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Title: A Dixie School Girl

Author: Gabrielle E. Jackson

Release date: June 12, 2008 [eBook #25765]

Language: English

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

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"MR. TEDFORD, HAVE YOU ANY HUYLER BOXES?"  
Dixie School Girl (Page 36)

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# A DIXIE SCHOOL GIRL

BY  
GABRIELLE E. JACKSON



MADE IN U.S.A.

M. A. DONOHUE & COMPANY  
CHICAGO :: NEW YORK

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TO MY TWO DIXIE NEIGHBORS,

whose entertaining tales of their childhood escapades have helped to make these stories, this first volume of the "Dixie Girl" is most affectionately inscribed by their friend.

G. E. J.

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## CHAPTER I

### FULL SPEED FOR FOUR CORNERS

Four straight country roads running at right angles. You cannot see where they begin because they have their beginning "over the hills and far away," but you can see where they end at "Four Corners," the hub of that universe, for there stand the general store, which is also the postoffice, the "tavern," as it is called in that part of the world, the church, the rectory, and perhaps a dozen private dwellings.

"Four Corners" is oddly mis-named, because there are no corners there at all. It is a circle. Maybe it was originally four corners, but today it is certainly a circle with a big open space in the center, and in the very middle of that stands a flag staff upon which floats the stars and stripes. The whole open space is covered with the softest green turf. *Not* a lawn, mind you, such as one may see in almost any immaculately kept northern town, with artistic flower beds dotting it, and a carefully trimmed border of foliage plants surrounding it. No, this circle has real Virginia turf; the thick, rich, indestructible turf one finds in England, which, as an old gardener told the writer, "we rolls and tills it for a thousand years." Nature had been rolling and tilling this green plot of ground for a good many thousand years.

The circle was encompassed by an iron rail fence to which the people from the surrounding community hitched their saddle or carriage horses when they came to the "Store" for their mail, or to make various purchases. And there the beasties often stood for hours, rubbing noses and exchanging the gossip of the paddocks, horse (or mule) fashion.

There were always several hitched there, and they were always gossiping or dozing as they waited for their owners to start toward home, and they represented all sorts and conditions of their kind just as those owners represented all sorts and conditions of men. Some were young men, some middle-aged, some old. Some were of the gentry of the surrounding country, some the humbler white folk, some the negroes who had managed to acquire small tracts of land which they farmed successfully or otherwise. Among them, too, was the typical shiftless, "triflin' no-'count" darkey who "jist sits 'round a-waitin'," though it would be hard for him to tell what he was waiting for.

Nevertheless, the "Corners" is the center of the activities of that community, though to make those who most frequently gather there, comprehend the limitations of its activities they would have to be set down in the midst of some big, hustling city.

Still, some who go to the Corners are very much alive to this fact, for they have journeyed throughout the length and breadth of their own land and many other lands beside. But they do not tell their less travelled brothers much of the wonders which lie beyond the towering mountains, which is just as well, perhaps. The stay-at-home might be less happy and content were they to learn of the doings of the big world beyond the barriers of their snug, peaceful valley, which seems to the wiser ones so far away from the trials, struggles, and worries of the world beyond.

And, curiously enough, when those of wider knowledge return to the valley they find again the peace and tranquility which they left there, and, breathing a sigh of relief, settle back into its restful atmosphere, and tranquil content, as one settles into a comfortable old chair.

The nearest "real, sure-enough town" to the Corners is Sprucy Branch and that is fourteen miles from Luray, with its famous caverns. To reach Sprucy Branch from Four Corners one must drive or ride "a right smart distance," and then to reach Luray take a railway trip or drive the fourteen miles. It is a beautiful part of this big world, and the valley is a happy one. Moreover, it would be hard to find a more delightful, little social world than its gentlefolk represent. Not the formal, artificial, rigidly conventional social world of the big northern cities, where few have time or inclination to be absolutely genuine, but the rare, true social life of the well-bred southerner, to whom friendship means much, kinship more, and family ties everything. Whose sons go forth into the world to make their mark, and often their fortunes, too, yet still retain the charm of their up-bringing, the traditions of their families, and their intense love of "the home back yonder." Whose daughters, though brought up, "raised," they often say, in the simplicity of country life, and more often than not having very limited financial resources, are in the truest sense of that beautiful old word, the gentlewomen we picture, prepared to grace their homes, or the outer world and reflect credit upon the land of their birth. And this is the conviction of her northern sister, the first of nine generations to be born beyond the borders of the old Bay State, so she can hardly be accused of a biased opinion.

And this lovely September morning, when the air holds just the faintest suggestion of autumn, when the leaves are beginning to hint of richer tints than the soft greens which they have worn all summer, when the native birds are hobnobbing and gossiping with their friends who are journeying farther south, "All the news of the north to the sunny south bringing," and the squirrels are chattering and scolding as they gather their hoard of chinkapins and other fodder for the long winter at hand, something is stirring. Yes, stirring vigorously, too, if one may judge by the hullabaloo which suddenly arises far down the East Pike. The people gathered upon the porch at the store prick up their ears to listen. There are a dozen or more there upon one errand or another, for the store is the commercial center of the district, and from it can be bought or ordered every nameable thing under the sun. It is also the postoffice, so, once, at least, each day there wends his or her way to it, every human being who expects, hopes for, or by any chance may receive a letter.

It was mail time. Hence the number of people gathered about to prick up their ears as the racket down the road grew louder and louder each second, and the thud of horses' hoofs, the shouts of boys' voices and a girl's ringing laugh were borne to them.

"Yonder comes the Woodbine bunch, I'll bet a dollar, and they're sure enough a-hittin' it up, too. Reckon that young one of the old Admiral's is a-settin' the pace, too. She's a clipper, all right," commented a man seated upon a tilted-back chair, his hat pushed far back upon his shock head. He was guiltless of coat, and his jean trousers were hitched high about his waist by a pair of wool suspenders.

Hardly had he ceased speaking when three horses came pounding into view, the leader ridden by a girl about fifteen years of age. The animal was a little mouse-colored beastie with white markings and eyes which gave a pretty strong hint of a good bit of broncho disposition to which the markings also pointed. He was lithe and agile as a cat and moved with something of the sinuous gliding of that animal, rather than the bounding motions of his eastern-bred mates. The two horses running neck and neck behind him were evidently blooded animals, and all three were a-lather from the pace set by their leader, all mud-bespattered to the point of being wholly disreputable, for a shower the previous night had left many a wide puddle in the road.

The girl leading rode as only a southern girl, accustomed to a saddle all her life, can ride. The saddle was of the Mexican type, but the headstall was the lightest possible, with a simple snaffle bit, even that seeming almost superfluous for she guided her mount more by the motions of her body than the bridle. She held the reins at arm's length in her left hand, while with her right she waved above her head a soft felt hat, her banner of defiance and derision of her pursuers. Swaying ever so slightly in her saddle, she brought her wiry little mount up to the platform, and slid from his back as snow slides from a hillside. The reins were tossed over his head and the race was ended.

Running across the porch she nodded or bowed comprehensively to all seated or standing upon it—the greeting accompanied by a sunny, happy smile which revealed faultlessly pretty teeth.

As she disappeared within the store her friends came rushing up to the platform, shouting after her as they drew up their horses:

"Here, come back! Hold on! That's no fair, even if you did beat. *We're* going to decide the kind of candy. You'll do us out of our last cent if we let you get it."

"Of course! Why not?" was called back, banteringly.

"Do you think I'm going to run Apache off his legs, risk breaking my neck and then not have the say-so in the end? I reckon not. It's just *got* to be chocolates *this* time. Cinnamon suckers are all right enough for a little race, but this was a two-mile go-it-for-all-you're-worth one, and besides, you'd better be nice to me, while you have the chance, because you won't have me with you very much longer."

"Ah, cut that out. We know it well enough. You needn't rub it in," was the chorus of answers.

"Shut up, Bev," added the taller of the two boys, a fair haired lad of sixteen or seventeen. He

was a handsome boy, with eyes of such a deep blue that they seemed violet, wavy golden hair and a fine, clear skin, though it was tanned many shades darker than nature intended it to be. The nose was clean cut, and the mouth and chin indicated considerable strength of character. He carried himself as though very sure of his place in the world, and his intention to hold it. Nevertheless, the face was a cheery, happy one.

The other boy was so like the girl that it was laughable. Exchange their garments and it would have puzzled the cleverest person to tell "t'other-from-which." To label them twins would have been superfluous. Nature had attended to that little matter fifteen years earlier in their lives, and even their old mammy used to say: "Now don' none of yo' other chillern go ter projectin' wid dem babies whilst I's got my haid turn'd 'way, cause if yo' does dey's gwine fer to get mixed pintedly, an' den I's gwine ter have ter spend a hull hour mebbe a-gettin' my mind settled pon which is which again."

Moreover, the fifteen years of daily association had only served to consummate what Dame Nature had so ably begun, for the girl and the boy almost thought and felt in unison. In all those years they had hardly been separated for a day. That is no further than a strict quarantine beneath the same roof had separated them, and that had been entirely Beverly's doings. At five she began the performance by contracting whooping-cough; at seven she tried mumps; at nine turned a beautiful lobster hue from measles, and at eleven capped the climax by scaring the family nearly to death with scarlet fever, and thereby causing her grandfather, Admiral Ashby, to exclaim:

"Lord bless my soul, Beverly, you are worse than the potato bugs; they *do* skip the fatal second year now and again, but you never let up."

Perhaps this criticism had called a halt in her performances in the line of contagious diseases, for since the scarlet fever scare she had quit frightening the family into spasms, and at fifteen was as charming, healthy, and tantalizing a bit of girlhood as one could wish to see, though about as much of a tomboy as one could find.

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## CHAPTER II

### WOODBINE

While Beverly Ashby is squabbling good-naturedly with her brother and chum, suppose we take this opportune moment in which to learn something about the trio?

Beverly and her brother, Athol, had elected to enter this world exactly fifteen years and four months prior to the opening of this story. They also chose the thirteenth of May, 1897, to spring their first surprise upon their family by arriving together, and had managed to sustain their reputations for surprising the grownups by never permitting a single year to pass without some new outbreak, though it must be admitted that Beverly could certainly claim the greater distinction of the two in that direction.

"Woodbine," their home, had been the family seat for many generations. It had seen many a Seldon enter this world and many a one depart from it. It had witnessed the outgoing of many brides from its broad halls, and seen many enter to become its mistress. It was a wonderful old place, beautiful, stately, and so situated upon its wooded upland that it commanded a magnificent view of the broad valley of Sprucy Stream. Over against it lay the foothills of the blue, blue mountains, the Blue Ridge range, and far to the westward the peaks of the Alleghanies peeped above the Massanutton range nearer at hand.

The valley itself was like a rare painting. The silvery stream running through the foreground, the rich woodlands and fertile fields, the marvelous lights and shadows ever holding the one looking upon it entranced. And all this lay before the broad acres of Woodbine, so named because that graceful vine hung in rich festoons from every column, gallery, portico and even the eaves to which it had climbed, a delicate gray-green adornment in early spring, a rich, darker tone in midsummer, and a gorgeous crimson in the autumn.

It was a spacious old mansion and would have been considered a large one even in the north, where, during the past fifty years, palaces have sprung into existence under the misnomer of "cottages." Happily, it did not tower up into the air as many of the so-called cottages do, but spread itself comfortably over the greensward, the central building being the only one ambitious enough to attain to two stories and a sharply peaked roof, in which were set several dormer windows from which a most entrancing view of the valley and distant mountain ranges could be obtained.

These dormer window chambers were rarely used, and, excepting during the semi-annual house cleaning, rarely visited. That one of these rare visits should have been paid one of them upon this particular day of which we are writing was simply Kismet. But of that a little later. Let us finish our picture of lovely Woodbine.

Across the entire front of the main floor as well as the second story, ran a wide piazza, gallery they call it in that part of the country. The lower gallery gave upon a broad, velvety lawn dotted with elms, beeches, oaks and feathery pines. No path led to this gallery, and when one stepped from it one's feet sank into the softest green turf. The door which opened upon it fairly spoke hospitality and welcome from its beautiful fan-like arch to its diamond-paned side lights and the hall within was considered one of the more perfect specimens of the architecture of its period to be found in the state, as was the stately circular double stairway leading to the floor above. Half way up, upon a broad landing, a stained glass window, brought long, long ago from England, let the western sunlight filter through its richly tinted panes and lie in patches of exquisite color upon polished stairs and floor.

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At the north and south ends of the house were the real entrances from the carefully raked, wide driveway which described almost a complete circle from the great stone gateway half a mile across Woodbine's lawn. Could this driveway have run straight through the house the circle would have been perfect, but it had to stop at the big south portico, with its graceful columns, and resume its sweep from the north one which gave upon the "office," the overseer's cottage, the various buildings devoted to the business "ob de gr'et house," as the darkies called it, and away further to the stables, carriage house, granaries and other buildings of the estate, with the servants' cabins behind these. All upon the north side of Woodbine was devoted to the practical, utilitarian needs of the place, all upon its southern to its pleasures and luxuries, for in the buildings circling away from the south end were the spacious kitchens, dairy, smoke house, laundry and other buildings necessary to the domestic economy of the household. None of these buildings touched directly upon the main house, but were connected with it by a roofed-over colonnade upon which the woodbine ran riot, as it did upon all the detached buildings, producing an effect charming beyond description. The colonnades described a semicircle from the north-west and south-west corners of the big house, and led from the kitchen to the big dining room, and from the office to the Admiral's study. All the buildings were constructed of rich red brick, brought from England generations ago, the pillars being of white marble. The effect against the dark green foliage was picturesque to agreed.

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Unlike many of the old southern homes, Woodbine had always been kept in perfect repair, and by some miracle of good fortune, had escaped the ravages of the Civil War. Its present owner, Admiral Athol Seldon, enjoyed a very comfortable income, having been wise enough during the troublous times of the war to invest his fortune where it would be reasonably safe. He would not have been called a wealthy man, as wealth is gauged in the great northern cities, but in this peaceful valley, where needs were simple and diversions sensible, he was regarded as a man of affluence and no little importance.

During the war he had served in the Confederate Navy, and served with all the strength of his convictions. When it ended in a lost cause he returned to Woodbine to learn in what condition the home he so loved had come through the conflict, for it was situated in the very vortex of the disturbance. Finding it but slightly harmed, and having sufficient means to repair it, he resolved to end his days there. He had never married, an early romance having come to a tragic end in the death of his fiancée soon after the outbreak of the war. Consequently, beautiful Woodbine lacked a mistress, to the great distress of the old family servants.

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To remedy this he sent for his brother's widow and her little two-year-old daughter, Mary. Beverly Seldon, two years his brother's junior, had been killed at the battle of Winchester in 1864, and the little Mary had entered this world exactly five months after her father's death. Her mother came very near following her father into the great beyond, but survived the shock to live beneath Athol Seldon's hospitable roof until Mary was eleven years of age, then quietly went to sleep, leaving Mary to her uncle's care. The child then and there became mistress not only of Woodbine, but of every living thing upon the place, her uncle included, and no only daughter could have been cared for, petted, spoiled or spanked more systematically than the Madcap Mary Seldon.

At twenty-six she married Turner Ashby, the grandson of one of the Admiral's oldest friends. Two years later a little daughter was born, but died before she was a year old. Then, just when the old Admiral was beginning to grumble because there seemed to be no prospect of a grand-nephew to inherit Woodbine, Mary Ashby presented him with not only an heir but an heiress as well, and the old gentleman came very near a balloon ascension.

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The twins were christened Athol Seldon Ashby and Beverly Turner Ashby before they had fully decided that they were really American citizens, and for seven years no happier household could have been found in the state. Then another calamity visited it. Turner Ashby was killed in a railway accident while north on a business trip. It was a frightful blow to the home in which he was adored by every member, from the Admiral straight down to the blackest little piccaninny upon the estate, and to make it, if possible, more tragic, all that ever came back to Woodbine was the seal ring he had worn, picked up in the charred ruins of the parlor coach. More than eight years had passed since that tragedy, and those years had changed Mary Ashby from a light-hearted, happy young wife and joyous mother to a quiet, dignified woman. Never again did her children find in her the care-free, romping play-fellow they had always known, though she never ceased to be the gentle, tender mother.

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And how they missed it. They were too young to fully appreciate their loss, though they grieved deeply for the tall, handsome, golden-haired, blue-eyed father who had been their jolly comrade, riding, romping with them, rowing, playing all manner of games, and always ready to relate some thrilling tale, and who, after eleven years of married life, had remained as much their mother's lover as upon the day he married her. Indeed, all the countryside mourned for Turner

Ashby, for such a personality could not be snatched from its environment without leaving a terrible blank for many years.

Athol was like him in character, but not the least in personal appearance, for both children were Seldon from the crowns of their dark heads to the tips of their small feet. Their chum, and inseparable companion, Archie Carey, might more readily have been taken for Turner Ashby's son: he was so tall, fair-haired and blue-eyed. Two years their senior and living upon the adjacent estate of "Uplands," he had grown up in an uninterrupted companionship with Athol and Beverly, and was regarded by them very much as an elder brother so far as camaraderie went, though by no means accorded an older brother's privileges by Miss Beverly. Indeed, she was more often the leading spirit in the fun, frolics or scrapes into which they were constantly plunging, as for example the one alluded to in the opening chapter. But that must have a chapter all to itself.

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## CHAPTER III

### FROM THE DORMER WINDOW

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Woodbine, as has been said, lay about two miles from Four Corners, the road leading to the post office clearly visible for almost its entire length.

It had always been the custom at Woodbine and Uplands to send to Four Corners twice daily for the mail, the children as a rule doing the errand and only too glad of the diversion, for they never failed to hear some bit of neighborhood gossip at the post office, or meet friends from some of the adjacent estates. Moreover, there was invariably the speculation regarding the writers of the letters taken from the box even when the letters were addressed to other members of their respective families, for neither Beverly, Athol or Archie had extensive correspondence with the world beyond the mountains. Just now, however, a new and vital interest had arisen, for after a grave family conclave it had been definitely settled that the time had arrived when Beverly and Athol must break away from the old order of things and be sent to boarding schools. Up to the present time a governess or a tutor had taught their young ideas to shoot, (straight or otherwise) with Admiral Seldon as head of the discipline department, a position by no means a sinecure since Beverly represented one-half the need of such a department. Until the children were twelve the governess had been all sufficient but at that point Athol rebelled at being "a sissy" and demanded a tutor, Beverly entirely concurring in his views. So a tutor had been installed and had remained until the previous July, when he was called to fill a more lucrative position elsewhere. Thus Woodbine's young shoots were left without a trainer, to the dismay of its older members and distress of its younger ones, for both Beverly and Athol had grown very fond of Norman Lee, who seemed but little older than themselves, though in reality quite ten years their senior. In the schoolroom he had been the staid, dignified instructor but beyond its walls no better chum and comrade could have been found. He was hale-fellow in all their good times and frolics. Consequently his resignation "just broke up the whole outfit," as Athol put it, and both children vowed they wouldn't have anybody else at Woodbine because nobody else could ever be half so nice as Norman Lee. Long before the three years of his tutorship ended he had become "Norman" to all the household, even the children adopting the more familiar appellation beyond the schoolroom doors, though within it the concession of "Mr. Norman" was yielded, which secretly amused the young tutor not a little, and often caused him to wonder how the boy and girl contrived to maintain the attitude so consistently and with such perfect gravity. For four hours of the day he might have been Methuselah's own brother from their standpoint but upon the school-room's threshold they dropped as garments the relations of pupils and teacher and became the best of good chums.

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It had been a singularly happy relation and it was not surprising that it seemed to them well-nigh impossible to renew it with an entire stranger.

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And truth to tell the Admiral and Mrs. Ashby were not in the least sanguine of being able to find any one else capable of repeating it and for a time were a good deal daunted by the outlook for the coming year.

The previous year Archie Carey had gone away to school and during his holidays had come back to Uplands brimful of enthusiasm and determined to have Athol join him. Athol was quite as eager to do so, the one fly in his ointment of pure joy being the thought of the separation from Beverly, though boy-like, he kept this fact deep buried in his heart. Nevertheless, it made him feel queer when the possibility of going upon divided ways to different schools became a very definite one indeed. The boy and girl were like a pair of horses which has been driven together fifteen years and suddenly separated. True, the separation was not as yet a fact, but human beings can suffer more in anticipation than the brute creation can in reality. The great question at present was which of many schools to select. Admiral Seldon had written to several for circulars and information, and had been nearly swamped with replies in every conceivable form. At length he had weeded the mass down to three, entering into more definite correspondence

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with these, and the replies to his last letters were now being eagerly awaited by Beverly, Athol and Archie. The school now under most favorable consideration for Beverly was about thirty-five miles from Spruce Branch, the town nearest Four Corners and Woodbine.

It was the coming of these letters which had caused the excitement at Woodbine as the boys and girl were about to go for the morning mail, Athol upon his little thoroughbred, Royal, Archie mounted upon his own handsome hunter, Snowdrift, and Beverly on a wiry little broncho which had been sent to her by an old friend of the Admiral's who had become the owner of a ranche in Arizona. The friend had assured Admiral Seldon that "Apache" had been "thoroughly gentled," and Beverly, who had never known the meaning of fear from the hour she could bestride a horse, had welcomed him with delight. Whether the old Admiral had done likewise is open to doubt, but Mrs. Ashby frankly protested. As a girl *she* had ridden every rideable thing upon the place but it was literally a horse of another color when it came to the point of Beverly doing as she had done. So Apache had been tolerated, not welcomed, by Mrs. Ashby, and having been an eye-witness to some of the little beast's astonishing performances when he first came two years before, she has exacted from Beverly a promise to be very cautious when riding him. Until his arrival Beverly had ridden Jewel, her fourteen-hand pony, and been quite content, but Jewel's luster was dimmed by Apache's brilliant "shines," as old Uncle Abel called his cavortings when feeling exceptionally fit from his unaccustomed diet of oats and feed. Out in Arizona his food had consisted of alfalfa grass with an occasional "feed" thrown in, so it is not surprising that the new order of high living somewhat intoxicated him. But Apache had won his place at Woodbine.

As the young people were about to set forth upon their two-mile trip for the mail Mrs. Ashby warned:

"Now Beverly be careful, dear. Apache has a lively tickle in his toes this crisp morning, and besides the roads are terribly muddy and slippery from last night's shower."

"I'll be careful mumsey dear," answered the girl, as she ran down the steps to spring upon her mount.

"Careful and *no* racing with the boys, remember," Mrs. Ashby called after her.

Perhaps Beverly did not hear the concluding admonition. At any rate we'll give her the benefit of the doubt, for at that moment Apache gave testimony of the tickle in his toes by springing straight up into the air in as good an imitation of a "buck" as any "thoroughly gentled" little broncho could give in the polite society of his aristocratic Virginia cousins. Mrs. Ashby gave a startled exclamation, but Beverly, secure in her seat, waved a merry good-by and was off after the boys who were calling to her to "hurry up."

Of course they had not heard one word of the foregoing conversation. Had they done so it is safe to say that they would never have proposed the two-mile race to the post office nor tormented Beverly for being "no sort of a sport," and "scared to back her painted plug against their thoroughbreds." They were honorable lads and would have felt honor-bound to respect Mrs. Ashby's wishes. But not having heard, they gave Beverly "all that was coming to her for riding a calico nag," though said "nag" was certainly a little beauty.

Nearly a quarter of the distance to Four Corners had been ridden when Beverly's temper, never too elastic, snapped. Her riding crop descended with a thwack, first upon Royal's round flank, then upon Snowdrift's and finally upon Apache's side as she cried:

"You-all hush up and *ride*. I'll beat you to Four Corners or die in the attempt!"

The sudden onslaught brought the result to be expected. The two thoroughbreds plunged forward with snorts of indignant protest, answered by Apache's very plebian squeal of rage as he shook his bony little head and struck into a gait such as Beverly had never dreamed a horse could strike. It was like a tornado let loose, and, expert little horsewoman that she was, she found ample occupation for all her wits and equestrian skill, though she managed to jerk out as she whirled past her companions:

"Two pounds of Huyler's candy if I *do* beat those giraffes of yours."

Hence the commotion at Four Corners a few moments later, the whirlwind arrived and the conversation recorded in the first chapter.

