-shut eyes:

"Who would have thought it! That girl here—right where I sent Grace! I—I certainly shall have to see Gordon about this. Hang his impudence! What does he mean by sending that girl to a place like this?"



"YOU MAY BE ACQUAINTED WITH A GIRL NAMED MONTGOMERY?" _Page 232._

CHAPTER XXII

IS IT A CLUE?

The most beautiful sight she had ever seen! That was what Nancy Nelson enthusiastically called it when, from the end of the long line of girls, walking two by two, she saw the flower-crowned seniors winding from the Hall, through the sun-spattered grounds, to the old brick church on the highway, beyond the estate, where the baccalaureate sermon was always preached.

No girl, she was sure, could ever be disloyal to Pinewood Hall, after having once seen the graduation procession. And then, the graduating girls themselves! Why, they were all ready for college!

How much they must know! Nancy sighed with envy, and hoped heartily that she would be able to remain at Pinewood long enough to be a chief figure in a similar spectacle.

Corinne Pevay looked like an angel. And Carrie Littlefield read the valedictory. To the mind of the girl just finishing her freshman year, these great girls—real young ladies, now!—were so far above her that it almost made her blink to look at them.

At Higbee School class after class had been graduated above Nancy, and she had seen the day approach—even her own graduation—without much excitement. But this was an entirely different occasion.

She had something to look forward to this summer. At the break-up for the long vacation she was going to have just as much part in the bustle as anyone.

Jessie Pease had already looked over her wardrobe, and there were several new summer dresses, including swimming and boating costumes. Mr. Gordon had sent the extra money needed without comment or objection.

And now Nancy's trunk was packed, and her bag, and with Jennie Bruce she was ready to take the first 'bus that left for the Clintondale station in the morning.

How different from her coming to the school in September!

She was at the head of her class. The freshmen had given her an overwhelming vote for class president for the soph. year. And Corinne had prophesied that she would yet be captain of the West Side—when she grew to be a senior.

Girls ran to kiss her before she got into the 'bus, and stood and waved their hands after her as it rolled away. And when she had arrived at the Hall, she stood on the porch in the rain without a soul to speak to her. Ah! this change was enough to turn the head of even a sensible girl.

However, Nancy was much too affectionate by nature and tender of other people's feelings to

be made haughty or vain by her schoolmates' kindness to her. It continued to be a wonder to her how a "mere nobody" had managed to gain such popularity.

And she was welcomed in Jennie's home as though she really was one of the family.

Jennie's home was a lovely, rambling old house, standing well back from the High Street in its own grounds, and affording ample space for the young folk to have fun in innumerable ways.

There was a lake not far away; and Mr. Bruce owned a pair of ponies that even the younger children could drive. There was a trip almost every day to the swimming place; then there were picnics, and visiting back and forth with other girls whom Jennie and her sisters knew. And nowhere did Nancy hear a word about her not being "just as good" as her comrades.

The mystery of her identity, however, was seldom buried very deep under other thoughts. And Jennie retained her interest in the puzzle, too.

Nancy had written to Scorch O'Brien to arrange for a meeting; as the red-headed youth seemed too bashful to come out to Jennie's house, the girls planned to meet him in the city. They got a most mysterious note in reply:

"DEAR MISS NANCY:

"You and your friend meet me at 307 Payne Street on Saturday afternoon. You can whistle outside; I'll hear you. Can't see you at Old Gordon's office for fear of spies. Did you ever see the Gray Man? He and Old G. has had a fight about you. It was a peach! They says when thieves fall out honest folks gets what's coming to them. Mebbe you'll get yours.

"Most respectfully yours,

"SCORCH O'BRIEN."

Jennie's big brother John, who had already taken some interest in Nancy's mystery, took the girls to town with him. His employer, who knew Mr. Gordon, had never been able to get the lawyer to talk about Nancy Nelson, although he had started the subject with him several times.

The girls did a little shopping for themselves, and some errands for Mrs. Bruce, and then had a nice luncheon. It was past noon then and they were sure that Scorch would be at home—for it was evidently his home address that he had given to them.

They asked a policeman how to find Payne Street and he kindly put them on a car which took the two girls to the corner of that thoroughfare. It was a street of small cottages, and empty lots, and goats, and many, many dirty-faced children. Some of these last ran after Nancy and Jennie and made faces at them as they sought out Number 307.

"But as long as the goats don't run after us and make faces, I don't care," declared Jennie.

Just then one nanny looked over a fence and said "Ba-a-a-a!" in a very loud tone, and Jennie almost jumped into the middle of the street.

"Come out! Come on!" she cried, urging her friend onward. "Goats are always butting in."

A derisive chorus of "ba's" followed them as they hurried along the street.

"There's 307!" cried Nancy, pointing.

The cottage in question was a rather neater-looking place than its neighbors. There was a fence which really was strong enough, and had pickets enough (if some of them *were* barrel-staves) to keep wandering goats out of the yard. There was a garden at the back, and a bit of grass in front, with a path bordered by half bricks painted with whitewash a dazzling white.

The porch and steps were scrubbed clean, too; it might have been a sign of Mrs. O'Brien's trade, that porch.

There were ducks, and geese, and poultry, too; but all fenced off with wire from the front and from the garden. And the girls heard the hungry grunting of a pig in its sty.

There was a good deal of noise within the house, too. The girls could hear childish voices in a great hullabaloo, a good-natured, but broadly Irish voice chiming in with them, and likewise a scampering across the floor which must have made the cottage rock again.

"He'd never hear us whistle in the world!" giggled Jennie.

"How funny we'd look standing here on the street and whistling, anyway!" replied Nancy.

"And then, I never could whistle," confessed Jennie. "Somehow I can't get my lips to pucker right."

"Why! neither can I!" cried Nancy. "I didn't think of that. We couldn't signal to Scorch by whistling, anyway."

"Unless we borrowed a policeman's whistle—or a postman's," said Jennie. "What'll we do?"

"Come on and knock," said Nancy. "We can make them hear somehow."

Which proved to be true. The girls made those inside hear at their first summons. Silence fell upon the O'Brien cottage on the instant.

There might have been some whisperings and soft commands; but then, in a moment, a good-looking, black-haired girl, in a clean apron and with her sleeves rolled up over her dimpled elbows, opened the front door.

"You're Norah O'Brien, I know," said Nancy, putting out her hand.

"You're a good guesser, Miss," returned the girl, who might have been sixteen or seventeen. "And who might you be—and the other pretty lady?"

"Why—didn't Scorch tell you—"

"Sarsfield, do ye mane?" asked Norah, her eyes twinkling.

"I mean Scorch O'Brien," declared Nancy.

"Patrick Sarsfield is his name," declared Scorch's big sister. "Here! P. Sarsfield O'Brien!" she shouted into the house. "It's coompany ye've got."

"Gee!" drawled the voice of the red-haired youth. "What did they come to the door for?" and he made his appearance, looking very sheepish.

"How could you expect us to whistle, Scorch?" demanded Nancy, while Jennie bubbled over with laughter. "Girls can't whistle."

"I never thought," admitted Scorch, shaking hands awkwardly with both visitors.

"Bring thim inter the house, P. Sarsfield," said Norah. "Have ye no manners?"

"There's too many kids," said the tousled Scorch, who had evidently been playing with the younger children, too.

"I'll shoo 'em out into the yard," promised Norah, and went away upon this errand while Scorch ushered his visitors into the tiny front room, which was evidently kept shut up save when the priest came, or some special visitor.

The girls sat down on the stiffly-placed chairs and looked about at the portraits of Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien when they were first married—he very straight and stern-looking in his policeman's uniform, with very yellow buttons, and Mrs. O'Brien with very red cheeks and much yellow jewelry painted into the picture by the artist at the bride's request. Mrs. O'Brien had never owned any trinket of more value than her wedding ring!

There was a wreath of everlastings in a glass case, which had lain on the good man's coffin. And there was a framed "In Memoriam" card on the wall, together with a "Rock of Ages" worked on cardboard in red worsted by Norah herself, no doubt.

Everything was as clean as could be, however. And Nancy, on her part, was much more interested in the change she saw in Scorch, than in anything else.

"Why, Scorch! how you've grown!" she exclaimed.

"That's in spite of the way they overwork me at the office," he replied, grinning.

"And you've had that tooth put in!"

"Yep. Ye see, missing that tooth, when I bit into anything it seemed like I was tryin' to make a sandwich look like a Swiss cheese. It troubled my aesthetic taste. So I let the tooth carpenter build me another."

"And your hair stays lots flatter than it did," declared Nancy.

"Yep. Sweet oil. It works all right."

"Nonsense, Scorch! You talk just as slangily as ever."

"But he writes a lot better than he did," said Jennie, suddenly. "Did you notice in his last letter?"

"You're practising, Scorch," said Nancy.

"I'm goin' to night school, Miss Nancy," admitted the boy, with a grin.

"That's a good boy!" exclaimed Nancy.

"Well, learning is all right—even if a feller's goin' to be a detective," declared Scorch, earnestly.

"And I expect you're learnin' a lot yourself, Miss Nancy?"

"Some," returned his friend.

"She's at the top of her class," Jennie declared, proudly. "Oh, she has us all beaten, Scorch."

"Sure," he agreed. "I knowed how 'twould be. There ain't nobody going to get the best of Miss Nancy."

"Unless it's that horrid Mr. Gordon," suggested Jennie, bringing the conversation around to the subject uppermost in all their minds.

"Ha!" exclaimed Scorch, looking mysterious at once, and hitching his chair nearer to the girls. "Were you on to what I said in my letter?"

"About the gray man? Yes!" cried Jennie.

"Did you ever see him?" asked Scorch.

"I—I don't know that I have," said Nancy, slowly.

"He ain't been snooping around that school?"

"Why, I haven't noticed anybody like that."

"A big man all in gray. He's some nobby dresser! I thought he was the President—or Secretary of State at least—when he came into the office and asked for Old Gordon. I takes him in at once.

"Now, they knowed each other well, those two did. Old Gordon was startled and he tried to heave up out of his chair. But you know how *he* is," added Scorch, with scorn. "Takes him ten minutes to work his way out from between the arms when he wants to get up. Don't know what he *would* do if there was a fire any time."

"Why, Scorch!" admonished Nancy.

"Well," said the boy, "he tries to heave up, and can't, and sings out:

"'Why, Jim!'

"'Hello, Hen,' says the man in gray.

"I hadn't shut the door—quite. Sometimes I don't," admitted the boy, with a wink. "I hears the gray feller say:

"'I just got back from Clintondale, Hen. What did you send that girl up there for, I want to know?'

"'What girl?' asks Old Gordon.

"'Nancy Nelson,' says the gray man

"'Sh!' sputters Gordon. 'Shut the door, Jim, if you're here to talk about *her*.'

"'But before the other feller shut the door I heard him say:

"'Wouldn't no other school but Pinewood Hall do for *her*?' and Old Gordon snaps right back at him:

"'Nothing's too good for her, Jim, and you know it.'

"Well!" continued Scorch. "I could have bit off the doorknob; I was so mad when they shut the door on me. I couldn't hear another thing.

"The gray man was in there a long time. When he come out he looked mad, too. I didn't hear Old Gordon's buzzer for a long time, and so I slipped down to his door and tried it.

"When I peeked in, what do you think?" asked Scorch, mysteriously.

"What was it?" gasped Nancy.

