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FOR GIRLS ***

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A SONG-CALENDAR BY A. L. C.

I

"When blood of autumn
Runs warm and red
In all the branches
Over head—
Sing clear bright sunshine,
And tender haze,
Sing glad beginning
Of College Days!

II

"When pines and spruces
Are bowed with snow,
When ponds are frozen
And keen winds blow—
Sing cozy corners
Or jingling sleighs,
Sing work or frolic
Of College Days!

III

"When comes sweet April,
With soft slow rain,
And earth has broken
Her frozen chain—
Sing low shy birdnotes,
And woodland ways,
Sing mirth and music
Of College Days!

IV

"When June days linger,
And warm winds blow
O'er fields of daisies
Adrift like snow—
Sing sad leave-takings

And tender praise
Of all the mem'ries
Of College Days!"

—Vassarion, '95.

Cordial acknowledgment is due to the editors of the *Youth's Companion* for their courteous permission to reprint in the following chapters of college life the episodes entitled respectively "Wanted: a Friend," and "Her Freshman Valentine."



SHE HID HER FACE AGAINST MARTHA'S DRESS

BEATRICE LEIGH at COLLEGE
A STORY FOR GIRLS

By JULIA A. SCHWARTZ

Author of
"Elinor's College Career" etc.

Illustrated by
EVA M. NAGEL

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Beatrice Leigh at College

CHAPTER I

BEA'S ROOMMATE

Lila Allan went to college in the hope of finding an intimate friend at last. Her mother at home waited anxiously for her earliest letters, and devoured them in eager haste to discover some hint of success in the search; for being a wise woman she knew her own daughter, and understood the difficulty as well as the necessity of the case.

The first letter was written on the day of arrival. It contained a frantic appeal for enough money to buy her ticket home immediately, because she had a lonesome room away up in the north tower, and nobody had spoken to her all the afternoon, and her trunk had not come yet, and she did not know where the dining-room was, and the corridors were full of packing-boxes with lids scattered around, and girls were hurrying to and fro with step-ladders and kissing each other and running to hug each other, and everything.

The second letter, written the following day, said that a freshman named Beatrice Leigh had come up to help her unpack. Beatrice had a long braid too, and her hair was the loveliest auburn and curled around her face, and she laughed a good deal. Lila had noticed her the very first evening. She was sitting at one of the tables in the middle of the big dining-room. When Lila saw her, she was giggling with her head bent down and her napkin over her eyes, while the other girls at that table smiled amused smiles. Lila knew instantly that this poor freshman had done something dreadful, and she was sorry for her. Later that same evening in Miss Merriam's

room she told how she had marched in to dinner alone and plumped down at that table among all those seniors. She seemed to consider it a joke, but Lila was sure she had been almost mortified to death when she learned of her mistake, and that was why she had laughed so hard. Several other freshmen were at Miss Merriam's. Two of them were named Roberta, and one was named Gertrude something. But Lila liked Beatrice best. Miss Merriam called her Bea. Miss Merriam was a junior who had invited in all the students at that end of the corridor to drink chocolate. Lila did not care for her much, because she had a loud voice and tipped back in her chair and said yep for yes.

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The third missive was only a postal card bearing a properly telegraphic communication to the effect that it was Saturday morning, and Bea was waiting to escort her to the chapel to hear read the lists of freshman names assigned to each recitation section. Mrs. Allan scanned the message with a quick throb of pleasure; then sighed as she laid it down. The indications were hopeful enough if only Lila would be careful not to drive away this friend as she had the others.

Meanwhile on that Saturday morning Bea and Lila, silent and shy, had crowded with their two hundred classmates into chapel. The two friends sat side by side. Lila was in terror of making some horrible blunder that might overwhelm her with a vast indefinite disgrace. She leaned forward in the pew, the pencil trembling between her fingers, the blood pounding in her ears, while from the platform in front a cool voice read on evenly through page after page of names. And then at last the tragic despair of finding that she had jotted down herself for two sections in English and none in Latin! When she managed to gasp out the awful situation in Bea's ear, that young person looked worried for full half a minute. It was a very serious thing to be a freshman. Then her cheery common sense came to the rescue.

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"Never mind. We'll go up and look the lists over after she has finished them all."

"Oh, can we? Will you truly go with me?" Lila drew a quick breath of relief and gratitude. This was one of the precious privileges of having found a friend. She gazed at Bea with such an adorable half-wistful, half-joyful smile on her delicate face that Bea never quite forgot the sensation of realizing that it was meant wholly for her. The memory of it returned again and again in later days when Lila's exacting ways seemed beyond endurance. For Lila's nature was one of those that give all and demand all and suffer in a myriad mysterious ways.

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On the afternoon of that Saturday when Bea skipped up the narrow tower stairs to invite Lila to go to the orchard to gather a scrapbasket full of apples, she discovered the door locked. In answer to her lively rat-tattoo and gay call over the transom, she heard the key turn.

Bea started to dash in; then after one glance stopped and fumbled uneasily with the knob. In her happy-go-lucky childhood with many brothers and sisters at home, tears had always an embarrassing effect.

"Let's—let's go to the orchard," she stammered. "It's lovely, and the fresh air will help your—your headache." She had a boyish notion that anybody would prefer to excuse heavy eyes by calling it headache rather than tears.

Lila pointed to the bed which was half made up.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she demanded in agonized reproach. "I thought the maids attended to the beds here. I left the mattress turned over the foot all day long, and the door was wide open. Everybody in the neighborhood must have looked in and then decided that I was lazy and shiftless. They believe that I have been brought up to let things go undone like that. They do, they do! Miss Merriam just the same as said so. She poked in her head a minute ago and said, 'Heigho, little one, time to make up your bed. It has aired long enough and the maid is not expected to do it.' She said that to me! Oh, I hate her!" Lila caught her breath hard.

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Bea opened her candid eyes wider in astonished curiosity. "But didn't you want to know about the maid?"

"She mortified me. Do you know how it feels to be mortified? The—the awfulness—" Lila stopped and swallowed once or twice as if something stuck in her throat. "She might have told me in a different manner so as not to wound me so heartlessly. She isn't a lady."

"Please." Bea twirled the door-knob in worried protest. "Don't talk that way. She is my friend. We live in the same town. She's nice, really. You've only seen the outside. Please!"

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"Oh, well!" Lila raised her shoulders slightly. "She isn't worth noticing, I dare say. Such people never are. I can't help wishing that you were not acquainted with her. I want you all to myself. I'm glad she belongs to another class anyhow."

Into Bea's puzzled face crept a troubled expression. "You're a funny girl, Lila," she said; "let's go to the orchard."

On their way across the campus, they passed countless girls hurrying from building to building. Every doorway seemed to blossom with a chattering group, a loitering pair, or an energetic single lady on pressing business bent. Bea met every glance with a look of bright friendliness in her eager eyes and lips ready to smile, no matter whether she had ever been introduced or not. But Lila's wild-flower face, in spite of its lovely tints and outlines, seemed almost icy in its expression of haughty criticism. No wonder, then, that this miniature world of college reflected a different countenance to each.

"Aren't they the dearest, sweetest girls you ever saw!" exclaimed Bea as the two freshmen turned from the curving concrete walk into the road that led to the orchard.

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"I saw only one who was truly beautiful," commented her companion. "I expected to find them prettier."

"Oh, but they are so interesting," protested Bea in quick loyalty. "Nearly everybody appears prettier after you get acquainted. I've noticed that myself. It is better to dawn than to dazzle, don't you think? Sue Merriam, for instance, improves and grows nicer and nicer after you know her. You will learn to love her dearly."

"Never!"

At the tone Bea gave an involuntary whistle; then checked herself at sight of Lila's quivering lips. "Oh, well, don't bother. Let's go on to the orchard. Look! There comes Roberta Abbott with about a bushel of russets. She is a funny girl too. To judge from her appearance, you would say she was sad and dignified. She has the most tragic dark eyes and mouth. But just wait till you hear her talk. Didn't you meet her last night at Sue's?"

"Yes." Lila turned away to hide the flicker of jealousy, for she had learned long since how transparently every emotion showed in her features. "I think we ought not to waste any time now. And anyway I'd rather get acquainted with you all alone this afternoon."

Bea stared. "You're the funniest girl!" She walked on after waving a sociable hand at Roberta. "It is interesting to have friends that are different, don't you think?"

"To have one friend who is different," corrected Lila.

"All right," laughed Bea. "Oh, see what a gorgeous glorious place this is, with the trees and scarlet woodbine and the lake sparkling away over there, and girls, girls, girls! But I don't believe that there is a single other one exactly like you."

During the next week this thought recurred to her more than once. By means of some diplomatic maneuvering, the two friends managed to have their single rooms exchanged for a double. After moving in, Lila seized a moment of solitude to plan a beautiful cozy corner for Bea. She dragged her own desk into a dusky recess and set Bea's at an artistic angle at the left side of the sunniest window. Just as she was hanging her favorite picture above it, Bea came rushing in with her arms full of new books.

"Oh, no, no, no!" she exclaimed impulsively, "that won't do at all. You must put it at the right so that the light will fall over the left shoulder. Otherwise the shadow of your hand will go scrambling over the paper ahead of your pen. Here, let me show you."

By the time she had hauled the desk across to its new position, Lila had vanished. Bea found her huddled in a woe-begone heap behind the wardrobe door in her bedroom, and flew to her in dismay.

"Oh, Lila, dearie, did you smash your finger or drop something on your foot? There, don't cry. I'll get the witch-hazel and arnica and court-plaster. What is it? Where? Why-ee!" she gasped bewildered, "why, Lila!" for her weeping roommate had pushed her gently away and turned her face to the wall.

"I was doing it for you," she sobbed. "I was trying to please you, and then you were so cr-cr-cruel! You were cruel."

"Cruel?" echoed Bea, "why, how? I haven't done a thing except buy the books I ordered last week. Yours were down in the office, too, but I didn't have enough money for all, because Sue Merriam borrowed four dollars. She asked after you and said——" Bea hesitated, smitten with novel doubt that she ought to begin to think three times before speaking once where such a sensitive person was concerned.

Lila sat up in swift attention and winked away her tears. "Said what?"

"Oh, nothing much." Bea wriggled. "Just talking."

"I insist."

"Oh, well, it doesn't signify. I was only thinking——" Bea paused again before blurting out. "She said that roommates are good for the character."