"Mr. Telford, have you got any Huyler boxes?" asked the winner of the race, resting her gauntleted hands and her riding crop upon the counter. "These boys are trying to make me take two pounds of cinnamon suckers on a bet. Did you ever hear such nonsense? I couldn't eat them in a year and real, sure-enough bets mean something better than suckers."

"Wall, Miss Bev'ly, I aint rightly knowin' what kind o' lollypops is in them boxes, most times folks jist helps theirselves an' I don't pay no 'tention ter the brand. It's all candy, I reckon," answered the shop keeper, drawing two or three boxes from his case and placing them upon his counter. From the appearance of the wrappings they belied Huyler's advertisement of being "fresh every hour," though one of the boxes bore that firm's name. The others were stamped by Martha Washington, Lowney and one or two other widely known manufacturers.

"Yes this one's Huyler's but I've got to have *two* this time. Yes I have too! Athol's got to put up for one and you for the other. Why just look at me! The mud on me ought to just naturally make you both *want* to do something to pay up for making me get into such a state."

"We didn't make you! You started the circus," protested her brother.

"Blessed if I'd do a thing for you if it wasn't likely to be the last race we'll have in one while.

Look at *those*," interjected Archie Carey, coming over from the letter window where he had gone to ask for the mail and slamming upon the counter beside the boxes of candy half a dozen plump letters. Three bore the addresses of the schools under consideration. All three faces grew sober.

"I'll bet those will settle your hash Bev," was Athol's comment.

"Ah, why couldn't you have been a boy instead of a girl anyhow," protested Archie. "Then you'd have come along with us as a matter of course and our good times wouldn't have all been knocked into a cocked hat."

"Come on. Let's go home," said Beverly soberly, as she gathered up her boxes, nodded to Mr. Telford, and took her mud-splashed self from the store, the boys lingering to pay the bill.

She had remounted Apache when they joined her, Archie carrying the letters which he stuffed viciously into the mail-bag strapped to his saddle. Then the two boys sprang upon their waiting horses. As they rode in silence Beverly glanced down at her khaki riding skirt and at Apache's mud-splashed body, and the next moment had stopped short, exclaiming:

"Look at us, and I promised mother I wouldn't race!"

"You did!" exclaimed the boys in duet.

"I sure did," she repeated with a solemn nod.

This was too much for her companions and the woodland bordering the road echoed to their shouts. When they had regained some self-control Athol asked:

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Do? I'm going to stop at the branch and scrub some of this mud off Apache and myself, for if we show up like this mother will think I've been acting ten times worse than I really have, though goodness knows it's bad enough as it is. I didn't mean to break my promise, but I couldn't let you boys put it all over me like you did and not get back at you. Now get out of the way while I clean up, and maybe you could do a little on your own accounts and not suffer for it either. 'Snowdrift!' He looks exactly like one after a spring thaw."

The boys glanced at the beautiful white horse and then at each other. The ensuing fifteen minutes were spent in the vigorous grooming of their steeds, Beverly scrubbing Apache as energetically as Archie and Athol did Royal and Snowdrift. Flat sticks served as scrapers and bunches of dry grass for cloths. When the animals looked a little less like animated mud pies Beverly turned her attention to her riding skirt. To restore that to its pristine freshness might have daunted a professional scourer. The more she rubbed and scrubbed the worse the result and finally, when she was a sight from alternate streaks of mud and wet splotches, she sprang upon the startled Apache crying:

"Come along home quick! If I've got to face the music the quicker it's done the better," and was off down the road in a fair way to being as muddy when she reached Woodbine as she was when she began her cleansing processes at the branch, while up in one of the dormer windows of the big house her mother stood smiling to herself. It was one of the rare occasions when she had occasion to go to that room for some stored away winter clothing against Beverly's pending departure for boarding school. As the riders resumed their homeward journey she smiled and said softly:

"How exactly like Beverly. Now will come confession and repentance and shall I be able to keep a sober face?"

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## CHAPTER IV

### DIVIDED WAYS

"Yes, I just forgot all about it, for of course I wasn't going to let the boys run me to death, and oh, mother, Apache can get over the ground! I never saw anything like the way he ran."

"No, neither have I," replied Mrs. Ashby significantly.

"You!" asked Beverly in surprise.

Mrs. Ashby nodded though her lips twitched.

Beverly's face clouded and her lips set.

"How did you see me?" she demanded.

"From the window of the north-east dormer chamber."

The girl's dark eyes grew darker and signs of a pending tempest lowered as she asked:

"Mother did you go up there to spy upon me? You almost *never* go into that room. Didn't you believe me? Did you think I had to be watched? I think that was horrid, horrid of you. You know



I didn't mean to break my word. I just forgot when the boys teased me about my calico plug and *you* wouldn't have stood for that if you'd been in my place. You just know you wouldn't. You used to do crazier things when you were a girl for Uncle Athol has told me just dozens and dozens of them. Why did you spy upon me? Why? Why? I loathe being distrusted."

The storm had burst with a vengeance.

"Beverly hush and listen to me. If you will pause a moment you will know perfectly well that I had no idea of 'spying' upon you. Have I ever done so? You know better. It seems to me you are displaying some doubt also. If I did not know it to be the outcome of your excitement I should decline to make any explanation. As it is I'll tell you that I went up there to get out your winter things in order to have them remodeled. By chance I looked out of the window—it is a view rather worth looking upon, you'll admit—and, well I saw a moving picture instead of the usual quiet landscape and it was 'going some' as Athol would say." Mrs. Ashby smiled involuntarily as she recalled the spirited action of that moving picture.

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"Yes wasn't it?" cried Beverly eagerly. "And, oh that little Apache is some horse, mumsey."

Then her face resumed its defiant expression and she continued: "But I showed them that they couldn't put it all over me and not pay for it. They got the try-out of their lives and *I* got two pounds of *decent* candy if I did get some mud into the bargain. I'd have come home to tell you anyway; you *know* I would don't you?"

"Have I intimated a doubt of it, dear?" The tone was very disarming, and warm-hearted, quick tempered just-souled little Beverly succumbed. Throwing her arms about her mother's neck she buried her head upon her shoulder as she sobbed.

"Oh, do forgive me. I was the horrid one for doubting you and saying such nasty things. Please give me bally hack and send me away to school quick. Then maybe I'll learn to think twice before I sass once, as Mammy Riah says. I reckon what I need is a good strict schoolmarm to boss me 'round."

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"I hope the 'bossing' element will be absent from the school we shall choose. I doubt it would work very well with you, Beverly. Sparks and gunpowder are apt to lead to pretty serious explosions and I dislike pyrotechnics which are likely to spread disaster. Now go change your clothes and make yourself presentable for I hear Uncle Athol calling and I dare say the momentous question is about to be answered. But what am I going to do without my little whirlwind to keep things stirring?" ended Mrs. Ashby, tenderly drawing the penitent into her arms.

"And oh, mumsey, mumsey where shall I ever find any one who will be as patient with the whirlwind? I suspect I'm going to be desperately homesick more days than once. But I'll truly, truly try not to disgrace you and Woodbine. Yes, we're coming Uncle Athol," as the Admiral's stentorian tones came booming up the broad stairway.

"Mary Beverly, come along quick and hear these letters. Lord save us, I'd rather run a blockade than choose a school for a couple of youngsters. I'll be gray, dead and buried before it's done! Come down I say."

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"We are coming Uncle," called Mrs. Ashby, laughing softly as she pictured the gray-haired old Admiral striding up and down the wide hall anathematizing all the schools in creation and launching side shots at the boys because they were laughing at him. His roar was far worse than his attack as the lads well knew, as sitting—no, sprawling—upon the big claw-foot sofa they did not hesitate to let fly a projectile or two in return, only to howl at the result, for well both knew his weakness for his grandniece. "She could wind him around her little finger," they said.

A moment later Mrs. Ashby appeared at the top of the landing to be greeted by:

"Come and hear these letters. Where's Beverly?"

"She will be down as soon as she changes her riding skirt."

The boys snickered.

Turning upon them the Admiral demanded:

"What are you young scamps chortling about?"

"Bev," answered his nephew. "Did you see her when she came in?"

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"Now what was the matter with her? She's usually all right."

"Oh, nothing. Just a trifle muddy. Mother can describe her appearance better than we can I reckon," laughed Athol, Jr.

The Admiral bent his keen eyes upon the boys. He was a handsome old gentleman and wonderfully well-preserved for his seventy-three years.

"And I'll lay a wager you fellows started the ball rolling and Beverly had to brace up and stop it," he nodded.

"We didn't! Honest, Uncle Athol, we didn't! Did we Arch?"

"Ask Bev. Here she comes," laughed Archie pointing toward the stairs down which a demure, spick and span, duck-clothed young lady was making her way with all the propriety of a young boarding-house-miss-in-the-making.

Instantly Athol had sprung to his feet and was mincing along behind the Admiral in such perfect

mimicry of his sister that Archie hooted. Beverly scorned to notice the by-play and asked:

"Do you want me Uncle Athol?"

"Yes, come along into my study for this er-er—well perplexing question is going to be settled right here and now."

Realizing that the settling meant a separation for a shorter or longer time, and for a greater or less distance, however determined, the boys sobered down and followed the others into the study.

There is no use going into details. The letters were duly read and discussed and it was decided that early the next morning Admiral Seldon and Mrs. Ashby should visit two of the schools, those nearest Sprucy Branch being selected.

"And please, Uncle Athol, choose Leslie Manor. It's so near Kilton Hall that the boys can ride over to see me and I can go to see them," begged Beverly, clasping her hands about her great-uncle's arm and looking up into his face in a manner to coax the birds off the bushes.

He drew her into his circling arm and turning her face up to his asked, as he kissed the soft lips.

"And how in kingdom come do you suppose *I'm* going to get on without your coming to see me often, you torment of my soul. And how do you expect the boys to cover those ten miles between Leslie Manor and Kilton Hall, much less you? And a pretty stir-up it would make if you were to go to their school, wouldn't it, you huzzy."

"Why, I'm Athol's sister, and almost Archie's too. Why couldn't I go? We'll have our horses, of course."

"Lord bless my soul, are you counting on moving the whole of Woodbine up yonder?" asked the Admiral in dismay.

"Why no, Uncle Athol, but of course we must take Snowdrift, Royal and Apache," answered Beverly as a matter of course. Whereupon Archie and Athol, standing just behind the Admiral, and Beverly fell upon each other's necks. Such an idea as taking their horses with them had never for a moment entered the boy's heads.

"Well, we'll see; We'll see," temporized the old gentleman, "No" seeming to have been left out of the vocabulary he employed in speaking to Beverly.

An hour was spent in discussing the subject pro and con and at its end Admiral Seldon cried:

"Quit running on dead reckoning and tell Mammy Riah to pack our grips, for your mother and I are off on the eight-thirty from Sprucy Branch and that means stepping lively tomorrow morning, Mary. And I want Uncle Abel to understand that the carriage is to be at the door at seven-thirty,—*not nine-thirty.*"

And so the die was cast. At seven-thirty the following morning the carriage accompanied by the three most interested in what the verdict would be upon its return, sped down the broad driveway, the leaves which had fallen during the night crinkling beneath the wheels, the carriage horses cutting all sorts of antics in sympathy with their saddle companions cavorting beside them, for the young people were acting as body guard.

It was not at all likely that the older people would return that night, for train service was limited, so all preparations were made for an overnight trip.

Bidding them good-by at the railway station Beverly, Athol and Archie rode back to Woodbine, in no mood for one of their wild stampedes. The real parting was too close at hand.

That day and evening seemed the longest to Beverly that she had ever known. Archie was to spend the night at Woodbine, and Aunt Caroline, Mammy Riah and Earl Queen, the butler, did their best to make up for the absence of the heads of the house, but it surely was a sober little group which sat down at the brightly polished mahogany dining table. Beverly in her mother's seat, Athol in his uncle's and Archie as guest. Aunt Caroline had sent up her daintiest preserves and had prepared a supper "fitten' for a queen," she averred. Her fried chicken would have put Delmonico's to shame and her hot waffles were "lak ter fly up offen de dish I serve 'em on," was Queen's affirmation as he took them from her, but nothing was eaten with its usual relish.

At ten the next morning came a long distance phone call from Admiral Seldon.

Beverly reached the phone first.

"And it's all settled? Which one? Leslie Manor? Good! And Ath's going to Kilton Hall? Oh, splendid! You'll be down on the three o'clock train? Meet you? Of course. Yes, I'll tell the boys. Mother sends love? Give her ours and tell her we are all right and have been as good as gold. Good-by!" and the phone was hung up with a snap as Beverly spun round and catching the one nearest at hand who happened to be Archie, turkey trotted him the length of the big hall before she'd end their curiosity.

And thus came the selection of the two schools. Athol with Archie at Kilton Hall, and Beverly at Leslie Manor, ten miles away, and near one of the most wonderful and beautiful caprices of that capricious lady Dame Nature, that human eye is ever likely to rest upon.

They were to leave Woodbine and Uplands on the last day of September, as the school term began October first, the intervening days being full of the excitement incident to their departure.

The thirtieth of September came at once too rapidly and too slowly, and dawned crisp and clear;

a good omen for the start.

Good-bys were said to the servants, Mrs. Ashby was embraced tempestuously by Beverly and given a bear hug by Athol, Archie shook hands and all three followed Admiral Seldon in to the waiting carriage, to wave good-bys to Mrs. Ashby who stood upon the south portico, and to all the servants gathered in the south colonnade.

Then Mrs. Ashby re-entered the silent house, went upstairs to Beverly's deserted room, dropped into a chair beside her bed and burying her head in the tumbled pillow wept like a girl.

A moment later Mammy Riah entered the room, caught sight of the weeper, grabbed up an old muddy shoe of Beverly's and raining tears into it forthwith raised a genuine darkey wail of woe which very nearly turned Mrs. Ashby's tears into hysterics.

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## CHAPTER V

### LESLIE MANOR

It was the opening day at Leslie Manor. Late the evening before the last girl had come straggling reluctantly back after a long summer vacation. This morning all was hustle and bustle. At the rear of the building the last trunks were being bumped down from the express wagon which had brought them from the railway station, and under the direction of Wesley Watts Mather, the dusky porter, janitor and general handy man, were being conveyed to the various rooms in which they and their owners would bide for the ensuing eight months, for Leslie Manor did not open its doors to its pupils until October first and closed them the first week in June. This was at the option of Miss Woodhull, the principal, who went abroad each June taking with her several of her pupils for a European tour, to return with her enlightened, edified charges in September. It was a pleasurable as well as a profitable arrangement for the lady who was absolutely free of encumbrance and could do as she chose.

Leslie Manor had once been the home of a widely known southern family whose fortunes had sadly decreased during the war and completely evaporated after it. For several years the place was entirely deserted and neglected, then Miss Woodhull, recently graduated from a New England college, and fairly bristling with degrees, for which she had exchanged the freshness, sweetness and spontaneity of youth and health, was ordered to spend at least a year in the south in the doubtful hope of recovering the youth and health.

Just where to find these valuable assets was the hardest question to answer. Her only relatives were an elderly maiden aunt and an irascible old uncle whose time was too filled with providing the wherewithal to maintain a very elaborate establishment for a very vain wife and three frivolous daughters, to leave any left over in which to think of the welfare of his only sister's child. Moreover, his wife and daughters could not endure her, and, truth to tell, they had about as much affinity for one another as have oil and water. They might flow side by side forever but never mingle.

The maiden aunt was her father's sister, an austere dignified old party who resided most exclusively in her ancestral home on Beacon Street, and lived in a rut worn *ages* deep by tradition, conviction and self-will. Virginia was, so-to-speak, heiress-presumptive. Not that she was likely to be supplanted by the birth of some one having greater claim to her aunt's fortune. Her possible rivals for the very substantial income which her aunt enjoyed were foundling asylums, a new religious cult just then in its infancy in the hub of the universe, and innumerable "movements" and "reforms."

She had sent Virginia through college, provided her with a fair allowance, bidden her make something of herself for the sake of her name and then washed her hands of all responsibility. In her own sight she had fulfilled all her duty. When Virginia Woodhull left — College after attaining degrees galore, but in broken health, and with twenty-eight years checked off upon her life's calendar, she seemed to have run plump up against a stone wall.

Dozens of positions were almost forced upon her. Mentally she was qualified to fill any of them, physically *not one*. Nor could she remain near the only relatives she possessed had they even cared two straws to have her remain.

While in this depressing state of mind and body a girl whom she had coached in the college graduated and was about to return to her home in Virginia. She was several years Virginia's junior, pretty, warm-hearted and charming, and possessed the power of looking a little deeper below the surface than the average human being possesses. She invited Miss Woodhull to accompany her to Roanoke and fate stepped in and did the rest. The month was spent in a lovely old home, Virginia Woodhull gained in health and strength, and recovered something in the way of nerve control and mental poise. When the month ended she decided to "do" the state whose name she bore and spent the rest of the year in going from one point to another in it until she knew its entire topography by heart.

In the course of her journeyings she visited the Luray Caverns as a matter of course, and enroute came upon picturesque, deserted, decrepit Leslie Manor, and fell as enthusiastically in love with it as it was given to her repressed nature to fall in love.

Moreover, for a long time she had been obsessed with a desire to bring into this happy, easy-going, contented state something of the energy, progress, intellectual activities (as she gauged them) of New England. The general uplift inspired by the seat of learning she had just left after post-graduate courses unto the nth degree: To thoroughly stir things up and make these comfortable, contented, easy-going Virginians sit up and take notice of their shortcomings. She was given a work in life, though quite unsought, and she meant to undertake it exactly as she has undertaken her college course and make a fine job of it.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, according to the viewpoint taken, the aunt in Boston was ceremoniously tucked away in the tomb of her ancestors just as this resolution crystalized and Virginia Woodhull found herself in possession of a very comfortable income, though said income had a string attached to it which was intended to yank it back to the religious cult before mentioned in the event of Virginia's *marriage* or death. Either way considered, it was a rather dubious heritage. But it served to purchase Leslie Manor and the school became a fait accompli. This was in the early eighties and from its opening day the school had flourished. Perhaps this was due to New England energy and culture, or possibly some credit rested with Mrs. Bonnell, the matron, and real head of the house; a sweet lovable, gracious Southern gentlewoman whose own family and fortunes had vanished when she was a tiny child, but who had grown up with relatives in whose home love ruled supreme and in which the little Veronica Dulany had blossomed as a flower. At forty years of age she still retained a genuine love and understanding of her fellow-beings in spite of many sorrows, and the death when she was still a mere girl of husband and little daughter before she had been called Mrs. Percy Bonnell five years.

At any rate, for ten years Mrs. Bonnell had ruled supreme at Leslie Manor, engaging its servants as she saw fit, directing the household, economizing as she felt wisest; feeding hungry girls, cuddling the homesick ones, caring for the ailing ones, and loved by every creature human or animal upon the place. Miss Woodhull had no time for domestic matters and all the sentiment in her had been killed in her early childhood.

And curiously enough the academic force at Leslie Manor was about equally divided into Woodhull and Bonnell factions. Miss Stetson, the teacher of mathematics was in keen sympathy with Miss Woodhull, as was Miss Forsdyke the Latin teacher, and Miss Baylis, the teacher of history and literature, but Miss Dalton the gymnasium and physical culture teacher, and Miss Powell who had charge of the little girls, sided with Mrs. Bonnell as did Monsieur Santelle, and old Herr Professor Stenzel. Even Miss Juliet Atwell, who came twice each week for aesthetic dancing, and several other stunts, openly worshiped at the Bonnell's shrine. Herr Stenzel's admiration had more than once proved an embarrassing proposition to the lady, for Herr Stenzel loved the flesh pots of Leslie Manor and knew right well who presided over them. But Mrs. Bonnell was equal to a good many Herr Stenzels.

But in one sense we have wandered a long way from Beverly Ashby and opening day at Leslie Manor, though all these people vitally concern her.

Leslie Manor stood in the centre of a wide, rolling, thickly wooded estate encompassed by a holly hedge noted for miles around for its beauty and its prickly barrier to freedom. The house had been restored and added to in order to meet the demands of a school harboring sixty or seventy girls, though it still retained its old lines of beauty and its air of hominess.

Miss Woodhull's first concern had been "to make the place sanitary," the last word spelled with italics, and to this end modern improvements and conveniences had supplanted the old, easy-going expedients of domestic economy. Everything in Leslie Manor became strictly modern and up-to-date. The upper floors were arranged in the most approved single bed-chambers or suites for the teachers and the seniors, the lower ones were accurately divided into living, dining and reception rooms. In one wing were the model recitation rooms and Miss Woodhull's office; in another the undergraduate's rooms. Nor had the grounds been overlooked. They were very trim, very prim, very perfectly kept and made one realize this at every turn. It also made one wonder how the old owner would feel could he return from his nameless grave at Appomatox and be obliged to pace along the faultless walks where formerly he had romped with his children across the velvety turf. But he and his were dead and gone and the spirit of New England primness, personified in Virginia Woodhull, spinster aged fifty-seven, now dominated the place.

It was lovely to look upon, and compelled one's admiration, though it left some indefinable longing unsatisfied. It was so orderly it almost made one ache.

Perhaps something of this ache unconsciously obsessed Beverly Ashby as she sat upon one of the immaculate garden seats, placed at the side of an immaculate gravel walk, and looked through a vista of immaculately trimmed trees at the dozens of girls *boiling* out of the door of the wing in which most of the undergraduate's rooms were situated, for all members of the under classes were housed in the south wing, the seniors rooming in the more luxurious quarters of the main building. Not that the seniors were the happier for their exaltation. They had enjoyed some pretty merry hours in that old south wing, but with the advent of the senior year were forced to live up to the dignity of the main building. The faculty occupied the north end of it.

Beverly had arrived the previous afternoon and, owing to the fact that she had never been at

school before in all her fifteen years, nor journeyed very far afield from dear old Woodbine, she did not know a soul at Leslie Manor so far as she now knew.

The parting of the ways when Athol and Archie bade her good-by at Front Royal and, accompanied by Admiral Seldon, went on to Kilton Hall gave Beverly an entirely new sensation. She then fully realized that she was growing up and that the old happy-go-lucky days of boy and girl frolicking were slipping into the background. That from that very spot where the roads branched she must begin her journey toward young-ladyhood, as the boys must begin theirs toward manhood, and the thought hurt like a physical pain. She didn't want to grow up and leave those happy days behind.

She had been met at Front Royal by one of the teachers who was returning to the school. Beverly had tried to talk to her as she would have talked with any one at home. But Miss Baylis did not encourage familiarity upon the part of the pupils, and promptly decided that Beverly was one of those irresponsible, impulsive Southern girls who always proved such trials to her and Miss Woodhull before they could be brought to understand strict conventions. Consequently, she had met Beverly's warm-hearted, spontaneous manner with frigid politeness and had relieved herself of the young girl's society the moment the school was reached.

Luckily, Beverly had fallen into Mrs. Bonnell's hands directly she reached Leslie Manor, so some of the ice coating in which she had made the five-mile drive from the railway station had been thawed by that lovable lady. But she had passed a desperately lonely evening in her room unpacking and getting settled, and had gone to bed in a frame of mind rarely experienced by Beverly Ashby.

Her room-mate, like many other tardy ones, would not arrive until the next day, and the whole atmosphere of the place spelled desolation for Beverly.

Her first Waterloo had been encountered early that morning when, feeling lonelier than she ever had felt in all her life, she dressed early and ran out to the stable to visit Apache. He seemed as lonely and forlorn as his little mistress and thinking to cheer him as well as herself, she had led him forth by his halter and together they had enjoyed one grand prance down the driveway. Unluckily, Miss Baylis had seen this harmless little performance, and not being able to appreciate perfect human and equine grace, had been promptly scandalized. It was at once reported to Miss Woodhull and Beverly was informed that "such hoydenish actions should be relegated to the uncultured herd."

Beverly did not ask whether she must number herself among that herd but the fact had been implied nevertheless, and she smarted under what she felt to be an unmerited and unduly severe rebuke, if not an open insult.

She was still smarting as she sat hidden in her nook, and sorely in need of an antidote for the smart.

Presently it came in the homeopathic form of like curing like.