"I never could guess!" exclaimed the eager Jennie.

"The old man had his head down on the desk, and his shoulders was heavin' like he was cryin'.

Now, what do you know about *that*?" demanded the boy, with the air of one throwing a bomb. The girls were speechless with surprise.

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CHAPTER XXIII

BACK TO SCHOOL AGAIN

"That's the strangest thing I ever heard," Jennie Bruce said, the first to break the silence. "Do you really suppose he was crying, Scorch—or was he laughing?"

"Say!" returned the red-haired youth, "Old Gordon never laughed in his life!"

"But why should he cry?" asked Nancy, much disturbed.

"Ask me an easier one," answered Scorch. "It struck me all of a heap. I backed out and waited for him to show up. When he went out to lunch he looked no different from other times."

"And I don't see that what you've told us is a bit of good!" exclaimed Jennie, suddenly. "We don't know who the gray man is."

"You ain't never seen him, Miss Nancy?" asked the boy, anxiously.

"Not that I know of," replied the girl.

"Well! I tried to find out who he was, and nobody around the office seemed to know. He'd never been there before. But if he comes again I'm goin' to get on his trail," declared Scorch, nodding emphatically.

"How'll you do that?" asked Jennie, quickly.

"I don't know. But I'll follow him out if I have to," said Scorch. "And he'll have to be pretty smart to lose *me*."

"Don't you do anything, Scorch, to get yourself into trouble," admonished Nancy.

"Shucks!" ejaculated Scorch. "I won't get into trouble. Don't you fear. But that gray man won't get away from me again."

The girls remained a while longer, getting better acquainted with Norah, and with the brood of younger O'Briens. There was the livestock in the back yard to look over, too; and Norah made tea and cut a cake, doing the honors of the house because Mrs. O'Brien was not at home.

"She does her scrubbin' at the offices Saturday afternoon instead of at night. Then we have her home Saturday evenings," said Norah, proudly. "And Patrick Sarsfield does not go to school Saturday evenings."

"Oh, say!" ejaculated the red-haired boy. "Call me 'Scorch.' 'Patrick Sarsfield' makes me feel top-heavy. I'd soon get round-shouldered carrying that around."

John Bruce met the girls at the station, to which Scorch escorted them in time for the afternoon train. Nancy shook hands with her champion warmly before they separated.

"You be a good boy and keep out of trouble," she advised him. "Maybe Mr. Gordon isn't as bad as—as you think. He never refuses me anything, and I feel ashamed to doubt him so."

"Say! what did he ever give you but money?" demanded Scorch.

"But that, you once told me," said Nancy, laughing, "was about the best thing in the world."

"It's good to have, just the same," quoth Scorch. "But perhaps havin' folks is better. And if Old Gordon has hidden you away from your folks, Miss Nancy, he'd oughter be made to give you up to them."

"That's a *new* idea, Scorch," returned Nancy, reflectively. "Do you suppose that I might have been stolen from my people for some reason?"

"Maybe you were stolen by Gypsies!" cried Jennie.

"Old Gordon doesn't look like a Gypsy," said Scorch, slowly, "nor yet the gray man I was telling you about."

"Come on and get aboard," said John Bruce, smiling. "I wouldn't worry my head about such things, if I were you, Nancy. We all like you quite as well as we should if you had a family as big as the Bruces'."

That was not the only time the girls saw Scorch O'Brien that summer; and on one occasion the entire O'Brien family—from the fat, ruddy-faced Mother O'Brien, down to Aloysius Adolphus O'Brien, the baby—came clear out to Hollyburg on the train, where they were met by the Bruces' man, and Nancy and Jennie, with a two-horse beach-wagon and transported to the lake for a picnic.

But Scorch—greatly to his disappointment—had nothing of moment to communicate to Nancy on that occasion, or on any other that summer. The "gray man" did not again appear at the offices and all he could say was that Mr. Gordon went on in his usual way.

"He lives in an old-fashioned hotel over on the West Side," said Scorch, "and I've been in his rooms two or three times. But it don't look to me as though he could hide the papers there anywhere."

"Hide what papers?" demanded Nancy.

"Why, there's always papers hidden away that would tell the heiress all she wants to know—if she could get at 'em," declared Scorch, nodding.

"You ridiculous boy! You've got your head full of paper-covered story books!" exclaimed Nancy. "Did you ever hear his like, Jennie?"

"Maybe he's right, just the same," observed her chum, slowly. "Mr. Gordon isn't likely to tell

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you anything himself. If you ever find out about your folks it will be in some such way as Scorch says."

Bye and bye it was time to go back to Pinewood Hall again. Nancy had remained the whole summer with the Bruces, and she had enjoyed every day of that time. Yet she was glad, too, to go back to her studies.

"And so would I be, if I had a chance of standing anywhere near you in classes," agreed Jennie. "But I'm always falling down just when I think I'm perfect in a recitation."

But there was much more dignity in the bearing of both Nancy and Jennie when they approached Pinewood Hall on this occasion. They were full-fledged sophomores, and they could not help looking down with amused tolerance on the "greenies" who were timidly coming to the school for the first time.

It was "great," as Jennie confessed, to be able to tell "those children" where to go, and what to do, and to order them about, as was the soph. privilege.

But when Nancy found that certain of her class were hazing the new-comers in a serious way, she took the class to task for it. She called a meeting and reminded them that it would displease both the new captains of the school—Mary Miggs on the West Side and Polly Hyams on the East—as well as Madame Schakael herself, if hazing of the new girls continued.

"Let's do unto others as we would have been glad to have others do to us when we came a year ago," said Nancy.

"Well, the sophs. drilled us, all right!" cried Jennie, who was a bit obstreperous on this point, for she liked to play practical jokes on the younger girls.

"And so," said Nancy, gravely, "we know how mean it was of them. This class wants to have a better record than the class above it—eh?"

"Talk for yourself, Miss Nancy!" snapped Cora Rathmore. "You're taking too much upon yourself."

"As usual, too," agreed Grace Montgomery, with scorn. "Just because you happen to be class president—"

"And quite by a fluke," interjected Cora.

"You needn't suppose that you can boss us in every single particular. If I want to make one of these greenies 'fag' for me, I'm going to do it."

"We have always agreed to be governed by the majority, you know," observed Nancy, softly. "Let us put it to vote. If the bulk of the class believe it better and kinder to help these younger girls instead of making them miserable for the first few weeks they are at Pinewood, let us all agree to be governed accordingly."

"Well, that's fair," said Jennie Bruce.

"Oh, she knows she's got the majority with her," snapped Cora, shrugging her shoulders. "The minority have no rights at all in this class."

"I am glad—or would be so—if I believed I was so popular," Nancy said, with some warmth. "But I believe with the majority of us girls my suggestion is popular. It isn't I."

Then she put the question and the Montgomeryites were in a very small minority.

Nevertheless, outside of class matters, Grace Montgomery was still something of a leader. She and Cora paid more attention to dress than other girls in the school. They spent more money on "orgies," too, and had hampers arrive from home more frequently. They were even more popular among the juniors than they were in their own class.

And soon a certain number of the new girls at Pinewood Hall began to ape the manners and quote the sayings of Grace Montgomery. The present class of seniors paid little attention to Grace and her growing clique; but Nancy and Jennie often spoke of the possibility of her having a large following before she was through her senior year.

"Unless she does something for which to be shown up before them all, the time will come when Grace Montgomery will divide the school. She'll never have much influence in her own class," said Jennie; "but in the school as a whole she will be a power if she can."

In athletics that fall, however, neither Grace nor Cora cut much of a figure. Cora tried hard for the school crew, but Miss Etching turned her back to the second boat for another year.

To make Cora all the angrier, Nancy "made" Number 6 in the eight-oared shell. It was something for the sophomore class as a whole to be proud of; for it was seldom that one of their number got into the "varsity" crew.

But Cora did all she could to belittle Nancy's triumph. She stood on the landing and sneered at the work of the crew, and especially at "Number 6" until one evening Jennie Bruce came up behind her, caught her by both elbows, and thrust her suddenly toward the edge of the float.

"Ouch! Don't! You mean little thing!" cried Cora.

"Mean?" said Jennie, sharply. "If I was as mean as you are, Cora Rathmore, I'd be afraid to go to sleep without a light in the room. Just think of being left alone in the dark with anybody as mean as *you* are!"

"Think you're smart! Ouch! Let go of me!"

"You quit ragging Nance Nelson, or I'll pitch you right into the river—now you see if I don't!" threatened Jennie.

"I'll tell Miss Etching on you!" threatened Cora, still struggling.

"Go ahead. And I'll tell her the things you've said down here every time the school crew is out. You have a funny kind of loyalty; haven't you, Cora? Pah!"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Cora, but rubbing her elbows where Jennie had held them like a vise.

She was a little afraid of Jennie's muscles, as well as of her sharp tongue. Jennie was not a heavy girl, but she was wiry and strong.

This fall rowing was a particular fad of the Pinewood Hall girls. In the long evenings after dinner all but the freshman class were allowed to go out on the river until Mr. Pease blew the

big horn at the boathouse to call the stragglers in.

Some of the girls owned their own boats, too, for of course they could not use the racing boats except in practice hours. Others, who did not own boats, hired them of a boatman below the estate, near the railroad bridge.

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Jennie and Nancy pooled their pocket money and bought a light skiff—a flat-bottomed affair which was just the thing for them to paddle about in shallow water, and was “seaworthy.” No ordinary amount of rocking could turn the skiff over.

They often pulled into the still pools, or meadow ponds, opening into the river, and plucked water-lilies. Nancy never did this without remembering her adventures before she came to Pinewood Hall—the occasion when she had helped save Bob Endress from drowning.

Bob was now a lordly senior at Dr. Dudley’s Academy. Nancy had only seen him flashing past the girls’ boathouse in the Academy eight. Bob was stroke of his school’s first crew. Nancy often wondered if he had learned to swim yet.

One evening when the two chums from Number 30, West Side (they had held their old room for another term, as sophs often did at Pinewood Hall), arrived at the little dock where the private boats were kept, they saw that their own skiff was in the water.

“Hullo!” exclaimed Jennie. “Some of the girls have been using the *Beauty*. What do you know about that?”

They began to run. One girl popped up out of the boat, saw them, and immediately climbed out upon the dock. It was Grace Montgomery.

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“Well, will you look who’s here!” ejaculated Jennie. “Who invited *you* to play in our yard, Miss?”

“Oh, never mind, Jennie!” begged Nancy, pulling at her chum’s sweater.

“I’m not going to have anybody take our boat without permission. Who is that other one? Why, it’s Cora, of course! Get out of that!” commanded Jennie, much more harshly than Nancy had ever heard her speak before.

“Dear me! I didn’t know it was *your* boat, Jennie,” said Grace, airily.

“Nor I,” chimed in Cora. “You can be sure I wouldn’t have got into the sloppy old thing, if I had.”

“Go ‘long, chile!” spoke Jennie, scornfully. “It wouldn’t matter to you whose boat it was. Your appreciation of personal property is warped.”

“Nasty thing!” snapped Cora.

“Just so,” returned Jennie. “Come on, Nance. We’ll get a padlock for our boat-chain tomorrow.”

When they had pushed off and were out of hearing of the girls on the dock, Nancy said, admonishingly:

“Why say things to stir them up? It does no good.”