At this Lila rose with such an air of patient endurance that poor Bea felt clumsy, remorseful, injured and perplexed simultaneously. A cloud of resentful silence hovered over them both through the weary hours of the afternoon. Not until the ten o'clock gong sent the echoes booming through the deserted corridors, did Lila break down in a storm of weeping that terrified Bea. She found herself begging pardon, apologizing, caressing, explaining and repenting wholesale of rudeness about the desk, of selfish neglect in the case of the books, of disloyalty in giving ear to Miss Merriam's gratuitous comments. This gale blew over, leaving one girl with darker circles under her eyes and a more pathetic droop at the corners of her mouth, leaving the other with a fellow feeling for any unfortunate bull who happens to get into a china shop, intentionally or otherwise. Life at college promised to be like walking over exceedingly thin ice every day and all day long.

And yet, after she had learned to make allowances for the oversensitiveness, Bea found Lila more lovable and winning week by week. She was philosopher enough to recognize the fact that every one has the "defects of his qualities." The very quality that sent Lila hurrying up-stairs in an agony of mortification because a senior had forgotten to bow to her, was the one that inclined her to enter into Bea's varying moods with exquisite responsiveness. It was delightful to have a friend who was ever ready to answer gayety with gayety and sober thoughts with sympathy. Indeed, when Lila was not wrapped up in her own suffering, she could not be

surpassed in the priceless gift of sympathy. For the sake of that, much might be forgiven.

Much but not everything. Just before the midyear examinations came a crisis in the growth of their friendship. One afternoon Lila reached the head of the stairs barely in time to make a sudden swerve out of Miss Merriam's breezy path.

"Heigho, Eliza Allan," she called in careless teasing, "why don't you spell your name the way it is in the catalogue? More dignified, I think. By the way, I've been into your room and left some burned cork for your chapter play. We had more than we needed last night. By-bye."

Lila walked on in frosty silence. By-bye, indeed! And to address her as Eliza, too, on this very afternoon when she had as much as she could bear anyhow. To hear her essay read aloud and criticised before the class, and then to have it handed to her across the desk, so that anybody could see the awful REWRITE in red ink scrawled on the outside! To be sure, all the essays had been distributed at the same time, and nobody knew for sure that hers had been the one read aloud. Still they might have seen the name on it or noticed how red and pale she turned, or something. And worse still, the examinations were coming soon, and she was sure she would fail. If it were not for leaving Bea, she would go home that night. She certainly would!

As she entered, Bea looked up brightly from the cardboard which she was cutting into squares.

"Here you are!" she exclaimed in cheery greeting, though her eyes had shadowed instantly at sight of the unhappy drooping of every line. "Sue Merriam has been in to show me how to make you up for the play next month. It takes quite an artistic touch to darken the brows and touch up the lashes. Catch these corks and put them away. They're messing up my dinner-cards."

Lila's shoulders quivered as if pricked by a spur even while she mechanically caught the bits of black and fumbled them in her fingers.

"She meant that my brows are too thin and my lashes too light. I would thank her to keep her criticism until it is called for."

For half a minute Bea kept her head down while her chest heaved over a sigh of weary anticipation. Then she turned with an affectionate query: "What has happened now, Lila? Tell me, dear."

Upon hearing about the affair of the essay, she expostulated consolingly, "Of course that is no disgrace. She is severe with all the girls, tears their essays into strips and empties the red ink over them. She doesn't mean it personally, you know. How can we learn anything if nobody corrects our mistakes? Anyway it was an honor to have it read aloud. Very likely the girls did not see the REWRITE. She never bothers much with the utterly hopeless papers. Come, cheer up! The red ink was a compliment."

"Do you really think so?" Lila smiled a little doubtfully. "It sounds like one of the sophists—'to make the worse appear the better reason.' I'd love to believe it, and you are sweet to me." She laid one arm caressingly across Bea's shoulders. "It is queer that I don't mind more when you scold me so outrageously."

"Scold you?" repeated the other in amazement at such a description of her soothing speech.

Lila nodded. "I never stood it from anybody else. Maybe it is because you are my special dearest friend. That is why I came to college, you know. At home the girls disappointed me. There were several in the high school who might have been my friends if they had been different from what they were. Ena Brownell and I were inseparable for weeks till one morning she went off with another girl instead of waiting for me on the corner, though I had telephoned that I would meet her there. Even if I was a few minutes late, she would have waited if she had really cared. I cried myself to sleep every night for a long time but I never forgave her."

"Um-m-m," muttered Bea, her head again bent over the cardboard, "how horrid! See, isn't this a lovely daisy I'm drawing? They're to be dinner cards for my next spread. This is for your place."

"It's sweet. I think you are the most talented girl in the class." Lila stooped for a hug but carefully so as not to interfere with the growth of the silvery petals. "There was another girl, and her name was Daisy. She seemed perfect till I discovered that she prized her own vanity more highly than my happiness. She refused to take gym work the third hour when I was obliged to have it. She said the shower bath spoiled the wave in her hair, and so she chose the sixth hour class. Yet she knew very well that I had Latin at that period. I don't care for that selfish kind of friendship, do you?"

"Um-m, no!" Bea's brush dropped an impatient splash of yellow in the heart of the flower. Then she glanced up with a penitent smile.

"You're so awfully loyal yourself, Lila," she said. "You try to measure everybody up to that standard. I shan't forget that day in hygiene when you declined to answer the question that floored me. It was like that poem about the girl who wouldn't spell a word that the boy had missed, because she hated to go above him. And at the tennis tournament you wouldn't leave till I had finished the match, though you shivered and shook in the frosty October air. You do a lot for me, and I am downright ashamed sometimes. See, behold the completed posy!"

"It is too pretty for a mere dinner card." Lila dropped into a rattan chair and idly tossed the corks from hand to hand. "Aren't you planning a long time ahead? Your family knows exactly what to send in a box. That last was the most delicious thing! I suppose we'll just ask our crowd of freshmen, Berta and Gertrude and the rest."

Lila's eyes were so intent upon the dancing corks that she failed to note the swift glance which

Bea darted in her direction.

"Um-m-m," she said cautiously, "I think I might like an upper class girl or two. Some of them have been awfully kind to me this year. Sue Merriam escorted me to the first Hall Play, and she proposed our names for Alpha, and on her birthday she asked me to sit at her table and meet some seniors as an invited guest. She said the "invited" with such a thump on it that my heart almost broke. Isn't she the greatest tease?"

No answer.

"It was mostly due to her that I came to college," continued Bea with an effort to speak naturally though her fingers shook the least bit in their grasp of the brush, and one anxious eye was watching Lila's face. "I've known her all my life. She persuaded the family to send me, and she tutored me last summer and helped in a million different ways. You don't understand how much I owe her. It is such a little thing to invite her to my—to our party. I'd love to do it, Lila."

Still no answer. The silence lengthened out minute after minute. Finally Bea ventured to raise her head and hold up another card for inspection. "See, a new daisy, but this one has a different disposition. Do you observe the expression—sort of grinning and cheerful? This is like Sue, while the first one is like you, an earnest young person, not one bit impudent. See it, lady. The dearest flower-face. I love it."

"And yet"—Lila's voice sounded choked, "you want to invite her to the party. You know it will spoil my pleasure. You—know—I—hate—her."

Bea's frame trembled once in a nervous shiver. Her fascinated eyes followed Lila to the window, where she stood staring out at the dazzling winter world of snow.

"You must choose between Susan Merriam and me. I have a right to demand it. I have a right. I have a right."

Bea saw Lila lift her arm as if to brush away the tears. Then one hand fumbled for her handkerchief, while the other squeezed the burned corks with unconscious force. She was certainly wiping her eyes.

"You must—you must—choose to-day—between Susan Merriam and me. If you choose her, I shall never speak to you again. If you choose me, you must have nothing to do with her. Nothing! You must drop her acquaintance. You cannot have both."

Bea suddenly tipped back in her chair, teetered to and fro for a frantic moment, then brought it down with a bump on all four feet.

"Nonsense!" she snapped.

Lila stood motionless so long that Bea had time to notice the ticking of her watch. Then she turned slowly around from the window.

"And this is friendsh—"



LILA STOOD STARING OUT AT THE SNOW

"Oh!" squealed Bea, "oh, oh, oh! Ha, ha, ha!" Flinging her arms out over the desk she buried her face upon them and shook with uncontrollable laughter.

Lila crimsoned to her hair, then went white with anger. Without a word she walked into her own room and locked the door.

Half an hour later when she rose from the bed and began to pour out a basinful of water to bathe her smarting eyes, she heard a rustle on the threshold. Glancing quickly around she saw a square of white paper being thrust beneath the door. It was a letter from home on the five o'clock mail. Lila picked it up and opened it listlessly. The fit of weeping had left her exhausted.

"My darling daughter," she read,

"This is a hasty note to say that your great aunt Sarah is on her way east, and will stop at the college for a day's visit with you. I wish to caution you, dear girl, against even the semblance of a slight in your treatment of her. Do not forget to inquire after Gyp the terrier, Rex the angora cat, Dandy the parrot, and Ellen the maid. Your aunt is exceedingly sensitive about such small attentions. You might invite your friends to meet her at afternoon tea, and if you can manage it tactfully you might warn them not to discuss topics with which she is unacquainted. She has, as you know, a very peculiar disposition. The least suspicion of neglect or hint of criticism exasperates her beyond endurance. In her childhood she suffered continually because of this oversensitive nature. I suspect that she made no effort to conquer the fault. Indeed so far as I may judge from her present attitude, she has always considered it a proof of superior delicacy and refinement. She has cherished her selfishness instead of fighting it. As a consequence her life has been embittered and unspeakably lonely. I believe that she has not a friend on earth except her pets, and even Gyp has learned not to frisk with joy at sight of anybody but his mistress.

"I am sure I may trust you, dear, to make her visit as happy as possible, although in truth it seems irony to speak of real happiness in connection with such a temperament. You may not be aware that even your Aunt Sarah was once the heroine of a romance. He was an extraordinarily fine man, and she would have found happiness with him, if with anybody. But one day in the rush of an important law-suit, he forgot to keep an engagement with her, and she never forgave the slight. After that disappointment—and it was a grievous disappointment, however self-inflicted—especially grievous to such an expert in self-torture—her nature grew rapidly and steadily more self-absorbed and unlovely.