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## CHAPTER VI

### NEW FRIENDS

Naturally, no real work was done on opening day. Miss Woodhull, stately and austere sat in her office directing her staff with the air of an empress. One of the old girls declared that all she lacked was a crown and sceptre, and the new ones who entered that office to be registered, "tagged" the above mentioned girl called it, came out of it feeling at least three inches shorter than when they entered. During her reign in Leslie Manor, Miss Woodhull had grown much stouter and one seeing her upon this opening day would scarcely have recognized in her the slender, hollow-eyed worn-out woman who had opened its doors to the budding girlhood of the land nearly thirty years before. She was now a well-rounded, stately woman who carried herself with an air of owning the state of her adoption, and looked comparatively younger in her fifty-eighth year than she had in her twenty-eighth.

As Beverly sat in her nook watching the little girls of the primary grades run out to their playground at the rear of the building, the old girls of the upper classes pair off and stroll away through the extensive grounds, and the new ones drift thither and yonder like rudderless craft, she saw two girls come from Miss Woodhull's office. One was a trifle shorter than Beverly and plump as a woodcock. She was not pretty but piquant, with a pair of hazel eyes that crinkled at the corners, a saucy pug nose, a mouth like a Cupid's bow and a mop of the curliest red-brown hair Beverly had ever seen. Her companion was tall, slight, graceful, distinguished. A little aristocrat from the top of her raven black hair to the tips of her daintily shod feet was Aileen Norman and though only sixteen, she was the one girl in the school who could hold Miss Woodhull within the limits of absolute courtesy under *all* circumstances. Although descended from New England's finest stock, Miss Woodhull also possessed her full share of the New Englander's nervous irritability which all the good breeding and discipline ever brought to bear

can never wholly eradicate. Her sarcasm and irony had caused more than one girl's cheeks to grow crimson and her blood to boil under their stinging injustice, for Miss Woodhull did not invariably get to the root of things. She was a trifle superior to minor details. But Aileen possessed an armor to combat just such a temperament and her companion, Sally Conant's wits were sharp enough to get out of most of the scrapes into which she led her friend. So the pair were a very fair foil to each other and a match for Miss Woodhull. What their ability would prove augmented by Beverly's characteristics we will learn later.

As they came down the steps from Miss Woodhull's office, said office, by-the-by, being in the wing in which the recitation rooms were situated and quite separate from the main building, Sally's eyes were snapping, and her head wagging ominously; Aileen's cheeks were even a deeper tint than they ordinarily were, and her head was held a little higher. Evidently something of a disturbing nature had taken place. They did not see Beverly in her bosky nook and she did not feel called upon to reveal herself to them. 69

"It was all very well to stick *three* of us together when we were freshmen and sophomores, but juniors deserve *some* consideration I think. If Peggy Westfield had come back this year it would have been all well and good, but to put a perfect stranger in that room is a pure and simple outrage. Why we haven't even an idea what she's like, or whether she'll be congenial, or nice, or—or—anything. Why couldn't she have given us one of the girls we know?" stormed Sally.

"Because she likes to prove that she is great and we are small, I dare say," answered Aileen. "Of course the new girl may be perfectly lovely and maybe we'll get to like her a lot, but it's the *principle* of the thing which enrages me. It seems to me we might have some voice in the choice of a room-mate after being in the school three years. There are a dozen in our class from which we could choose the third girl if we've got to have her, though I don't see why just you and I couldn't have a suite to ourselves. Mercy knows there are enough rooms in our wing and next year we'll have to be in the main house anyway, and I just loathe the thought of it too." 70

"Ugh! So do I! But let's reconnoiter and try to spot our bugbear. I wonder if it wouldn't be appropriate to call her by another name? We've got to share our *rooms* with her even if we haven't got to share our bed. Why didn't the Empress tell us her name? the stubborn old thing! Just 'a girl from Sprucy Branch will share your suite this year. She arrived last evening and has already arranged her things in A of Suite 10.' A of course! The very nicest of the three bedrooms opening out of that study and the only one which has sunshine all day long. You or I should have had it. I don't call it fair. She's probably trying to make a good impression upon Miss Sprucy Branch. The name sounds sort of Japanesy, doesn't it? Wonder if she looks like a Jap too?"

"Well if you are speaking of me I can tell you right now that Miss Woodhull hasn't succeeded in making any *too* pleasing an impression upon Miss Sprucy Branch and so far as keeping Room A in suite 10, is concerned, either of you is welcome to it, because it would take just mighty little to make me beat it for the stables, mount Apache, habit or no habit, and do those thirty-five miles between this luck-forsaken place and Woodbine in just about four hours, and that is allowing something for the mountains too. Apache's equal to a good deal better time, but I should hate to push him, when we were heading toward *home*. That would pay up for any amount of delay. Thus far I haven't found Leslie Manor as hospitable as our servant's quarters at Woodbine." 71

Beverly's cheeks were as red as Aileen's, and her eyes snapping as menacingly as Sally's by the time she had come to the end of her very deliberately uttered speech, though she had not moved a hair's breadth upon her bench, nor had she changed her position. Her head was propped upon her hand as her arm rested upon the back of the seat, but she was looking straight at the astonished girls as she spoke.

Never had there been a more complete ambush sprung upon a reconnoitering party, and for a moment both girls were speechless. It was Sally who saved the day by springing away from Aileen and landing upon the seat beside Beverly as she cried: 72

"Are *you* to be our room-mate?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I've got to be *somebody's* I suppose and I've been assigned A 10. And from your conversation, which I couldn't very well help overhearing, you two seem to have been assigned B and C for study 10. But I've just given vent to my point of view."

There was still a good bit of electricity in the atmosphere, but it must be admitted that for the past eighteen hours Beverly had been pretty steadily brushed the wrong way, and it was an entirely new experience for her. Add to this a good dose of homesickness and a sense of utter loss at her separation from Athol, and her present frame of mind is not difficult to understand.

"Are you Beverly *Ashby* of Woodbine?" persisted Sally, while Aileen dropped down upon the seat beside Sally to listen.

"Yes," was the laconic if uncompromising reply. 73

"Well that's the best news I've heard since I left Richmond, and I'm just tickled nearly to death!" exclaimed Sally, spinning about to hug Aileen rapturously. This sudden change of base was so astonishing that Beverly's sense of humor came to her rescue and she laughed.

Sally again pivoted toward her crying:

"Why I know you perfectly well! I've known you all my life! And you know me just as well as I know you. Don't you know you do?"

"Not so that it overwhelms me," laughed Beverly.

"Where did you meet Miss Ashby?" asked Aileen who felt it was about time she came in for this wholesale discovery of "auld acquaintance."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. This is Aileen Norman, the third girl for suite 10. She's from Charlottesville and ought to know your family too. I reckon you know hers. Everybody does. Just like they know yours. Why your mother and mine went to Catonsville to school together. Didn't you know that? She was Sarah Wirt then. Why I think it's too lovely for words! And we were just as mad as fury when we started out to hunt up the new girl we had to room with this year and here you aren't a new girl at all but one we've always known. Why I'm so tickled I'm foolish. Hug me Aileen or it will all seem like a dream and I'll wake up and find we've got to roost with someone like that stupid Electra Sanderson, or Petty Gordon, who can't do a thing but talk about that midshipman at Annapolis to whom she says she's engaged, and she's only just seventeen. She makes me tired."

"I hope you'll forgive us for all we said as we came down the walk. We certainly had no personal feeling as you must understand, but we were pretty well stirred up over the idea of having to begin junior year with someone we didn't know after having had the same room-mate for three years," explained Aileen diplomatically, striving to pour a drop or two of oil upon perturbed waters.

"I couldn't very well feel any resentment toward you or Miss Conant when I didn't know either of you from Eve, and I'm sorry if I seemed to. The truth is I was lonely and homesick and just ready to light into anybody. Is Miss Woodhull always so high and mighty, and Miss Baylis so like an iceberg?"

"Mercy, did you fall into her clutches the first jump? She's the limit! Oh, Miss Woodhull's so deadly afraid she won't uphold the dignity of dear Bosting and her Massy Alma Mater that she almost dies under the burden, but thank goodness, we don't see much of her, and Miss Baylis is *such* a fool we laugh behind her back. She's trying to make herself solid with the Empress because she thinks she will succeed to her honors when the high and mighty lady retires. But she's harmless because all her airs and graces are veneer. Give her one good scratch some day and you'll see how thin the veneer really is. But come on up to No. 10, and let's get settled. Neither Aileen nor I had any heart to do a thing until we found out who had been popped into A. Cricky, but I'm glad it's *you*," and slipping her arm through Beverly's right one while Aileen took possession of the left, all three hurried toward the house, Sally announcing:

"We'll introduce you to all the nice girls and we'll call ourselves the "Three Mousquetaires." There may not be any such word, but that doesn't matter in the least: It's Frenchy and I *love* French. And besides, we mean to band together to fight for our rights and down oppression," asserted this young Jacobin, as arm in arm all three made their way to the pretty suite allotted to them on the second floor of the wing, for Beverly had entered Leslie Manor as a junior, her previous work under Norman Lee having well fitted her to do so.

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## CHAPTER VII

### A RUNAWAY

By the end of October, the golden month, and always beautiful in Virginia, things had shaken into routine. During that time suite Number 10 had become one of the most popular in the school, as well as one of the most attractive, for, to the intense satisfaction of the trio their belongings were in as perfect harmony as themselves, Beverly's things being pink, Sally's the softest green and Aileen's all white and gold. Consequently all went merry as a marriage bell.

But there had been hours of intense longing upon Beverly's part for the freedom of bygone days and Athol. The brother and sister had been entirely too united in every way to find perfect compensation in the companionship of others, however warm the friendships formed, and each missed the other sorely. Of course letters had been exchanged during the month, but letters are a poor substitute for the voice of those we love best. Only Mrs. Ashby realized how intense was the brother's and sister's longing to see each other. Archie, also, fumed under the enforced separation and vowed that "something was going to break loose mighty sudden if his people and Athol's didn't get busy and *do* something."

Had Beverly been at liberty to ride Apache as formerly the ten miles separating the two schools would have meant merely a jolly cross country run, but she was only permitted to ride when the other girls rode, and under the supervision of a groom who was held responsible for his charges.

Nor had the boys been allowed to visit Beverly, the male sex being regarded by Miss Woodhull as a sort of natural enemy whose sole aim in life was to circumvent, deprive and rob hers of its just rights. Miss Woodhull was essentially a militant suffragette and her stanch admirers, Miss Baylis and Miss Stetson were her enthusiastic partisans. Miss Atwell, the teacher of esthetic dancing and posing, who came thrice weekly to instill grace into the graceless and emphasize it

in those who were already graceful, sat, so to speak, upon the fence, undecided which way to jump. She inclined strongly to the strictly feminine attitude of dependence upon the stronger sex, but was wise to the advantage of keeping in touch with those occupying the seats of the mighty at Leslie Manor.

At Kilton Hall rules were less stringent. The boys could ride every afternoon if they chose and often did so, ranging the country far and wide. Many a time they had gone tearing past Leslie Manor when the girls were stived up within and been exasperated at being "so near and yet so far," as an old song puts it. Hence Archie's frame of mind, and his determination to change the existing state of affairs before long if possible. Letters sent home by the boys and those Beverly wrote to her mother were the seeds sown which the three hoped would later start the "something doing." Meanwhile Beverly chafed under the restraint, and such chafing generally leads to some sort of an outbreak.

It was Wednesday afternoon, October twenty-ninth, and riding-lesson day. Every Wednesday and Saturday Andrew Jackson Jefferson, whose name was as queer a combination as himself, for he seemed to be about half *horse*, so wonderful was his understanding of those animals, and so more than wonderful *theirs* of him, took his "yo'ng sem'nary ladies a-gallop in' th'oo de windin's ob de kentry roads," proud as a Drum Major of his charges.

And well he might be, for Andrew Jackson Jefferson had not only entire charge of the horses belonging to Leslie Manor, but he had bought them, and he knew good horseflesh. So the Leslie Manor horses as well as the half dozen boarded there by the students, were always a credit to the school. Their coats shone like satin, their hoofs were spick and span, no shoes ever clicked for want of the proverbial nail, fetlocks were trimmed like a bridegroom's hair, and manes and forelocks brushed to the silkiness of a bride's. Harness and bits were scrupulous. Jefferson knew his business.

When Apache was sent to Leslie Manor he was such a contrast to the other horses that Jefferson at first looked askance at him, but Apache was a wise little beast. As a preliminary move he gently nozzled Jefferson, then by way of showing him that he was not to be taken too seriously, he flew up into the air, executed a wild fling and descended upon the exact spot from which he had risen, which exhibition so tickled Jefferson that he grinned broadly and announced to his underlings:

"Dat's some hawse! Yo' hyar me! Befo' he's done been in dis hyre stable a week he gwine ter be eatin' outer ma hand," and Apache verified the statement by becoming Jefferson's abject slave before four days had passed, and Beverly basked in reflected glory, for was she not Apache's "Yo'ng Mist'ess?"

"Kyant tech dat chile nothin' 'bout *ridin'*", was Jefferson's fiat when he saw Beverly astride her little mouse-colored and white mount. "*She* paht ob dat hawse!"

There had already been several riding lessons since school opened, and each time Jefferson's delight in his newest charges increased. Born and brought up with the race, Beverly knew how to handle the negroes, and Jefferson as promptly became her slave as Apache had become his.

Now the prescribed route for these riding excursions was within a five-mile radius of the school. "No further," said Miss Woodhull. Those bounds seemed safe from encroachment upon the part of the Kilton Hall students, even had their Wednesday and Saturday mornings and afternoons not been entirely given over to athletics, thus precluding excursions upon horseback.

As a rule Jefferson took out eight or ten girls, but this particular Wednesday afternoon several had obtained permission to go to town with Mrs. Bonnell to do some shopping, have some photographs taken, see the dentists and what not, so the riders were reduced to Sally, Aileen, Petty Gaylord, Hope MacLeod, a senior, and Beverly. All were well mounted and each was looking her best in her trim habit.

It was customary for the party to stop at the porte cochere to be inspected by Miss Woodhull, but on this particular afternoon Miss Woodhull was absent at a social function in the neighborhood and the duty devolved upon Miss Stetson, the teacher of mathematics, a strong-minded lady with very pronounced views. She dressed as nearly like a man as was compatible with law and decency, wore her hair short, and affected a masculine stride. She came from Miss Woodhull's state.

Jefferson drew up his cavalcade of five and awaited the appearance of Miss Stetson whom he despised with all your true negro's power to despise "white folks what doesn't know dey is white." Miss Stetson insisted upon calling him Mr. Jefferson, affirming that "the race never *could* be self-respecting or, indeed, wholly emancipated, until treated as the equals of the white race."

She now strode out upon the piazza, cast a critical eye upon the horses, nodded and said:

"Very fit. Very fit. Quite in order. You are to be commended Mr. Jefferson, but er—isn't there something a little peculiar in the appearance of your horses' er—er—headgear? Their *eyes* seem to be exposed more than usual; and look somewhat bare, so to speak. Can it be possible that you have forgotten something?"

"Fergot?" queried Jefferson, looking from one animal to the other. "Ah cyant see nothin' I'se done fergot, Miss Ste'son. What it look lak ain't on de hawses, ma'am?"

"Why their eyes seem so prominent. They seem to *see* too much, er—"

Beverly was attacked with a sudden paroxysm of coughing. Jefferson nearly disgraced himself,



but managed to stammer:

"We doesn't ingen'ally put blinders on de saddle hawses, Miss, but ef yer says so I'll tak 'em long back ter de stables an' change de saddle headstalls fer de *kerridge* ones, tho' it sure would look mighty cur'ous."

"No! No! Certainly not. It was merely a remark in passing. You are the better judge of the requirements I dare say," and Miss Stetson beat a hasty retreat, entirely forgetting to warn her charges against venturing beyond bounds.

Could she have seen Beverly's lips set she might have grown suspicious. The riding party started, Jefferson muttering:

"Ma Lawd! dat 'oman suah do make me tired. Blinders on ma saddle hawses! Huh! 'Mr. Jefferson'. Reckon I bettah tek ter callin' her Sis' Angeline," Angeline being Miss Stetson's christian name.

When the grounds of the school were left a few miles behind her Beverly drew up to Sally's side and said significantly:

"She did not tell us to keep within bounds."

"She forgot to. She was too busy missing the blinders," laughed Sally. Beverly laughed softly and continued:

"You girls hold in your horses when we've gone a little further. I want to ride on ahead with Jefferson. I've a word to say and I've an idea he is in a receptive mood."

"What are you up to, Bev?" asked Aileen.

"Just watch out. We'll take a new route today unless I'm much mistaken," and touching Apache lightly with her heel she cavorted to Jefferson's side. He had been too absorbed in his thoughts of Miss Stetson to leave room for any others: Your darkie is not unlike a horse in that respect; his brain is rarely capable of holding *two* ideas at once. Perhaps that explains why darkies and horses are usually in such accord.

As Apache careened against Jumbo's side the big horse gave a plunge forward which jerked Jefferson's wits back to his surroundings. That was exactly what Beverly wished.

"Lor' Miss Bev'ly, you done scare Jumbo an' me foolish," he exclaimed, striving to bring Jumbo down to his usual easy pace, for the tall hack had resented the little broncho's familiarity, though he could not know that his own grandsire and Apache's were the same.

"Jefferson, will you do something to please me this afternoon?" she asked eagerly.

"I shore will if it aint gwine ter get me into no fuss wid de Misses," temporized Jefferson.

"It won't get you into any fuss with anybody. Miss Woodhull is not at home and Miss Stetson was too busy trying to find out where the horses had lost their blinders to tell us *not* to take the road to Kilton Hall."

Jefferson almost chortled.

"So, when we come to that road will you turn down it and leave the rest to me? And don't be surprised or frightened at anything Apache may do."

"I aint scared none at what you an' dat hawse doin'. He's got sense and—" added Jefferson with concession—"so has you. I aint got no time ter be a troublin' 'bout you-all. It's dese yo'ng ladies I has ter bat my eyes at; an' dey shore do keep me busy sometimes. Now what I tell you? Look at dat?" and as though in sympathy with Beverly's schemes, Chicadee, the little mare Petty Gaylord was riding chose that moment to shy at some leaves which fluttered to the ground and, of course, Petty shrieked, and then followed up the shriek with the "tee-hee-hee," which punctuated every tenth word she spoke whether apropos or not.

That was exactly the cue Beverly needed. A slight pressure of her knee upon Apache's side was sufficient. He was off like a comet, and to all intents and purposes entirely beyond his rider's control.

Sally and Aileen laughed outright. Petty stopped her giggle to scream: "Oh, she's being run away with!"

"Not so much as it would seem," was Hope MacLeod's quiet comment as she laid in place a lock of Satin Gloss's mane, and quieted him after his sympathetic plunge.

"Well ef she is, she *is*, but I'm bettin' she knows whar she a-runnin' *at*," said Andrew Jackson Jefferson more quietly than the situation seemed to warrant. "But just de same I'm thinkin' we might as well fool oursefs some," and he hastened his pace, the others doing likewise. It would never do to let one of his charges be run away with and not make an effort to save her from a possible calamity.

Meanwhile the runaways were having the very time of their lives. Not since that two-mile race to Four Corners for the letter which proved the wedge to divide her own and Athol's ways, had Beverly been able to "let out a notch," as she put it. Nor had the little broncho been permitted to twinkle his legs as they were now twinkling over that soft dirt road. Virginia roads were made for equestrians, *not* automobiles. Head thrust forward as far as his graceful slender neck permitted, ears laid back for the first unwelcome word to halt, eyes flashing with exhilaration, and nostrils wide for the deep, full inhalations and exhalations which sent the rich blood coursing through each pulsing artery, little Apache was enjoying his freedom as much as his rider. In two seconds they were at the top of a rise of ground, down at the further side and out of sight of the others. Then, to make the exhibition realistic, Beverly drew out her hat pin, gave it a toss to the side of the road, and the wind completed the job by whisking her soft felt hat off her head and landing it upon the roadside bush.

90

Oh, it was glorious! Five miles? What were five miles to the little beastie which had many a time pounded off twenty-five without turning a hair? Or to Beverly who had often ridden fifty in one day with Uncle Athol and her brother? Just a breather. And when there swept through the gateway of Kilton Hall a most exalted, hatless, rosy-cheeked, dancing-eyed lassie mounted upon a most hilarious steed, the gate-keeper came within an ace of having apoplexy, for she was a portly old body.

But Beverly did not pause for explanations. Her objective point was the athletic field at the rear of the building and her appearance upon it might have been regarded in the light of a distinct sensation. It would never do to forsake too promptly the role of being run away with. There were coaches and referees upon tennis court, cinder path and football field, and boys galore, in every sort of athletic garb, performing every sort of athletic stunt.

91

When Beverly set out to do anything she rarely omitted any detail to make it as near perfect as possible. As she tore across the lawn which led to the field her sharp eyes discovered Athol upon one of the tennis courts and closer at hand a lot of other boys sprinting, gracefully or otherwise, around the cinder path, taking hurdles placed about a hundred feet apart.

Now, if there was one thing in this world upon which Apache and his young mistress agreed more entirely than another, it was the pure delight of skimming over a fence. A five-footer was a mere trifle. The three-foot hurdles upon the cinder path a big joke. The tennis nets? Pough!

If Beverly really was tugging upon Apache's bridle he was not permitting anything so trivial as a girl's strength to bother him, and her knees told him quite a different story as he swept upon the cinder path, took two hurdles like a deer and was off over the tennis courts and over a net before the astonished players could draw a full breath.

Then they woke up!

92

"It's a runaway!" cried Mr. Cushman, who had charge of the football coaching, to be echoed by the tall quarter back in football togs, as both broke away in pursuit, the whole field quickly taking the alarm also. But that tennis court held one individual whose wits worked as quickly as the star performer's, and there and then shrilled across it a high-pitched, peculiar whistle which they both knew mighty well, and the four-legged one obeyed instantaneously by wheeling so suddenly that he put a very realistic climax upon the scene by nearly unseating the two-legged one, as he tore pell mell for the whistler and came to a sudden halt in front of him, to the increased astonishment of the general audience.

"Gee whiz, Bev! What's let loose?" cried Athol, trying to respond to Apache's nozzling, whinnying demonstrations of delight and reach his sister's extended hands at the same time, while Archie did his record-breaking sprint across the gridiron, and the whole field came boiling toward them.

"I have. Don't you see I've been run away with? It's lucky Apache turned in here," answered Beverly, with remarkable calmness for one so lately escaped from disaster or sudden death, as she brushed back her flying locks, for—well—reasons.

93

"Run away nothing! *You* run away with! Piffle. Ah, cut it out Apache! I know you're ready to throw a fit at seeing me, but keep bottled up for a minute, won't you?" he ended as Apache lay hold of his tennis shirt and tried to jerk him into attention. But he gave the bony little head a good-natured mauling nevertheless, as Archie rushing up exclaimed:

"You're a winner, Bev!" Then the others surrounded them, the two coaches really concerned lest the young lady had suffered some mishap, and Mr. Cushman brushing the boys aside as he asked:

"Are you faint? Can we be of any assistance?" and Mr. Ford, the new instructor from Yale and mighty good to look upon (so decided Beverly in the space of one glance) pressed to her side to ask: "Were you riding alone when your mount bolted?"

Before Beverly could draw breath to reply the answer came from another quarter.

94

Now there is no such accomplished actor, (or liar) upon the face of the round world as your genuine darkey. Indeed he can do both so perfectly that he actually lives in the characters he temporarily creates and believes his own prevarications, and that, it must be admitted, is *some achievement*.

When Beverly departed so suddenly upon her self-elected route, Jefferson naturally had but a very hazy idea of her intentions. He knew Kilton Hall lay over five miles straight ahead, and he knew, also that Beverly's brother was at school there, but Jefferson did not possess an analytical mind: It could not out-run Apache. He knew, however, that he must put up a pretty good bluff if he wished to save his kinky scalp upon his return to Leslie Manor, so he set about planning to "hand out dat fool 'oman a corker." Moreover, Petty was inclined to take the situation seriously. Petty was sweetly romantic, but stupidly literal. At times a hopeless combination. The riding party had cantered along in the fleeing Beverly's wake for a little more than a mile when Petty spied the hat upon the bush. Nothing further was needed to confirm her misgivings.

95

"She *has* been run away with, girls! She has! I think it's perfectly awful not to ride faster. She may be lying on the road d-e-a-d-!"