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“Oh, fudge! What does it matter? Do you suppose that I care if Grace or Cora ‘have a mad on’ at me? Much!” and Jennie snapped her fingers.

They were pulling out into the river. The sun was already below the hills; but the light was lingering long in the sky and on the water. The chums had an objective point in a little cove across the river, where splendid lilies grew.

The evening boat from Clintondale down the river came in sight and the girls rested on their oars to let it pass. The little waves the small steamer threw off rocked their skiff gently.

“Goodness!” exclaimed Jennie, suddenly. “This skiff is all wet. My feet are soaked.”

“Why, what’s the matter?” asked Nancy. “The water is over *my* shoes, too.”

“I bet those girls slopped some into the boat when they launched her,” declared Jennie, angrily.

“Wish we had a bailer. Why, Jennie! the boat’s leaking!”

But Jennie had already found that out. And she found *where* it was leaking.

“The plug’s been pulled, Nance!” she exclaimed. “See that bunch of rags floating? That’s what Cora Rathmore stuffed into the hole when she pulled out the plug. She knew the water would soon work them out.”

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“But where’s the plug?” asked Nancy.

“They took it away with them. It’s a mean trick!” gasped her chum. “Why, Nancy! The water is gaining fast. Here we are in the middle of the river and the skiff will sink under us before we can row to shore!”

CHAPTER XXIV

THE THANKSGIVING MASQUE

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Of course, both Jennie and Nancy could swim; but swimming with one’s clothes on, from the middle of Clinton River to the shore, would be no small feat.

And there wasn’t time to throw off much of their clothing, for the skiff was sinking under them. Once the bunch of rags had been forced out of the hole where the plug had been, the water spurted in like a miniature fountain.

The boat began to swing in the current, too. They had both drawn their oars inboard and the

craft drifted at the mercy of the river.

"What *shall* we do?" gasped Jennie, again. "We're go-ing-right-do-own!"

"Not yet!" cried her chum, tearing off the little coat she wore.

In a moment Nancy doubled up the sleeve and thrust it into the hole in the bottom of the boat. She forced it in tightly, and as it became wet and more plastic, she rammed it home hard.

"But that won't last long," objected Jennie.

"The water'll force it out again. And what will we do with the water that is already in here?"

Indeed, the girls were barely out of the wash of the water, and their feet and ankles were soaking wet.

They dared not move suddenly, either; the gunwales of the boat were so low that, if it pitched at all, the river would flow over the sides.

"Why! it will sink any minute and leave us sitting here in the water!" groaned Jennie, again.

"Take off one of your shoes—careful, now," commanded Nancy. "We can bail with them," putting into practice her own advice.

They managed each to remove one of the low, rubber-soled shoes they wore. But these took up so small an amount of water, although they bailed vigorously, that Jennie began to chuckle:

"Might as well try to dip the sea out with a pail, Nance! What a ridiculous position we're in!"

But it was really more serious than that. It was fast growing dark, and no matter how loudly they shouted, their voices would not reach to the landing. The wind was against them.

On the other side of Clinton River, opposite the scene of their accident, were open fields and woods. Few people lived within sight; indeed, only two twinkling lights from house windows could they now see on that side, and both of those were far away.

"Do you suppose we could slip overboard without swamping the boat, and so lighten it?" demanded Nancy.

"What good would that do?"

"Then it wouldn't sink and we could cling to the gunwales. It would keep us afloat."

"Oh, that plug's come out!" gasped Jennie.

It had. Nancy stooped and forced the cloth into the hole again; but her motion rocked the boat dangerously. A ripple came along and lapped right in, and the girls were almost waist deep!

"Oh, dear me!" wailed Jennie. "We might just as well be drowned as be like this. We *are* drowned from our waists down."

"Nev—er—say—die!" gasped Nancy, struggling with the jacket-sleeve to make it stay in the hole.

"We've got to get out!" cried Jennie. "This is where we get off—even if it *is* a wet landing. If we're out of the boat, it will only sink so that the gunwales are level with the water. Isn't that so?"

"I believe so," admitted Nancy.

"Then out we go," said Jennie, working her way toward the bow.

"What you going to do?"

"Lighten the boat. You slide out over the stern. We've got to do it, Nance."

"I guess that's so," admitted her chum. "Do be careful, Jennie. And if the boat *does* sink, don't lose your head. We can swim."

"Well, I can't swim to shore in all these clothes. I wish I had loosened my skirts at the start. Oh, dear!"

The daylight had drifted out of the sky and there was no moon. The stars shone palely and it seemed as though a mist had suddenly been drawn over the surface of the river.

The lights of the steamboat had long since disappeared around the bend. There didn't seem to be another pleasure boat on the river this evening. And yet there must have been a lot of the girls out, somewhere.

Jennie and Nancy got their feet over the ends of the boat and slid carefully down into the water. Their skirts buoyed them up a bit; but they knew that once the garments were saturated, they would bear them down instead.

"Are—are you all—all right, Nance?" gasped Jennie, from the bow, as the water rose about her. "Oh, oh! Isn't it wet?"

"Cling to the boat, Jen!" begged Nancy, from the stern. "I—I don't believe it will sink."

And even as she spoke the skiff, lurching first one side and then the other, sank slowly down into the depths of the river.

Both girls screamed. They came together with a shock and clung to each other in something like panic. And, so struggling, both dipped under water for a moment.

But when they came up, Nancy held her chum off, and cried:

"Don't do that again, Jennie! If you have to dip, hold your nose. Let's not lose our heads about this. We've got to swim for it!"

"Swim!" gasped Jennie Bruce. "I feel as if there was a ton of lead around my legs. I can't kick any more than the mule could with his legs tied!"

"Get rid of the skirts," said Nancy, struggling to unfasten her own. "You can do it—if you try. There! mine's gone."

"Oh, my—blub! blub! blub!" came from poor Jennie, as she went under.

Nancy reached and caught her by the hair. Both their caps had floated away. She dragged her chum to the surface and held her until she got her breath again.

Meanwhile Nancy was trying to undo the fastenings of Jennie's clothes; and she succeeded after a time.

"Oh, dear, me!" she gasped. "I never wished to be a boy so much before."

"Well, even a boy would find himself somewhat mussed up here in the middle of the river," sobbed Jennie.

"But he'd have a knife in his pocket, and could cut his clothing off," returned Nancy, with

some vigor.

In these few moments that they had been out of the boat the current, of course, had carried them down stream. But now, partially relieved of their clinging garments, they wanted to strike out for shore. But which shore?

"I believe we're nearer the westerly side," said Jennie.

"If we swim over there we won't know where to go to dry off and get clothes. And there'll be an awful time at the school," said Nancy.

Just then the horn at the boathouse sounded mournfully across the water. It was first call for the scattered boats to return—half-past eight. If all the girls were not in by nine they had to explain the reason to Miss Etching.

"Well, then, shall it be the boathouse?" queried Jennie.

"We've drifted a long way below it. See! there's the bend," said Nancy, rising to look. "Let's make for the nearest point on that side."

"Come on, then!" said Jennie, and side by side, but heavily, the two girls struck out.

Neither was quite sure that she could swim that far under the present conditions. Yet they were too plucky to say so to each other.

For at least five minutes they plugged away and then Nancy, rising up again, uttered a startled exclamation.

"What's the matter?" demanded Jennie.

"Why! we're *below* the point!"

"The current's taking us down stream!"

"That's it!"

"Goodness me!" exclaimed Jennie. "We'll land somewhere about at the Academy, if we don't look out."

At that instant they both heard the swish of oars, or a paddle. In unison they raised their voices in a shout:

"Help! This way!"

They could not see the craft approaching, for the mist on the river had been growing thicker and thicker, all this time. But there was an answering cry:

"I'm coming! Holler again!"

"Oh, it's a man!" gasped Jennie.

"It's a boy!" declared Nancy.

"Shout again!" cried the voice in the mist.

"Well, I'm going to be saved if I'm *not* dressed for company," declared Jennie, and she raised her voice again:

"This way! We're in the water!"

"Coming!"

Then into sight flashed a ghostly craft, which came straight for them.

"Oh! it's only a canoe!" wailed Jennie. "We can't climb into a canoe."

"My goodness! It's two girls!" ejaculated the person paddling the canoe.

"Mr. Endress!" exclaimed Nancy, recognizing the boy from Dr. Dudley's Academy.

"What?" shouted Bob Endress. "Is it Nancy Nelson?"

"And Jennie Bruce. We lost our boat. It sank," explained Nancy, breathlessly.

"Each of you grab the gunwale of my canoe. Easy, now!" admonished Bob.

They did so, one on either side, astern.

"Now I can paddle you to shore. Just let your bodies float right out. It's lucky I came along. The current's so strong around this bend."

"I never saw a boy so welcome before!" gasped Jennie, getting back her courage immediately.

"And now I can return your compliment, Nancy," said Bob, laughing. "You saved me from drowning, and if you hang on long enough I'll manage to save you, I guess."

He could not paddle the canoe very swiftly with the weight of the two girls dragging it down; but in ten minutes they were in shore and knew that they were safe.

"We could wade in," said Nancy, gasping a little for breath.

"Wait," commanded the boy. "Hadn't I better take you right up to the landing?"

"Oh, mercy! no!" cried Jennie. "We want to run right home across the fields. The back door won't be locked."

"We'd better go to the gym. first and get skirts," said Nancy, the practical. "Maybe we can slip in then without anybody being the wiser."

"How under the sun did you manage to sink that skiff of yours?" Bob demanded, showing thereby that he knew more about Nancy and her chum than Nancy had supposed.

"The plug came out," said Nancy, shortly.

"Why didn't you put it back?"

"It wasn't an accident!" exclaimed Jennie. "One of the girls drew the plug and just stuffed the hole with rags. We didn't know it. Of course, the water forced the rags out when we got half-way across the river."

"Why, that was criminal!" cried Bob, angrily. "That was no joke."

"Well, we didn't laugh ourselves to death about it," agreed Jennie.

"What girl did it?"

"I'd hate to tell you," snapped Jennie. "There were two of them in the trick, I'm sure. But I certainly will pay them off!"

"They ought to be punished. You might have been drowned," declared Bob.

But Nancy said nothing. She did not propose to discuss Grace Montgomery's shortcomings with her cousin.

The two girls got ashore in the semi-darkness, and thanked their rescuer again.

"I'll ask after you to-morrow over the 'phone," declared Bob. "I hope you won't get cold."

"Oh, goodness me! don't ask," cried Jennie. "Then we will have to explain the whole business. And I don't want to go before the Madame."

"That's right, Jennie," agreed her chum. "Please don't ask after us, Mr. Endress."

"Then let me know how you get along through Grace. I see her a lot," said Bob. "But you girls are never with her."

"Aw—well," drawled Jennie, coming to Nancy's rescue. "You know, we girls go in bunches. Nancy and I chum together, and it's a close corporation. We don't often go about with other girls."

Then they said "Good-night!" and ran off through the bushes. Their wet garments hampered them somewhat in running; but they came at last breathless to the gym. and Samuel had not yet locked up for the night.

So they got into gym. togs—both blouses and skirts,—and managed to enter the Hall by the rear door of their wing and get up to Number 30 without being caught by any teacher, or the Side captain.

The wet clothes were flung out of the window and, very early in the morning, Nancy arose, slipped out of the house, and carried the garments to the drying yard.