"My darling little daughter, sometimes I have feared that you may have inherited a similar tendency. It has been difficult, dearest, to guide aright where even the slightest word of criticism stings and burns and lashes. You, more than many girls, need the discipline of wisest, frankest friendship with others of your own age. I see that during your high school days I did wrong in trying to supply their place to you with my own companionship. A child, however precious, cannot be forever kept wrapped in cotton-wool.

"So, dearest daughter, you will understand how joyful I am this year in hearing of your new friends. Don't let them slip away through any fault of yours. Whatever is worth winning is worth keeping, even at the cost of many a sacrifice of foolish pride.

"When you see your aunt, be sure to remember me to her.

"With a heart full of love,
"MOTHER."

Lila read the letter, replaced it in the envelope, and walking across the little room threw herself again face downward on the bed. After a while the dressing-gong whirred its tidings through the corridors. Lila slid to her feet and began to walk mechanically toward the mirror.

"But Bea laughed. She laughed at me. Mother doesn't know that Bea laughed. And I thought she was my friend." Lila felt another sob come tearing up toward her throat and clenched her teeth in the struggle to choke it back. Blinded by a rush of fresh tears, she opened the top drawer of the bureau and felt for her brush with groping fingers.

"She laughed right in my face. I—I—could have forgiven everything else. But—but mother doesn't know that Bea in-insulted me. She—laughed—right—in—my—"

Then through the blur Lila happened to catch sight of her reflection in the looking-glass. The last sob broke off sheer in the middle, and left her with her lips still parted in an unfinished quiver.

The horrified face that stared back at her from the mirror was striped and rayed with startling streaks of black. The astonished eyes shone out from white circles framed in ebony sunbursts; the nose was like an islet washed by jetty waves; the mouth slowly widened under a fiercely upcurved line of inky hue.

In the study on the other side of the door, remorseful Bea was wearing several paths in their best rug, as she waited for some sign. Suddenly a new sound welled up and she bent her head to listen, in quick dread of another storm of weeping. But, no! This was different. It was not a sob, though it did seem rather gaspy. It bubbled and chuckled. It was laughter.

"Lila!" cried Bea, and made a dash toward the room. Lila flung open the door.

"Bea!" she answered, "I am going to give a tea for my Aunt Sarah. Do you think Sue Merriam

CHAPTER II

ENTER ROBBIE BELLE

Now it happened one evening in the early fall, while Bea and Lila were learning to live together, that the Students' Association held a meeting to appoint corridor wardens for the year.

In the throng that came pouring out of chapel afterward, Bea, who had an eel-like rapidity in gliding through crowds, found herself at the doors some yards in advance of Lila. Halting to wait in the vestibule, she overheard a junior instructing a new freshman officer in her duties.

"It is very simple. Oh, no, Miss Sanders, no, indeed! There is nothing meddlesome about it. You're not expected to spy upon the girls in your neighborhood. The aim is merely to preserve a certain degree of quiet. Girls are often thoughtless about being noisy in the corridors. Simply remind them now and then in flagrant cases that they are disturbing those who wish to study. Of course you must be tactful, though it is rarely that a student wilfully disregards the rights of others."

Bea peered around the edge of her particular door in order to catch a glimpse of this freshman so distinguished. It was the tall, fair-faced child with the splendid long braid, who lived at the end of Berta's transverse. Now the sweet mouth was drooping disconsolately, and the big eyes looked dewy with anxious tears.

"I—I don't think I'd like to," she said.

"Oh, but it is something that must be done, and you have been selected as the one in that vicinity who strikes us as best fitted for the duties of the position. It is really, you know, a case of public service. Every one at some time or other ought to be willing to make sacrifices of personal desires for the good of the community, don't you think? But forgive me for preaching. I didn't mean to. By the way, how do you like college, Miss Sanders?"

"It isn't so much fun as I had expected," said she. Bea's head popped around the door again. The junior was smiling with an air of amused superiority.

"Ah, yes, I understand. Probably you used to have a sister or cousin at college, and from her letters you supposed that the life was composed chiefly of dancing, fudges and basket-ball with a little work sandwiched in between. Is it not so? And now——"

"I don't mind the work," here Bea's head popped out a third time to contemplate this interesting classmate, "but——"

"Beatrice," called Lila at her other ear, "Berta says to hurry or we'll miss the best of the fun. It's to be a sheet-and-pillow-case party to-morrow, and a lot of the girls are coming in to learn how to do the draping. Berta has an idea. Come along quick!"

Robbie Belle Sanders stared after them wistfully. "Those girls live near me," she said, "they have fun all the time."

The junior's keen glance spied in the open countenance something that kept her lingering a moment longer. "This is a democratic place," she said in a more sympathetic tone, "every girl finds her own level sooner or later. The basis is not money or social rank of the families at home. It is not brains or clothes or stuff like that. It is simply that the same kind of girls drift together. They're congenial. It seems to be a law. A general law, you understand. Of course," she hesitated for an instant before being spurred on by her sense of scrupulous honesty, "there are exceptions. Once in a while a girl fails to find her special niche. Maybe she rooms off the campus and is not thrown in contact with her own kind. She may be abnormally shy—that hinders her from making friends. Or perhaps she does something that queers herself first thing."

"Queers herself?" echoed Robbie Belle, "how does a person queer herself?"

"Oh, I don't know." She paused to reflect. "She does outlandish things. And still it isn't what she does so much as what she is. Her acts express her character. If her character is queer, she behaves queerly, and the others fight shy of her. After all, I dare say she does find her own level, and there is nobody else there. So she goes along solitary through the four years."

Robbie Belle looked frightened. "I wish I knew what things are queer," she said.

"Oh, being different from the other girls, for instance, awfully different, so different that everybody notices it. Not just original, you know, but actually queer. Watch the girls, particularly those who always go around alone, and you'll learn. Good-night, Miss Sanders. I must congratulate you again on the honor of being appointed freshman warden. Good-night."

Robbie Belle walked slowly down the corridor to her room. "I wonder if I am queer," she thought. "I am almost always alone." She halted before a door that displayed a small square of

white paper pinned in the middle of its upper half. Robbie Belle, her hand on the knob, regarded the sign hopelessly. "If you have a roommate who never takes down her ENGAGED, and she doesn't like company and she won't go anywhere with you herself, maybe you can't help being queer."

Robbie Belle entered softly. It was a large room and seemed quite bare because of the absence of curtains, rugs, and cushions. The unsociable roommate was sitting beside the centre table, her elbows propped on its shiny surface that was innocent of any cover and ignorant of the duster. A green shade over her eyes connected a blur of nondescript hair with a rather long nose beneath which a pair of pale lips in the glow of the drop-light was rapidly gabbling over some lines in Greek scansion.

Without looking up, she waved one hand forbiddingly; and Robbie Belle obediently shut her mouth over the few words that were ready to be uttered in greeting. She stood waiting in her tracks, so to speak, until the final hexameter had wailed out its drawling length, and Miss Cutter pushed back the green shade.

"Well," she demanded, "what was the important business before the meeting? I could not spare valuable time for self-government foolishness to-night."

"They appointed corridor wardens," answered Robbie Belle.

"Oh, indeed! It is certainly time, I must say. In theory it is all very well to make the rules a matter of honor, but when you happen to live in a nest of girls who behave as if they were six years old, I insist that something more forcible than chapel admonitions is required. Who is the warden for this neighborhood?"

"I am," said Robbie Belle.

"You are!" Miss Cutter pushed the green shade farther up on her high forehead. "Well, I must say!" She surveyed her roommate with new interest. "How exceedingly extraordinary!"

Robbie shifted her weight to the other foot. "I didn't want to be," she said.

"No, of course not, and you nothing but a child yourself. It must be your height and that grave way you have of staring. With that baby-face, couldn't they see that your dignity is all on the outside?"

Robbie said nothing, but if Miss Cutter had not been quite so near-sighted she might have spied deep in the violet eyes a glint of black remotely resembling anger.

"Think of appealing to a sixteen-year-old infant—really you are literally in-fans, which is to say, one without the power of speech! Fancy me applying to you to compel quiet in the halls! Imagine that boisterous crowd trailing after Miss Abbott and Miss Leigh et al.—Hist!" She lifted her head like a warhorse sniffing battle near. "There they are now."

Robbie Belle lifted her head too and listened, although indeed the noise would have penetrated to the most inattentive ears. A multitude of feet were marching lock-step past the door to a chorus of giggling, stifled squeals and groans, while at intervals a voice choking with emotion rose in shrill accents: "There was an old woman all skin and bones, o-o-oh!" When it faltered and collapsed on the o-o-oh, the other voices joined in and dragged out the syllable to lugubrious and harrowing length. Then some one giggled hysterically and another squealed. The soloist took up the verse: "She went to the church to pray, o-o-oh!" The chorus wailed and moaned and croaked and whimpered and groaned in concert. Miss Cutter regarded Robbie Belle sternly.

Robbie Belle's shoulders rose and fell over a deep breath. She stepped across to the door and closed the transom softly just as the next weird line hissed out above the tumult and then sank into its smothering welter and moan of vowels. Robbie spoke more loudly.

"One of them said that they were going to dress up in sheets and pillow-cases to-night. They are practicing for the Hallowe'en party. It's only fun."

Berta's voice—it was Berta who did the solo—here rose in a quavering shriek that halted not for keys in their holes or transoms in their sockets: "The worms crawled in and the worms crawled out, o-o-o-oh!"

Miss Cutter rose to her indignant feet. "Roberta Sanders, as you are the corridor warden for this neighborhood, I appeal to you. I make formal complaint—"

"They've gone." Robbie Belle smiled in relief and sat down rather quickly. The lock-step had receded into the muffled distance and the ear-splitting wail wafted back in tones that grew steadily fainter.

Miss Cutter took off her glasses, rubbed them bright, put them on again, and contemplated Robbie Belle.

"I do believe that you would rather I suffered than that they became offended with you. You are afraid to rebuke them."

Robbie's eyes fell and the guilty color rose slowly through the delicate skin of throat and brow. But Miss Cutter did not see it. She had pulled down the green shade and propping her elbows in their former position had returned to her scansion. She had wasted too much time already.