By this time Jefferson thought it might be politic to manifest more concern, so throwing a well-assimilated anxiety into voice and manner he said hastily:

"Now you fo' yo'ng ladies jist come 'long careful an' orderly, so's not ter bring no mo' trebbulations, 'pon us an' I'll light out fer dat run-way. Ma Lawd, I'se been clar distracted fer de las' ten minutes fer ter know which-a-way ter tu'n! I aint really believe Miss Bev'ly is in no danger 'twell Miss Petty done got me so sympathizin', but now I'se shore rattled an' I'se gwin' ter find out fer sartin. Come on yo' Jumbo! Wo'k yo' laigs fer fair," and under touch of the spur the big horse broke into a gait which bade fair to speedily overhand the scapegraces, *providing Jefferson let him do so.*

A turn in the road simplified the problem.

"Now don' yo' tak ter sweatin' yo'self so's I has ter spend a hull hour a-coolin' yo' down," admonished Jefferson when well out of sight. "We'll git there, an' when we does we'll mak' one fair show down," and thereupon Jefferson restrained his steed to a long swinging run which told off the miles without making him turn a hair until Kilton Hall was in sight. *Then* the dusky actor and his mount prepared to make their spectacular entré. Pulling up at the roadside Jefferson threw his cap upon the ground, twisted his tie awry, and let fly the belt of his riding blouse, then dismounting, he caught up a few handfuls of dust and promptly transformed big bay Jumbo into as disreputable looking a horse as dust rubbed upon his muzzle, his chest and his warm moist flanks could transform him. It was this likely pair which came pounding across the athletic field of Kilton Hall at the moment of Mr. Ford's question, the human of the species, with eyes rolling until they were nearly all whites, shouting as he drew near:

96

"My Lawd-a-mighty, Miss Bev'ly, is yo' hu't? Is yo' daid?"

It was a good enough bit of acting to have won the actor fame and fortune. As a matter of fact, Beverly gave one glance at the fly-away figure, then clasping both arms around Apache's neck, buried her face in his mane and to all intents and purposes collapsed into a paroxysm of tears, to the entire dismay of Mr. Cushman, and the skeptical "sizing up" of the situation by Mr. Ford, more lately from the campus. It was Athol who promptly turned a few handsprings behind their backs and Archie who rolled over upon the grass chortling.

97

"Don't be alarmed! Don't be alarmed, my good man. Your young lady is none the worse for her involuntary run (just here a distinct snort came from the ground behind Mr. Cushman) though I dare say a little unstrung and exhausted. But we stopped her mount ("yes you did!" came sotto voce from Athol) and now we will lead your mistress back to the house where Mrs. Kilton will be delighted to minister to her comfort. Are you too nervous to ride to the rear entrance, Miss Ashby?" for during the few words spoken Mr. Cushman had discovered that this was Athol Ashby's sister, had the resemblance left any doubt of that fact.

Beverly resumed an upright position, hastily wiped away her tears, (one *can* laugh as well as weep them) and answered:

"Oh, no sir. Of course I was a little startled at first, but Apache is never vicious, and it was only the need of exercise which made us—*him*—bolt, you know."

98

The acrobat came to an upright position and very nearly upset the whole show.

Meantime Jefferson with many flutterings and gesticulations, had dismounted and managed to work his way to Archie's side and whisper:

"Don't yo' let on, will yo' suh?"

"Not on your sweet life. It's the best ever. But where's the rest of the bunch? There must *be* some. You always take out a full fledged seminary."

"Praise Gawd der aint but fo' dis time, an' dey's yander on de pike some—'ers. But I'se near scared blue."

"Gray, you mean. Keep cool. I'll fix it all right. Oh, Mr. Cushman the groom had to leave the other young ladies back yonder on the road and he's a good bit upset about it. Hadn't he better ride back to them? They'll be scared blue you know."

"Certainly. Certainly. By all means. Return to them at once. This young lady will be carefully looked after," and Jefferson lost no time in going.

99

"You'd better bring the whole outfit—I—er—I mean you'd better bring the other young ladies to the Hall," called Mr. Ford, deciding that if Beverly was a sample of the Leslie Manor girls it would be just as well to see more of the material. Had he caught the sudden flash in Archie's eyes perhaps he would have grown a bit wiser.

Twenty minutes later all five girls were seated in Mrs. Kilton's cozy living room, the boys, and the instructors who had shifted into drawing-room garments in record time, serving hot chocolate and little iced cakes.

As they were not expected home until five anyway there was no cause for concern. There would be no alarm at Leslie Manor. Meanwhile Jefferson, who had looked after the horses, was holding the floor in the servant's quarters. If a report of that afternoon's experiences did reach Leslie Manor he meant to have first scoop.

After an hour spent very delightfully, for Mr. Ford was attention itself to Beverly, to Archie's ill-concealed disgust, Hope MacLeod advised a move toward home. As they were about to start Beverly asked sweetly:

"Oh, dear Mrs. Kilton, would you mind if Athol showed me his room? You know we have never before in all our lives been separated and I get so homesick for him and his traps it just seems as though I couldn't stand it."

"Why of course you may go up, my dear," smiled kindly Mrs. Kilton. She was too wholesome to see the least impropriety in so simple a request.

"Oh, hold on a second, Ath. Keep her a minute until I rush up and stow a few of our duds. We didn't stop to slick things up when we shifted," and Archie bounded away.

"Come on now, Bev. I reckon he's had time to make Number 70 presentable," said Athol three minutes later, and the brother and sister went demurely from the room.

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## CHAPTER IX

### WHILE GOBLINS DANCED

101

Although in little sympathy with frivolous forms of entertainment, Miss Woodhull did condescend to a Hallowe'en Masquerade each year, and two nights after Beverly's John Gilpin performance the girls were preparing for the dance in the big gymnasium.

A collection had been taken up among the sixty girls constituting the academic grades and a couple of musicians engaged for the occasion. They came from an adjacent town where they formed part of a colored orchestra of more than local fame, which was in great demand for miles around. Consequently, the girls would have good music for their frolic and as Mrs. Bonnell looked to the refreshments, everything was satisfactory excepting Miss Woodhull's veto upon "the absurd practices of Hallowe'en:" meaning the love tests of fate and fortune usually made that night. Those were debarred, though many a one was indulged in in secret of which that practical lady little kenned.

102

As a hostess and chaperone were deemed absolutely indispensable upon any occasion, however informal, Mrs. Bonnell was always eagerly sought after by the girls to act in the former capacity and Miss Dalton the gym instructor in the latter. Miss Dalton seemed just like a girl herself, and was, in fact, not many years her pupils' senior. She was in her twenty-fourth year, but looked about nineteen, a jolly, chummy, lovable woman, though no instructor maintained better discipline, or was more willingly obeyed. She and Mrs. Bonnell worked in perfect harmony when their duties brought them together.

Now it is only reasonable to surmise that Beverly and the boys had made the very utmost of the fifteen minutes spent in Athol's room the previous Wednesday, and some lightening-like communications had been interchanged. On the way back to Leslie Manor, Beverly, Sally and Aileen had kept somewhat in the rear, Petty and Hope (by the latter's finesse) contriving to keep Jefferson between them. This had not been difficult because Jefferson simply *had* to have someone to talk to.

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What the three in the rear discussed will be seen later. Those leading were needlessly trying to convince Jefferson of the folly of making any reference whatsoever to the unexpected route taken that afternoon.

Had they only known it, he was as anxious as they were to keep the affair from headquarters, his chief misgivings resting in the possibility of the report coming from Kilton Hall. As a matter of fact, it never occurred to either Dr. or Mrs. Kilton to report it. It was a mere incident which had ended rather pleasantly than otherwise, and, as a matter of fact, the relations between the two schools were not over cordial. Dr. and Mrs. Kilton had made very gracious overtures to Miss Woodhull when she first opened Leslie Manor, but desiring to keep distantly at arm's length all relations with a school that harbored boys, her response had been as frigid as her New England coast line in February. This was rather fortunate in the present case. Dr. and Mrs. Kilton not only requested the instructors not to give needless publicity to the affair, or anxiety to Miss Woodhull by permitting any report of the runaway to become circulated, but also warned the servants and forbade the boys discussing it abroad. And the boys were wise enough to put two and two together. So a discreet silence was maintained, and Miss Woodhull spared a nerve

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shock.

At seven-thirty o'clock on Hallowe'en, suite Number 10 buzzed like a bee-hive. The three occupants were dressing, two or three girls were assisting at the robing, and two or three more who were already costumed were acting as spectators.

Beverly was going as Tweedle-dum, her costume consisting of funny little ruffled trousers, a Lord Fauntleroy shirt, jacket and collar, her hair braided and tucked inside her waist and her head covered by a huge Glengarry bonnet. Tiny patent-leather pumps and little blue socks completed the funny makeup. She was as bonny a little lad as one could find, her name being plainly printed upon her big collar. Who would complete the pair by being Tweedle-dee no one had been able to coax from her. Her reply to all the girl's importunities being:

105

"Just wait and see if we don't match well."

Sally was to be Will-o'-the-Wisp, and a plump, spooky sprite she made with dabs of phosphorus upon her fluttering black cambric costume, and funny peaked cap, which glowed uncannily when the room was darkened. She carried a little electric bulb lantern which unexpectedly flashed its blinding rays into people's faces.

Aileen chose to be the evening star and very lovely she looked in her costume made of several silver-spangled scarfs draped over one of her dainty "nighties," which, of course, fell straight from her shoulders. Her hair was caught up with every rhinestone pin or buckle she owned or could borrow, and Mrs. Bonnell had supplied from the properties kept for private theatricals the glittering star she wore above her forehead.

Aileen moved a goddess and she looked a queen, for she was a very stately, lovely young girl.

At the stroke of eight all were ready and a general rush was made for the gym, the girls laughing, talking, jostling each other and in most hilarious mood, but, when they reached that gaily decorated room Tweedle-dum was not among them.

106

The gym presented a pretty picture that night lighted by pumpkin Jack o' Lanterns in which electric bulbs had been hidden, and by grotesque paper lanterns representing bats, owls and all sorts of flying nocturnal creatures. The side walls had been covered with gorgeous autumn foliage, palms and potted rubber plants stood all about, and last, but by no means least, there was a long table laden with goodies and more pumpkin decorations. The room was a fitting scene for goblin's revels.

A barn dance had just begun, when down through the gym pranced Tweedle-dum *and* Tweedle-dee, and so identical were the figures that no mortal being could have told one from the other had they chanced to become separated. But this they seemed to have no intention of doing. Together they went through the figures of the pretty fancy dance, prancing, twirling, advancing, retreating; arms clasped or held above each other's heads, feet twinkling in perfect time, heads nodding, eyes dancing through the peepers of their little black half-masks, lips smiling to reveal faultless teeth.

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In two minutes everybody was asking:

"Who *is* it? Who *are* they? How *can* they look so exactly alike? We didn't know there were two girls in the school who matched so well, and who could do everything so exactly alike."

But neither Tweedle-dum nor Tweedle-dee enlightened the questioners. Indeed, neither spoke one word, signs having to answer to all queries.

Presently the musicians struck up a hornpipe, when away they went in the jolliest dance eyes ever looked upon, and would have absorbed all attention had not a new diversion been created just then.

During their prancing, Sally, in her Will-o'-the-Wisp costume, had been darting in and out between the tall potted plants and bowers constructed of Autumn leaves, her luminous tatters fluttering and her dancing light blinding every dancer into whose face she flashed it.

Just as Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee were in the height of their performance she darted from her bosky nook and flitted down the room, closely followed by a tall Jack o' Lantern with his pumpkin light. No one in the room was so tall. Who could it be? There was just one person in the school who might look as tall if so disguised and that was Miss Stetson, but even the liveliest imagination could hardly fancy Miss Stetson in that guise. Moreover, Miss Stetson could never have pranced with such supple grace as this dancing Jack was prancing after the Will-o'-the-Wisp. No, it could not be Miss Stetson.

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Towering above the nimble little Will, Jack cavorted, swung his lantern and by signs indicated his desire to imitate Tweedle-dum's and Tweedle-dee's performances, to which Will promptly acceded and the quartette hornpipe was on.

Now it was Miss Woodhull's custom to grace all festive occasions by her presence just prior to the stroke of nine-thirty when refreshments were served. The revelers were to unmask before partaking of the feast. After the feast they were at liberty to dance until ten-thirty but not a moment later.

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The fun was at its height, Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee had danced with every other goblin, the evening star included, though it must be confessed that Tweedle-dee had been unanimously pronounced the better leader by his partners, and Jack "almost as good as a boy; she was so strong and danced so divinely," though none had as yet guessed the identity of either. Then Miss Woodhull, escorted by Miss Baylis, entered the gym. Had it been possible to suddenly

reduce the temperature of the room and thus congeal the dancers the effect produced could hardly have been more chilling.

From the merriest, most hilarious frolicing, the gayest, cheeriest bantering and laughter, to the utmost decorum was the transformation effected in two minutes after Miss Woodhull's and Miss Baylis' entrance. With the exception of Tweedle-dum, Tweedle-dee, Will-o'-the-Wisp and Jack o' Lantern, the girls ceased dancing and stood in groups and even the musicians played more softly.

There was not the vestige of a smile on Miss Woodhull's face as she looked upon the four dancers. She tolerated such frivolity; she was compelled to do so; her school would have been unpopular had she not done so; other schools approved of them.

Raising her lorgnettes, she looked sharply at the four dancing figures. Then turning to Mrs. Bonnell, who had crossed from the table to receive her, she asked:

"Who is that strikingly tall figure in the Jack o' Lantern costume. I did not know we had so tall a girl in the school."

"I am sure I do not know, Miss Woodhull. She came in after the dancing began. She sustains the character well, doesn't she?"

"I wish to know *who* she is. Send someone for her if you please," answered the principal, ignoring the question. She was a little doubtful of that tall girl. In times gone by some of her pupils had been guilty of indiscretions. If this were a repetition it must be nipped in the bud.

Mrs. Bonnell beckoned to one of the masqueraders, a jolly little Tam o' Shanta, and bade him bring Jack.

He nodded and instantly darted off in pursuit of him. As well have tried to capture the original of the character!

The mad chase lasted perhaps five minutes. Miss Woodhull was powerless. How could she accuse Jack of disrespect to her or disregard of her commands when he could not possibly have known them? He was only acting his part to perfection any way. Besides Tam never had caught the goblins: The shoe had been on the other foot. But at that second Jack tripped over a ring set in the floor of the gym and went sprawling, his pumpkin lantern flying out of his hand and breaking into a dozen fragments. Tam was almost upon him, but before he could lay hold Jack was up again, had made a spring, caught one of the flying rings which dangled high above his head, swung like a monkey from that to the next, and so on down the line until he was in range of the gallery, at which he hurled himself bodily, landed upon the railing, balanced a half-second and was safe upon the gallery floor, to the boundless amazement of the onlookers and absolute banishment of their suspicions regarding the identity of Miss Stetson. That spring settled his fate with Miss Woodhull: No girl in Leslie Manor could have performed such a feat, and all the dancers were staring speechless. It was the ominous silence before the storm.

"That masquerader is not a girl, Miss Bonnell! It is some boy! Who has perpetrated this outrage? Miss Baylis, order all the outer doors closed and guarded and a thorough search made. This matter shall be sifted to the very bottom. No, you will all remain in this room and immediately unmask under Mrs. Bonnell's eyes. I shall superintend the search," and Miss Woodhull sailed majestically from the room.

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## CHAPTER X

### THE SEARCH

"We're in for it," whispered Tweedle-dee to Tweedle-dum, as the two comical figures drew unobtrusively into the rear of the group of girls now removing their masks under Mrs. Bonnell's half-amused, half-serious eyes, for she began to suspect that some sort of innocent prank had been played which, like many another would have harmlessly played itself out if let alone. She had always been opposed to the rigorous ban placed upon boys and their visits to Leslie Manor by Miss Woodhull, believing and justifiably too, that such arbitrary rules only led to a livelier desire in the girls to meet said boys by hook or by crook.

"Hush!" whispered Tweedle-dum "and come behind this rubber plant. Now get down on your hands and knees and follow me."

Tweedle-dee promptly obeyed orders and the next moment was in front of the spiral stairway which led to the gallery.

"Make yourself as small as possible and crawl on your *stomach* up this staircase. At the other end of the gallery is a door leading into our wing. I can't tell you another thing. Just use your wits," and Tweedle-dum flitted back to be swallowed up in the crowd of girls who, once more restored to an equable frame of mind were laughing merrily, everyone asking everyone else if she knew who the Jack o' Lantern really was. This very fact was sufficient reassurance for Mrs.

Bonnell. She knew girls better than Miss Woodhull knew them in spite of having *known nothing* else for more than forty years, but she resolved then and there not to ask too many questions, which fact made two girls her slaves for life. The discipline department was not her province nor was it one which anything could have induced her to undertake. If Will-o'-the-Wisp was aware of the name of her partner in the quartette hornpipe, or Tweedle-dum knew Tweedle-dee's surname Miss Woodhull was the one to find it out, not she. So smiling upon the group before her she asked:

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"Are you now all visible to the naked eye and all accounted for? If so, let us to the feast, for time is speeding." No urging was needed and lots were promptly drawn for the privilege of cutting the fate cake. Mrs. Bonnell had not considered it necessary to mention the fact that she had ordered Aunt Sally, the cook, to bake one for the occasion, and while good fellowship and hilarity reign below let us follow two less fortunate mortals whom the witches seemed to have marked for their sport that night.

Agreeable with Miss Woodhull's orders, Miss Baylis, who was only too delighted to shine so advantageously in her superior's eyes, had scuttled away, issuing as she went, the order to close *all* outer doors and guard them, allowing no one to pass through. Guileless souls both hers and Miss Woodhull's, though another adjective might possibly be more apt. The house had a few windows as well as doors.

Meeting Miss Stetson on the stairs she found in her a militant coadjutor, and wireless could not have flashed the orders more quickly. Servants went a-running until one might have suspected the presence of a criminal in Leslie Manor rather than a mere boy.

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Meanwhile, what of Jack o' Lantern and Tweedle-dee? Jack, it must be admitted, had the greater advantage in having made a quicker get-away, but Leslie Manor had many bewildering turns and corners, and when one has been an inmate of a house less than—well, we won't specify the length of time—one cannot be blamed for growing confused. Jack had made for the very door Tweedle-dum had advised Tweedle-dee to make for and darted through it muttering as he paused a second to listen: "Gee, I wish I wasn't so confoundedly long legged!"

No sound coming to his ears from any of the rooms opening upon the corridor into which he had darted, he sprinted down its length until it terminated suddenly in a flight of stairs leading to the lower hall. He had descended about half way when a babel of voices sent him scuttling back again, and a moment later a voice commanded.

"Wesley, hurry up to the south wing. Whoever is in the house certainly tried to make an escape from that quarter."

"Yas'm. I catches 'em ef dey 're up dar," blustered Wesley Watts Mather, hurrying up the stairs and almost whistling to keep his courage up, for your true darkie finds All Saint's Night an awesome one, and not to be regarded lightly. Moreover, nearly all the electric lights were turned off, only those necessary to light the halls being left on, and this fact made the rooms seem the darker.

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Now Jack o' Lantern's costume, like Will-o'-the-Wisp's, had been liberally daubed with phosphorus and he still grasped the electric flash-light which had illuminated his shattered pumpkin. There was no time to stand upon ceremony for Wesley was almost at the top of the stairs. A door stood open at hand and he darted through it into the room, overturning a chair in the darkness.

"Hi, you! I done got you!" shouted his dusky pursuer and burst into the room in hot chase. The next instant the exultant shout changed to a howl of terror, for in the middle of that room stood a towering motionless figure from which radiated sheets of lightning, one blinding flash darting straight into the terrified darkie's eyes. "A flash ob lightenin' what cl'ar par'lyzed me an' helt ma feet fast to de floo'! Den, befo' I could get 'em loosen' dat hant jist lif' his hoof—yas ma'am, dat was a hoof, not no man's foot—an' I 'clar cross ma heart he done hist me froo dat do' an' cl'ar down dem stairs. He want no *man*. He de debbil hissef. No siree, yo' ain' gettin' me back up *dem* stairs twell some white folks gwine *fust*. Not *me*. I knows when ter lie low, I does." (Goal kicking develops a fellow's muscles.)

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Nor could any amount of urging or scolding prevail, and Miss Stetson, the strong-minded, was obliged to go up to investigate. But though every room was searched there was no sign of mortal being. All the window sashes in Leslie Manor had been rehung in the most approved modern methods and could be raised and lowered without a sound. A porch roof and a slender column are quite as available as flying rings to a born acrobat.

As she was returning from her fruitless search she encountered Miss Woodhull.

"Well?" queried that lady.

"It is *not* well. If there really was any one in that wing, which I am compelled to doubt, he has made a most amazing escape."

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"Doubt?" repeated Miss Woodhull with no little asperity. "You will hardly doubt the evidence of my own eyesight, will you Miss Stetson? I *saw* that person cross the gallery and enter the south wing. Be good enough to go down to the gymnasium and call the roll. I desire to know if all the girls are accounted for."

To judge by Miss Stetson's expression she was none too well pleased by the principal's tone. Nevertheless, she repaired to the gym and ignoring Mrs. Bonnell's assurance that no girls were missing proceeded to call the roll. Of course all responded.

Meanwhile, Miss Woodhull had summoned Jefferson, who if no less superstitious, was backed up by her august presence, and together they mounted the stairs and made a room-to-room inspection, peering into every closet or any possible hiding place. Not a sign of human being was found until they came to the study of Suite 10, then a faint sound was audible in bedroom A beyond.

Quicker than it would seem possible for a person of her proportions to move, Miss Woodhull entered the study, reached the electric switch and turned on the lights, calling at the same moment:

"Who is in that room?"

There was no reply, and the irate lady, speedily covering the distance between the electric switch and the bedroom door, turned on the light in that room also.

There stood Tweedle-dee.

He had removed his mask and was about to don a long gray automobile coat.

"What are you doing here, Beverly, when I gave explicit orders that no one should leave the gymnasium?" demanded Miss Woodhull, frowning portentously upon the delinquent.

"My costume is so thin I was cold. I came up after my coat, Miss Woodhull," was the smiling answer, spoken quite softly enough to turn away wrath.

"You came in direct disobedience to my orders? You may now remain here for the rest of the evening."

"Oh please, Miss Woodhull, let me go back. They are to have a reel," begged her victim.

"No, I have spoken. You will remain in your room."

Without more ado the defrauded one hurled herself into the middle of the bed, buried her head in the immaculate pillows and burst into a paroxysm of sobs.

"You have brought this upon yourself. Had you obeyed me there would have been no occasion for this punishment."

"I was freezing! I just won't stay stived up here while all the girls are having such fun in the gym. It isn't fair. I haven't done a single thing but get this coat," was sobbed from the bed, as a vigorous kick sent the eiderdown cover flying almost in Miss Woodhull's face. A little more energy would have compassed it.

Miss Woodhull deigned no reply, but turning swept from the room locking the door behind her. She could deal summarily with rebellious pupils. Then the search was resumed under her eagle eye, but without results. Not a creature was to be found, and dismissing her followers she returned to the gym to get Miss Stetson's report.

"Are *all* the older pupils present?" she asked.

"They are," replied Miss Stetson somewhat icily.

"Excepting Beverly Ashby, of course."

"Beverly Ashby is here. She is standing in the group near the table," corrected Miss Stetson with some satisfaction.

"Impossible. I have just this moment locked her in her room for disobedience and insolence. You are mistaken."

"Hardly, as you may convince yourself by merely looking."

Miss Woodhull did look and for a moment felt as though caught in the spell of that mystic night. Beverly Ashby stood laughing and talking with Sally Conant, Aileen and Mrs. Bonnell, as merry a little Tweedle-dum as one could picture. Miss Woodhull caught her eye and motioned her to approach.

"Ye gods and little fishes," whispered Beverly to Sally as she left the group and went toward Miss Woodhull. That lady's expression was most forbidding.

"Why are you here?" she demanded icily.

Beverly looked at her innocently as she answered: "I don't think I quite understand you, Miss Woodhull."

"Not understand me? Is your intellect impaired? Did I not order you to remain in your room for the remainder of this evening?"

"No, Miss Woodhull."

Miss Woodhull turned crimson. Such barefaced audacity was unheard of.

"How did you manage to leave the room, may I inquire?"

"I have not left the room since I entered it at eight o'clock, Miss Woodhull."

"Mrs. Bonnell," called the now thoroughly exasperated principal, "did you see Beverly Ashby return to this gymnasium less than ten minutes ago?"