So they got over this adventure without the teachers being the wiser. There was a hue and cry about the lost skiff, however.

"What are we going to say?" demanded Jennie, of her chum. "You won't let me go at Grace and Cora and make 'em pay for it. What'll we do?"

"Let folks think the skiff floated away from the landing. What do we care if they say we didn't tie it?" returned Nancy. "It's our loss; isn't it?"

"But those girls ought to be made to pay for the skiff."

"How would you make them pay? Cora never has any money, anyway," said Nancy, remembering the sum that her ex-roommate already owed her from the year before. "And they'd both deny touching the plug, anyway. We can't prove it."

"Well, I don't care! I hate to have those girls get the best of us. I'll think up some trick by which we can pay them back."

"Nonsense, Jennie!" reproved Nancy. "You wouldn't be mean just because *they* are mean."

"I don't know but I would—if it wasn't for you," admitted her chum, sighing.

But in the end nothing was done about the skiff and the girls' adventure. The matter blew over. There was so much going on at Pinewood Hall that fall, and the sophomores were so very busy, that the loss of the boat soon ceased to be a topic of conversation—saving between the owners and, possibly, the two other girls who knew all about the incident.

The seniors and juniors promised the school a very lively social season this winter. And of course the sophs. were "in on it," as Jennie said, to a degree.

As early as October the big girls got permission to plan a dance, with the Academy boys invited, for Thanksgiving Eve. It was to be a masquerade, too, and that gave the girls a delightful time choosing costumes and—in some cases—making them at odd hours themselves.

Those who would, might gather, twice a week, with Jessie Pease and learn to sew. Nancy and Jennie were faithful to this "extra" and both made their own costumes under Jessie's sharp eye.

Jennie was going to be dressed as an owl, and wear huge spectacles and carry an open book.

"I'd never look wise at any other time," giggled the irrepressible. "So I will do so now."

And in her fluffy gray and white garments, with the skirts drawn close around her feet and slit only a little way so that she could barely walk and dance, Jennie really *did* look too cute for anything.

Nancy was costumed as a "drummer girl"—a brilliant uniform with knee skirt, long boots, a little, round, "Tommy Atkins" cap with chin-strap, and a little snare-drum at her hip that she really learned to beat.

The big hall was cleared for dancing and decorated by the girls themselves with the loot of the autumn woods. No more brilliant affair, everybody declared, had been arranged since Pinewood Hall had become a preparatory school.

Dr. Dudley's boys marched over at eight o'clock, every one of them fancifully attired. Despite the fact that the tastes of the boys ran a good deal to costumes denoting the Soldier of '76 and Blackbeard, the Pirate, the novelty and variety shown by the girls made the scene a delightful one.

Nancy Nelson and her mates of the sophomore class were not likely to be wall-flowers this year, or to lack for partners. The former's striking costume marked her out, too, and after the grand march, she was sought out by Bob Endress.

"Oh, I'm afraid I don't dance well enough, Mr. Endress," the girl said in a whisper, and blushing deeply.

"You do everything well, I believe," declared he. "Now, don't disappoint me. I've been trying ever since that night I found you and your chum in the river, to get a talk with you. But you're so shy."

"I—I'm always busy," replied Nancy. "And—and you know the Madame is very strict about us talking with any of you boys."

"Wow! we won't bite you," laughed Bob. "Besides, I meet Grace and Cora Rathmore often. I tried to pump them about your accident; but they declared they knew nothing about it. I guess you warned them not to tell."

Nancy had nothing to say to this, but she could, not refuse to go on the floor with Bob, although she saw Grace, dressed to represent a gaudy tulip, glaring at them with blazing eyes from across the room.

CHAPTER XXV

GETTING ON

Jennie Bruce did not go home that Christmas. Instead, she remained at Pinewood Hall with Nancy and was "coached" for the after-New Year exams. So she was able to send home better reports for her first half-year's work than she had had before.

Nancy took to study naturally; it was a "grind" for Jennie, and she was frank to admit it.

Nancy stuck to her books just as closely after Thanksgiving as she had before; but as a sophomore she had more freedom than was usually granted to the freshies. Therefore she was able, if she wished, to enter more fully into the social gayeties of her classmates.

And after the very successful masque on Thanksgiving Eve, she could not escape Bob Endress altogether. He *was* a nice boy, and Nancy liked him. Besides, there were two topics that drew the two together.

Bob never got over talking about that August afternoon, that seemed so long ago, when Nancy had helped to rescue him from the millrace. On the other hand, Nancy was quite as grateful to him for saving her and Jennie from the river.

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So, as well as might be, Bob and Nancy were very good friends. Bob would be graduated in June, and at that same time Nancy would become a full-fledged junior. Bob was going to Cornell; but that was not too far away, as he often told her, for him to come back to Clintondale to see both the girls and boys there.

The only thing that troubled Nancy about this semi-intimacy between herself and the Academy boy was the fact that Grace Montgomery was so angry. She seemed to have an idea that the only person who had any right to speak to her cousin was herself.

Nancy was not so afraid to demand her rights as she once had been. If Grace and Cora scowled at her, and belittled her behind her back, Nancy had learned to go serenely on her way and pay no attention to them.

What if they *did* say she was a "nobody?" Nancy knew that she was popular enough with her classmates to win the high position of class president twice in succession.

"Let the little dogs howl and snarl," Jennie said. "What do *we* care?"

Yet the slur upon her identity could always hurt Nancy Nelson. Many a night, after Jennie was sound asleep in her bed, Nancy bedewed her pillow with tears.

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She reviewed at these times all the important incidents in her short life.

The few brief notes that Mr. Gordon had sent to her she treasured carefully. She could not admire that peculiar gentleman; yet he was the one link that seemed to bind her to her mysterious fortune.

She received characteristic notes from Scorch O'Brien, now and then; they got past the Madame's desk unopened because they were addressed on the typewriter, and purported to come from the office of Ambrose, Necker & Boles.

So the weeks sped. Spring came and then the budding summer, and again the long line of white-robed girls walked the winding paths of Pinewood Hall. The school year seemed to have fairly flown and Nancy and her mates found themselves facing the fact that they were no longer sophomores, but juniors!

The Montgomery clique "got busy" again and tried to balk the election of Nancy for a third time to the office of president of the class. To be president in junior year was just as good as an appointment to the captaincy of a Side in senior year.

But Nancy had kept on the even tenor of her way. Her marks were just as good as ever, and she stood at the head of most of her classes. The teachers liked her and most of her own class considered her a bright and particular star. So there was little chance of Grace and Cora accomplishing their ends.

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The graduating exercises at Pinewood occurred the day before that same ceremony at Dr. Dudley's school. The older boys of the Academy were usually invited guests at the exercises of the Hall; and some of the first and second-class girls remained over a day after graduation to see their friends in the boys' school graduated.

Nancy and Jennie received each an engraved card requesting "the honor of their presence" at Clinton Academy, with Bob Endress's name written with a flourish in the lower corner.

So, although Nancy was going home with Jennie for the summer once more, they begged the Madame's permission to remain over for the boys' graduation.

And how angry Grace Montgomery was when she learned that Bob had invited Nancy and her chum! Bob had stood well in his class—was quite the cock of the walk, indeed—and Grace wanted to show him off to the older girls as her especial property. She worked the cousinly relationship to the limit.

And after the exercises, when Bob came down from the platform particularly to lead Nancy and Jennie to his parents and introduce them, Grace and Cora went away in anything but a sweet frame of mind.

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Mr. and Mrs. Endress spoke very kindly to Nancy. Bob, it seemed, had often spoken of the girl whose quick wit had saved him from the millrace almost two years before.

"And you are in Grace Montgomery's class?" observed Mrs. Endress. "It is odd we have never heard Grace speak of you, Nancy. And where will you spend your summer?"

Nancy told her how kind the Bruces were to invite her for the long vacation.

"I hope we shall see you both," said Mrs. Endress, nodding kindly to Jennie, too, "before fall.

We are not so very far from Holleyburg, you know. Ah! here come Grace and the Senator."

Nancy and her chum fell back. A tall man dressed in a gray frock coat and broad-brimmed hat—the garments so often affected by the Western politician—was pacing slowly up the aisle with Grace and Cora.

He was in gray all over, from hat to spats, save that his tie had a crimson spot in it—a very beautiful ruby pin.

"My goodness me, Nance! The Man in Gray!" whispered Jennie, chuckling.

"What's that?" gasped Nancy.

"Why, you remember the man Scorch told us of?"

"What man?"

"The man in gray who came to see your guardian, Mr. Gordon?"

"Oh! Well," and Nancy recovered her composure. "I guess Grace Montgomery's father has nothing to do with *me*. But I have seen him before."

"You have?" returned Jennie, in turn surprised.

"Yes. Last year just about this time. He came to the Hall to see Grace. I wonder——"

She did not finish. She wondered if the Senator would remember her. He did. But to Nancy's confusion he scowled at her as he passed, and did not speak.

"My!" murmured Jennie in her chum's ear. "He's just as unpleasant as his daughter; isn't he? I guess Grace comes by *her* mean disposition honestly enough!"

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CHAPTER XXVI

MR. GORDON AGAIN

Once that summer Nancy plucked up courage to go in to Cincinnati from Jennie's home, and called upon Mr. Gordon. She did not tell him to expect her, but bearded the lion as she had once before.

Jennie went with her, of course; only she remained waiting in a tea-room near the big office building where the lion had his lair. Even Scorch was amazed to see Nancy Nelson, dressed in her best and outwardly composed, walk into the outer office of Ambrose, Necker & Boles.

"Such a shock!" gasped Scorch, pretending to faint away in his chair beside the gate in the railing. "And, say! Miss Nancy, how tall you're getting!"

"So are you, Scorch," she told him, holding out her hand.

"And good-looking—My eye!"

"Your hair is a whole shade darker, Scorch."

"You couldn't say nothing handsomer, Miss—not if you tried for a week," declared the office boy, shaking hands vigorously. "What's turned up? Are you going to crack the whip over Old Gordon?"

"How you talk, Scorch! You mustn't be so disrespectful. And why should I crack any whip over Mr. Gordon?"

"You will when you get the best of him—eh?"

"I certainly shall not. He—he's been very kind to me, as far as I know."

"Go in and see if he's kind now," grinned the red-haired one.

"Oh, no, Scorch! You announce me."

"Yah! you're too easy on him," growled Scorch, and went off to do as he was bid. When he came back he didn't look very pleasant.

"He says you can come in," snapped Scorch.

"What's the matter?" asked Nancy, a little fearfully.

"He acts like a bear with a sore head trying to open a honey tree. He'll eat you alive, Miss Nancy."

"All right. The banquet might as well begin right now," returned the girl, bound not to show how shaky she really was.

So she walked directly to Mr. Gordon's door, knocked lightly, and without waiting for any encouragement, walked in upon the big man in the armchair before the flat table.

Again he was silent, but Nancy knew that he was looking at her in the mirror. Nancy was very glad, for a moment, that she was looking her best. She flushed a little, took another step forward, and said:

"How do you do, Mr. Gordon?"

"What do you want now?" demanded the lawyer, ungraciously.

"I want you to see me and tell me if you are satisfied with my progress, sir," she said, boldly, as she had intended.

"Humph! I receive reports from the woman who runs that school."

"But you don't know how I look—how much I've grown."