Conscience-smitten Robbie Belle slid silently through the door and stood at loss for a minute in the deserted corridor. It was Friday night. Nobody studied on Friday night except girls who were queer or who roomed with superior special students like Miss Cutter. On her first day at

college Miss Cutter had remarked that there might be a vacant seat of congenial minds for Robbie at her table. Somehow the grave young freshman who was hoping for fun failed to find them satisfying. She had not won a real friend yet, and here it was the end of October.

Robbie Belle was not conceited enough to feel sorry for herself, or else she might have perceived a certain pathos in that listless journey of a lonely child from her worse than solitary room to the deadly quiet of the library. One of the hilarious ghosts who were weaving spells under the evergreens happened to glance in through a great softly shining window and recognized the drooping head above a long deserted table between the shelves of books.

"There's our noble warden," whispered Bea, "studying on Friday night! Looks like a dig as well as a prig, n'est-ce-pas?"

Berta's eager dark face grew sober under the swathing folds of her pillow-case. "Maybe it isn't her fault," she said.

But Robbie Belle unaware of this precious drop of sympathy plodded through an essay on Intellect, wrote out a laborious analysis, and at the stroke of the nine-thirty gong crept reluctantly back to her room. The next morning she translated her Latin, committed a geometrical demonstration to a faithful memory, consumed a silent luncheon amid a dizzying cross-fire of psychological arguments, walked around the garden, through the pines and over the orchard hill for a scrupulously full hour of exercise, read her physiology notes, and composed one page of her weekly theme before dinner time. After dinner she stood in a corner of Parlor J and watched the dancing. Then she went to chapel with Miss Cutter, returned alone in haste to dress in the concealing sheet and pillow case. It was rather difficult to manage the drapery without aid, especially in the back and at the sides. The strange junior who had chosen Robbie's name from the class list and undertaken to escort her to the party found awaiting her a rumpled young ghost with raiment that sagged and bagged quite distressingly in unexpected places. But the eyes that shone from between the crooked bands of white were joyous with excitement. In this disguise she was sure that no one would recognize her; and so of course they would not know that she was queer, and perhaps she would have fun at last.

And at first it really seemed as if she would. Imagine a big gymnasium with jack-o'-lanterns on the rafters and a blazing wood-fire in the wide fireplace, and five hundred figures in white circling and mingling among the shadows, and at least a thousand sticks of candy, and three big dish-pans full of peanuts, and gallons and gallons of red lemonade. When her escort proposed that they should go up-stairs to look in upon the seniors and sophomores who were having a country dance, Robbie Belle moistened her lips and said, "If you please, don't wait for me. I enjoy it so much here." Then at the junior's formal, "Oh, certainly, Miss Sanders!" she remembered that often people did not understand her unless she used a bothersome number of words. So she added hastily, "I mean that you must go with your own friends and leave me here, because I am watching some girls I know, and I want to speak to them. Please don't trouble any more about me, thank you."

"I do know them," she assured herself as her escort disappeared, "and I do want to speak to them even if they don't know me. I think"—she hesitated and turned quite pale at the prospect of such daring, "I think I shall go and play with them. They will suppose I am one of them. Nobody will know."

At this point the file of impudent ghosts, headed by Berta, who looked unusually tall and still angular under her flowing sheet, paraded past Robbie Belle's corner, their elbows flapping like wings. With a gasp for courage she took one step forward and found herself prancing along at the end of the line.

It was such fun! Robbie Belle had shot up to an annoying stature so comparatively early in life that her romping days seemed to have broken short off in the middle. She had never had enough of tag and hide-and-peek and coasting. She hated long skirts. Indeed that was one reason why she longed to join the enviable circle of freshmen around Berta: they wore golf skirts all day long, except when hockey called for the gymnasium costume or bicycling demanded its appropriate array. The reason why she liked Miss Abbott best of course was because her name was Roberta, too.

On this Hallowe'en, in joyous faith in her disguise, she forgot her height and breadth and the dignity imposed thereby. And anyhow Berta Abbott was just as tall, if not of such stately proportions. So Robbie Belle with exulting zest in the frolic raced up-stairs and down with the mischievous band of freshmen. They skipped saucily around members of the faculty, chased appreciative juniors, frightened the smallest forms into scuttling flight, and gave their great performance of "There was an old woman all skin and bones," in the middle of the upper hall, where the seniors were entertaining the sophomores.

It was fun to howl. It was so long since Robbie Belle had grown up that she had almost forgotten the joy of using her lungs to their full capacity. With her spirits dancing in the afterglow of such vocal exercise, she marched after the others down to the hall below. There in the vestibule Berta halted her followers for final instructions.

"Now, girls, fall into line according to height. We are going to astonish—Why!" She fixed two amazed dark eyes upon the tallest, "who are you?"

Robbie Belle heard; she felt her heart shriveling within her; her shoulders seemed to shrink together; her head drooped. Then turning away slowly she moved toward the gymnasium apartment, a loose corner of her robe trailing at her abashed heels. But she did not escape swiftly enough to avoid catching the sound of hisses.

“Ha! an interloper!”

“Hist! ye false intruder!”

“Seize him! To the shambles!”

“To the guillotine! Ho, brothers! pursue!”

That made Robbie Belle flee so fast that she was able to take refuge behind Prexie himself while the vengeful furies withdrew to a respectful distance. That night when she was shaking her pillow back into its case Robbie noticed some damp spots amid its creases. A few minutes later she laid her head down on it and proceeded to create some more. There was only one comfort in the throng of scorching reflections: this was that it had not been Berta’s voice that had called her an intruder. Perhaps Berta did not think she had done something so awfully wicked after all.

This faint hope infused more dreadful bitterness into the incident that happened in mathematics C on Monday. Anybody would have believed that Berta was offended past forgiveness. She sat next to Robbie. She was not very well prepared that morning, possibly in consequence of Saturday’s excitement. The instructor was more than usually curt and crisp with an unsmiling sternness that struck terror to palpitating freshman hearts. In the middle of the hour Berta became aware that a problem was traveling rapidly down the row toward her; and she had not been paying attention. She had not even noticed the statement of it, for it had started at an apparently safe distance from her seat. Turning with a swift motion of the lips she asked Robbie Belle to tell her. And Robbie Belle—how she longed to tell it! It had almost leaped from her lips while conscience reasoned wildly against it as deceit. It would not be honest. And yet—and yet—the girls would think she was queer. They would say she was mean and priggish, for she might have told Berta as easily as not.

There! the third girl from Berta was trying to explain her own ignorance and failing brilliantly. Now the second was stammering through a transparent bluff. Berta had settled back, coolly resigned to fate. How she must suffer, after having stooped to ask for aid! Poor Robbie Belle! Poor, lonely, disappointed Robbie Belle! For strange to say she flunked too and the question journeyed on triumphantly to the mathematical prodigy at the end of the row.

In the corridor outside Berta exerted her nimble self to overtake Miss Sanders, who was sidling away in a strikingly unprincesslike manner, her eyes shifting guiltily.

“So you didn’t know the answer either? Wasn’t that the biggest joke on me! And really, Miss Sanders, I beg your pardon for asking. It popped out before I could gather my wits. I am scared to death in that class, though of course that is no excuse for sponging. I’m glad you didn’t know it enough to tell me after all.”

Robbie Belle lifted the lashes from her flushed cheeks. “I—I did know it,” she said with a gulp.

“Oh!” said Berta, and stared, “how—how peculiar!”

Robbie Belle held back the tears till she had reached her room, seized her hat and snatched her thickest veil. Then she fled to the loneliest walk among the pines. Her veil was a rarity that rendered her an object of curiosity to everybody she passed on the way. But she hurried on, somewhat comforted by the conviction that no one could mark her reddened eyelids. In truth she had good need of comfort, for Berta Abbott herself had said that she was peculiar. And peculiar meant queer!

That evening Robbie sat down to study for the Latin test announced for the next day. Miss Cutter was studying, too, harder than ever. The green shade was pulled so fiercely forward that a fringe of hair stood up in a crown where the elastic had rumbled it. Her grammar, lexicon and text-book occupied most of the table, but Robbie did not complain. She could manage very well by laying her books, one on the open face of another, in her lap. For once she was grateful that an ENGAGED sign shielded them from interruptions, for Latin was her shakiest subject, especially the rules of indirect discourse. The instructor had warned the class that this weak spot was to be the point of attack. If Robbie Belle should not succeed in drumming the rules into her head before the ideas in it began to spin around and around in their usual dizzy fashion when she waxed sleepy, she might just as well stay away from the recitation room. Or better perhaps, for in absence there was a possibility of both doubt and hope: hope on Robbie Belle’s part that she might have been able to answer the questions if she had been there, on the teacher’s part doubt concerning the exact extent of the pupil’s knowledge.

At the end of the corridor just outside their door a narrow stairway led to the north tower rooms on the floor above. Beatrice Leigh and Lila Allan and a number of their liveliest friends lived up there on the fifth, with Berta Abbott at the foot of the stairs near Robbie’s place of abode.

Just as Robbie’s usually serene brow was puckering its hardest over the sequence of tenses, a door banged open in the tower and the stairs creaked under swift clatter of feet—a dozen at the very least.

Miss Cutter scowled beneath the green shade; Robbie Belle could tell that from the way the fringe of upright hair vibrated.

“Savages!” she muttered, “they’ll tear the building to pieces. No wonder the newspapers report that the college girl’s favorite mode of locomotion is sliding down the banisters.”

“No,” said Robbie Belle, “not that. They take hold of the railing and jump several steps at a time. I’ve seen them. Miss Leigh says she does it for exercise.”

“And this also is exercise!” Miss Cutter clutched her ears as a tornado swept past their

threshold.

Robbie bent to listen anxiously. "They're going to the ice-cooler," she said, "pretty soon they will go back again."

"Yes," said Miss Cutter as she rose and moved toward the door, "they will doubtless go back, and doubtless also they shall go in a different manner."

Then she went out and remonstrated briefly but to the point. Whereupon the culprits apologized with noble profusion and tiptoed their way to the stairs. This would have been an admirable proof of repentance if their heels had not persisted in coming down on the bare boards in very loud clicks at very short intervals. And every click was greeted by a reproving chorus of "Sh-sh-sh!"