"Beverly has not been *out* of it, Miss Woodhull. She has been enjoying her refreshments with the other pupils."

"Ridiculous! Miss Stetson, perhaps *you* have a clearer idea of facts since I requested you to



return to the gymnasium and call the roll. Was Beverly present when you did so?"

"She was standing not ten feet from me, Miss Woodhull. Of this I am positive, because her cap fell from her head as she replied and delayed the response of the girl next on the roll, who stopped to pick it up."

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"I believe you are all irresponsible! These silly Hallowe'en customs have turned your heads. I have never approved such inane proceedings. Why you may as well try to convince me that I, myself, did not enter Suite 10, and that I did not speak to Beverly Ashby in it not ten minutes ago, and leave her there in the middle of her bed weeping and conducting herself like a spoiled child because she could not participate in the closing Virginia Reel. Utter nonsense! Utter nonsense! But we will have no more hoodwinking, rest assured. There has been quite enough already. You may all go to your rooms reels or no reels. I have experienced enough folly for one night—if not much worse."

For a second there was profound silence, then a general cry of protest arose. To be defrauded of their Virginia Reel for no justifiable reason, and sent to bed before ten o'clock like a lot of naughty children when they really had not done a single thing, was too much.

Petty wept openly. Petty's griefs, sorrow or joys could invariably find prompt relief in tears or giggles. She existed in a perpetual state of emotion of some sort.

Aileen murmured:

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"Look at Miss Stetson's face. She doesn't know whether to frown or smile. She will lose her reason presently."

"Oh, why need the Empress have come in at all. We were having such fun and—" Sally paused significantly.

Beverly nodded a quick comprehension of what the conclusion of Sally's sentence would have been, and said, under cover of the babel of voices, for even the Empress, stalking along ahead of her rebellious ones could not entirely subdue their protests:

"And I am wondering what we shall find up in Number 10, and especially in bedroom A." And in spite of those possibilities she laughed softly.

"And not a single mouthful of that delicious spread after those ten miles. I call it a perfect outrage," muttered Sally like a distant thunder-storm.

Beverly flashed one quizzical, tantalizing glance at her. "Don't let *that* worry you," she said.

"What?" whispered Sally eagerly.

"Hush. Listen to the Empress. Oh, isn't this the richest you ever heard?"

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## CHAPTER XI

### "DE HANTS DONE GOT DIS HYER HOUSE SURE"

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They had now reached the south corridor, Miss Woodhull in the full force of her convictions, again heading straight for Suite 10, and bedroom A, in order to substantiate her statement of having within the past twenty minutes locked Beverly in.

She was affirming in no doubtful voice to Miss Stetson: "There is no reason that I should try to justify myself or endeavor to prove that my faculties are unimpaired, unless I choose to do so, but I prefer to convince both you and Mrs. Bonnell that I generally know what I am talking about. You will find that door securely locked!"

They needed no urging, but the door opened at a touch, locks nevertheless and notwithstanding. The light was switched on instantaneously. The room was absolutely undisturbed, likewise the bed. The puff cover, so lately hurtling through space and straight for Miss Woodhull's august head, lay neatly folded in a triangle across the foot of the bed. The pillow case did not show a line or crease. The spread was absolutely unrumpled. In short, not one single thing was out of place or tumbled. The room might not have been occupied for twenty-four hours so far as any sign of disturbance was evident.

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Miss Stetson looked just a trifle skeptical. Mrs. Bonnell's lips twitched a bit at the corners though her face was most respectfully sober.

With one withering glance at Beverly, the teachers, and all concerned, Miss Woodhull remarked scathingly: "If you were capable of such expedition in worthier causes you would lead the school," and glancing neither to the right nor left, swept from the room.

"You are to retire at once and no noise, young ladies," ordered Miss Stetson, divided between satisfaction at having proved her statement regarding Beverly's presence in the gym and her resentment at being doubted at the outset.

Mrs. Bonnell had already retreated to her special sanctum, there to have a quiet laugh over the

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whole absurd situation. She had guessed, of course, who Tweedle-dee and Jack o' Lantern were and in spite of rules to the contrary, thought it a rather good joke than otherwise. Presently she would send the servants into the gym to clear away the remains of the feast, but she would have her laugh first.

Miss Baylis, whose room was in the main building with the seniors had repaired thither to enforce compliance with Miss Woodhull's commands. No easy task, for some of the girls were long past baby days and resented baby treatment. The other teachers also had their hands full. Consequently the south wing was left entirely to Miss Stetson's supervision, and the south wing was a pretty sizable building and naturally under existing circumstances, it did not simmer down as promptly as under ordinary conditions. Miss Stetson was compelled to go from room to room.

"Girls, be quick! Get undressed as fast as you can and put out your light," urged Beverly.

"What's up?" demanded Sally, who was inclined to dawdle from very perversity.

"Springing another one on us, Bev?" asked Aileen, laughing softly but hastily complying with orders.

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Beverly vouchsafed no answer beyond a significant little jerk of her head.

In five minutes the lights were out in A, B, and C and Study 10 was in darkness also. Miss Stetson, ever suspicious, tiptoed back to peep in but found nothing amiss. Then a new outbreak far down the corridor summoned her to that end and Number 10 was for the time being left in peace. This was the cue. Beverly let about five minutes pass, then slipped out of bed and into her bathrobe and bedroom slippers in a jiffy. Sally and Aileen needed no hint to follow suit.

"Come quick," whispered Beverly.

Number 10 was fortunately, (or unfortunately) nearer the door leading to the gym gallery than some other suites. The corridor was now conveniently dark, the lights having been extinguished by Miss Stetson. Only the patches of moonlight shining through the windows showed the prowlers which way to turn. In two seconds the gallery door was reached and the three were upon the gym side of it.

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Now Miss Woodhull's pet economy was lights, and woe betide the luckless inmate of Leslie Manor who needlessly used electricity. The girls often said that if the house ever caught fire Miss Woodhull would pause in rushing from it to switch off any electric bulb left burning. From sheer force of habit she had switched off the lights in the gym as she hurried from it, a key happening to be at the side of the door through which she led her brood. That the tail-end of the crowd might have stumbled over something was a trifling consideration.

Beverly's quick wits which had grasped many details of Miss Woodhull's idiosyncrasies, had taken in this one. It served her turn now. The gym was lighted only by moonlight, and silent as silence itself. The girls tittered.

"Isn't the joke on you, Bev?" asked Aileen.

"Oh look! Quick!" whispered Sally.

Beverly merely nodded.

At the further end of the room something glowed uncannily. Then two figures stole into a patch of moonlight, one tall and tattered; the other enveloped in a long garment which resembled a girl's coat, and from out the darkness came a sepulchral whisper:

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"Where the dickens did you say that key was?"

"Under the last side-horse," Beverly whispered back. "Can't you find it?"

"Ah, I looked under the first one," was the disgusted answer.

"Did you get the box?"

"Yes, I've got it all O. K.," replied the taller figure, "and now we're going to beat it. Good-night. Did you get ragged again?"

"Nothing stirring, but we wanted to be sure you got the eats. They're great. Good-night," whispered Beverly.

"So long," and spook number one having evidently found the key in question made for a door which gave upon the rear terrace. Just as he was about to insert the key the door was opened from the outside and Wesley's wooley head was outlined in the moonlight. The spooks darted behind the refreshment table and the three watchers dropped into inconspicuous heaps upon the gallery floor.

Wesley had entered with his pass key in compliance with Mrs. Bonnell's orders. The maids who were to help him had lingered to get their trays. Wesley would have given a good deal could the clearing up have been deferred until the light of day, but he was obliged to obey Mrs. Bonnell.

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"Whar dose fool gals at wid dey trays?" he muttered, "Seem lak gals ain' never whar yo' want 'em *when* yo' want 'em, an' pintedly dar when yo' don'. Ma Lawd, whar' dat 'lectric switch at," he ended as he clawed about the dark wall at the side of the door for the duplicate of the switch Miss Woodhull had so carefully turned off.

As he found it a groan just behind him caused him to swing sharply about.

Unless one has heard a darkie's howl of terror at what he believes to be an apparition it is

utterly impossible to convey any idea of its weirdness.

Wesley tried to reach the door. So did the tall spook. The result was a collision which sent Wesley heels over head, and before he could scramble to his feet again two spooks instead of one had vanished.

With a second howl the darkie shot across the gym and out of the door which led into the main building, where his cries speedily brought an audience to which he protested that:

“De hants done got dis house, suah!” and so successfully drew attention to the main floor that the three girls had no difficulty in slipping back to Number 10 and raising a window to listen to the thud of hoofbeats down the driveway.

So ended All Saint’s Eve, though Wesley Watts Mather long retained his horror of that gymnasium after nightfall.

Then for a time all moved serenely at Leslie Manor. Thanksgiving recess was drawing nigh and the girls were planning for their holiday, which would begin on the afternoon of the day before and last until the following Monday morning.

Beverly was, of course, going to Woodbine, the boys to be her escort from Front Royal, to which junction she would be duly escorted by Miss Stetson, in company with Sally and Aileen, who were also going home.

Petty Gaylord was to join her doting mamma in Washington and proceed from that city to Annapolis to attend the Thanksgiving hop at the Naval Academy with the idol of her affections and also go up to the Army-Navy game in Philadelphia upon the Saturday following, and Petty was a very geyser of gurgling giggles at the prospect.

Beverly’s five days at home with the boys seemed only to emphasize the separation of the past two months and make the ensuing ones harder to contemplate.

The Sunday evening before she must go back to school she was nestling upon the arm of the Admiral’s big chair, her arm about his neck, her dark head resting lovingly against his white one as she “confessed her sins.”

From baby days this had been a Sunday night custom, and more passed between these two in those twilight hours than anyone else ever kenned.

The Admiral’s study was one of those rooms which seem full to the very ceiling of wonderful memories, and was also one of the homiest rooms at Woodbine.

It was the hour before tea time. Across the big hall could be heard Earl Queen’s mellow tenor as he softly intoned: “Swing low, sweet chariot,” while laying the table for the evening meal, the little clink of silver and glass betraying his occupation.

Mrs. Ashby had gone upstairs with Athol to unearth some treasures he wished to take back to school with him. The big house was very silent, a peaceful, restful spirit pervading it.

Upon the hearth in the study the logs blazed brightly, filling the big room with a rich, red glow and the sweet odor of burning spruce.

For some time neither Beverly nor her uncle had spoken. He was thinking intently of the confessions just made as he gazed at the darting flames and absently stroked the hand she had slipped into his, her other one gently patting his shoulder. Now and again she kissed the thick, silvery curls which crowned the dear old head.

Presently he said abruptly:

“And now that you’ve gotten your load of sins off your shoulders and bundled onto mine do you feel better?”

“No, I can’t say that I do, but I had to unload all the same. There is no one at the school to unload upon, you see. Besides, it could never be like you, any way. You always let things sort of percolate, before you let off steam, but it’s mostly all steam, or *hot air*, at Leslie Manor.”

“Reckon you can supply your share of the latter, can’t you?” was the half serious, half-bantering retort.

“Somehow, I haven’t felt exactly hot-airy since I’ve been there. It makes me feel more steamy; as though I’d blow up sometimes. It seems so sort of—of—oh, I don’t know just how to tell you. I’d *like* to like Miss Woodhull but she’d freeze a polar bear, and I believe she just hates girls even though she keeps a girl’s school. And Miss Stetson must have been fed on vinegar when she was a baby, and Miss Baylis is the *limit*, and Miss Forsdyke lives in Rome.”

“Is anybody just right?” asked the Admiral, quizzically.

“Some of them would be all right if they had half a chance or dared. Mrs. Bonnel is a dear. Miss Dalton’s lovely, but has no chance to prove it. Miss Powell is the most loveable girl you ever knew and the little kindergarteners adore her. Miss Forsdyke would be lovely if she wasn’t scared to death of Miss Woodhull and Miss Atwell would be sort of nice if she wasn’t so silly. Oh, Uncle Athol if you only *could* see her pose and make us do stunts! And she’s just like a jelly fish; all floppy and tumble-a-party. I feel just exactly as though I hadn’t a bone in my body after two hours flopping ‘round under her instructions.”

“What in thunder do they waste time on such nonsense for?” blurted out the Admiral.

“To make us supple and graceful. Am I stiff, Uncle Athol? I’ve always felt ten times more supple

after a rattling good gallop with Ath and Archie, or half a dozen games of tennis, than after I've turned and twisted myself into bowline-knots with Miss Atwell. Oh, *how* I miss the old good times, Uncle Athol! Why can't Ath come to see me or I go to see him sometimes? If they'd only let me I'd never think of running away as I did that day."

"Good Lord how can I tell the workings of an old maid's mind?" exploded Admiral Seldon. "It's too big a question for me to answer. I've always had an idea that it was a good thing for boys and girls to grow up together, and so has your mother, I reckon, or she'd never have allowed you to romp 'round with Athol and Archie as long as you have. And I can't for the life of me see that you're any the worse for it. But maybe that's just exactly the difference between an old maid's and an old bach's viewpoint. Can't you wheedle her as you wheedle *me*. Seems to me if you went at it like this you might make her believe that the port and starboard lights were black and white instead of red and green. Try it."

"*Cuddle* Miss Woodhull! Uncle Athol would *you* like to cuddle Miss Woodhull?" demanded Beverly tragically.

"God bless my soul, No! I'd as soon cuddle that statue of Diana yonder on the lawn."

"So would *I*," was the prompt reply. "I reckon I'd rather. She isn't half so cold. Wheedle? Hum. Wouldn't it be funny if I could? I'll think about it. But if she were as cuddable as you it would be —de-li-cious," she ended with a bear hug.

"Here's Queen to announce tea. Come along you artful huzzy. I never have an atom of justice or logic in me when I talk to you."

Nevertheless, he kissed her very tenderly as he untwined her circling arms. The past two months had been very lonely ones for him without her.

"Will you try to make Miss Woodhull let us see each other?" she begged.

"I'll think about it. I'll think about it. And do you do some thinking too lest you disgrace Woodbine.

"I'm *going* to think. *Hard*," she added, as together they entered the cheerful dining room.

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## CHAPTER XII

### AFTER THE HOLIDAYS

The session between the Thanksgiving and Christmas vacation always seemed a brief one, filled as it is with plans for the latter holiday.

When the Thanksgiving holiday was over Beverly and the boys went back to their respective schools under Admiral Seldon's escort. At least he went as far as Front Royal with Athol and Archie, leaving them at that point to go on by themselves while he accompanied Beverly to Leslie Manor. He was minded to have a few words with Miss Woodhull and know something more of the lady's character than he already knew. The outcome of that interview left a good deal to be desired upon the Admiral's part. He returned to Woodbine "with every gun silenced," and the lady triumphant in her convictions that *her* methods of conducting a school for girls were quite beyond criticism. It would be utterly impossible for Beverly to even think of visiting her brother at Kilton Hall, she said, nor could she consent to Athol visiting Leslie Manor. She did not wish to establish a precedent. As to Archie *ever* coming there, *that* idea was preposterous. Why every boy for miles around would feel at liberty to call upon her pupils and they would be simply besieged. She had conducted her school successfully for many years under its present methods and until she saw more cogent reasons for changing she should continue to do so.

Had not the Admiral made arrangements for the year it is safe to surmise that Beverly would have returned to Woodbine with him, and his frame of mind, and the remarks to which he gave utterance, as he drove back to the junction, elicited more than one broad grin or chuckle from Andrew J. Jefferson as he drove. But Beverly did not know anything about it.

So the weeks sped by until the Christmas recess drew near and the girls were once more planning to scatter, far and wide, for their two-weeks holiday.

Now be it known that Petty had returned from her Thanksgiving trip to Annapolis in a more sentimental frame of mind than ever, and filled as full of romance as an egg is of meat.

Each day brought a letter always addressed in a feminine handwriting, to be sure, or there would have been little chance of said letter ever reaching Petty. They were, she confided to every girl in the school under strictest promises of secrecy, re-addressed for "Reggy" by "darling mamma," for mamma, knowing how desperate was their devotion to each other, just simply could not help acting as a go-between. And she knew very well too that she, Petty, would not have remained at school a single day unless she did this. Why, mamma, herself, had eloped with papa before she was sixteen. One whole year younger than she, herself, was at that

moment. "Wasn't that romantic?"

"Where is papa now?" asked Beverly. She had never heard him mentioned.

"Oh, why—well—he has business interests which keep him in South America nearly all the time, and—er,"

"Oh, you needn't go into details. It doesn't make any difference to me," said Beverly, and walked away with Sally.

"Isn't she odious! And so perfectly callous to sentiment," cried Petty.

"She's a dear, and it's a pity you hadn't a small portion of her common sense," championed Aileen emphatically.

"I have sense enough to be engaged before I'm *seventeen*, and to know what it means to be *embraced*, which is more than any other girl in this school can boast," brindled Petty.

"Well, I should hope it is!" was Aileen's disgusted retort. "And if you don't watch out you'll boast just once too often and Miss Woodhull will get wise to your boasting. Then there will be something stirring unless I'm mighty mistaken."

"Pouf! Who cares for Miss Woodhull? I don't believe she ever had a proposal in all her life."

"Well, you'd better be careful," was Aileen's final warning as she left the half-dozen girls of which Petty formed the bright particular star.

"Those three feel themselves so superior yet they are such children," was Petty's withering remark.

Aileen was two months her junior. Sally less than a year and Beverly exactly fifteen months. But being engaged very naturally develops and broadens one's views of life. Dear "Reggie" was just twenty, and had his lady love but known that interesting fact, had already been "engaged" to three other susceptible damsels during his brief sojourn upon the earth. Moreover, he was openly boasting of it to his fellow midshipmen and regarding it as a good joke. Oh, Reggie was a full-fledged, brass-buttoned heart-breaker. Happily he was not a representative among his companions. Most of them are gentlemen. They can do a good bit of "fussing" as they term it, but this wholesale engagement business is the exception, rather than the rule.

Nevertheless, Petty had sang of the charms of Annapolis until all her set were wild to go there, and her enthusiasm had spread like chickenpox. If the affairs at Annapolis were all Petty pictured them and the midshipmen as fascinating, the place must, indeed, be a sort of Paradise.

Of course, all the girls knew that Beverly was a real, true Admiral's grandniece. That he had left Annapolis upon his graduation to take sides with his native state. So why had Beverly never been to that alluring place?

Beverly had never given Annapolis a thought. Now, however, she meant to know a few facts regarding it, and while home on her vacation learned a number. She also learned that sometime in the spring, during the Easter holiday, possibly, her uncle might take her and the boys to Washington and while stopping in the capital, visit the old town which lay adjacent to the Naval Academy Reservation.

Upon her return after the Christmas recess Beverly made some casual allusion to this fact, and at once started a new and livelier interest. Why couldn't a party of girls be chaperoned there by one of the teachers, choosing the same time?

In five minutes it was all planned. But they had Miss Woodhull to reckon with, and Easter was still many weeks ahead on the calendar.

When not long after came the mid-year examinations. The girls had been working hard all the week and were tired. Examinations had ended the day before and they had about reached the limit for that week. February was the month most dreaded of all the eight. The last period of each day was twelve to one, the juniors had history and English literature under Miss Baylis. Now Miss Baylis at her very best was not a restful individual with whom to come in touch, and after a long morning of hard work and the growing hunger of healthy appetites for food for the body rather than for the mind, the girls did not find "a barbed tongue" and a caustic disposition soothing.

English literature as taught by Miss Baylis was not inspiring to say the least, and the half hour devoted to it had not aroused enthusiasm. Then came the second half hour for English history; Miss Woodhull believing it well to take up the kindred subject while the girl's minds were well imbued with the first one. Just as Miss Baylis was about to begin she was summoned from the recitation room by Miss Forsdyke.

"Take your books and refresh your memories for a moment or two: I shall be back immediately, and I *hope* you will employ this special privilege in studying diligently. *You* in particular, Electra, for you certainly did not make a brilliant showing in your literature recitation. Remember I shall expect you to redeem yourself in history, for the periods are identical," was her admonition as she went toward the door. As she was about to pass through it, she paused to repeat her words. Sally yawned behind her book. As the door closed Petty's inevitable "tee-hee-hee" was audible. The next second the door was hastily opened.

"I *hope*," and Miss Baylis' suspicious eyes were upon her charges. Then she vanished. Naturally someone else tittered.

Barely five minutes passed and when she returned her first words were:

"I hope—" then she paused for a smile appeared upon every face bringing the abstracted lady back to earth. It was Beverly who asked innocently: "Excuse me, Miss Baylis, but did you tell us to begin our literature papers at the ninety-fifth line of Pope's Essay on Man: 'Hope springs eternal'?"

"We ended our literature recitation ten minutes ago, Beverly. If you were so inattentive as to miss what I said that is your misfortune," was the austere retort. Nevertheless, the shot had told. 148

Ten more minutes of the period slipped by, nay, crawled by, in which Miss Baylis darting from one victim to another bent upon reaching their vulnerable points. Then it came, Electra Sanderson's turn to recite.

Now Electra Sanderson was distinctly of the *nouveau riche*. She came from an eastern city where money is the god of things. Why her father, a kindly soul who had risen from hod carrier to contractor, happened to choose Leslie Manor for his youngest daughter must remain one of the unanswered questions. Perhaps "mommer" made the selection on account of the name which had appealed to her. Manors or manners were all one to her. At any rate, Electra (christened Ellen) was a pupil at Miss Woodhull's very select school. A big, good-natured, warm-hearted, generous, dull *slouchy* girl of seventeen, who never could and never would "change her spots," but was inevitably destined to marry someone of her own class, rear a flourishing family and settle down into a commonplace, good-natured matron, Leslie Manor nevertheless, and notwithstanding. Miss Woodhull and her staff might polish until exhausted. The only result would be the removal of the plating and the exposure of the alloy beneath. 149

Electra didn't care a whoop for the old fogies who had lived and ruled in England generations before she was born. Indeed, she would not have wept had England and all the histories ever written about her disappeared beneath the sea which surrounded that country. What she wanted now was to get out of that classroom and into the dining room visible from the window near which she was sitting, and through which she gazed longingly, for there could be found something tangible. Her thoughts had been in the dining room for the past five minutes, consequently she was not aware that Sally had surreptitiously reached toward her from the seat behind, laid hold of about eighteen inches of the lacing of her Peter Thomson (dangling as usual) and while Petty Gaylord, sitting next Sally, was secretly reading a letter concealed behind her book, had made fast Electra's Peter Thomson lacing to Petty's boot lacing, *likewise* adrift, and then soberly awaited developments. 150

Sally could manage to do more things unobserved than any other girl in the school, though she had found a fair rival in Beverly.

Thus lay the train "of things as they ought (not) to be" when Miss Baylis fired her first shot at poor Electra.

"Electra suppose you return to *this* world of facts,—you seem to be in dreamland at present—and tell me who brought a rather unpleasant notoriety upon himself at this period."

Electra returned to England and English affairs at a bound. But to which period was Miss Baylis referring? Electra had not the ghost of an idea but would make a stab at it any way.

"Why-er-oh, it was-er-the man who made extensive use of bricks in the House of Commons," she ventured at random.

"What?" demanded Miss Baylis, utterly bewildered.

"Yes, ma'am. I mean yes, Miss Baylis. I can't remember his name but he did. I learned that by heart last night at study period," staunchly asserted Electra, sure for once in her life of her point, for hadn't she *read* those very words? 151

"Of 'bricks'?" repeated Miss Baylis.

"Yes m—, Miss Baylis."

Miss Baylis' eyes snapped as much as any pair of colorless blue eyes set too close together can snap. One of the many hopeless tasks which she had undertaken with Electra had been to banish from her vocabulary that impossible "ma'am", yet like Banquo's ghost it refused to be laid.

"Open your book at that page and read the sentence," commanded the history teacher.

Electra obediently did as bidden and read glibly.

"He made extensive use of—'" and just there came to an embarrassed halt as a titter went around the schoolroom.

"Silence!" Miss Baylis' tone of voice did not encourage levity. "Well?" she interrogated crisply.

"It's *bribes*, Miss Baylis," said poor Electra, covered with confusion and blushes.

"Exactly. The greatest simpleton would understand that. Are you more familiar with bricks than bribes?" It was a cruel thrust under the circumstances, and Miss Baylis had the grace to blush at the look of scorn which darted from Beverly's eyes straight into her own and the curl which Aileen's lips held. But even a worm may turn, and for once Miss Baylis was taken off her feet by having Electra reply: "I guess it's more honest to be." 152

"Good!" came from someone, but Miss Baylis thought it wiser to ignore it.