"Come around here, then, and let's look at you," he growled, although he had been staring at her, she knew, since the moment she entered the office.

His big face was quite as expressionless as it had been nearly two years before when she first remembered having seen it. If the little eyes showed any expression when she first entered it was now hidden.

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"You look like a well-grown girl—for your age," he said, with some hesitation. "What do you want?"

"To know if you can tell me anything more about myself—or my people—or what is to become of me when my schooling is done?"

"I can tell you nothing," he replied, his brows drawing together.

"I have learned typewriting, and I am excellent in spelling, and Miss Meader is teaching me stenography," she said, simply. "If—if the money should—should stop coming any time, I thought I would better know how to go about supporting myself."

"Ha!" He stared at her then with some emotion which sent a quick wave of color into his unhealthy cheek.

"What's that for?" he demanded, at last.

"What is what for, sir?"

"Your getting ready to earn your livelihood?"

"You say you do not know anything about the source of my income. It may stop any time."

"Well?"

"Then wouldn't it be necessary for me to go to work?"

"You wouldn't want to take money from *me*, then?" he snapped.

"Why, I—I—You say you're not even my guardian. I've no reason to expect anything from you if the money stops coming. Isn't that so?"

"Independent—eh?" he said, with a brief chuckle.

"I hope to be able to get along when I have to."

"When you have to?"

"If I have to, then," she said, nodding.

"Well! Maybe you're right. No knowing what might happen," he said, as though ruminating. "Say! Anybody ever talk to you about this money I have to spend on you?"

"No-o, sir. Only my chum and I talk about it," said Nancy, slowly.

"Curious, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," replied Nancy, slowly. "And yet, it is more than curiosity. Suppose my—mother was alive—or, my father—"

"Ha!"

Mr. Gordon passed a big hand over his big face. He smoothed out something there—either a wry smile or a spasm of pain.

"Suppose, instead, you had a bad-tempered step-mother, or a drunken brute of an uncle, or a miser of a grandfather, or some other evilly-conditioned relative. Wouldn't you rather be as you are than to know such relatives?"

He looked at her sharply.

"We-ell—yes—perhaps—"

"Ha! you don't know how well off you are," grunted Mr. Gordon. "Well! I'm busy. What more do you want?"

"No—nothing, sir," said Nancy, disappointedly.

"Want some more money for your vacation? Those Bruce people must be very fond of you to keep you so long for nothing."

"They are very kind."

"There is money here for you if you want it," said the lawyer, carelessly. "You want nothing?"

"I—I'd like to see Miss Trigg again. She was kind to me—in her way."

"Who is Miss Trigg?" he demanded.

Nancy explained. He reached into his pocket, selected some bills, and gave her more money than she had ever had at one time before.

"Go on back there to Malden and see your old teacher, if you like. Take the Bruce girl with you. Now, good-bye. I'm busy."

He was just as brusque and as brief of speech as he had been before. Nancy went away, again deeply disappointed. But she and Jennie went to Malden that week and visited Miss Trigg at Higbee School. Miss Prentice was with a party visiting the Yosemite; but poor Miss Trigg never got away from the Endowment.

The good, wooden, middle-aged woman was really glad to see the girl who had spent so many tedious summer vacations in her care. She tried to be tender and affectionate to Nancy; but the poor lady didn't know how.

The girls had a nice time about Malden, however. Nancy took her chum to the millpond, where the water-lilies grew, and showed her where Bob Endress had come so near being drowned in the millrace.

Jennie grew very romantic over this place.

"Just think, Nance! Suppose, years and years from now, after you've finished at college, and Bob Endress has got through college, too, you should come here to see Miss Trigg, and he should come here, too, and you should meet right here walking in this path.

"Wouldn't that be just like a storybook?"

"Nonsense, Jen!" exclaimed Nancy, laughing.

But sometimes, after all, the story books are like real life. And if Nancy had had fairy glasses that she might look ahead the "years and years" Jennie had spoken of, how amazed she would have been to see two figures—identical with her own and Bob's—walking here in the twilight!

But girls of the age of Nancy Nelson and Jennie Bruce are usually much too hearty of appetite, and wholesome of being, to be romantic—for long at a time, anyway.

The chums were as wild as hares that summer. They ran free in the woods, and went fishing with Jennie's brothers, and "camped out" over night on the edge of the pond, and learned all manner of trick swimming, including the removal of some of their outer clothing in the water.

"We're not going to be caught again as we were there in Clinton River, when our boat sank,"

declared Nancy, and Jennie agreed.

When they went back to Pinewood Hall they were as brown as Indians, and as strong and wiry as wolves. Miss Etching complimented them on the good the summer seemed to have done them.

Now came the time when Nancy Nelson and her chum "went higher" in more ways than one. They were full-fledged juniors, and they had to give up old Number 30, West Side, which they both loved, to incoming freshies.

They drew Number 83—a lovely room, much larger than their old one and more sumptuously furnished. It had a double door, too, and the walls were almost sound-proof.

"What a lovely room to study in!" cried Nancy.

"And a great one to hold 'orgies' in," whispered Jennie, her eyes twinkling.

So they determined, a week after school opened, to have "a house-warming." Nancy had a good part of her spending money, given to her by Mr. Gordon during vacation, left in her purse. They invited twenty of their closest friends of the junior class and, as Jennie expressed it, "just laid themselves out" for a fine spread.

There was to be fudge, too, which Nancy had the knack of making. The chums had a chafing dish hidden away, and this was brought forth and the ingredients made ready, while Nancy hovered over the dish like a gray-robed witch.

"Do you know what Cora Rathmore said?" chattered one of the visitors.

"Everything but her prayers!" declared Jennie, with sarcasm.

"No, no! about this racket to-night."

"Didn't know she knew we were going to have a house-warming," said Jennie, looking up quickly. "I hope not!"

"She *does* know," said another girl.

"Then somebody must have told," declared Nancy, warmly. "We tried to keep it very quiet."

"And from Cora, too!" said Jennie, shaking her head.

"Well! she said you were just too mean for anything when you did not ask her—and she right on this corridor," said the first speaker.

"Well, wouldn't that jar you?" commented Jennie Bruce.

"And she said she hoped you'd get caught," pursued the other girl.

"Wow, wow, says the fox!" exclaimed Jennie. "What do you think of that, now, Nance?"

"I think if we *are* caught we'll know whom to blame it to," responded her chum, decidedly.

"My goodness me! Do you suppose she would be so mean?" cried another of the visiting juniors.

"There's nothing too mean for Cora to try," answered Jennie.

"And I saw her outside her room just as I came in here!" exclaimed another girl.

"Oh, me, oh, my!" cried Jennie. "I've got to go and see to this."

She dashed out of the room, leaving the other girls in a delightful tremor. She was gone but a moment.

"Oh, girls! Scatter!" she gasped, when she stuck her head in at the door again. "Cora's out of her room and there's somebody coming up the lower flight."

"The Madame herself!" gasped Nancy.

The other girls grabbed handfuls of the good things, and ran. The fudge was not quite done.

"Quick! Out of the window with it!" gasped Jennie, seizing the handle of the pan.

"But she'll smell it!" wailed Nancy.

"Will she? Not much!" declared Jennie, and grabbing a rubber shoe from the closet held it for thirty seconds over the flame of the alcohol lamp.

Nancy, meanwhile, had been hiding away all the goodies. The candy, pan and all, had gone out of the window. Nothing but the awful stench of the rubber shoe could be smelled when the lights went out, and the girls hopped lightly into bed.

"Rat, tat, tat!" on the door.

Jennie yawned, rolled over, and yawned again.

"Rat, tat, tat!"

"Oh, yes'm!" cried Jennie, bouncing up.

"Nancy Nelson! Nancy Nelson's wanted!" exclaimed the sleepy voice of Madame Schakael's maid, who slept downstairs.

"Oh, dear, me! What's happened?" demanded Nancy, unable to carry out the farce now. This was not what the girls had expected.

"Wanted down in the office, Miss. Telegram. The Madame wants to see you right away."

The maid went away.

"What do you suppose has happened?" demanded Nancy of her chum.

"It isn't anything about fudge," groaned Jennie. "I'm sorry I told you to throw the fudge out of the window. And I've spoiled a perfectly good rubber!"

"I must run down. Come with me, Jen!"

"All right," agreed her chum, and together the two girls in their flannel robes scuttled out of Number 83 and down the two flights to the lower hall.

There was a light in the principal's office. When Nancy and Jennie went in Madame Schakael was sitting at her broad desk. It was not yet midnight.

"I was sorry to break up your party, Nancy," said the little lady, with a quiet smile. "But it seemed necessary."

"Oh, Madame! did you know——"

"I was kindly told by one of your classmates," said the Madame, grave again. "I am sorry it so happened. I do not encourage meannesses of any kind at Pinewood Hall. The tattler is one of the most abominable of our trials.

"As for the breaking of the rules by girls who wish to stuff themselves with goodies after

hours, I have little to say. A junior who is president of her class, and on the road to being one of our most prominent pupils, knows best what she wishes to do."

"Oh, Madame! Forgive me!" begged Nancy, greatly troubled. And even Jennie saw nothing humorous in the incident.

"You are forgiven, Miss Nelson," said Madame Schakael, cheerfully. "I expect, however, my junior and senior girls to help rather than hinder the general deportment of the school. And 'orgies' after hours do not set the younger girls a good example.

"However," said the principal, kindly, "this was not my object in calling you down, as I said before. A telegram has arrived for you. I do not understand it, but perhaps you will. Here is the evening paper—it in part solves the mystery. But who, my dear, signs himself or herself 'Scorch'?"

"Scorch!" gasped both Nancy and Jennie together.

The Madame pushed the yellow slip of paper toward the startled Nancy. She read at a glance what it contained:

"Come to Garvan's Hotel at once. G. in bad way. See P. & O. accident.—SCORCH."

"Scorch is Mr. Gordon's office boy," said Nancy, trembling.

"And 'G.' stands for Mr. Gordon," whispered Jennie, looking over her chum's shoulder.

The Madame had rustled open the paper and now displayed the front page to the eyes of the girls. Spread upon it was the account of a terrible accident on the P. & O. Railroad. At the top of the list of injured, printed in black type, was:

"Henry Gordon, lawyer, Cincinnati, seriously."

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CHAPTER XXVII

THE MAN IN GRAY AGAIN

"Do you understand it, Nancy?" asked the principal, quietly.

"Oh, yes, Madame!"

"I suppose it is natural for them to send for you if your guardian is hurt?"

"Scorch would be sure to send for me," whispered the girl, nodding.

"Scorch?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"A very peculiar name, Nancy."

"He—he is a peculiar boy. But I know him. I have been to his home. He is my friend."

"And Garvan's Hotel?"

"Is where Mr. Gordon lives. He is a bachelor."

"Ah! Then I presume it is all right. But to go to Cincinnati at night—there is a train in an hour

"Dear Madame Schakael!" cried Jennie. "Let me go with her. I'll take care of her."

"She's better able to take care of you, I think, Miss Flyaway," observed the Madame, with a smile.

"We'll take care of each other, then," said Jennie, promptly. "I'll wire my father, or my brother John. They'll come in to the city to meet us to-morrow morning."

"That may be a good way to handle the matter," said the principal, accepting Jennie's suggestion with relief. "Miss Nelson should go at once, I believe. I'll 'phone Samuel at the stables and have him here at the door with the light cart before you girls can possibly get ready. Each of you pack a bag—and pack sensibly. Be off with you!" commanded the little woman, handling the matter with her customary energy, once her decision was made.