The instant they reached the hall above, pandemonium broke loose. To judge from the sounds, they were playing blindman's buff with scampering of heavy shoes, scraping of chairs, banging against walls, flopping on mattresses. Even reluctant Robbie Belle looked upward in fear that the ceiling might fall. When a deputation of wild eyed sophomores from an adjacent study arrived to protest against a continuation of the outrage, the shrinking corridor-warden had no loophole for escape from her duty. Outwardly calm, inwardly quivering, she mounted the stairs to expostulate on behalf of the Students' Association for Self-Government.

When the peace officer reached the foot of the flight, the noise sank abruptly into a silent scurrying—on unadulterated tiptoes this time. When she appeared at the top, she beheld the tower hall deserted, every door shut and a suspiciously profound stillness reigning in the dimly lighted Paradise of fun. Ah! she drew a breath of relief from away down in her boots. Surely now she had performed her duty. Nobody could expect her to find fault after the disturbance had ceased. Now the girls below would be at liberty to study in peace.

Barely had she completed her hurried descent before the strange silence above was shattered suddenly by the simultaneous banging of seven doors. Seven full-lunged voices burst forth into a howling song, while twice as many feet thumped and tapped and pranced and pounded in the mazes of an extemporaneous jig.

Robbie Belle halted instantly, with a quick lift of her head. Her nostrils quivered. Her violet eyes snapped black. Her hands clenched. Turning swiftly she mounted the stairs once more. But this time she was angry. The uproar was an insult to the authority of the Students' Association. She forgot for the minute all about shy Robbie Belle.

And the mischievous freshmen above—the flippant fun-loving irresponsible six-year-old freshmen—they waited ready to meet the warden with an impudent burst of revelry, and thus to dash her official dignity from its exasperating estate. When they saw Robbie Belle's face they simply stared. They listened in silence to the few rapid words that stung and burned and smarted. They watched her depart, her head still held at its angle of wrathful justice. Then they looked at one another.

They could not see how, when once safely in the haven of her room, she broke down utterly and lay trembling and sobbing in Miss Cutter's astonished arms. Now at last she had surely committed an unpardonable offense against the only girls for whom she cared in the whole collegeful—especially Berta. Now Berta would be certain she was queer.

Meanwhile in the tower, Berta drew a long breath and glanced around at her dismayed and sobered companions.

"The more I see of that girl," she said, "the better I like her. And we have been awfully silly—that's a fact. The next time I see her I shall tell her so too. Now suppose we go and do a little studying our own selves."

Somehow or other before Thanksgiving Day, Robbie Belle Sanders had ceased to be disappointed in college. With Berta for a dearest friend and Miss Cutter withdrawn to a more congenial neighborhood, she was finding it even more fun than she had expected.

CHAPTER III

A QUESTION OF ECONOMY

"I LOVE music myself," said Robbie Belle, lifting serene eyes from her porridge, "but to-day is Thanksgiving Day."

"Oh!" sighed Berta, as she clasped her hands—those thin nervous hands with the long fingers that Robbie Belle admired all the more for their contrast with her own dimpled ones, "think of hearing Caruso and Sembrich together in grand opera! I could walk all the way on my knees."

"What!" cried Robbie Belle in wide-eyed astonishment, her spoon half way to her mouth, "walk seventy miles! And miss the Dinner?"

The graduate fellow at the head of their table looked quite sad as she nodded her pretty head, though to be sure her napkin was hiding her lips.

"Why!" gasped Robbie Belle, freshman, "but Dinner is to begin at three and last till almost six. And we are going to have salted almonds and nesselrode pudding and raw oysters and chocolate peppermints and turkey and sherbet and macaroons and nuts and celery and Brussels sprouts and everything. We are painting the place-cards this morning and one is for you. It is a shame for you to sacrifice it just to hear grand opera, Miss Bonner. Are you really intending to take the nine o'clock train?"

Again the fellow nodded. Robbie Belle's wondering gaze rested a moment on Berta's gypsy face alight now with an intensity of longing. Deliberately depositing her spoon on one side of her saucer and her buttered bit of roll on the other she devoted her entire attention to this marvel.

"I cannot understand," she said clearly, "it is only singing. And to-day is Thanksgiving Day. It comes once a year."

Miss Bonner brushed her napkin across her mouth rather hurriedly and excused herself from the table. Robbie Belle watched her retreating down the long vista of the dining-room.

"Would you honestly choose to go with her if you could, Berta?" she asked, "grand opera is only something to see and hear and then it is all over."

"Oh, Robbie Belle!" groaned Berta, "how about the Dinner? That is only something to eat, and then it is all over too."

"Why don't you go if you want to?" inquired Robbie Belle as she reflectively picked up her roll again. "We can invite somebody else to take your place at the table. Bea and Lila are going to the hothouse for smilax and chrysanthemums."

"Why don't I go?" Berta leaned back and drew a long and melancholy sigh from the bottom of her boots. "Girls," she turned to the others who were still lingering over their breakfast, "she asks why I don't go to hear grand opera. And it costs two dollars railroad fare even on a commutation ticket, and seats are three dollars up, and I have precisely thirty-seven cents to last me till Christmas."

"Oh," commented Robbie Belle repentantly, "I didn't think. I'd love to pay for all of you, only I haven't any money either."

Berta clutched at her heart and bent double in a bow of gratitude unspeakable. Robbie Belle continued to stare at her thoughtfully. "If you truly want to, Berta, we might save up and go to the opera some other day. I'm willing."

"Willing! Dear child! Willing! Behold how she immolates herself upon the altar of friendship! She is willing to go to grand opera and sit listening to sweet sounds from dawn to dark——"

"Oh, Berta!" interrupting in alarm, "not from dawn to dark really? How about——"

"Luncheon?" the other caught up the sentence tragically. "Ah, no, but calm thyself, dear one. Be serene—as usual. There is an intermission for luncheon. We could go to a restaurant. It would be a restaurant with a vinegar cruet in the centre of the table and plates of thick bread at each end and lovely little oyster crackers for the soup. Perhaps if you had two dollars extra you might order terrapin."

"And pickles," put in Bea generously, "with striped ice-cream."

"And angel food with chocolate frosting an inch thick," contributed Lila.

"It's a long time till spring," said Robbie Belle regretfully, "but very likely we will need all that while to save it up."

As it turned out, they did need all that while to save it up. For beauty-loving Berta with her eternally slim purse and hopelessly meagre account-book, the plan at first seemed only a vision of the moment. Nobody can save out of nothing, can she? Robbie Belle, however, had a stubborn fashion of clinging to an idea when once it became fixed. Her ideas, furthermore, were apt to be clean-cut and definite. This is how she reasoned it out:

If a girl receives five dollars a month from home to pay for books and postage and incidentals, she is entitled to whatever she saves from the allowance. Every time this girl refrains from writing a letter, she has really saved two cents or the value of the stamp, to say nothing of the paper. Whenever she walks down town instead of riding, she has a right to the nickel to add to the fund in the back of her top bureau drawer. If she buys a ten-cent fountain-pen instead of a dollar one, she virtually earns ninety cents. If she rents a grammar for twenty-five cents instead of paying one dollar and a half for a new book, she is a thrifty person who deserves the difference. Every time she declines—mournfully—to drop in at the restaurant for dinner with a crowd of friends, or refuses to join in a waffle-supper, Dutch treat, she is so much nearer being a melancholy and noble capitalist.

"Yes, that's all right for you," assented Berta airily when told of this working theory, "but supposing you don't have the money to save in the first place? I fail to receive five dollars a month from home or even one dollar invariably; and I always walk to town and never enter the restaurant except to wait while you save ten cents by buying half a pound of caramels when you want to buy a whole pound."

"They're forty cents a pound, Berta," objected scrupulous Robbie Belle. "I really saved twenty cents yesterday, you see."

"Ah, of course, how distressingly inaccurate of me. And I also—I saved five dollars and fourteen cents by using my wash-stand for a writing-table instead of buying that bargain desk for four dollars and ninety-eight cents. The extra fifteen was saved on the inkwell I did not buy either. I say, Robbie Belle Sanders, let's save the entire sum by denying ourselves that set of Browning we saw last week."

Robbie Belle looked grieved. "You always make fun of everything. You act as if you didn't care."

Berta turned away for a minute, and stood gazing from the window of her little tower room. The window was small and high, but the view was wide and wonderful toward the purple hills in the west. At length she said something under her breath. Robbie Belle heard it and understood. It was only, "I'm afraid."

Robbie Belle knew that Berta was afraid of caring too much. She had listened once in twilight confidence under the pines to the story of how Berta had been all ready to start for college three years before, when a sudden family misfortune changed her plans and condemned her to immediate teaching. In the bitterness of her disappointment she had vowed never to set her heart on any plan again.

Walking over to Berta's side Robbie Belle took the listless hand in both her comforting ones.

"Even if we shouldn't manage it this year, you know, we could try again next year. We might earn something extra during the summer."

"Next year!" echoed Berta under her breath. "I can't count on next year—I dare not. You do not understand, for your scholarship is certain through the course, while mine depends on what Prexie thinks I am worth. I am under the eye of the faculty. Don't talk about next year. I am pretending that this is the last time I shall be here in October, then in November, then in December. I look at everything—the lake, the trees, the girls, the teachers, the dear, dear library, and say, 'Good-bye! Good-bye, my college year.' They may not help me to come back, you know. If I really try not to expect it, I will not be disappointed in any case. Of course, I am not worth four hundred dollars to them. I am afraid to hope for it."

"Why, you are the brightest student here. Bea says so and you know it!" exclaimed Robbie Belle indignantly; "there isn't any question about your being granted another scholarship when you apply for it next spring. They weigh everything—intellect, personality, character, conduct. Never you fear. If they give only one scholarship in the whole college, it shall be to you. You are superstitious: you fancy that if you do your best to expect the worst, the best will happen, because it is always the unexpected that happens. Only of course, that isn't true at all."

Berta was smiling mistily around into the fair face. "Dear old Robbie Belle! Will Shakespeare was right—'there's flattery in friendship'—it makes me rejoice. The trouble, you see, sweetheart, lies in my character. I misdoubt me that Prexie will spurn my plea if he hears how often we have a meeting of the fudge club at a tax of two cents per head. Let's save up that two cents for the Opera fund."

Robbie Belle drew a deep sigh. "All right," she agreed with a doleful glance toward the particular blue plate in which she was accustomed to pour her share of the delicacy. "Anyway the doctor calls fudge an 'abomination.' Bea will scold because she hates scrimping. But then she doesn't care so much as we do for music unless it is convenient."