"You may stand and read that sentence five times. Perhaps it may percolate after so doing."

Electra, still smarting under the sting of Miss Baylis' sarcasm rose hastily, and with her as hastily rose Petty's foot to a horizontal position, encountering in its ascent the rung of Electra's chair and toppling it over with a crash.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### CULINARY EXPERIMENTS

Most of the girls gave vent to startled exclamations, but Miss Baylis was speechless with rage. Electra turned and twisted in her frantic endeavors to discover the origin of the upheaval, and Petty made a mad scramble for her history book which the sudden jerk had sent flying out of her hands, the sentimental missive fluttering from its hiding place to drop at Beverly's feet. Stooping hastily, Beverly caught it up unnoticed in the greater confusion, though she could not help seeing "Darling little sweetheart," in a large immature hand at the heading. With a scarcely repressed laugh she hid it in her book, and turned to face the storm center, Miss Baylis.

"Who is responsible for this folly?" demanded the irate one.

There was no reply.

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"I wish an answer," reiterated Miss Baylis, turning to Beverly who sat near Petty. "Is this your idea of a joke?"

"Not exactly, Miss Baylis."

"Are you guilty of this act?"

"No, Miss Baylis."

"Do you know who is?"

"I could not tell if I did, Miss Baylis."

"I shall force you to tell," was the unguarded retort.

"It is rather hard to force an Ashby or a Seldon to do something they consider dishonorable, Miss Baylis," was the quiet reply.

"You are insolent."

"I did not intend to be."

Of this Miss Baylis was quite well aware. She had begun to understand something of Beverly's character and to learn something of the importance of this Woodbine family and their standing in the community. Consequently she turned her attention to Sally and asked:

"Is your sense of honor equally nice? Which of your classmates played this senseless trick?"

Sally remained silent.

"Did you hear my question?"

"I did, Miss Baylis."

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"Then why do you not answer me. If you are aware which girl did this silly thing why do you keep silent when you know I am sure to discover sooner or later?"

"Perhaps for the same reason Beverly has," answered Sally. "But why don't you ask me if *I* did it Miss Baylis? I've often done far worse, haven't I?"

"You are rarely vulgar in your pranks," was Miss Baylis' amazing retort, which caused the class to gasp. What was back of this extraordinary hedging?

"Well I *did* do it, Miss Baylis, and I am perfectly willing to stand the punishment. Shall I go to Miss Woodhull's office after class?"

"No, I wish to talk with you myself."

Sally looked scornful. Well she knew that Miss Baylis had passed her vacation at Kittery Point where Uncle Tom Conant, a bachelor had also passed his. Uncle Tom was rich, good looking and dapper. A lady's man who charmed every member of the fair sex with whom he was thrown, but with no more idea of matrimony than of murder in his heart. He was devoted to his brother's children, as well as the fair sex in general and could no more help flattering every one of them than he could help petting the children who were always crowding about him. Some of his stories of Miss Baylis' "shining up" to him had nearly convulsed his nieces. It was the memory of these which brought the smile to Sally's lips at the lady's last words. At that moment the last bell sounded and Miss Baylis was obliged to dismiss her class as quickly as possible. Miss Woodhull was very intolerant of tardiness at meals. Upon the instant the release bell sounded the classes must be dismissed and each girl must hurry to her room to make herself presentable at luncheon.

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"Sally, you will come to me *immediately* after luncheon. I am deeply pained that you could be guilty of such deportment. I wish to talk seriously with you," was Miss Baylis' concluding admonition to the incorrigible one.

"Yes, Miss Baylis," replied Sally, as she scrambled up her books and joined the girls all hurrying to their rooms.

Petty lingered to glance beneath chairs and desks for the lost letter. To her dismay it had vanished completely. She never suspected that Beverly running upstairs with the others, held it safe in her history. She would return it to Petty later. Just at present she was too much amused by Miss Baylis' attitude toward Sally, who had told her of some of the funny scenes at Kittery Point, to think much about Petty's love affairs, and before luncheon was over a diversion was created, which made her entirely forget it.

For some time, "Aunt Sally Jefferson," the cook at Leslie Manor had been ailing, and had recently gone away to "res' up." Mrs. Bonnell knew well enough that it was useless to protest. These "res'in' ups" were periodical. Usually she substituted a colored woman who lived at Luray, but Rebecca had taken a permanent situation and was not available.

Jefferson came to her rescue. He had a "lady frien'" who could cook nearly as well as his mother. Mrs. Bonnell was skeptical, but it was a case of "needs must when the de'il drives," and Juno Daphne came as substitute cook. Then Mrs. Bonnell's trials began. One morning girl after girl left her fried smelts untasted though ordinarily they were a rare delicacy in that part of the world.

Mrs. Bonnell investigated. What *was* the trouble? Had Juno prepared them properly?

"Yas'm I did. I just done fry 'em."

"Did you clean and wash them carefully?" persisted Mrs. Bonnell.

"No'm. Dey's such triflin' fish I ain' see no sense 'n botherin' ter clean and wash 'em."

The next morning such smelts as had been left uncooked for the previous breakfast, came to the table a truly tempting sight, but with the first mouthful a distinct murmur arose and Mrs. Bonnell exclaimed: "Mercy upon me! *What* has she done this time?"

Inquiries followed.

"Yas *ma'am*. I done wash 'em *good* dis time. I wash 'em wid dat sof' soap what Aunt Sally done made befo' she took sick!"

And then for more than a week all went serenely. Now dessert was being brought on. Mrs. Bonnell always served it. Wesley came in from the pantry bearing a large platter upon which rested a mold of pudding of the most amazing color mortal eye ever rested upon. It was a vivid beautiful sky-blue and Wesley disclosed every ivory in his ample mouth as he set the dish upon the table. Mrs. Bonnell had ordered corn-starch pudding with chocolate sauce. When she looked upon the viand before her she gave a little cry of dismay.

"Wesley what is it?"

"De Lawd on'y know, Miss. I sho' don'. Dat Juno done sent it in."

"Go at once and ask her what she used in making this pudding. I have never seen its equal."

"Ner I," chuckled Wesley as he hurried off. In five minutes he was back, his hand across his mouth and struggling manfully not to disgrace himself.

"Well?" queried Mrs. Bonnell, her lips twitching.

"She—she—" he strove to articulate. "She—she say she done got de-de-sta-sta-sta'ch in—de la'ndry, an' she—she—taken dat fer ter be ec'nomical an' save 'spence fer de school. It—it—wor lef' over by Aunt Mandy f'om de washin'. She ain' think,—ha—ha,—she ain' think de *bluin'* in it mak' no diff'ence, he-he-he—. Please, ma'am, scuse me, I can't stan' fo' no mo," and Wesley beat a hasty retreat.

Juno Daphne departed that afternoon, Mrs. Bonnell wishing to avoid the services of a coroner.

As there was no study period on Friday evenings the girls were at liberty to amuse themselves as they chose. At least, within limitations, though they often miscalculated the limitations. The afternoon had been too dull and cold for much outdoor exercise, so they had spent it in the gymnasium practicing basket-ball. In March they would play a game with a team from a town a few miles from Leslie Manor.

Beverly, Sally and Aileen were all on the team, Beverly having made it through adaptability rather than knowledge, for she had never seen a basketball before coming to school, but being as quick as a cat had made good. Consequently the occupants of Suite 10 were glad to rest their weary bodies upon couch or easy chairs when dinner was over, and Sally was entertaining them with an account of her interview with Miss Baylis after luncheon.

"She makes me tired. If it had been you, Bev, she would have sent you down to Miss Woodhull's office in jig time. But I've a good one for Uncle Tom," and Sally laughed.

"I wouldn't have cared if she had sent me. I'd rather come to an issue with the Empress anytime than with Miss Baylis. But the whole thing was funny as the mischief," answered Beverly from her big wicker chair.

"Let's make some fudge. I've got the needfuls, and it will sweeten our tempers. Such things



make me cross for hours. We don't indulge in petty squabbles at home. Mother would be disgusted if she knew of some of the things which take place here, and father would say there was something wrong with the gasoline. He's just bought a new car so his metaphors are apt to be gasoliny," laughed Aileen.

"What will you make the fudge in? You let Hope MacLeod have the chafing dish."

Aileen looked daunted for a moment. Then her face lighted.

"I've a tin pail. I can make it in that."

"But *how*? You can't boil it without the lamp."

"Can't I? Just you watch me do it." Aileen was resourceful. In a few minutes she had the mixture in her pail, and the pail swinging by a string over the gas jet. Leslie Manor was quite up-to-date. It had gas as well as electricity, though gas was not supposed to be used excepting in cases of emergency. Once or twice the electric current had failed.

Aileen had fastened the string from one side of the room to the other on a couple of picture hooks. A none too secure support. Then all three sat down to wait until the fudge gave signs of boiling and promptly became absorbed in a new interest, the Easter vacation.

In the midst of the conversation, Beverly paused. She had suddenly remembered Petty's note.

"What's the matter?" asked Sally.

"I've forgotten something," she answered, scrambling from her chair and crossing to her desk for her history. She would take the note back to Petty. It was utter nonsense of course, but it was Petty's and if she was pleased with such nonsense, she was welcome to it. She looked hurriedly through the book. The note was not in it. Where could she have dropped it? No, she had not dropped it, of that she was certain. She had taken pains to keep the book tightly closed. She meant to have given the note to Petty directly after luncheon. How provoking! Maybe Petty had seen her catch it up and had come for it herself. She would go and ask her. As she turned to make her intention known to the others there was a snap overhead. The heat had burned Aileen's string before the fudge had begun to boil and pail and contents descended upon the study table with a rattle and splash, the hot mass scattering in every direction.

For the ensuing half hour the three girls had their hands full and Petty, notes, history examination and all minor affairs were forgotten.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### COMPLICATIONS

But Petty had *not* taken the note from Beverly's history. It had been removed by quite a different person. In fact about the last one either Beverly or Petty would have dreamed of.

But of this a little later.

By the time the fudge had been cleaned off from everything within a radius of five feet, for a more complete splash had never been made by any descending mass, the "lights out" bells were ringing in all the corridors. Miss Woodhull had only to press a series of buttons arranged in the hall just outside her study door to produce the effect of the needle-prick in the fairy tale. Every inmate immediately dropped asleep. Every? Well, exceptions prove a rule, it is said.

The following morning Beverly told Petty the circumstances of picking up the note and of its subsequent disappearance.

Petty was in despair and scolded and wept alternately, accusing Beverly of having deliberately confiscated it, and hinting pretty broadly that she had also read it.

The moment this accusation left her lips she regretted it because she knew it to be utterly unfounded and the blaze which sprung into Beverly's eyes warned the little shallow pate that she had ventured a bit too far. She tried to retract by saying she was "nervous and excited and *perfectly miserable* at the loss of the letter. It was the first of Reggie's letters she had *ever* lost, and he had written every single day for a *whole* year."

"Three-hundred and sixty-five letters, and every one mushy?" cried Beverly, incredulously. "I should think it would be worse than eating a pound of nougat every day."

Petty alternately moped and searched all Saturday, but, of course to no purpose. When Monday morning came she was in despair, and went to her first recitation in a most emotional frame of mind.

It happened to be French, and Monsieur Sautelle had been the French instructor but four months. Moreover, he had not yet been in America a year and American girls, and things American, were not only new but a constant source of marvel to him. He lived in a world of hitherto unknown sensations and this morning was destined to experience an entirely new one.

The period was nearly over before it came Petty's turn to recite and Petty, as the result of having spent all her study period in a vain search for the lost letter, was totally unprepared.

"Mademoiselle Gaylor, you will be so good as to come the conjugation of the verb love, indicative mood, if you please."

Unfortunate choice!

Petty was in a very indicative mood already. Had he chosen any other verb she might have survived the ordeal, but under the circumstances to openly affirm: "I love; Thou lovest; *he* loves —."

Well, there are limits to every one's endurance under extreme emotion.

Petty hesitated and was lost. Not a word would come. Her throat throbbed and it seemed as though that pound of nougat Beverly had alluded to must be stuck in it. 167

"Proceed, if you please, Mademoiselle," urged Monsieur. Petty sat almost directly in front of him, or rather she stood—Miss Woodhull wished each pupil to stand while reciting—and upon being urged to "proceed" raised to him a pair of violet eyes swimming in tears, and a face of abject woe.

Monsieur Sautelle was not over thirty. A dapper, exquisite little man. He was distraught at the sight of this tearful damsel and, very naturally attributed her distress to unpreparedness. Petty was a pretty, inconsequential little creature born to play upon the feelings of one man or another. It did not much matter who he happened to be so long as he could satisfy the sentimental element in her makeup, and she was mostly sentimentality.

"Mademoiselle I implore. Why these tears? You quite desolate me. It is no such crushing matter that you do not know 'to love'."

"But oh, I do. I *do*," sobbed Petty.

"Then you will most kindly demonstrate that fact to the class. They wait."

If ever instructor was taken literally Monsieur Sautelle was then and there, for with an overpowering sob she swayed forward, flung both arms about the dismayed man's neck and burying her face against his immaculate collar, gurgled: "Oh, I love! I *do* love! Thou lov-v-est! He—He—loves—*me!*" 168

It was the most astonishing conjugation the startled Professor had ever heard in all his thirty years, and he frantically strove to remove the clinging damsel, at the same time commanding: "Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle, make yourself tranquil! You will cease at once. Mees Woodhull! Mees Stetson, Mees—Mees."

Now it so happened that Miss Stetson's recitation room adjoined Monsieur Sautelle's. She heard his call and responded with wingéd feet, arriving upon the scene just as Eleanor Allen, Petty's bosom friend, had sprung to her side, and while in reality striving to untwine Petty's clinging arms seemed also to be in the act of embracing the French teacher.

What followed is almost too painful to dwell upon, but within ten minutes, all three actors in the little drama were arraigned before Miss Woodhull and it was only Eleanor's clever tongue which saved the situation. She stated very emphatically that Petty had been too ill to study on Saturday evening; she did not feel it necessary to name the nature of the malady. That it had been impossible for Petty to prepare her lessons for Monday and that her act was purely the outcome of nervous excitement and held no personal demonstration toward Professor Sautelle. 169

This statement the Professor was more than delighted to back up and Petty's tears clenched it. Miss Woodhull could not endure tears; she had never shed one in her life so far as she could recall—and she wished to end the scene forthwith. Consequently the Professor was politely dismissed and speedily went to procure fresh linen. Under Miss Stetson's charge Petty was sent to the Infirmary, where she was detained a week, and Eleanor was bidden to go to her next recitation. But Eleanor, who was Petty's confidant in all things, instantly decided to keep her trump card to be played when the moment should be ripe. Eleanor had missed her vocation in life. She should have been in the Turkish diplomatic service instead of in an American boarding school. 170

Eleanor had taken the note from Beverly's history. She did so because, having seen Beverly pick it up and place it there she decided, from innate suspicion of all her fellow beings, that Beverly meant to use it to Petty's undoing. It never occurred to her that Beverly could entertain a generous motive toward a girl whom she held in aversion if not contempt. Then the note once in her possession she wished to keep it a day or so, in the hope that Petty might discover for herself where it had gone. It never entered her head that Beverly would go straight to Petty and explain the situation, and in a reticent freak quite uncommon to her nature, Petty had not confided this fact to Eleanor. And now it was out of the question to do so for the pupils were not permitted to visit the girls in the Infirmary.

Two weeks later the basket-ball game with the rival school was imminent and the team was working like mad. Leslie Manor had been beaten the year before and a second defeat would spell disgrace. Eleanor was on the sub-team. So was Electra. The captain and one forward were seniors. Aileen center, Sally a forward, Beverly had made good as guard and was working like a Trojan for the great event. 171

The Friday afternoon before the game a party of girls were taken to the village to do some shopping. Nothing more diverting than purchasing new shoe ties, hairpins, bows, and various

other trifles. Also to make sure that the decorations ordered for the gymnasium would be punctually sent over to the school that afternoon and last, but by no means least, to indulge in chocolate sodas etc., at the big drug store.

It so happened that Miss Forsdyke, the Latin teacher was acting as chaperone that afternoon and Miss Forsdyke was alive just exactly two thousand years after her time. She should have lived about 55 B.C., for in reality she was living in that period right in the Twentieth Century A.D. and was so lost to all things modern, and so buried in all things ancient, that she was never quite fully alive to those happening all around her. As a chaperone she was "just dead easy" Sally said. A more absent-minded creature it would have been hard to come upon.

Sally, Aileen and Beverly were lingering over the last delicious mouthfuls of nut sundaes. Electra had finished hers and gone to an adjoining counter to make a purchase. Miss Forsdyke, who had declined Sally's invitation to have a sundae, was selecting a tooth brush at an adjoining counter when Beverly asked:

"Miss Forsdyke, why can't we carry the flags and ribbons back with us? Then we would be sure of them."

Miss Forsdyke laid down the tooth brush, picked it up again, hesitated, then walked toward Beverly, saying, "I am not quite sure that Miss Woodhull would approve. She does not like the pupils to carry parcels—large ones, I mean—and these would be quite large, would they not?"

"Then why not phone to her to ask if we may?" suggested Sally.

"Why-er-I-suppose I-I could. Will you kindly direct me to the public tooth brush?" she turned to the clerk to ask. "Oh no, no, I mean the public telephone booth," she corrected, coloring a deep pink.

"It's behind you," answered the clerk, trying not to laugh, and pointing to the booth which was exactly behind Miss Forsdyke. Still grasping her tooth brush she scuttled into the booth.

Naturally, Electra had been an interested listener and Electra's mind did not grasp two ideas simultaneously as a rule. She had not yet made her wants known to the clerk, who stood deferentially waiting for her to do so. As the possibility seemed vague he asked politely.

"What can I do for you, Miss?" and nearly disappeared beneath the show case when Electra answered.

"Will you please give me a glass eye. No, no, I mean a glass eye *cup*."

"That's no school, it's a blooming lunatic asylum," clerk No. 1 declared to clerk No. 2 as the last pair of shoeheels disappeared through the door, "an' the *old* one's the looniest of them all."

Nevertheless, some of those "lunatics" put up a good game of basket-ball the next afternoon.

As the game progressed the school and the spectators were jubilant. At least one-half of the latter were, and none more so than two girls who had come with the rival team, as all the Leslie Manor girls believed, and, although strangers, certainly enthused more over the blue and yellow, the Leslie Manor colors, than over the green and red.

"Look at those two stunning girls in the third row on the left side, Aileen. Do you know who they are?" asked Sally, during one of the intermissions.

"Never laid eyes on them before," replied Aileen. Isn't the tall fair one beautiful though? I've never seen such eyes and skin in all my life.

"She knows how to dress too, believe me," was Sally's admiring comment. "That's a stunning velveteen suit she has on, and her hat well, New York or Paris, sure."

"The smaller one must be attractive too. But isn't it funny that she should wear her chiffon veil under her lace one instead of outside of it? I wish she'd raise them properly; I want to get a good look at her face. Somehow she reminds me of someone I've met before but I can't think of whom. We'll ask Beverly." But just then the whistle blew and the game was on again.

When Leslie Manor won on a score of twenty to seven, the girl in the chiffon veil jumped to her feet, pitched her muff high into the air and yelled. Then evidently overwhelmed with mortification at her wild demonstration instantly dropped back upon her chair, aided in her descent thereto by a vigorous tug from her companion.

At Beverly's grasping, "Oh!" Aileen and Sally started. Beverly had not noticed the two girls until that instant.

"What's the matter?" asked Sally.

"Nothing. Just a funny kink in my side. It's all over now."

"You've played too hard. I knew you would. Come quick and get a good rub-down. You're nearly all in. Why didn't we realize it sooner. Come on," and full of solicitude they hurried her away to the dressing-room, her supposed indisposition driving all thoughts of the strange girls from their heads, and when the three were dressed and ready to join their companions the visitors had disappeared; gone undoubtedly with others who had come to witness the game, and they never thought to mention their presence to Beverly.

That they in common with the other guests had been ushered into Miss Woodhull's library, where, agreeable to custom, hot chocolate was served, had each, by some miraculous means contrived to be served *three times*, and had held a brief but most flattering conversation with Miss Woodhull, Sally, Beverly and Aileen never suspected. When they took their departure Miss

Woodhull suddenly remembered that they had not been introduced to her and that she had not the vaguest idea of their names. Which of her teachers or pupils had been so very remiss?

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## CHAPTER XV

### THE TRUMP CARD

It so happened that the presence of the two strange girls had aroused the curiosity of someone else, and that this somebody being of a suspicious nature at all times required but little to set her fancies a-galloping. She had watched the girls all through the game, and at its end sped away to the dressing room and changed her clothes with remarkable expedition. Then, instead of joining her companions in Miss Woodhull's reception room, where tea was to be served to pupils and guests, she hurried into her outdoor garments, and slipped out of a side door, made her way around the house to a clump of fir trees in which she could watch undetected all who left the main entrance of Leslie Manor.

She did not have to wait long. The two girls were among the first to leave, but instead of following the broad main walk as the other guests did, they turned into a side path as though wishing to stroll about the grounds. The moment they were out of sight the suspicious one was hot-foot upon their trail, and Miss Eleanor Allen was compelled to do some lively stepping out in order to overtake her quarry. Only they were certainly most athletic young women if one might judge from the manner in which they strode forward.

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Naturally at that season of the year the outskirts of the grounds were entirely deserted. The elegantly dressed young ladies hurried toward a dense clump of cedars which grew near the prickly holly hedge, and, to Eleanor's amazement, the wearer of the big chiffon veil began to tug and haul at it until it came loose, while the taller girl began to divest herself of her handsome fur collar and coat. Eleanor gasped, and the next moment nearly passed away, for now Miss "Chiffon-Veil's" skirts fell from her, and Miss "Tall-Blonde" began to wriggle out of *her* garments as a boy might wriggle out of his coat and vest.... It was all Eleanor could do to repress a cry of horror. Then off fell the big hat, the hair coming with it, and before her stood a tall, fair boy in his trousers and shirt.

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"Gee Whiz! Ath, pitch me my coat quick! Those girl's togs nearly smothered me and now I'm freezing," he cried.

The garments desired were picked out of a bundle of things hidden in the cedars, and flung at the shivering blonde, who promptly scrambled into it, and drew from one of the pockets a cap, which he jammed down upon his curly pate. Then swooping down he caught up the feminine gear lying upon the ground, jammed it pell mell into a laundry bag, and heaved it over the hedge into the road beyond, his companion, now having cast his outer raiment, doing precisely the same thing. Then both shinned up a tall tree whose branches overhung the road, walked like rope-walkers along a branch which topped the hedge, and dropped lightly to the ground. Eleanor ran to the hedge in time to see the laundry bags pitched upon the backs of two waiting horses, the boys scramble upon their mounts and with a whoop of triumph go pelting off down the road.

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"Well, I never! Well, I never!" gasped Miss Paulina Pry, which was unquestionably the absolute truth, though not characteristic. "That was Beverly Ashby's brother and her beau!" Eleanor's selection of common nouns was at times decidedly common. "Now, Miss High-and-Mighty, we will see what happens to girls who are so very superior to other girls but can read their letters and sneak boys into our school against rules," and back she sped to the house, filled to the brim with knowledge, but with such a paucity of wisdom in her brain that it was a wonder she kept to the path. It was a pity that no one was at hand to quote for her benefit: "Knowledge is haughty that she knows so much, but Wisdom is humble that she knows no more."

From the moment Eleanor Allen entered Leslie Manor, she had been Petty Gaylord's slave, and a more complete "crush" never was known. Flowers, candy, books, and what not were lavished upon her adored one. Everything that Petty would accept, and since Petty's discrimination was not of the nicest order all proved fish which fell into her net. Eleanor lived in the atmosphere of Petty's thrilling romance until she almost felt it to be her own. She had seen the lost letter flutter to the schoolroom floor, and had also seen Beverly pick it up. Her first impulse was to run and tell Petty, but had no opportunity to do so in the classroom. Then she decided to effect its rescue herself, and while the others were at luncheon had slipped into Beverly's room and extracted the note from her history. She never dreamed that Beverly meant to return it to Petty and did not know that she had gone to her the following morning to explain its loss as well as she was able. Eleanor intended to give Petty the note at once, but when circumstances had prevented her from doing so for several hours, she made up her mind to keep it in her own possession in order to use it to Beverly's undoing. Just how this was to be compassed she had no very clear idea, and *now* had come a fine opening. She hated Beverly because she had laughed at Petty's love affair, and ignored completely the one who worshipped at Petty's shrine. The

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scene in Professor Sautelle's room had nearly thrown Beverly into hysterics, and Eleanor had also witnessed that. Oh, she had a long score against Beverly Ashby.