Nancy and Jennie ran up to their room once more. The whole house was still now, especially on the junior floor.

Only they thought they saw Cora Rathmore's door ajar.

"That's the nasty cat who told!" hissed Jennie, as she and her chum began to dress.

"Never mind. We won't do it again, Jennie. We were wrong."

"I suppose we were. But, Nance!"

"What is it, dear?"

"I hate like time to have to be an example for the greenies and sophs.," wailed Jennie, cramming things into her traveling bag quite recklessly.

The girls were ready for their strange journey in twenty minutes. There was no dawdling over dressing on this occasion. When they returned to the Madame's office Samuel was just bringing the dog-cart to the door.

"Are you warmly dressed, girls?"

"Yes, indeed, Madame."

"Have you sufficient money?"

"I have nearly ten dollars," said Nancy.

"And I have half as much," added Jennie.

"Here is twenty more," said the Madame, putting it into Nancy's hand. "Your guardian, Mr. Gordon, has always left a sum for emergencies in my hand. It seems he has been very liberal. I

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hope, Nancy, that you will find him not so seriously injured as the circumstances seem to suggest."

She kissed them both warmly and went to the hall door with them.

"Get their tickets and see them aboard the train. Speak to the conductor about them, Samuel," she said to the under gardener.

"Indeed I will, Madame," replied the good fellow.

As they rattled down to the lodge gates, the door of the little cottage opened and Jessie Pease hurried out in her night wrapper.

"Wait! Wait, Samuel!" she called, and held up a little basket. "You'll be hungry on the train, girls. Some chicken sandwiches, and olives, and odds and ends that I managed to pick up after the Madame telephoned to me about your trouble." 296

"I hope it isn't so bad as it looks, Nancy. And take care of her, Janie—that's a good lassie!"

"Oh! aren't folks just *good!*" exclaimed Nancy to her chum, as Samuel drove on. "It just seems as though they *do* like me a little."

"Huh! everybody's crazy about you, Nance! You ought to know that," returned Jennie. "I don't see what a girl who's made so many friends needs of a family—or of money, either. Don't worry."

But Nancy wiped a few tears away. Never before had she appreciated the fact that here at Pinewood Hall she had made many dear and loving friends. "Miss Nobody from Nowhere" was just as important as anybody else in the whole school.

Samuel drove almost recklessly through the streets of Clintondale in order to make the night train that stopped but a moment at the station. They were in good season, however, and the man put them, with their bags and the basket, aboard.

It would not have paid to engage sleeping berths at that hour. The two girls had comfortable seats, and of course, were too excited to wish to sleep. Jennie proceeded to open the lunch basket at once, however. 297

"No knowing when we'll get a chance to eat again," declared Nancy's lively chum, who was enjoying to the full the opening of this strange campaign.

What should they first do when they reached the city? Would the hotel be open so early in the morning? Would Scorch be at the station to meet them?

And this question brought Nancy to another thought. Scorch had not been communicated with.

So she wrote a reply to his message, saying that she and Jennie, were coming to Cincinnati and were then on the train, and had the brakeman file it for sending at the first station beyond Clintondale at which the train stopped.

She addressed it to Scorch O'Brien's home, believing that it might reach him more quickly in that way. She did not suppose that the red-haired youth would be allowed to remain at Garvan's Hotel over night.

As it chanced, it was a very good thing Nancy Nelson sent this message, and addressed it as she did. But, of course, neither she nor Jennie Bruce suspected how important the matter was at the time. 298

And, within a few minutes, something else gripped the attention of the girls. They were discussing Jessie's chicken sandwiches, "and other odds and ends," when a man walked down the aisle of the rocking coach toward them.

"Oh, look, Nance!" whispered Jennie.

Nancy looked up. The towering figure of a man dressed in a gray suit, with hat and gloves to match, stopped suddenly beside them. It was Senator Montgomery, Grace Montgomery's father.

"Hul-lo!" he muttered, evidently vastly surprised to see the girls in the train bound for Cincinnati.

"How do you do?" said Nancy, softly.

"Yes! you're the girl. I thought I was not mistaken," spoke the Senator, and although he frowned he seemed to wish to speak pleasantly. "You go to the same school as my daughter?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pinewood Hall?"

"Yes, sir," repeated Nancy.

"What is your name?"

"Nancy Nelson."

"I thought I could not be mistaken." The frown was gone from his face now and his sly eyes twinkled in what was meant to be a jovial way. "You girls are not running away, I suppose?" 299

"Oh, no, sir," said Nancy, timidly.

"What is the matter, then?" he asked, quickly. He held a folded paper in his hand which he had evidently been reading.

"My—A gentleman who looks after me has been hurt and I am going to him," responded Nancy, hesitatingly. "They have telegraphed for me."

It seemed as though the Senator's face paled. "You don't mean to say he sent word to *you*?" he demanded.

"Oh, no! not Mr. Gordon."

The Senator's face became suddenly animated again. He smote one hand heavily upon the chair back.

"Not my old friend, Henry Gordon—a lawyer?"

"Yes, sir."

"I saw he was hurt. Why! I myself am going to Cincinnati for the special purpose of seeing if he really is seriously ill!"

"Indeed, sir?"

"Quite so," declared the Senator. "And he sent for *you*? I didn't know he had a relative living,

my dear."

"No," explained Nancy. "It was Scorch who sent for me."

"Scorch?"

"Mr. Gordon's office boy."

"Humph!"

"And I am not related to Mr. Gordon," explained Nancy, wishing to be perfectly open and aboveboard. "But Mr. Gordon has always looked after me and—and I didn't know but I might be of some use to him if he is alone and injured."

"Ahem!" returned the Senator, grimly. "I do not know that I quite approve. I cannot understand what your principal was thinking of when she let you two girls come off alone on such an errand. But—Ahem! I will see you when we arrive at Cincinnati."

Jennie had not said a word during this conversation. She waited until Senator Montgomery had gone along the aisle and was out of earshot. Then she seized Nancy's arm suddenly.

"I've got it!" she whispered.

"Ouch! Got what?" demanded Nancy, striving to free her arm.

"I see it all!"

"Then let me see a little of it, Jennie. And, goodness me, dear! don't pinch so. What *do* you mean?"

"Do you know who that man is?" demanded Jennie, in an awed whisper.

"Of course. He's Grace Montgomery's father."

"Yes!" cried Jennie, impatiently. "But who else?"

"Why—why——"

"I don't understand why we did not see it before!" exclaimed Jennie, mysteriously. "At any rate *you* ought to have remembered it when Scorch was talking that day."

"I really wish you would say what you mean, Jen," said her chum.

"That man—that Senator Montgomery—who knows your Mr. Gordon so well and says he is hurrying to him now——"

"Well?" asked the wide-eyed Nancy.

"That fellow is the man in gray of whom Scorch told us so long ago. Don't you remember? The man who came to Mr. Gordon and seemed to object because he had sent you to school at Pinewood Hall?"

Nancy was stricken dumb for the moment. Scorch's description of the mysterious man who had left Mr. Gordon in tears came back to her mind now, clearly.

"The man in gray," repeated Jennie, nodding her curly head vigorously.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SCORCH "ON THE JOB"

"Oh, dear! Do you suppose that can be possible?" Nancy demanded, finally.

"You know I'm right," Jennie returned, firmly.

"It—it might be another man."

"Two big men, who look important, and who both dress so peculiarly?"

"We-ell!"

"It's he, all right," declared Jennie, vigorously. "And he knows as much about you as Gordon does."

"Do you think so?"

"But he isn't as kindly-intentioned toward you as even Old Gordon. I know by the look he gave you as he went away."

"But Grace Montgomery's father!" gasped Nancy.

"Maybe you're related to Grace," ventured Jennie, with a sudden chuckle. "And after all the stuff she's said about you 'round Pinewood, too!"

"Oh, I hope not!" exclaimed Nancy.

"Don't want Grace for a relation—eh?"

"Dear, me! No!" cried Nancy, quite honestly.

This amused Jennie immensely; but soon she became more serious and the two girls discussed the possibilities of the matter most of the way to Cincinnati.

Mr. Montgomery did not come back to them. They were free, therefore, to wonder what he would do when they reached the city.

"Perhaps he won't want you to see Mr. Gordon," suggested Jennie.

"But why?"

"Why is he so much interested in your affairs?"

"Do we know that he *is*?" demanded Nancy.

"Well! Scorch heard him——"

"If it really was the same man."

"Dear me!" said Jennie, wearily. "You are such a Doubting Tomaso——"

"I don't believe that's the feminine form of 'Thomas,'" chuckled Nancy.

"I don't care. It's as plain as the nose on your face——"

"Now, don't get too personal," begged Nancy, rubbing her nasal organ. "Let's wait and see."

"But he may try to stop us, I tell you."

"Not likely. And why?"

"Oh! you've asked that before," cried Jennie, petulantly.

But all they could do was to wait and see. Mr. Montgomery might not even notice them again, although he had intimated that he would speak to them when they arrived at the station.

However, the two girls got off the train at their journey's end without at once seeing the Senator. It was very early in the morning and the big train-shed seemed all but deserted.

Nancy knew, however, that there was a cab stand just outside, and she and her chum hurried out to it. Before they could find a cabman or speak to the officer on duty in front of the building, Mr. Montgomery came bustling up.

"Are you girls going immediately to Mr. Gordon's hotel?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied Nancy.

"Come right along with me, then. I have a taxi waiting."

Jennie held back a little; yet even she did not see how they could refuse the offer. They followed him around the nearest corner, and so did not see a figure that shot panting across the square to the entrance of the station they had just left.

This was a youth whose hair, even in the early morning light, displayed all the fiery hue of sunrise. It was Scorch—but for once Scorch was just too late.

Nancy and Jennie were out of sight with the "man in gray" before the boy reached the railway station in answer to Nancy's telegram.

Mr. Montgomery escorted the two girls to a cab standing in a dark street. It seemed to have been waiting some time, for its engine was not running and the chauffeur was pacing the walk.

Possibly Mr. Montgomery had done some telegraphing ahead, too.

"Get right in here, girls," he said. "Lucky I was coming on the same train with you. Your folks will certainly be worried about you."

"Now, wasn't that a funny thing for him to say?" asked Jennie, as she stepped in after Nancy.

There was no chance for Nancy to reply, however, for Mr. Montgomery was close upon their heels. The chauffeur jumped to his seat, the door slammed, and the cab was off.

"How far is it to Garvan's Hotel?" asked Nancy.

"It's some distance," replied Mr. Montgomery. "I only hope Gordon is not hurt as badly as the paper says. Of course, if he is in the hands of doctors and nurses they may refuse to let any of us see him."

"Oh! I hope not!" exclaimed Nancy.

"We can wait till he's better, then," Jennie suggested. "John will be in town this morning and we'll go to his office and then go home with him and wait until you can see Mr. Gordon."

Mr. Montgomery snorted, but said nothing. Indeed, he seemed very glum after they were in the cab.

What a distance it did seem to Garvan's Hotel! The cab traveled at high speed, for there was not much traffic at this hour and the few policemen paid no attention.

"This isn't at all the part of the city I thought Mr. Gordon lived in," observed Nancy, once.