Berta's contributions were the result of more active exertions than the other's passive self-denial. She sat up one night till two o'clock to dress a doll. Every fall a few hundred dolls were distributed to be dressed by the girls for the Christmas tree at the Settlement House in the city. Some of the students took dolls and paid other girls to make the clothes. Berta earned a dollar by helping Bea with the three which that impulsive young woman had rashly undertaken. In February she composed valentines and sold them to over-busy maidens who felt unequal to rhyming in the reaction after the midyear examinations. In March she painted Easter eggs and in April she arranged pots of growing ferns and flowers from the woods. By May the fund was complete and the tickets were bought.

As the longed-for event drew nearer, Berta made a string of paper dolls and joyfully tore off one for each passing day.

At last the morning dawned. Robbie Belle was dreaming that she had fallen asleep in fifth hour Latin. It seemed as if the instructor called her name and then came walking down from the platform, thump, thump, thump, in her broad-soled shoes. It was unladylike to thump so heavily, thought Robbie Belle in the midst of her confused dismay over having lost the place in the text as well as forgotten the translation. The thumping sharpened to a rat-tat-tat upon the bedroom door.

"Robbie Belle, Robbie Belle, you lazybones! The night watchman has knocked twice already. Get up, get up this instant! We're going to hear Grand Opera to-day! O-o-oo!"

Robbie Belle lifted her head to listen. "Berta Abbott, you've got a chill. I hear you shivering. Hurry into your clothes this minute. I'll bring you the quinine."

Quinine! Berta shivering from excitement laughed softly to herself. Dear old Robbie Belle! Quinine on this wonderful day! Listen! That was the twittering of swallows under the eaves. A squirrel peered in at her window, his bright eyes twinkling. It was too bad that he did not enjoy music. But perhaps he did after all. Hark! that was a robin. And listen! There sounded the full-throated whistle of a brown thrush. The world was ringing with music—beautiful, beautiful, beautiful! And she was going to hear Grand Opera to-day! That had been her most precious

dream next to coming to college. To come to college and to hear Grand Opera too!

"My cup runneth over! My cup runneth over," she chanted softly to herself, while from Robbie Belle's room rose a faint noise of deliberate dressing, subdued splashing, slow steps, a rustling that was almost methodical in its rhythm.

"Berta," she announced, appearing with hat set straight and firm over her smooth dark hair, her coat over one arm, her umbrella neatly strapped, "I think I shall carry my Horace, for it is a two-hours' ride, and to-day is Saturday and after Sunday comes Monday."

Berta clapped her hands over her ears, "Go away, go away to your breakfast, miserable creature! Horace! that worldly wise old Roman! With the river before your eyes, the beautiful river in May!"

"The next ode begins, 'O Fons Bandusiae!—a fountain, you understand," protested Robbie Belle in injured tones, "he loved the country. I wanted to read it aloud to you and get in my practice on scansion that way. I am learning to do it quite well. Listen! 'Splendidior vitro-o-o,'" she declaimed, dragging out the syllables to lugubrious length.

"Dear Robbie Belle," murmured Berta pleasantly, "if you breathe one line of that stuff on this journey I shall throw you into the river myself—cheerfully." She nodded vigorous approval of her own sentiments, and her contrary hair seized the opportunity to tumble down again in resentment of impatient fingers. "Oh, Robbie Belle, come and twist this up for me, won't you? We shall be late for the train. I don't believe we care for breakfast anyhow."

"Not care for breakfast!" Robbie Belle shut her mouth determinedly. She walked over to the wardrobe, pinned Berta's hat securely on the fly-away hair, caught up her jacket, tucked the tickets into her own pocket, and sternly marched her scatter-brained friend out of the room and down the corridor.

"It's gone to her head," she muttered sadly as if communing with herself, "the idea of music has gone to her head. I must address her soothingly. Yes, yes, we're going—we're going soon, don't worry. But we're a-going clothed and in our right mind—mine at least, and fed."

On tiptoe they flitted down to the big empty dining-room. A special breakfast was being served to the dozen or more students who intended to take the early train to the city. The unaccustomed stillness in the vast apartment usually vibrating with clatter of dishes and chatter of tongues seemed dreamlike to Berta in her exalted mood. Robbie Belle found it necessary to exert her firmest authority in order to get Berta to eat even a roll and swallow a cup of chocolate.

Two of the seniors who were going shopping lamented that they had neglected to apply for opera tickets until the house had been sold out. Berta gazed at them pityingly. To have the money and to be in the city, and yet not to be able to go! Why hadn't they thought of it in time? She had anticipated it years in advance. This world was full of queer people—all sorts of people who did not care for music, and even some who did not care for books. Wasn't it the strangest thing—not to care!

When somebody consulting her watch announced that the special electric car was to leave the Lodge Gates for the station in seven minutes, Berta dropped spoon and napkin in eager haste to depart. Out into the corridor and around the balusters to the messenger room where they were required to register their names and destination. At the foot of the broad staircase hung the bulletin board in the pale flicker of a lowered gas-jet. The morning light was brightening through the windows beyond. Berta halted mechanically to scan the oblong of dark red in search of possible new notices. Something may have been posted since chapel last night.

Ah, yes, there was a fresh square of white tucked under the tapes that marked the felt into convenient diamonds. Berta read it at a glance.

"All students requiring financial assistance for the coming year are requested to make written application to the President before May 10th. It is understood that those receiving such aid will exercise all reasonable economy in avoiding unnecessary expenditure."

Berta did not move, though her mobile face seemed to harden in a curiously stony expression. She read the notice again. Robbie Belle came breezily from the messenger room.

"Anything new, Berta? You look queer." She followed the direction of the fascinated eyes. She read it slowly and drew a deep breath.

"So we can't go after all," she said.

Berta seemed to wake up suddenly from a trance. "Robbie Belle!"

"I can't help it," doggedly though the smooth forehead had clouded in a quick frown of pain at the cry, "it would not be honest. I didn't know before."

"It's our own money," protested Berta defiantly.

"But our scholarships are the same as borrowed."



"ANYTHING NEW?"

"The tickets are bought and paid for."

Robbie Belle caught a glimpse of figures emerging from the dining-room. "There come those two seniors who forgot to get seats in advance. Isn't it lucky! Now we can sell them ours."

"Give me my ticket," demanded Berta's voice sullenly, "you never cared."

"But it is not honest," repeated Robbie Belle stubbornly. "I never thought of it in that light before. It is not honest to spend five dollars and more for a luxury while we are living on borrowed money."

"Give—me—my—ticket."

The seniors rustled past. To Berta their laughter sounded far away. "Oh, girls, we'll have to hurry! Hear that bell jangle."

"The conductor does it on purpose to see us run. We have three minutes yet. Those two freshmen by the bulletin-board are going."

"It is not honest," said Robbie Belle.

Fragments of gay chatter floated back to them. "Caruso and Sembrich in Lucia di Lammermoor! Fancy! It is the most wonderful combination of extraordinary talent—genius. I shall certainly go if I have to stand up every minute of the three hours."

"It is simply wicked to miss such an opportunity."

"Important part of our education, isn't it? I only wish my thesis were on the 'Development of the Drama.' I should employ the laboratory method most assuredly."

"The critics say that such a chance as this does not occur more than once in a century."

"It is not honest," said Robbie Belle, back in the shadowy corridor before the bulletin-board.

"Will you give me my ticket?"

Robbie Belle flinched before the passionate low tones, and the roseleaf color in her cheeks went quite white. She handed Berta both tickets. "You may do what you like with mine," she said and turned slowly away.

Berta fled in the wake of the hurrying seniors. Her head buzzed with frantic arguments. It was her own money—she had earned it. Nobody had a right to dictate what she should do with it. Robbie Belle never could see more than one side of a question. To forbid unnecessary expenditure just because she accepted a loan to carry her through college! Who was to say whether it was unnecessary or not? The Opera was part of her musical education. She would repay the scholarship with interest at the earliest possible date after she began to earn a salary. What meddling insolence! The girls who held scholarships were the brightest and finest in college—some of them. And to treat them as if they were extravagant, silly little spendthrifts! It was honest. Hadn't she denied herself everything all the year—clubs and dinners and drives and flowers and ribbons and gloves and new books and fine note-paper and that cast of the Winged Victory which she had wanted and wanted and wanted? Not that she assumed any credit for such self-denial—it simply had to be, that was all. But now, this was different. She owed it to herself not to miss such a wonderful occasion. A chance in a century—that was what the senior said.

Ting-aling, ting-aling! jangled the bell madly. The conductor paused, his hand on the strap. A

breathless girl sprang upon the platform, darted into the car, tossed a packet upon a convenient lap.

"There are two seats for the Opera. We can't go." And she had leaped from the moving steps and vanished through the great iron gates of the Lodge.

Back in the dormitory before the bulletin-board Miss Bonner, the graduate fellow, was staring at the new placard. She gave a slight start of astonishment at a glimpse of Berta hastening past her. Then because she had heard the story from Robbie Belle two minutes earlier, she pretended to be absorbed in the notices, for she suspected that any comment would start the tears that Berta was holding back. However, she was smiling to herself after the girl had vanished up the stairs. When the gong struck for breakfast, she halted at the faculty table to whisper a few words to the professor in her special department. The professor answered, "How glad I am!"

"And you really believe that it would have prejudiced the scholarship committee against Miss Abbott, if she had persisted in this extravagance? She has worked so hard to earn it."

"I understand," the professor was sympathetic but unswerving from her convictions; "it seems somewhat cruel when one considers how passionately fond of music the child is. Still you must remember that this scholarship fund is the result of endless self-denial. I have known several alumnæ, to say the least, who have sacrificed greater privileges than visits to the Opera for the sake of contributing an extra mite. Would it be just for one who benefits from the economy of others to spend in self-indulgence?"

Meanwhile Berta, unconscious of the fact that her whole college career and the future to be moulded by it had depended upon her decision to do right in this apparently insignificant respect, had trudged up to a certain lonely room. Robbie Belle lifted a wet face from a consoling pillow.

"Berta!" It was like a soft little shout of triumph. "I knew——"

Berta swallowed a lump in her throat and managed to smile a whimsical smile from behind dewy lashes.

"Maybe we'll have clam chowder for luncheon," she said, "and then won't those two seniors be sorry!"