That evening as Miss Woodhull sat by her study table reading a tap came upon her door and Eleanor entered at the word "Come."

Miss Woodhull was not over-pleased at being interrupted in the midst of a thrilling article on the Suffrage question and the militant doings of her wronged sisters in England. "Well?" she queried crisply.

"I would like to speak to you, Miss Woodhull."

"Very well, speak," was the terse reply.

This was somewhat disconcerting. Eleanor coughed.

"Will you be good enough to state your errand without further peroration. I do not relish being interrupted in my reading."

"I—I—thought I ought to tell you,—to show you—I mean you ought to see this note which I found," and Eleanor crossed the room to Miss Woodhull's side, the note held toward her.

She took it, asking as she did so: "Why come to me about so trivial a matter? What is it? Where did you find it?"

"I didn't think it trivial and that is why I came right to you," Eleanor replied, ignoring the embarrassing questions.

Miss Woodhull opened the note. The first line acted like a galvanic shock. She sat up rigid as a lamp post. The words were "Darling Little Sweetheart:—" Then she read on:

"When I close my eyes I can still feel your soft arms about my neck and your kisses upon my lips. I can't wait much longer for you, darling. Something must be done. I just can't stand it. I've got to see you before Easter. It's no use to say I can't, because I'm going to—somehow. So don't be surprised at anything. Leslie Manor is not so many miles away and ways and means can be contrived in spite of all the old maid guardians that ever lived. Wonder if the old lady knows how it feels to have a man kiss her? I bet she don't! I've never seen your Suffragette queen, but I don't need to after all you've told me about her. She must be a cuckoo.

"So keep your weather eye piped, sweetness and leave the rest to your

Adoring 'Boy'"

By the time the Empress reached the last word of that missive her face had assumed the color of a gobbler's wattles, and her eyes were blazing. Eleanor was nearly frightened to death at the Genius of Wrath which she had invoked.

"To whom does this nauseating thing belong?"

"It was not in an envelope when I found it, Miss Woodhull."

"Where did you find it?"

Eleanor hesitated, it would never do to seem too communicative.

"Did you understand my question?"

"Yes, Miss Woodhull."

"Then reply at once."

"I found it in the south wing," she said hesitatingly.

"Ah!" The word was exhaled triumphantly. "In the lower end of that wing?"

"Yes, Miss Woodhull."

"Near Suite 10?"

She recalled the tall, acrobatic visitor of All Saints' Eve. She had always suspected Beverly and her suspicions had been confirmed when Admiral Ashby asked her to sanction visits from Athol and Archie. "You did quite right to come to me with this letter. It is far too serious a matter to be dealt with by my subordinates. I highly commend your discretion. I shall sift the matter to the bottom."

Eleanor winced. That "sifting" might change from a small affair to a large one, as a snowball may grow into an avalanche. Then she said with well-assumed contrition, "Oh, Miss Woodhull, I would not for the world accuse *anyone*. It may be just fun——"

"There is no element of fun in such a letter as this, and absolutely no humor. I have realized for some time that a decided atmosphere was being created in this school, but have been unable to discover its origin, and *this*," giving the letter the vicious shake a terrier would give a rat, "may prove the touchstone. I need hardly enjoin absolute secrecy upon your part. You have already proved your discretion. If you make any further discoveries you will, of course, come to me at once. By-the-way, when did you find the letter?"

"Why—er—several days ago, Miss Woodhull."

"Then why have you so long delayed coming to me?" The eyes were very searching.

"I was afraid—afraid—I might be mistaken. That after all it really didn't mean anything. The girls often play jokes upon one another, you know."

"Not such senseless jokes as this one I trust. What caused you to alter your opinion?"

The professional stage certainly missed a star when it failed to discover Eleanor. She hesitated, looked down, then up with appealing eyes. She twisted her fingers together and untwisted them. She shifted from one foot to the other, all of which was maddeningly irritating to Miss Woodhull.

"This is no time for hesitation,—speak!"

"This afternoon," whispered Eleanor.

"Sit in that chair and tell me everything without further circumlocution." The tone was final.

With appropriate hesitancy the events of the afternoon were graphically pictured for the Empress. When they were completely drawn she said with the grimness of Fate: "You may go, but remember, not one word to your companions." A most superfluous admonition, for Eleanor was nearly petrified with fear as it was. She retreated to her room with all possible speed and her room-mate wondered what had taken place to make her look so pale, but refrained from asking questions. Eleanor and her room-mate were not entirely congenial.

It was close to nine-thirty when she entered her room which was on the floor above Beverly's. Down in hospitable Suite 10 the social spirit was rampant. The Basket-ball victory was being celebrated by a spread. Light bell did not ring until ten Saturday nights. Beverly was in the act of biting into a chocolate éclair when Miss Stetson came to the door. Beverly was sitting back to it and supposed it was one of her companions.

As all will concede, an éclair is, to say the least, an uncertain quantity. Even upon a plate and carefully manipulated with a fork, it is given to erratic performances. When held between a thumb and forefinger, and *bitten* into, its possibilities are beyond conjecture. Miss Stetson appeared at a most inopportune moment (she usually did) and each girl rose to her feet, Beverly under the circumstances being the last to do so because she had no idea that Miss Stetson was anywhere near No. 10. Her tardy uprising brought about the inevitable result. Her teeth came together upon her éclair and the filling escaped its bounds, landing in many places that it should not have landed. When Miss Stetson had removed about a tablespoonful of cream filling from her bosom, she said icily: "Miss Ashby, you are to report at Miss Woodhull's study at once," and utterly ignored Beverly's apologies.

"Report at Miss Woodhull's office at nine-thirty at night?"

Consternation fell upon the revellers. The hair had snapped and Damocles' sword had certainly fallen.

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## CHAPTER XVI

### A CRISIS

Fully as bewildered as the girls she had left behind her, Beverly went quickly to Miss Woodhull's study. So far as she could recollect nothing could be scored against her deportment unless, at this late date her wild gallop to Kilton Hall had become known, or the presence of Athol and Archie at the Hallowe'en frolic had been discovered. True, she had recognized Athol and his companion as they were leaving the gymnasium that afternoon, but she did not believe that any one else had. As to any foreknowledge of that prank she had not had the slightest. So her conscience was quite clear on that score anyway. She tapped at the door and was bidden enter. Miss Woodhull's expression as she looked at Beverly was most forbidding.

"Good-evening, Miss Woodhull. Miss Stetson said you wished to see me."

Utterly ignoring the greeting, Miss Woodhull thrust toward Beverly the incriminating letter, at the same time demanding: "Who has had the audacity to send such a thing as this to you while you are a pupil in my school?"

Beverly started at sight of the lost love billet, Miss Woodhull noted the start and a sneer curved her set lips.

"No one sent it to me, Miss Woodhull," she answered calmly.

"You will probably add that you have never seen it before."

Beverly did not reply.

"Answer me at once."

"Yes, I have seen it before."

"Where did you last see it?"

"In my English history book."

"How came it there, pray?"

"I put it there myself."

"And yet you have the temerity to tell me that it is not yours? Are you in the habit of reading letters which are addressed to other people?"

"Was the letter addressed, Miss Woodhull? It was not even in an envelope when it came into my possession."

"You have no doubt destroyed the envelope. Nevertheless, I must insist upon knowing who wrote that letter."

"I cannot tell you, Miss Woodhull. I have never looked at the signature."

"How dare you resort to such fencing with me? You cannot evade a direct answer, for I have resolved to learn the writer's name, and report him to the principal of his school," asserted Miss Woodhull, jumping at conclusions.

"I cannot tell you the writer's name."

"You mean that you *will* not. But, I warn you, this obstinacy only adds to the gravity of the situation."

"It is not obstinacy, Miss Woodhull; I do not know it."

"Yet you admit having had this open letter in your possession and insist that it is not your own? A curious combination, to say the least," was the sarcastic retort.

"I had the letter, but it is not mine. I never read it, and I do not know the writer's name." This was entirely true, Beverly had never heard dear "Reggie's" surname.

"Perhaps you are likewise ignorant of the identity of the two people who masqueraded as Tweedle-dee and Jack o' Lantern?"

"They were my brother and his friend Archie," was the prompt reply.

"Ah! Then you will admit something of this intrigue."

"If it can be called by so portentous a name," answered Beverly smiling.

That smile acted like a match to gunpowder. Miss Woodhull's temper and self-control vanished together, and for a few moments Beverly was the object of a scathing volley of sarcastic invective. As it waxed hotter and hotter Beverly grew colder and colder, though her eyes and cheeks were blazing.

"It is useless to keep up this silly deception. You may as well try to make me believe that you were not aware of the presence of your brother and your silly sweetheart disguised as girls this afternoon, and that you did not lay the whole disgraceful plan for them to escape at the rear of the grounds." Miss Woodhull did not confide to Beverly that she had been most beautifully hoodwinked by those same girls, who had actually gone into the reception room, partaken of the "eats" with the other guests, held charmingly lisping conversations with two or three of the faculty, Miss Woodhull included, who had afterward commented upon the "charming manners of the two young girls who had come from Luray," they having so informed that lady.

"Sweetheart?" repeated Beverly in amazement. It was the one word which burned itself into her brain. The tone in which she echoed it ought to have enlightened Miss Woodhull. "Archie my sweetheart?"

"I dare say that is what you call him, since he so terms you in this missive," sneered Miss Woodhull.

"Archie is like an older brother to me, Miss Woodhull. We were raised together," said Beverly with a simple dignity which should have prohibited further taunts of the kind.

"Raised?" queried the lady. "Do you class yourself with the vegetable or the lower animal kingdom?"

"I think you must have heard that expression used before in Virginia," was the quiet reply, though her cheeks grew a deeper red, and had Mrs. Ashby been present, and occupying the tribunal it is safe to assume that she would have been prepared for something to happen right speedily. Indeed it was a wonder something had not happened long ago.

"It is just such barbarisms of speech that I have spent a quarter of a century in a vain endeavor to eliminate from the extraordinary vocabulary of this section of the United States, but I recognize it to be a Sisyphus task. That, however, is aside the question. The vital ones at this moment are: By whom was this letter written? When did you receive it? What is the meaning of its contents, and how you could have had the audacity to hold clandestine meetings with this young man? Also, how many times he has actually forced himself into my school disguised as a girl?"

In a slow even voice Beverly replied to each question:

"I do not know the name of the person who wrote that letter. I never received it. I can not tell you the meaning of the contents because I do not know them. I have never held any clandestine meetings with Athol or Archie, and so far as I knew until after the game today they had been in this school but once. At that time I knew they were coming and we did it partly for a lark and partly because I wanted so terribly to see Athol." A little catch came into her voice just there. Miss Woodhull wholly misinterpreted the reason for it and murmured sarcastically:

"Athol."

"Yes, my twin brother, Miss Woodhull. I do not expect *you* to understand what we have always been to each other. As to their presence here this afternoon, I knew absolutely nothing of it until Athol pitched his muff into the air and gave our old yell of victory at the end of the game," and Beverly nearly laughed at the recollection of her start when the old familiar sound fell upon her ears, and the memory of the way in which that muff had hurtled into the air.

"Your mirth is most ill-timed, Miss Ashby. This is by no means a facetious occasion, please understand. I do not lightly tolerate the infringement of my rules, as you will learn to your cost. If, as you state, you are ignorant of the contents of this letter you may now read it aloud in my presence. Perhaps that may refresh your memory and enable you to answer *truthfully* the other questions."

Miss Woodhull held the letter toward Beverly. The girl did not stir.

"Did you understand my command?"

"I did, Miss Woodhull. I have already told you the entire truth, but I must decline to read that letter because it is not mine."

"Decline! Decline!" almost shrieked the infuriated principal. "Do you dare defy my commands?"

"I do not wish to defy your orders, Miss Woodhull, but I can not read someone else's letter."

Beverly's voice was trembling partly from nervousness, partly from outraged pride.

"You shall read that letter to me whether it is yours or not though I have not the slightest doubt that it is yours, and that you are trying to shield yourself behind some purely fictitious person. You seem to possess a lively imagination."

Beverly stood rigid. Miss Woodhull waited.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to give a name to your fictitious being?"

"I do know to whom that letter was sent, for I saw her drop it. I picked it up to return it to her, but before I could do so it disappeared from my history. I could not help reading the first line because it stood out so plainly before me when I picked the letter from the floor. I know nothing further of its contents, and I do not wish to. That line was silly enough. The girl did not know what had become of it until I went to her later and told her about finding it and also about its loss afterward. From that moment to this I have never laid eyes upon it, and I wish I never had seen it at all. You may believe me or not as you choose, but until I came into this school such things had never entered my head, and mother and Uncle Athol would be perfectly disgusted with the whole showdown. And so am I." Beverly paused for want of breath.

"*Who dropped that letter?*" The words were in italics, notwithstanding the fact that some vague doubts were beginning to form in the back of the principal's brain.

"Do you for one second think that I will tell you?" blazed Beverly.

"I am very positive that you will tell me without a moment's delay, or you will be suspended from this school within twenty-four hours, if not expelled. Her name! At once!"

"I shall never tell you no matter what you do to me. What do you take me for? How *dare* you think me capable of such a low-down, mucker trick?" Unconsciously she had lapsed into Athol's vernacular. It was the last touch to Miss Woodhull's wrath. She actually flew up out of her chair and catching Beverly by her shoulders shook her soundly. Then it all happened in a flash. Miss Woodhull was a tall woman and a large woman as well. She weighed at least one-hundred-seventy pounds. But from lack of proper exercise (she loathed walking) and the enjoyment of the many luxuries which the past successful years had made possible, she was exactly like a well-modeled India rubber figure.

Beverly was tall for a girl not yet sixteen, and as the result of having grown up with two active healthy boys, and having done every earthly thing which they had done, she was a living, vital bunch of energy and well-developed muscles, and fully as strong as Athol.

Never since tiny childhood when Mammy Riah had smacked her for some misdeed, or her mother had spanked her for some real transgression, had hand been laid upon her excepting in a caress. That any human being could so lose her self-control as to resort to such methods of correction she would not have believed possible.

Then in a flash all the fighting blood of the Ashbys and Seldons boiled, and with a cry of outraged feelings Beverly Ashby laid hold of Miss Woodhull's flabby arms with a pair of slender muscular hands, backed her by main force against the chair which she had so hastily vacated, and plumped that dumbfounded lady down upon it with a force which made her teeth crack together, as she cried indignantly:

"How dare you touch me! How dare you!"

Then with a whirl she was across the room, out of the door and up the stairs to Study 10, which she entered like a cyclone and rushed across into her bedroom, slamming and locking the door.

What mental processes took place behind that locked door her astonished room-mates, who had been eagerly awaiting her return, could not even guess, and dared not venture to inquire. Not a sound came from the room.

"What do you suppose has happened?" asked Sally breathlessly.

"Something a good deal more serious than we have any idea of. Beverly Ashby is not the kind of girl to look or act like that without a mighty good cause. Did you notice her face? It frightened



me," was Aileen's awed reply.

"What can we do?" asked Sally in deep distress.

"Not one single, solitary thing, and that's the very worst of it. We don't even know what has happened," and the two girls began to prepare for bed in a bewildered sort of way.

Meanwhile down in that perfectly appointed study a very dazed woman sat rigid and silent. For the very first time in all her life she had encountered a will stronger than her own, had met in the person of an individual only a quarter of her own age a force which had literally and figuratively swept her off her feet and set at naught a resolution which she believed to be indomitable. And worst of all, it had all come to pass because she had lost her self-control. Up to her own outbreak Miss Woodhull was forced to admit that Beverly had been absolutely courteous. It was purely her own act which had precipitated that climax. For fully half an hour she sat as one stunned, then she said, and the words almost hissed from her colorless lips:

"I shall make an example of her! She shall be expelled in disgrace!" though then and there she resolved that none should ever learn of that final scene, and—well—somehow, though she could not explain her conviction, she knew that the outside world would never learn of it through Beverly.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### IN THE WEE SMA' HOURS

When Beverly swept into her room her thoughts were like a seething cauldron; One instant one impression boiled to the surface, only to be submerged the very next by others surging to the top. She could not think connectedly. Everything seemed jumbled pell mell in her brains. Just one incident took definite shape: She had been shaken like a naughty child and told that she was lying. And all because every instinct of honor and justice forbade her betraying a class-mate, even though she entertained for her little less than contempt. And the effect of Miss Woodhull's act was very much as though a man had deliberately walked up to Admiral Seldon, accused him of lying and slapped his face.

During the six months which she had spent at Leslie Manor, Beverly Ashby had been no more nor less than just herself: neither better nor worse than the average girl. But for her six months in a boarding-school presided over by a woman who had never known any real girlhood, or girlhood's exuberance, was an experience far different than for the average girl. Miss Woodhull had grown more and more iconoclastic, and more of a law unto herself with each advancing year. She had become as adamant to all natural impulses, and apparently dead to all affection. Bitterly intolerant of suggestion, advice, or even the natural laws of ethics. With each year she had grown more difficult to live with, and less and less fitted to govern growing girls. But in the beginning the school had established a reputation for the thoroughness of its curriculum and its instruction, as well as for its discipline, and there is little doubt that some of the girls which had come to it during the past thirty years were in need of some discipline.

But Beverly Ashby was not of the type who required discipline of the order Miss Woodhull believed in. Beverly had lived for more than fifteen years under the discipline of love and good judgement, and had developed fairly well in that atmosphere. Her mother had never reproved or punished her in anger. The Admiral, while adoring her, was "boss of the ship," and both she and Athol had always recognized that fact. His word was law. Moreover, she had always been treated as a reasoning human being *invariably* trusted; a nice code of honor having been established from the moment the twins could understand the meaning of that fine old word. And that is much earlier in children's lives than a good many grownups believe.

No wonder an outraged little mortal now sat at her window, her heart beating tattoo, her temples throbbing, her cheeks blazing, her eyes flashing, but her hands clenched and icy cold. There she sat until all sounds in the big house were hushed. She was as rigid as though carved from marble, even though her breath came and went pantingly.

The hand upon the clock in the stable tower crept from hour to hour, the bell telling off the half-hours. She neither saw nor heard. Then came the twelve long deliberate strokes announcing the witching hour. At the first stroke Beverly started into life. By the time the last had sounded the pretty pink dinner gown she had been wearing lay in a tumbled heap upon the bed where she had tossed it.

By this time the moon which had been pouring its flood of light into her room was dropping behind the tall trees and the room was growing dark. The steam heat had long since died down and the room was cold. She was entirely unconscious of physical conditions. Silently as a shadow she worked, and with the swiftness of a cloud scudding before a gale of wind. In ten minutes the room was in perfect order and she was garbed in her stout riding-boots, heavy riding skirt, a warm flannel shirt waist and heavy sweater. Her wool skating cap was pulled tight down about her ears, and she carried her riding crop in her gloved hands.

Gently raising her window she slipped out upon the piazza roof, crawled upon her hands and knees to the edge, tossed her riding crop to the ground and then, boy-fashion slid down the piazza pillar as easily as Athol could have done it. Picking up the riding crop she sped across the lawn to the stable, well hidden by the foliage.

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Andrew Jackson Jefferson and his two assistants slept in a little cottage behind the stable. The stable door was locked but a small window at the side had been left open for ventilation. Monkey-wise she scrambled up and through it. A low nickering from the horses greeted her; they knew her at once. Apache was contentedly munching his hay. Horses sleep or eat capriciously. To slip on his bridle, adjust and cinch his saddle took but a few minutes. Then she led him from his stall, silently unbarred the big doors, led him outside, again closed the doors carefully, and mounted him. The night was clear and cold. The moon, though now well toward the western mountains, still made it bright. Not a sound had Beverly uttered for over two hours, but now, leaning forward she clasped both arms around the little broncho's neck, rested her face against his mane, and whispered:

"Apache, no Seldon or Ashby can ever be told that they are lying. Do you understand? We are going back to people who don't say such things. It's a long distance, and I don't know the way very well I may get lost, but I don't believe that *you* will. Take me safely home, Apache. *Please, please* take me home to dear old Woodbine and mother and Uncle Athol and Mammy Riah and Athol and—and everybody I love."

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A little sob ended the entreaty, and as though he understood every word she had spoken Apache gave a neigh loud enough to waken the Seven Sleepers.

Beverly clapped her hand across his nostrils as she cried:

"Oh, you mustn't! You will wake everybody up! Go!" and with a bound Apache went, but as though he now fully understood he swept like a shadow across the lawn, out through a side gate and down the pike. Jefferson on his cot in the cottage roused enough to mutter:

"Dat hawse a-hollerin'. I bettah get up an' see——" and then resumed his snore just where Apache's farewell had interrupted it. And out in the great lonely, silent night the little horse sped away like the wind. For a mile Beverly let Apache gang his ain gait, then she drew him down to the steady lope which he could keep up for hours without tiring.

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The lines: "But there is a road from Winchester town, A good broad highway leading down," might have been written of the first five miles of the road Beverly was following, and which led to Front Royal. Those miles were covered in less than half an hour. But over thirty still lay ahead and some of them would have been pretty rough riding even in summer time and with the roads in good condition.

The moon was now dropping behind the distant range of the great North Mountains, the air was chill and penetrating, and the dense darkness which precedes the dawn enveloped all the world. Front Royal, save for a few scattered, flickering lights, lay in absolute darkness. Beverly drew a quick breath and shut her teeth hard. From Front Royal to Luray her way must be on dead reckoning and Apache's incomprehensible instinct, and those miles seemed to Beverly to be double the length of ordinary miles. Still, she knew, that she could not go far astray if she kept between the railroad and the river, so plucking up her courage she fled through the sleeping town like a wraith. Once beyond it the roads branched and her first doubt had to be settled. Dismounting, she went close to the stone mile post and tried to read the sign. She managed to make out the name, but it might as well have been Greek. She knew nothing of the town indicated three miles beyond.

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"Apache," she said desperately, "do you know that it's up to *you*?" Then she looked to her saddle cinch and her stirrup straps, took the little beast's head in her arms and hugged him, and kissed his velvety muzzle. "Yes, it's up to you. You've got to pull out for Woodbine and Uncle Abel somehow."

Perhaps Uncle Abel's name was the pass word. At any rate, Apache nuzzled Beverly, neighed, pawed the ground impatiently, and indicated in every possible way that he would do all any horse could.

"All right then. Now make good!" and with a light spring she was again in the saddle.

There is no time to dwell in detail upon that dark, cold, terrible ride between Front Royal and Luray. Beverly had never been so cold in all her life. She let Apache choose his own way, and take his own gait, which was now slow and doubtful, and then like an arrow, as his confidence grew. Luray was reached in time and skirted, then all was plain sailing to Spruce Branch fourteen miles beyond. Apache had often been to Luray and knew every inch of that road, but Beverly was by that time nearly numb from the cold. Then:

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"As if he knew the terrible need,  
He stretched away with the utmost speed.  
Hills rose and fell, but his heart was gay  
With *Woodbine* only eight miles away."

Three-thirty A. M. had just been struck by the ship's clock near the head of Admiral Seldon's bed, the "seven bells" rousing him slightly. He had never ceased counting time by "watches," and as sure as "morning watch" drew near he would waken. The habits of early years are not readily forsaken.

The faintest suggestion of dawn was visible over the Blue Ridge when, instead of turning over

again and settling down for his last, snug morning nap, the old gentleman started wide awake and keenly alert.

“Had he heard a horse neigh?” Impossible! The stables were too far from his bedchamber for any such sound to reach him. “Reckon I must have been dreaming of Beverly and her little skallawag,” he said softly, and was about to settle down once more when a neigh, loud, clear and insistent, pierced the crisp morning air.

“What the ——?” he cried, springing out of bed with surprising agility for his years, and switching on the electric lights. Hurrying to the window which commanded the sweep of the driveway he peered out. In the faint light the indistinct outline of a horse was visible.

“Now which of those young devils of colts has escaped?” was his query, as he hastily donned his clothes, and started down stairs.

But that neigh had been heard by others also, and as the Admiral reached the end of the hall Mrs. Ashby came from her bedroom arrayed in bath robe and bed slippers.