Mr. Montgomery made no comment. Jennie squeezed her chum's hand and sat closer to her. To tell the truth, Jennie was getting a little frightened.

The cab passed through a web of narrow streets. The girls, although they knew something about the city, were soon at sea as far as the locality was concerned.

"Where *are* we?" cried Nancy, at last.

"We have arrived," spoke the Senator, harshly. "Jump out. I'll take you right indoors. I have been here to see Gordon before."

"But—but this doesn't look like a hotel," murmured Nancy, first to reach the sidewalk.

The houses were rows of mean-looking, three-story brick edifices. They were in a narrow street near the corner of a wider thoroughfare.

"This is the side entrance," said the Senator, and taking the girls firmly by the arm, ushered them up the steps of the nearest house.

He did not even have to knock. Somebody must have been on watch, for the door swung open instantly.

Neither Nancy nor Jennie saw the person who opened the door. It was very dark in the hall.

"How is our patient?" asked Mr. Montgomery, rather loudly, as they stepped in.

"Not very well—not very well," said a wheezy voice. "You can go right up to that room, sir—the sitting room. Ahem! You'll have to see the doctor before you can speak with Mr.—Mr.—"

"Mr. Gordon," said the Senator, briskly. "All right, girls. Hurry upstairs."

Nancy and Jennie were quite confused. They did just as they were urged to do by Senator Montgomery. At the top of the flight he pushed open a door and the chums went into the room. The curtains were drawn. One feeble gas jet was burning. It was a fusty-smelling, cluttered room, furnished with odds and ends of old furniture and hangings.

"I'll be with you directly," said Mr. Montgomery, and closed the door.

"Oh!" squealed Jennie.

"Did you hear it?" whispered Nancy, seizing her chum.

The key had been turned in the lock. They tried the knob—first one shook it and then the other. The door could not be opened and there did not seem to be another door leading out of the room.

"He's locked us in!" said Nancy, amazed.

"I knew he was a villain!" declared Jennie, with a vicious snap of her teeth. "Isn't he just like Grace?"

"But—but how *dares* he do such a thing?" gasped Nancy.

"He's a rich man—he can do anything. Or, he thinks he can," returned Jennie. "But you wait

till my father gets hold of him!"

"Do—do you suppose he'll dare do us any bodily harm?" queried Nancy, anxiously. "Oh! I wish I hadn't got you into it, Jennie."

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed the more reckless Jennie. "He only wants to keep you from seeing Gordon."

"But—what for?"

"He's afraid Mr. Gordon will weaken and tell you all about yourself," responded her practical chum. "That's plain enough."

"Oh, dear, me! do you think so? And suppose poor Mr. Gordon *dies*?"

"Then you'll never know who you really are, Nance. At least, you can be sure Grace's father will never tell you."

"If he knows."

"If he doesn't know, and isn't afraid of your finding out, what does he bother with us this way for?" demanded Jennie, angrily.

"Maybe we can get out of the window?"

"It's at the back of the house. We couldn't get out of the yard."

"Let's scream."

"Who'd hear us here? Might as well save our breath," said Jennie.

"I—I wish Scorch was here," declared Nancy.

"So do I—with all my heart. Bless his red head! He'd get us out of this in short order."

As she spoke there came a tapping on one of the window-panes. Jennie and Nancy both ran to the window, drew aside the heavy curtain and raised the shade.

Only a little light filtered in. But it was sufficient to show them a pale face flattened against the glass.

The face suddenly grinned widely. Then a hand waved. They saw his red hair under his cap, and the two girls clung together with a cry of delight.

Scorch O'Brien was "on the job."

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CHAPTER XXIX

ALL ABOUT NANCY

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The red-haired youth drew himself up to the window-sill (he had climbed a rickety arbor below) and motioned to the girls to unlock the sashes. They did so and Scorch forced up the lower one.

"Hist!" he whispered, in a tone so hoarse that it almost choked him. "Where is he?"

"We don't know," said Jennie, hastily. "He's locked us into this room."

"Of course he would," said Scorch, airily. "Don't they always do that? It's the gray man; isn't it?"

"Yes, yes!" said Nancy. "Senator Montgomery."

"That's the man. I got onto his name lately. And I seen him again, too. Now he'll keep you from Mr. Gordon."

"Is he hurt very badly?" asked Nancy, anxiously.

"You bet he is!"

"Oh, Scorch!"

"But you're goin' to have a chance to talk with him first. He'll see you, too. He told me so only last evening. I was with him all night. Then I ran home for breakfast and found your telegram. Then I beat it for the station. But you'd got away before I got there."

"Senator Montgomery came down on the train with us," explained Nancy. "And he said he was coming right to Garvan's Hotel to see Mr. Gordon—This is not the hotel; is it, Scorch?"

"I should say not!" returned the boy. "He fooled you. I asked among the cabmen at the station, and they all saw you and the gray man. So I knowed there was trouble afoot."

"He took you around the corner, and there a milkman saw you all getting into the taxi. So I grabs another taxi—I had money belongin' to Old—to Mr. Gordon—in my pocket."

"That taxi-driver was a keen one, he was. He trailed your machine like he was trackin' a band of Injuns. Cops saw you pass, and switchmen at the trolley crossin's."

"So we got here just as the taxi was whiskin' his nibs away—"

"Then he's not in the house?"

"I knew he wasn't when I asked," said Scorch, calmly. "He's beat it for Garvan's. That's where we'll go, too."

"Oh, Scorch!" cried Jennie. "You're wonderful. How you going to get us out?"

"Not by the window, I hope," murmured Nancy.

"Of course not," the young man replied. "See here."

He produced from either trousers leg the two parts of a jointed steel bar. It went together with a sharp click and proved to be a burglar's "jimmy" of the most approved pattern.

"Scorch O'Brien! Where did you get that thing?" demanded Nancy. "You could be arrested with it in your possession."

"Forget it," advised Scorch, easily. "My next-door neighbor is a cop. He let me have it, and I'll

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show you how to use it."

The youth went to the single door of the room, inserted the point of the bar between door and frame near the lock, and the next moment the dry wood gave way, splintering all around the lock. The door came open at a touch.

"Sup—suppose they stop us?" breathed Jennie, trembling.

"Let 'em try!" exclaimed the valiant Scorch, and led the way into the dark hall.

They marched downstairs, the girls clinging together and trembling, without a soul appearing to dispute their advance. The outside door was chained; but Scorch had no difficulty in opening it. And so they passed on out into the grimy street just after sunrise.

The house was merely an old, ill-kept lodging house, the person who ran it being under some sort of obligation to Senator Montgomery. The girls never learned what street it was on.

"My taxi's waiting," said Scorch, proudly, hurrying them around the corner. "Come on, before it eats its head off and breaks me."

"Oh, I've got money, Scorch!" cried Nancy.

"All right. You may need it later."

The taxi-cab driver paid no attention to the girls as they got in. Scorch took his seat beside him, and they were off. In a very few minutes they stopped at Garvan's Hotel, in a much better-looking neighborhood, and Scorch paid for the cab.

"Come on, now, and let me do the talking," said the red-headed youth. "That gray man is ahead of us; but he isn't the whole thing around *this* hotel. They know me better than they do him."

Nobody sought to stop them, however. They went up in the elevator and got out at the third floor. Scorch led the way along the corridor, and suddenly turned the knob of a door without knocking. The door was unlocked.

"Here! What do you want in here, young man?" snapped a voice that Nancy and Jennie recognized.

It was Senator Montgomery. Scorch pushed ahead.

"I must see Mr. Gordon," he said. "I've been with him ever since he was brought in from the wreck. I'm takin' my orders from him."

"He is in no fit shape to give orders. You can't see him——"

He broke off with a startled cry when he saw the girls.

"Where—where did they come from?" he gasped.

"Right from where you locked them in, Mister," replied the boy, boldly. "But you didn't count on me; did you? I was on the job. Mr. Gordon has asked to see Nancy Nelson, and he's going to see her."

"You young scoundrel!" exclaimed the man in gray. "I'll have you arrested for breaking and entering."

"All right, sir," returned the youth, quite calmly, but walking swiftly to the window of the room. "See yonder, Mister? See that cop on the corner? Well, that's Mike Dugan. He's my next-door neighbor. And if you were the President of the United States, instead of a senator, Mike Dugan would be a bigger man than you."

"Understand? Nancy Nelson sees Mr. Gordon just as soon as the nurse says it's all right. You try to interfere and I'll call my friend up here!"

The inner door opened and a white-capped nurse appeared.

"Not so much talking, please!" she said, severely. "You are disturbing Mr. Gordon. Has the girl appeared yet?"

Nancy Nelson ran forward. Senator Montgomery tried to stop her; but Scorch was right in his path.

"Stand back!" exclaimed the red-haired youth, emulating his favorite heroes of fiction. "She's a-going to see him!"

"Of course she is," said the nurse, taking Nancy's hand. "I believe it will do him more good than anything else. He is worried about something, and if he relieves his mind, the doctor says, he has a very good chance of recovering."

"He's mad. He's not fit to talk with anyone," declared Senator Montgomery, as the door closed behind Nancy and the nurse stood on guard.

The man was dripping with perspiration and showed every evidence of panic.

"Say, boss," advised Scorch, "if Mr. Gordon is likely to tell anything that is goin' to incriminate you, as the newspapers puts it, take my tip: Get away while you can."

And whether because of Scorch's word, or for other reasons, Mr. Montgomery tiptoed from the room, and was not seen again about the hotel. Nancy and Jennie remained, however, for several days, being assigned to a room next to Mr. Gordon's suite.

Just what passed between the injured man and Nancy Nelson nobody but the two will ever know. Nancy did not tell everything even to her chum. But Mr. Bruce likewise had a long interview with the lawyer that very day and at once went to work under the injured man's direction to obtain certain property which might be tampered with by those who had kept Nancy out of her rightful fortune for so long.

Henry Gordon was equally guilty with his old partner, Montgomery. But the latter had benefited more largely from the crime, and Gordon had been a party to it under duress.

Years before, when he lived in California, Henry Gordon had been tempted to commit a crime. Had it become known he never could have practised law again—in any state. Montgomery knew of the lawyer's slip and held it over him.

The Senator's wife had a sister who was married to a very wealthy man—Arnold Nelson. It was supposed that Mr. Nelson's family—himself, his wife, and little daughter—had died suddenly of a fever during an epidemic in a coast town.

With the child dead, the entire property belonging to the Nelsons came to Senator

Montgomery's wife, and he had the handling of it. But Gordon, who had known and loved, as a young man, Nancy's mother, after the parents' death found the deserted little girl, placed her with Miss Prentice at Higbee School, and forced Montgomery to pay, year by year, for the child's board and education.

Where Nancy was, Montgomery did not know until he came across her at Pinewood Hall. Gordon had no idea that the Senator intended sending his own daughter to Pinewood, too.

So that, in brief, was the story the broken and injured lawyer told his charge. Later he explained more fully to Mr. Bruce, Jennie's father, and with the aid of good counsel, Mr. Bruce made the Montgomerys disgorge the great fortune that they had withheld from Nancy's use all these years.

In the end Mr. Gordon did not die. He remained an invalid for some time, but slowly recovered. Nancy, by that time, had become such a necessity to him that he went to Clintondale for the weeks of convalescence when the doctors refused to let him get back into legal harness again.