CHAPTER IV

HER FRESHMAN VALENTINES

WHEN Bea straightened her head from its anxious tilt over the desk, she drew the tip of her tongue from its perilous position between two rows of white teeth, and heaved a mighty sigh of relief.

Then she blinked admiringly upon the white pile of envelopes lying in the glow of the drop-light. "There! That makes fifteen valentines all for her. She will be sure to receive more than any other senior, and that will teach Berta Abbott a thing or two. The idea of her insisting that her senior is more popular than my senior!"

With a smile that was rather more sleepy than dreamy, the industrious young freshman picked up the precious missives.

"O Lila,—my magnanimous roommate,—are you asleep? Do you want to listen to my last valentines? I intend to run down and put them in the senior caldron presently. Is this sentimental? When I read it to Berta, she laughed at it.

"My Music

"At thy birth were gathered voices of the sea,
Murmur of the breezes in the forest tree,
Songs of birds and laughter—"

At this point an open umbrella, which hid the pillow on the farther narrow bed, gave a convulsive shiver, and a fretful voice complained:

"Will you turn off that gas and stop your nonsense? Here it is midnight, if it's an hour, and I haven't slept a wink, with that light blazing. I know I shall fail in the written test to-morrow, Valentine's day or not."

Bea stared pensively at the Topsy-like corona above the flushed face. "I don't believe she ever puts her hair up in curlers now, do you? She is superior to such vanities, and anyway, it is naturally curly, you know, and that probably makes a difference. I wonder if she even stoops to making verses. Do you suppose she sends valentines to other girls? Of course, she doesn't care a snap whether she receives more than any, and is declared the most popular senior. H'm-m-m!" drifting into reverie afresh. "I dare say I could compose a poem on that idea. For instance:

"I know a senior all sedate—"

The umbrella bounced tempestuously across the floor, and was followed by a pillow driven hard and straight at a tousled head that ducked just in time.

"U-huh!" ferociously. "Well,

"I know a freshman, sure as fate!
Who shall no longer sit up late,
Because her long-suffering roommate—"

Here the gas flared suddenly into darkness, and slippers feet scurried away from the desk. The door opened and shut quickly; and Bea, her valentines clutched safely against her dressing gown, was speeding through the dark corridors toward the senior parlor. There a kettle, overflowing with bits of white, swung from a tripod before the shadowy folds of the parlor portières.

Ah! Bea, bending toward the caldron with arm extended, stiffened without moving. She had heard something. Yes, there it was again—a muffled footfall on the stairs near by. Hark! Down the black shaft from the cave above came stealing a second slender figure in a flowing robe of some pale woolly stuff. In her hands also was clasped a packet of envelopes.

"Hello, Berta!" Bea said.

"Oh, good-morning, Miss Leigh!" responded Berta, advancing with a tread the stateliness of which was somewhat impaired by a loosely flapping sole. "Did you rise early in order to prepare for the Latin test?"

Bea brushed aside the query with the contempt it deserved. "Are all those for your senior? I don't think it's fair for you to copy verses out of any old book, while every one of mine is original; and yet yours count exactly as much. Well, anyway, I wouldn't send my senior anything that was ordinary and unworthy of her acceptance. How many have you?"

This ignoble curiosity was likewise ignored by Miss Berta, who proceeded with dignified slowness to drop her valentines one by one into the caldron. Bea, with lingering care, deposited her contribution on the very top. One slid over the edge, and in rescuing it she disturbed a fold of the portière. A glimpse within set her eyes to sparkling.

"Berta, there's an open fire in the senior parlor, and it's still red!"

"Ho," whispered Berta, in reply to the unspoken challenge, "I'm not afraid! Let's," and two flowing, woolly robes glided into the warm room, with its heart of glowing coals. One bold intruder nestled in the biggest arm-chair, the other fumbled for the tongs.

"Aren't we wicked! Robbie wouldn't do it." Berta cuddled deeper among the comforting cushions. "But—oh!—doesn't it feel good in here!"

Bea poked a coal until it split into a faint blue blaze. "We're worse than wicked. We're cheeky,—that's what,—coming into this room without being invited. Suppose some senior should discover us!" She paused, smitten by the terror of the new thought. "Just suppose my senior should find me here! She has a horror of anything underhanded or sly. I should die of shame!" It was a genuine groan, and Berta was too startled to laugh.

"I guess it isn't very nice of us," she acknowledged meekly.

"I'm going this instant." Bea's hand was on the portière when a rustling in the kettle caught her attention. Through a rift between the folds she spied lace ruffles about a delicate hand that was dropping envelopes down upon the others. Over the tripod a face appeared for one moment in the dim light, and then was gone. Light steps retreated swiftly, and a door closed not far away on the senior corridor. Bea had recognized her senior.

When the two midnight visitors stole timorously forth a moment later, Bea's eyes traveled wistfully toward the big envelope lying squarely on top of all the valentines.

Berta regarded her keenly. "Why don't you march up and read the name, if you want to so much?" was her blunt question.

"She must be pretty fond of somebody," whispered Bea, "if she stayed up till now just to write valentines for her. I wish—"

"Do you think it is sneaking to look?" persisted Berta. "If she objected to having it seen, she might have turned it address down."

"It is address down," murmured Bea, sadly, "and I know it would be dishonorable to try to see it. She herself would call any act like that contemptible."

At this crisis Berta sneezed—sneezed hard and long and with suspicious vehemence. And when Bea cast one lingering farewell glance toward the caldron, she perceived that the topmost missives were sliding over the edge in the breeze raised by that gusty sneeze. The big square envelope tumbled clumsily down upon its back and lay staring, quite close to the flickering gas. Bea's wilful eyes rested on it one illuminating instant, and then leaped away, while her cheeks whitened suddenly. The name on the valentine was that of the senior herself.

Poor little Bea! After the first dazed moment she began to select and gather up the fifteen valentines which she had deposited five minutes before.

"Why, Beatrice Leigh!" gasped Berta. "You haven't any right to take them back after you have

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mailed them!"

"Do you imagine for one moment that I shall give valentines to a girl who sends them to herself? And the senior who receives the most is declared the most popular in the class!"

"But—but," stammered Berta, "perhaps she thought—perhaps she didn't think—"

"And I was afraid a girl who could do a thing like that might blame us for entering the senior parlor uninvited!"

Bea's hands fell listlessly at her sides as she walked away. "I don't care," she said. And Berta, who was wise in some unexpected ways, wondered why people always said they did not care just when they cared the most.

Next day various anonymous verses were delivered at the door where Lila Allan wrestled with the rules for indirect discourse, while her roommate, chin in hand, stared gloomily out at the snow-darkened sky. Valentines were silly, anyway, and it was a shame for any one to waste time and energy in hunting foolish rhymes for eyes and hair and smiles and hearts. How could a person be sure about anybody, if a girl with a face like a white flower could send valentines to herself with the address side down?

All day long the senior caldron bubbled notes faithfully till the very last minute. After chapel the class fluttered into their little parlor, with its fire blazing merrily and its shaded lamps glowing. Somebody, disguised in a long gray beard and flowing gray robe, stalked in amid laughter and clapping, and began to distribute the contents of the kettle.

Berta, hanging at a perilous angle over the stairway just outside, felt some one halt silently beside her, and glanced up into Bea's eyes.

"Hello!" she said, in an excited whisper. "Can you see all right, Bea? I think she has called my senior's name about twenty times already. Look how the valentines are heaped in her lap! Where's your senior?"

"That person with the gray beard," began Bea, calmly, only to be interrupted by, "Why, so it is! What fun! Where does she put the envelopes addressed to herself? Oh, yes, I see. Why——" Berta caught Bea's skirts in a firm grasp. "See here, young lady, you'll go over the banisters head first if you don't undouble yourself pretty soon. You'll——"

"That's the very valentine—that big, square envelope in her hand this instant! She sent it to herself——"

Bea saw Saint Valentine read aloud the name, and then stop short, staring at the address in a puzzled way. She turned the envelope over to examine its back, and study the waxen seal. Suddenly she bent her head in the delighted laughter that Bea once had thought so charming. She laughed till the long gray beard threatened to shake itself free.

"Isn't that the greatest joke! I was scribbling verses last night till I was too sleepy to see straight. I didn't mean to send this to myself. How perfectly ridiculous!" and she tossed the innocent missive into the fire.

Outside on the shadowy stairway Berta gave a little squeal of pain. "Ouch! You're pinching me black and blue! Why, Bea, Bea Leigh, whatever in the world——"

A packet of white, bound with an elastic, went flying through the air, to fall with a rustling plop into the half-empty caldron. An inquisitive senior going out to investigate spied only the deserted stairs, and heard nothing but four scampering feet on the corridor overhead. Saint Valentine, with a voice that dropped lower and lower into a muffled murmur, read her own name fifteen times in succession, and blushed rose-pink, from gray beard to powdered hair, while the other seniors laughed and laughed.

Two minutes after the valentines had been counted and the result announced Bea was waltzing about Berta's room, with that unwilling captive in her arms.

"Ho! Who says your senior is more popular than my senior now?" she jeered. "Who won that time, I want to know?"

"Before I'd have a senior who sends valentines to herself!" grumbled Berta wickedly, to the ceiling.

"Ho!" chanted shameless Bea. "I knew it was a mistake all along. That's the reason I didn't tear up my valentines."

"Yes?" commented Miss Berta, with an inflection so maddening that in three seconds she was fleeing for her life.

CHAPTER V

THE GIFTIE GIE US

It had been raining for a week. Berta was writing a poem, her elbows on the desk, her hair clutched in one hand, her pen in the other. At the window Robbie Belle was working happily over her curve-tracing, now and then drawing back to gaze with admiration at the sweeping lines of her problem. Once the slanting beat of the drops against the pane caught her eye, and she paused for a moment to consider their angle of incidence. She decided that she liked curves better than angles. She did not wonder why, as Berta would have done, but having recognized the fact of preference turned placidly back to her instruments.

Splash! came a fiercer gust of rain, and Berta stirred uneasily, tossing her head as if striving subconsciously to shake off a vague irritation of hearing. Another heavier sound was mingling with the steady patter. Rub-a-dub-dub, rub-a-dub-dub! Robbie Belle glanced up and listened, her pencil uplifted.

"It's Bea," she said, "she's drumming with her knuckles on the floor in the corridor. She says that it is against her principles to knock on the door when it has an engaged sign on it. Shall I say come?"