“What is it?” she asked.

“The Lord only knows. One of those confounded colts broken loose I dare say, and if it is I’ll crack Uncle Abel’s head for him,” and away he hurried.

But Uncle Abel, who possessed six instead of five senses, the sixth being “horse sense” had heard that neigh, too, and the ceremony of his robing requiring less time than the Admiral’s, he was already speeding toward that sound as fast as his old legs would carry him. As he turned the corner of the house he was welcomed by a most jubilant neigh, and the next second had reached the steaming Apache, and exclaiming:

“Ma Lawd-Gawd-A’mighty, what done happen! Is dat yo’, Miss Bev’ly? Baby! Honey! Is yo’ daid?” for a rigid, unconscious little figure was leaning forward with her arms clasped tightly around the panting horse’s neck.

Quicker than it takes to tell it Abel had unclasped the clinging arms and was tenderly lifting her from the horse’s back. At that moment the Admiral burst through the big front door and came striding across the lawn, storming at each step:

“You Abel! You old fool! How did that horse break loose? How——My God! Who is that?” for he was now near enough to see the three figures and to hear Abel’s sobs which punctuated his words as he held the helpless little figure in his arms.

“What is it? What has happened?”

“Gawd only knows, Mars Athol. But he’p me wid dis chile quick please sur. She lak ter die ef we don’ do some’n.”

No need of that request. Relieved of his precious burden, Apache sped away for the stable, his duty faithfully performed. There many willing hands cared for him while his little mistress, the excitement, fatigue and cold having completed Miss Woodhull’s cruel work, was tenderly carried into the house by old Abel and her uncle, the latter muttering:

“It’s some of that damned woman’s work! I know it is, and I’ll bring the whole school down about her ears unless I find out the truth of it all. My little girl! My little girl! Over thirty-five miles in the dead of night, alone and nearly frozen. Mary! Mary! Mammy! Everybody come quick and phone for Doctor Marshall!”

But Beverly was not dying, and within an hour, under her mother’s and good old Mammy Riah’s ministrations, was warm and snug in her bed, though weak and exhausted. When the doctor came he ordered absolute quiet and undisturbed rest. “She will soon drop off to sleep, and let her sleep for hours if she can. She is utterly worn out and as much from nerve strain as physical fatigue if I know anything of symptoms. What happened, Seldon?”

“The good Lord who brought her through it only knows, for I don’t, though I mean to learn as soon as that child is in a condition to tell me. And then by the great guns something’s going to let loose. I’ve talked with that stone image of a woman at Leslie Manor and I know what it can say. It isn’t a woman; It’s a blight upon the sex: A freak: It’s *stone*, and when lightning strikes stone something bursts to smithereens. And by all that’s powerful the lightning’s going to strike *this* time. Thirty-five miles all alone in the dead of the night. Marshall I’m all bowled over. Good Lord! Good Lord!” The Admiral paced the library like a caged lion.

“A woman without children is only half a woman,” sputtered fat little Doctor Marshall. “I’ll be in again toward evening. Don’t worry about her, for she’ll come out all right. She has a constitution like India rubber.”

“Well may the Lord help that old maid if she doesn’t!” was the Admiral’s significant answer.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### WHEN THE LIGHTNING STRUCK

"Hurry up Bev! You'll be late for breakfast. You've done some sleeping since ten o'clock last night," called Sally, pounding upon the door of bedroom A, but getting no response.

Aileen had already knocked and called without eliciting a reply, and both the girls were worried but tried not to show it. When ten more minutes passed in silence Aileen looked troubled and asked:

"Do you think she is ill? Ought we to call Miss Stetson?"

"Miss Stetson!" snapped Sally. "If she is ill she would rather see the old Nick himself than Miss Stetson. I'll run and get Mrs. Bonnell."

In spite of her anxiety Aileen laughed. True enough, Miss Stetson was not exactly the person to call in when one was ill. "That's true, Mrs. Bonnell will be the one to call. But I wish Bev *would* answer. It scares me almost to death. And I'd like right well to know what happened last night. Beverly Ashby is not the sort of girl to go up in the air over nothing, believe me, but she was pretty high up last night. Do go for Bonny, Sally. I'm too nervous to wait another minute."

"All right," and away sped Sally down the corridor. As she reached the foot of the stairs she almost ran into Wesley.

"Has yo' heard what done happen las' night, Miss Sally?" he asked excitedly.

"No. What was it?" asked Sally eagerly.

"Miss Bev'ly's hawse done been stole f'om de stable; saddle, bridle an' all."

"Never!" cried Sally.

"Yas ma'am, dey done been! Jeff'son yonder in de study a-tellin' Miss Woodhull 'bout it right dis minute," and Wesley hurried away to the dining room.

"Apache stolen! Oh——" Sally gasped. She recalled the words which Beverly had spoken the very first hour of their acquaintance: "It would take very little to make me light out for Woodbine."

Six months had passed since those words had been spoken, and during those months Beverly had known some lonely hours as well as happy ones; she had been made miserable more than once by Miss Bayliss, Miss Stetson and Miss Woodhull, who seemed to have conceived a most unmerited dislike for the girl. Sally knew nothing of Miss Woodhull's dislike for Admiral Seldon because he had presumed to question her policy, nor could a girl of Sally's sweet nature possibly understand the smallness of one which would take out upon a defenceless young girl the resentment which she harbored toward her older relative. Nevertheless, that was precisely the situation, and Miss Stetson and Miss Bayliss were Miss Woodhull's mirrors.

Sally soon found Mrs. Bonnell and together they hurried up stairs. But Mrs. Bonnell was no more successful in getting a response to her calls than the girls had been.

"Sally, can you climb?" she asked.

"Yes, Mrs. Bonnell," answered Sally wholly bewildered.

"Then crawl through your window and along the roof to Beverly's. I'm not going to stir up a fuss unless I am compelled to. Look in and tell me what you see. Be careful, dear," she ended as Sally scuttled over the window sill. They leaned out to watch her. She gave a little cry when she discovered that the room was empty.

"What is it?" they asked in a breath.

"She—she isn't there at all," gasped Sally.

"Not there! Raise the window and go in and unfasten the door, Sally. Be quick for the breakfast bell will ring in a few minutes."

Sally did as bidden. The room was as undisturbed as it had been twelve hours before.

Aileen ran to the closet. "Her riding things are gone!" she cried.

"And Wesley just told me that Apache had been stolen in the night," wailed Sally.

"There is more to this than we thought," said Mrs. Bonnell considerably perturbed. "Now I *must* report to Miss Woodhull."

She turned and hurried from the room but had not gone ten steps down the corridor when she met that lady with wrath and fire in her eye.

"What is this fresh annoyance concerning Beverly Ashby? Jefferson has just told me that her horse was stolen in the night. A likely story! It is some new deception upon her part. Such duplicity it has never been my misfortune to encounter. I wish to speak to her at once," stormed the principal, striding into the study.

Now to be responsible for a young girl not yet sixteen years of age, and one whose family is widely known throughout the entire state, and to discover that said young lady has been missing from beneath one's roof all night, is, to say the least, disconcerting. For the first time in her domineering life the Empress was thoroughly alarmed. Alarmed for Beverly's safety, the reputation of the school, and, last, but by no means least, for what such a denouement might bring to pass in the future financial outlook for her business. The school had paid well, but how long would its patronage continue if the facts of this case became widely known?

Miss Woodhull was an alien in the land of her adoption. She had never tried to be anything else. She had established herself at Leslie Manor because she wished to acquire health and wealth, and she had achieved her objects to a wonderful degree. But she had made no friends. She did not wish to make friends among the Southerners. She despised them and all their customs, and though in the beginning they had made many gracious overtures of friendship she had repulsed them at every turn. Consequently they soon began to regard her with indifference if not with contempt. There was absolutely nothing in common between them. She was merely a business proposition in their midst. Their children could acquire beneath her roof the education they desired for them, and there it ended. If, as rumor stated, she really came of gentle Northern blood it must have received a very peculiar infusion in her immediate forebears. They missed something of the noblesse oblige which was to them as a matter of course. So with each passing year the gulf had imperceptibly widened until Miss Woodhull was as much alone in hospitable Virginia as though she lived in Borneo.

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Upon realizing that Beverly was really missing her first impulse was to phone to Kilton Hall, for, of course, she had risen early and rushed off to see Athol. Miss Woodhull's blood boiled at the thought! Kilton Hall of all places the one she detested most. It had been a thorn in her flesh from the moment she knew of its existence for its policy was diametrically opposed to her own. Still, inquiries must be made without further delay, but she would be discreet. So she called the school up by phone:

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"Had they seen anything of a stray horse? One of her pupil's horses had escaped during the night and she was phoning in every direction in her endeavors to find it. It was Miss Ashby's horse and he might have made his way as far as the hall."

"No, there was no stray animal there, but Dr. Kilton would have a thorough search made in their neighborhood."

But Dr. Kilton was a far cry from being a fool. Why should Miss Woodhull think a runaway horse had run all that distance? And if he *had* Dr. Kilton was fully convinced that he had not run riderless. He had not forgotten that October runaway. Moreover, he had detected a repressed excitement in the voice over that phone. He very quietly conferred with Mrs. Kilton and that lady was quite as quick-witted as her spouse. They decided to maintain a discreet silence, but to make some quiet inquiries. A few hours later Smedes, the Doctor's body servant, was sent upon an errand to the little village nearest Leslie Manor, and Smedes knew every servant at that school. When he returned Dr. and Mrs. Kilton became considerably wiser regarding the true facts of the case, but decided to say nothing to Beverly's brother for the present. But they kept in constant communication with Leslie Manor, via Smedes and Jefferson.

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Far and wide did Leslie Manor send messages and messengers. No horse was to be found. In the school chaos reigned, and the usual Sunday decorum and peace went by the board completely. Some of the girls were rebellious, some hysterical, some scolded and some wept silently, and to a unit they all blamed Miss Woodhull for the situation. Mrs. Bonnell and several of the teachers were wholly indignant that she had not instantly communicated with Beverly's family, as was obviously her duty. Mrs. Bonnell openly urged it. Miss Woodhull pooh-poohed the idea. "Beverly would come back when she recovered from her fit of sulks, and would be properly punished for her conduct by expulsion. She had already transgressed to a degree to warrant it, and had been warned the evening before to that effect. ("Ah," breathed Mrs. Bonnell at this admission). Communicate with Beverly's people? Absurd! Why magnify such a trivial matter? Girls had made believe to run away from the school before, and would doubtless do so again. They invariably ran back again and Beverly would do likewise when she got ready. She was probably with some friend in the neighborhood. She was in the habit of forming friendships with all sorts and conditions of people. That her horse was also gone might be a mere coincidence, or else she was trying to frighten them all, and would come riding back by sundown. She was capable of almost any insubordination, and rising at dawn and riding off somewhere was merely a fresh demonstration of it."

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That Miss Woodhull was merely "whistling to keep her courage up" all well knew.

But sunset failed to bring the runaway, and Kilton Hall knew of this fact right speedily. Then Athol was called to the Doctor's study and the facts told him. The boy was thunderstruck, and blurted out:

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"It's that old harridan!" then blushed crimson. Dr. and Mrs. Kilton did not reprove the outbreak, but pardoned it upon the ground of excitement.

"You would better call up your uncle at once, Athol. I do not wish to interfere, or criticise, but I know what I should wish if it were my daughter," said Mrs. Kilton.

"Thank you ever so much, Mrs. Kilton, I'll do it right off," and he hurried into the little room at the end of the hall where the phone stood, Mrs. Kilton following, while the Doctor wondered what the next move must be. A moment later he joined them. Athol soon had Woodbine on the wire and then ensued a funny, one-sided conversation.

"Oh, Uncle Athol, is that you?"

"Say, have you,—that is,—has Bev sent any message to you today? What! She's there, in bed? Great Scott! When did she come?"

"Three-thirty this morning on Apache? And all in? Gee! But she's all right now? You have just been hearing the whole story from her? She did those thirty-five miles in three hours? Jimminy

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Christmas! Say, she's a pippin! Bully girl! I knew that pie-face over at her school would queer the whole show. Say, Uncle Ath, I'd just like to put one over on her for fair. What did she do to Bev, anyhow?"

"She never! What, told her she *lied!*" Athol very nearly kicked over the little phone stand.

"And Bev wouldn't stand for it and lit out? Snappy work! I say, Uncle Ath, let me come home, please, and hear all about it. I'll blow up if you don't say yes, honest, I shall. The Doctor won't let me? You bet he will. He and Mrs. Kilton are right here beside me and almost dancing up and down. They're peaches."

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" he jerked over his shoulder. "But they are all right. They've been almost worried to death. They heard of it early this morning and wanted to get word to you right off, but didn't dare butt in, you see...."

"Yes, they have just said I may come and I'll be down on the first train in the morning. I mustn't say a word to *Arch*. Oh, Uncle Ath! Well, I won't if you say not but I reckon I'll burst if I don't tell him. You don't want the old maid to get wise that Bev's at Woodbine? Going to give her a little dose of discipline? Oh, I say, Uncle Ath, give her all that's coming to her. She rates it all right, all right. She's made things just too darned hot for Bev, and a whole bunch of the girls up there. Everybody hates her."

"Eh?" as Mrs. Kilton's hand was laid warningly upon his shoulder. Dr. Kilton had turned hastily away. He could not trust his countenance, nor did he wish to hear too much. The boy which had never died in him was rebelling in sympathy with Athol.

A few more sentences and Athol hung up the receiver, and sought the Doctor. He was boiling with rage.

"Brace up, old chap. It's nothing serious, you may be sure of that, or your uncle would have sent for you at once. And, remember, mum's the word."

"Yes, sir. I'll remember, sir. And thank you a whole lot, sir, for letting me phone. I'll hold my jaw—I mean I won't say a single word."

"A pretty state of things, I'll be bound," stormed Dr. Kilton when Athol had gone. "Why that woman——" he did not complete his sentence.

"I wish she would sell out and go to live in Jericho, or some other remote place!" cried Mrs. Kilton, petulantly. Then added eagerly: "Oh Avary, perhaps she will—after all this. It will stir the whole countryside."

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## CHAPTER XIX

### FOR HAPPIER DAYS

While Athol was fuming at Kilton Hall and trying to keep his promise to his uncle to "hold his jaw," though it very nearly resulted in lockjaw, the ferment at Leslie Manor grew.

The older girls had grown rebellious almost to a unit, and the entire school was terror-stricken or hysterical, the inevitable outcome of a discipline which had steadily grown more severe and arbitrary; a nagging surveillance which only incited in the pupils a wild desire to do the very things of which they were unjustly suspected and accused. They were never trusted, their simplest, most innocent acts were misconstrued, their word doubted, and, as in Beverly's case, Miss Woodhull had more than once cruelly baited and insulted them.

Truly, "the years had wrought strangenesses in her," and a more short-sighted policy than she had adopted for the past five it would be hard to conceive.

Mrs. Bonnell and some of the teachers had been painfully alive to all this for a long time. Two or three of the instructors had resigned and sought positions elsewhere, unable to work in the unhappy atmosphere which Miss Woodhull created.

Once Mrs. Bonnell had bearded the lioness in her den and striven to remonstrate with her, which had drawn upon her devoted head such a storm of resentment that she had then and there tendered her resignation also. At that point Miss Woodhull, realizing how entirely dependent she was upon Mrs. Bonnell's perfect management of Leslie Manor had actually apologized and begged Mrs. Bonnell to remain. She excused her language upon the score of excessive fatigue after so many years of unremitting work. "Unremitting?" Mrs. Bonnell smiled but accepted the apology. Her livelihood depended upon her own work, and she also loved the place and had many friends in that part of the world. But the idea of Miss Woodhull's "arduous work" was certainly amusing. Miss Woodhull never did a thing (but criticise) from one day's end to the next. She had long since given up all classes, and now merely presided as the autocrat of the establishment, unloved by any, feared by many, disliked by all. If Miss Stetson and Miss Baylis really did like her they also shared the fear she inspired.

More than one upheaval had occurred in the course of the school's existence, but had always been quickly hushed up, though vague rumors had circulated throughout the community. During later years, however, more than one girl had "been dismissed," so Miss Woodhull stated, "for unbecoming conduct." The girls themselves told different stories. For the past three years Dr. and Mrs. Kilton had been quietly trying to purchase Leslie Manor through agents in Richmond, for a good bit of inside information had come to them regarding the manner in which matters were shaping there, and their pride in the community, and in Warren County, shrank from some possible crisis which would bring upon it an unpleasant notoriety.

In one sense the girls in Leslie Manor were well cared for. Their physical and personal welfare were safe in Mrs. Bonnell's hands and the instruction was thorough and excellent. But in the wise development of character, in the trustful, happy confidence which girlhood should know, in the harmony which is girlhood's right, or the harmless frolicing, and healthful bodily development from spontaneous activities, they were sadly lacking. Everything was cut and dried. All things ordered from Miss Woodhull's austere standpoint. No wonder that the school harbored "Pettys" and "Eleanors" and "Electras" and a few other oddities. Until this year it had never sheltered a "Beverly," and this same Beverly was likely to prove, though with no such intention upon her part, its Waterloo.

And thus stood affairs that Sunday evening after Beverly's flight, and then from a source least expected Bomb Number 1 was hurled.

All day long Electra Sanderson had been strangely silent. At eight o'clock she marched down to Miss Woodhull's study, rapped upon the door, and was bidden enter. That lady sat with her hand upon the telephone receiver, about to remove it. She now fully realized that Admiral Seldon must be communicated with at once. She must face the music this time. She almost hailed Electra with joy as the source of a brief respite.

Electra crossed the room, rested one hand upon the corner of Miss Woodhull's desk, plucked up her courage and plunged in head first:

"You scolded Beverly Ashby for receivin' a letter she didn't *get*. It wasn't hers at all. It was Petty Gaylord's. I saw her receive it. I don't want to tell tales, but I *wont* have Beverly blamed for something she never done—*did*. She's always been nice and polite to me and Petty aint been. Eleanor Allen *stole* that letter and brought it down here to you just to get Beverly into trouble. I *saw* her do it. She took it right out of Beverly's history book. Petty dropped it in history class and never knew what had become of it. The next morning Beverly came into our room and told Petty that she had picked it up to return it to her but when she opened her book to get it it was gone, but Petty wouldn't believe her and said awful things to her till Beverly just looked at her the way she *can* look when she *despises* people (well Miss Woodhull knew that look) and went out of the room. But Eleanor had that letter all the time, 'cause I saw her sneak into Beverly's room and snitch it. I don't know what she wanted with it, but after I saw her take it I watched her every single minute. I thought she would give it to Petty, of course, they're so stuck on each other, but she didn't. She just kept and kept it for some mucker trick, and when I saw her comin' down to your study last night I knew just as well as anything what she was up to. She hates Beverly just because she won't have anything to do with her and laughs at Petty and her mash. Petty's just dead in love with that feller at Annapolis. Now if you don't believe what I've told you you can just send for both of them and ask them yourself. I don't care a cent what you do for I'm going to leave this hateful school tomorrow and you can't stop me. And I'll tell dad all about this fracas too. I hate you and everything in the school—so there, now!" and with this final explosion Eleanor turned and fled from the room. Erin Go Bra! If Eleanor's story had not collapsed Miss Woodhull her English certainly would have compassed that result. She fell back upon her chair panting. Just then her phone rang: BOMB No. 2.

"No, Admiral Seldon, your niece is not here this evening. She is temporarily absent. When do I expect her to return? Oh, er—I think by tomorrow at latest. Is she where you can communicate with her by phone? Oh, certainly, certainly. The number? Why, er, I must ascertain for you. You must know immediately? You have heard alarming rumors? Ridiculous! Your niece missing since last evening? Preposterous! Absurd! Yes, of course, if you insist. And you will be over by the first train in the morning? Really, you are over-solicitous. My pupils are well looked after and cared for. You have reason to believe they are? Your tone hardly bears out your statement. She must be here to receive you when you arrive? Oh, certainly. *Very* well. Good-by." The Empress came nearer fainting after that conversation than she had ever come in all her life.

But such a nature as hers must have a vent for its spleen, and what better ones than Eleanor and Petty, the cause of all the mischief? The electric bell which summoned them to Miss Woodhull's study fairly sputtered sparks. Eleanor was sulkily silent. Petty, as usual, in tears. Tears were Petty's long suit.

We have not time to dwell upon the details of that interview even if we would. Eleanor was one of the few girls to really be expelled from the school, and Petty promptly fled to "darling mamma" and "Reggie."

Early Monday morning Admiral Seldon arrived upon the scene and was closeted with the Empress for two solid hours. This time his guns were *not* silenced, and those passing the study door could hear a steady rumble like heavy firing afar off, and in the intervals lighter shots, as though a gatling gun were popping its stacatto fire. Ultimately the heavy gun silenced the gatling. The last shot was something upon this order:

"Your methods, Madam, may prevail elsewhere, but permit me to say that they are a dead

failure here. You are not training cart horses, but thoroughbreds, and you can't lash and spur *that* breed. No, my niece will *never* return to Leslie Manor while it continues under its present management, and the next time I select a school for her the character and personality of its head will influence my choice far more than the curriculum, or modern methods. We have managed in bygone days to produce some pretty fine specimens of the true gentlewoman by the old methods in vogue in this part of the United States, and I am hopeful that we may produce a few more before the race dies out. Yes, I assuredly advise a rest, Madam, and that you prolong it indefinitely. It will benefit you immensely, I am sure—and also a great many others. I have the honor to wish you good-morning. And you need feel no further concern regarding my niece."

The following week the Easter recess began. During that recess Miss Woodhull went to a famous Sanitarium in the state in order to "Restore her over-taxed nerves." She did not know that the physician in charge was one of Admiral Seldon's oldest friends. He strongly advised against resuming her duties after the Easter recess, and urged her to discontinue all work (?) for at least a year, and to seek an entire change of scene.

She followed his advice so far as change of scene was concerned, but her idea of a complete rest was an immediate and very active affiliation with her suffering sisters in a crusade for their "rights," and the overthrow of the oppression of the sterner sex. She sailed for England, and once in London became one of the most rampant of the wronged ones.

Meanwhile the school was being conducted by Miss Baylis, who for five blissful weeks reigned supreme, while "hope" hinted a permanent one. But, alas! nothing is so delusive as human hope. That city across the sea settled Miss Baylis' plans, and Miss Woodhull's future. That lady had found her true place among England's "gentlewomen" (?), though she had utterly failed to do so among Virginia's. Over there she could chuck books at the heads of dignified judges and glory in seeing the old gentlemen dodge. She could heave her shoes at the Chancellor, and shout and yell with her wronged sisters. She could smash windows, blow up people's houses, arrange and cavort with the maddest of her feminine friends, and give a glorious vent to all the long pent-up belligerence in her makeup, to the everlasting humiliation, mortification, shame and horror of the GENTLEWOMEN of her own land. Exit Miss Woodhull.

And her substitute? Her triumph was short lived. Leslie Manor was sold in May. Agents in Richmond conducted the sale. No one knew the purchaser, but during the following month workmen appeared as by magic and labored like gnomes all day, and almost all night too. New buildings were erected, all sorts of strange changes made in the old ones. The place assumed huge proportions. What could it all mean?

In August the cat popped out of the bag. Dr. and Mrs. Kilton moved in. A new and imposing sign appeared upon the handsome iron grill-work of the entrance gate, the gold letters reading: "The Wilder-Kilton Co-Educational Academy!" Wilder had been Mrs. Kilton's maiden name. Old Kilton Hall, long since out-grown, became the home farm, and a sort of retreat for any pupils who were ailing or in need of a complete rest. The school was to be opened September thirtieth, under an entirely new auspices, and certainly under very new conditions. It was a daring venture, a complete innovation, but Dr. and Mrs. Kilton were sanguine of success. Whether their dreams were realized or not must be told in "A Dixie Girl Co-Ed."

And down in Woodbine?

Well, three hilarious young people were nearly tearing the world to tatters in their joy. In May Admiral Seldon had taken them to Washington and Annapolis, where they had, sure enough, had the time of their lives. Then, the sight-seeing fever increasing, Mrs. Ashby joined them in Philadelphia, and away they went to New York, Niagara, and finally to Europe, where the summer was spent in one round of ecstasy. And now September was drawing to its close, and with the last day of that month their eagerly-longed for co-ed days would begin.

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