He was really a changed man. He could not act as Nancy's guardian; Mr. Bruce, Jennie's father, did that. But there was scarcely a pleasant afternoon during the remainder of Nancy's junior year, while Mr. Gordon was at Clintondale, that a very red-haired youth, in a smart auto outfit, did not drive up to the school entrance in a little runabout, and whisk Nancy down to the village hotel to see Mr. Gordon for an hour or so.

And Nancy learned to like Mr. Gordon better than she had ever expected to when she first bearded the lion in his den.

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CHAPTER XXX

NO LONGER A NOBODY

After Jennie Bruce's father, on behalf of Nancy, made his first demand upon Senator Montgomery in reprisal of the latter's diversion of Nancy's fortune, Grace Montgomery disappeared suddenly from Pinewood Hall.

It had been so sudden that the girls—especially those who had been so friendly with her—could scarcely recover from the shock.

At first, when Nancy and Jennie had gone off at midnight, it was rumored around the school (said rumor starting from Cora Rathmore's room) that the two chums had been expelled for holding an "orgy" after hours. And there was nobody to contradict this statement, eagerly repeated by the Montgomery clique, until Jennie came back.

She was bound not to tell Nancy's secret, however; otherwise Grace Montgomery would have "sung small." The latter, however, was her bold and mischievous self right up to the very day—some weeks later—when she received a long letter from her heart-broken mother.

Mrs. Montgomery had never known the truth about her sister's child. It became known somehow that Grace's mother begged Grace to make a friend of Nancy and try to influence her to make her lawyer's demands less severe upon the Senator, for his fortune was toppling.

But Grace would never have done this. She had talked of, and to, Nancy Nelson too outrageously. She could not have asked a favor of the girl she so disliked—whom she doubly disliked now!

So she borrowed her fare of Madame Schakael and took the first train home; and Pinewood Hall never saw her again. Indeed, the girls she left behind scarcely heard of Grace Montgomery. She never wrote to Cora, even; and had Bob Endress not come over from Cornell for the New Year dance, Nancy and Jennie would not have heard much about her.

"They have all gone back to California," said Bob, who did not at all understand the rights of the matter. "Somehow the Senator has lost most of his money, and they had just enough left to buy a little fruit ranch down in the state somewhere. Too bad!"

Nancy did not explain. Why should she have injured his cousin in his estimation? But she and Bob remained very good friends.

Nancy lived quite as plainly as she had before. She saw no reason for changing her mode of living because the lawyers told her there were great sums of money in store for her.

That summer, however, she *did* insist on taking the entire Bruce family to the mountains as her guests; for they had been very kind to her, and that while she was still "A Little Miss Nobody."

Mr. Gordon had gone back to his practice ere this. He was much aged in appearance and would always walk with a limp; but his confidential clerk, a certain red-haired youth in whom Jennie Bruce would always have a particular interest, was at hand to take the burden of work from the lawyer's shoulders when need came.

Perhaps Patrick Sarsfield O'Brien outstripped everybody else in the changes that came. In six months (during which he diligently applied himself to the night school course) he shed his slang like a mantle. Instead of cheap detective stories hidden in his desk, he had text-books.

He is, in fact, a rising young man, and will be a good lawyer some day. Mr. Gordon is very proud of him.

And so is Nancy. Scorch was her first friend, and she will never forget him or cease to be

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interested in his growth and welfare.

Nancy and Jennie are climbing the scholastic hill together. Already the girls and teachers of the Hall are beginning to brag about Nancy Nelson. She stands at the head of her class, she is stroke of the school eight, champion on the ice, and has won a state tennis championship medal in the yearly tournament of school clubs. She is no longer "A Little Miss Nobody."

Yet she remains the same gentle, rather timid girl she always was. She can fight for the rights of others; but she does not put forth her own claims to particular attention.

"Pshaw! You let folks walk all over you just the same as ever, Nance!" her chum, Jennie, declares. "Haven't you any spunk?"

"I—I don't want to fight them," Nancy replies.

"Goodness to gracious and eight hands around!" ejaculates Jennie, with exasperation. "If it hadn't been for Scorch and me you'd never got hold of your fortune and sent the Montgomerys back to the tall pines. You know you wouldn't!"

But Nancy only smiles at that. She doesn't mind having her chum take for herself a big share of the credit for this happy outcome of her affairs.

THE END

SOMETHING ABOUT
AMY BELL MARLOWE
 AND HER BOOKS FOR GIRLS

In these days, when the printing presses are turning out so many books for girls that are good, bad and indifferent, it is refreshing to come upon the works of such a gifted authoress as Miss Amy Bell Marlowe, who is now under contract to write exclusively for Messrs. Grosset & Dunlap.

In many ways Miss Marlowe's books may be compared with those of Miss Alcott and Mrs. Meade, but all are thoroughly modern and wholly American in scene and action. Her plots, while never improbable, are exceedingly clever, and her girlish characters are as natural as they are interesting.

On the following pages will be found a list of Miss Marlowe's books. Every girl in our land ought to read these fresh and wholesome tales. They are to be found at all booksellers. Each volume is handsomely illustrated and bound in cloth, stamped in colors. Published by Grosset & Dunlap, New York. A free catalogue of Miss Marlowe's books may be had for the asking.

THE OLDEST OF FOUR

"I don't see any way out!"

It was Natalie's mother who said that, after the awful news had been received that Mr. Raymond had been lost in a shipwreck on the Atlantic. Natalie was the oldest of four children, and the family was left with but scant means for support.

"I've got to do something—yes, I've just got to!" Natalie said to herself, and what the brave girl did is well related in "The Oldest of Four; Or, Natalie's Way Out." In this volume we find Natalie with a strong desire to become a writer. At first she contributes to a local paper, but soon she aspires to larger things, and comes in contact with the editor of a popular magazine. This man becomes her warm friend, and not only aids her in a literary way but also helps in a hunt for the missing Mr. Raymond.

Natalie has many ups and downs, and has to face more than one bitter disappointment. But she is a plucky girl through and through.

"One of the brightest girls' stories ever penned," one well-known author has said of this book, and we agree with him. Natalie is a thoroughly lovable character, and one long to be remembered. Published as are all the Amy Bell Marlowe books, by Grosset & Dunlap, New York, and for sale by all booksellers. Ask your dealer to let you look the volume over.

THE GIRLS OF HILLCREST FARM

"We'll go to the old farm, and we'll take boarders! We can fix the old place up and, maybe, make money!"

The father of the two girls was broken down in health and a physician had recommended that he go to the country, where he could get plenty of fresh air and sunshine. An aunt owned an abandoned farm and she said the family could live on this and use the place as they pleased. It was great sport moving and getting settled, and the boarders offered one surprise after another. There was a mystery about the old farm, and a mystery concerning one of the boarders, and how the girls got to the bottom of affairs is told in detail in the story, which is called, "The Girls of Hillcrest Farm; Or, The Secret of the Rocks."

It was great fun to move to the farm, and once the girls had the scare of their lives. And they attended a great "vendue" too.

"I just had to write that story—I couldn't help it," said Miss Marlowe, when she handed in the manuscript. "I knew just such a farm when I was a little girl, and oh! what fun I had there! And there was a mystery about that place, too!"

Published, like all the Marlowe books, by Grosset & Dunlap, New York, and for sale wherever good books are sold.

A LITTLE MISS NOBODY

"Oh, she's only a little nobody! Don't have anything to do with her!"

How often poor Nancy Nelson heard those words, and how they cut her to the heart. And the saying was true, she *was* a nobody. She had no folks, and she did not know where she had come from. All she did know was that she was at a boarding school and that a lawyer paid her tuition bills and gave her a mite of spending money.

"I am going to find out who I am, and where I came from," said Nancy to herself, one day, and what she did, and how it all ended, is absorbingly related in "A Little Miss Nobody; Or, With the Girls of Pinewood Hall." Nancy made a warm friend of a poor office boy who worked for that lawyer, and this boy kept his eyes and ears open and learned many things.

The book tells much about boarding school life, of study and fun mixed, and of a great race on skates. Nancy made some friends as well as enemies, and on more than one occasion proved that she was "true blue" in the best meaning of that term.

Published by Grosset & Dunlap, New York and for sale by booksellers everywhere. If you desire a catalogue of Amy Bell Marlowe books send to the publishers for it and it will come free.

THE GIRL FROM SUNSET RANCH

Helen was very thoughtful as she rode along the trail from Sunset Ranch to the View. She had lost her father but a month before, and he had passed away with a stain on his name—a stain of many years' standing, as the girl had just found out.

"I am going to New York and I am going to clear his name!" she resolved, and just then she saw a young man dashing along, close to the edge of a cliff. Over he went, and Helen, with no thought of the danger to herself, went to the rescue.

Then the brave Western girl found herself set down at the Grand Central Terminal in New York City. She knew not which way to go or what to do. Her relatives, who thought she was poor and ignorant, had refused to even meet her. She had to fight her way along from the start, and how she did this, and won out, is well related in "The Girl from Sunset Ranch; Or, Alone in a Great City."

This is one of the finest of Amy Bell Marlowe's books, with its true-to-life scenes of the plains and mountains, and of the great metropolis. Helen is a girl all readers will love from the start.

Published by Grosset & Dunlap, New York, and for sale by booksellers everywhere.

WYN'S CAMPING DAYS

"Oh, girls, such news!" cried Wynifred Mallory to her chums, one day. "We can go camping on Lake Honotonga! Isn't it grand!"

It certainly was, and the members of the Go-Ahead Club were delighted. Soon they set off, with their boy friends to keep them company in another camp not far away. Those boys played numerous tricks on the girls, and the girls retaliated, you may be sure. And then Wyn did a strange girl a favor, and learned how some ancient statues of rare value had been lost in the lake, and how the girl's father was accused of stealing them.

"We must do all we can for that girl," said Wyn. But this was not so easy, for the girl campers had many troubles of their own. They had canoe races, and one of them fell overboard and came close to drowning, and then came a big storm, and a nearby tree was struck by lightning.

"I used to love to go camping when a girl, and I love to go yet," said Miss Marlowe, in speaking of this tale, which is called, "Wyn's Camping Days; Or, The Outing of the Go-Ahead Club." "I think all girls ought to know the pleasures of summer life under canvas."

A book that ought to be in the hands of all girls. Issued by Grosset & Dunlap, New York, and for sale by booksellers everywhere.

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By LILLIAN ELIZABETH ROY
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Adirondacks, bring to the girls enlargement of horizon, new development, and new joys.

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On horseback from Denver through Estes Park as far as the Continental Divide, climbing peaks, riding wild trails, canoeing through canyons, shooting rapids, encountering a landslide, a summer blizzard, a sand storm, wild animals, and forest fires, the girls pack the days full with unforgettable experiences.

GIRL SCOUTS IN ARIZONA AND NEW MEXICO

The Girl Scouts visit the mountains and deserts of Arizona and New Mexico. They travel over the old Sante Fe trail, cross the Painted Desert, and visit the Grand Canyon. Their exciting adventures form a most interesting story.

GIRL SCOUTS IN THE REDWOODS

The girls spend their summer in the Redwoods of California and incidentally find a way to induce a famous motion picture director in Hollywood to offer to produce a film that stars the Girl Scouts of America.

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GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*, NEW YORK

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A LITTLE MISS NOBODY; OR, WITH THE
GIRLS OF PINEWOOD HALL ***

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