Apparently Berta did not hear the question. With her chin grasped firmly in one fist, she was staring very hard at a corner of the ceiling where there was nothing in particular. Robbie looked at her and sighed, but the resignation in the sigh was transfigured by loving awe. She picked up her pencil in patient acquiescence. Berta must not be disturbed.

"Chir-awhurr, chir-awhurr, tweet, tweet, tweet!" It was Bea's best soprano, with several extra trills strewn between the consonants. "Listen to the mocking-bird. Oh, the mocking-bird is singing on the bough. Bravo, encore! Chir-awhurr! Encore!"

"Make me over, Mother April,
When the sap begins to stir.
When thy flowery hand delivers
All the mountain-prisoned rivers,
And thy great heart throbs and quivers
To revive the joys that were,
Make me over, Mother April,
When the sap begins to stir."

Robbie Belle was leaning back in her chair to listen in serene enjoyment. She loved to hear Bea sing. Berta was listening, too, but with an absent expression, as if still in a dream.

The voice outside the door declared itself again. "Ahem, written by Bliss Carmen. Sung by Beatrice Leigh. Ahem!" It was a noticeably emphatic ahem, and certainly deserved a more appreciative reply than continued silence from within. After a minute's inviting pause, the singer piped up afresh.

"Make me over in the morning
From the rag-bag of the world.
Scraps of deeds and duds of daring,
Home-brought stuff from far-sea faring,
Faded colors once so flaring,
Shreds of banners long since furled,
Hues of ash and hints of glory
From the rag-bag of the world.' Ahem!"

The concluding cough was so successfully convulsive that Robbie Belle's mouth opened suddenly.

"It must be something important," she said.

Berta woke up from her trance. "Come!" she called.

At the first breath of the syllable, the door flew open with a specially prepared bang, and Bea shot in with an instantaneous and voluntary velocity that carried her to the centre of the rug.

"Oh, girls!" she exclaimed in the excited tone of a breathless and delighted messenger bringing great and astonishing news, "it's raining!"

In the ensuing stillness, she could almost hear the disgusted thud of expectation dashed to earth.

"Villain!" said Berta, and swung around to her interrupted poem.

Robbie's puzzled stare developed slowly into a smile. "I think that is a joke," she said.

Then Bea laughed. She collapsed on the sofa and shook from her boots to her curls. It was contagious laughter that made Robbie chuckle in sympathy and Berta grin broadly at a discreet pigeon-hole of her desk. When the visitor resumed sufficient self-possession to enable her to enunciate, she sat up and inquired anxiously,

"Did you hear me sing?"

Berta regarded her solemnly. "We did," she answered.

"Yes," said Robbie Belle.

"Well, that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to change. I'm going to be made over, Mother April. I'm going to turn into a genius for a while. I've always wanted to be a genius. It's no fun to be systematic and steady and conscientious, and so forth, is it, Robbie Belle? At least it isn't

very much fun, considering what might be done with our opportunities. So I intend to behave as if I had an artistic temperament. I am going to let my work pile up, cut late, skip meals, break engagements, never answer letters, give in to moods, be generally irresponsible, and so forth, just like Berta. I'm going to——"

"What!"

Bea laughed again mischievously at the sound of outraged dignity in Berta's voice. "Yes, I am. I have the spring fever: I don't want to do anything, and I don't want to do nothing either. In fact, this is the single solitary thing I do want to do. That's the reason why it will be so agreeable to be a genius. At least, it will be agreeable to me, if not to my contemporaries and companions. I shall do exactly as I please at the moment. Another reason will be the thrill of novelty—I'm simply dying for excitement."

"Thrill of novelty!" groaned Berta. "I infer that you never do as you please. You continually 'sackerifice' yourself——"

"Yes, yes, of course, but I was afraid you hadn't noticed." Bea raised her fingers to smooth the corners of her mouth straight. "Now, you've been growing worse—I mean, more and more of a genius ever since entering college. I myself ought to be called Prexie's Assistant, somewhat after the order of Miss Edgeworth's 'Parent's Assistant,' you know, because my career has been such an awful warning to the undergraduate. But you're an example——"

"I am not a genius," Berta spoke with biting severity of accent; "Lucine Brett is a genius, and I despise her."

"You used to despise her," put in Robbie Belle gently.

Berta caught her lip between her teeth for a fleeting instant of irritation, for she was not naturally meek. Then she glanced at Robbie with a quick smile all the sweeter for the underthrob of repentance over her impatient impulse. "All right, I used to long ago. But to return to our guest. I am not a genius, I hasten to remark again. Furthermore I shall be excessively obliged if Miss Leigh will march out of this apartment and stay where she belongs."

In the pause which was occupied by Bea in considering a choice of retorts stupendous, Robbie spoke again.

"I think Bea misses Lila while she is in the infirmary," she said.

Bea swung magnificently on her heel. "I have decided that the proper rejoinder is a crushing silence. I wish you good afternoon." At the door she halted. "And I shall be a genius for a spell. You just watch me and see. Shelley was lawless, you know, and Burns and Carlyle, I guess, and Goethe and George Eliot——"



"OH, THANK YOU; I DON'T WANT ANYTHING TO EAT"

"What!"

This was a shout of such indignation that Bea vanished instantly. A moment later she poked her head around the lintel.

"Well, they were," she said, "and so are you. It is a marvel to me how you hoodwink Prexie

about your work. Pure luck! Vale!"

Berta's repartee consisted of a sofa pillow aimed accurately at the diminishing crack.

The next day was Saturday. Bea failed to appear at breakfast—a catastrophe which had not occurred before in the memory of the oldest junior. Berta who usually arrived herself half an hour late headed a procession of inquiring friends, three of whom bore glasses of milk and plates of rolls to supply the dire omission. A succession of crescendo taps at her door was at length rewarded by a drowsy-eyed apparition in bath-robe and worsted slippers.

"Oh, thank——" she exclaimed at sight of the sympathetic group, and suddenly remembered that she must be different from her ordinary self. "I don't want anything to eat. I didn't feel exactly like getting up early. I seem to prefer to be alone this morning." And she managed, though with a hand that faltered at the misdeed, to shut the door in their astonished faces.

"Well, I never!" "What has happened?" "Was it a telegram?" "How perfectly atrocious!" "Is she sick?" "Beatrice Leigh to treat us with such unutterable rudeness!"

Berta listened with a queer little smile on her sensitively cut lips. Once she noticed a hasty twist of the knob as if Bea had snatched at it from the other side under the prick of the comments floating over the transom. As she walked slowly away the smile faded before a shadowing recollection. She was wondering if her own manner had truly been so unpardonable on that autumn morning when Robbie had carried her a baked apple with cream on it and plum bread besides. It had certainly been irritating to be interrupted in the middle of that rondel for the sake of which she had skipped Sunday breakfast. She had not forgotten how amazed and disappointed Robbie had looked with the saucer in one hand, the plate in the other, while the door swung impatiently back to its place. But then, the poem was sufficient excuse for that discourtesy, Berta assured herself in anxiety to justify her behavior. If she had waited to be polite, the thought and the rhymes would doubtless have scattered beyond recall. Nobody could condemn her for slamming the door and hurrying again to her desk. She had saved the rondel, and it had been printed in the Monthly. That was worth some sacrifice, even of manners to dear old Robbie. She always understood and forgave such small transgressions of the laws of friendship. Only it certainly looked different when somebody else did it.

An hour or so later while Berta was bending devotedly over her notes in the history alcove of the library, she was vaguely aware of a newcomer sauntering carelessly behind her chair. A heavy book clattered to the floor, and somebody's elbow in stooping to pick it up nudged her arm. Her pen went scratching in a mad zigzag across the neat page and deposited a big tear of red ink where it suddenly stopped.

"Oh, I'm sorry," exclaimed Bea repentantly, for she was indeed the culprit; "it's horrid to be heedless on purpose. I didn't know it would really do any harm."

Berta glanced up quickly from her blotter. So Bea considered a reckless disregard for books and persons also a quality of genius. Berta felt a slow blush creeping up to her brow at the candid memory of her tendency to bump into things and brush against people when in a dreamy mood—and to pass on without even a beg pardon.

"You're evidently new to the business, my cautious and calculating young friend," she whispered, "you should have ignored the resultant calamity. Ah—why, child!" she stared in surprise, "your collar is pinned crooked and your turnover is flying loose at one end, and your hair is coming down. You look scandalous."

Bea looked triumphant also. "It's an artistic disarray," she explained. "It's hard work because I've slipped into the habit of being prim and precise, and I had to bend a pin intentionally. Four girls already have warned me about my hair falling down. It worries me a lot and yet it doesn't give the same effect as yours. Does yours feel loose and straggly?"

Berta's hand flew to her head. "You sinner! Mine is just as usual."

"Yes, I know it," assented Bea innocently, "it's a negligee style. I'm being a geni——"

"Go away!" Berta snatched up her bottle of red ink. "Fly, villain, depart, withdraw, retreat, abscond, decamp,—in short, go away!"

Bea went, holding her neck stiffly on one side to balance the sensation of unsteadiness above her ears. Berta watched her with a wavering expression that veered from wrathful amusement to uneasy reflectiveness. Was it really true that she dressed so untidily as this little scamp made out? Perhaps she did slight details once in a while, but though not scrupulously dainty like Lila, still she tried to be neat enough on the whole. Could it be possible that the other girls criticised her so severely as this?

The suspicion bothered her so effectually that she left the library five minutes early and hurried to her room for a few renovating touches before luncheon. Her hair caused her such extraordinary pains that she was late in reaching the table. She found that Bea had usurped her place at the head, but forgot to object in the confusion of being greeted with: "Heigho, Berta, what's happened?" "You're spick and span enough for a party." "Are you going to town this afternoon?"

"Young ladies!" Berta ignored the warm color that she felt rising slowly under her dark skin, "I am astonished at your manners. Don't you know that you should never refer to an individual's personal appearance? I read that in a book on etiquette. You may allude to my money, to my brains, to the beauty of my soul, but you must not remark upon my looks. I don't understand the principle of the thing, unless it is that compliments on the other three articles fail to injure the

character, whereas flattery with regard to my pulchritude——”

Bea’s hand shot into the air and waved frantically.

“Please, teacher, what is that funny word?”

“Go to the Latin lexicon, thou ignoramus.”

“I can’t,” said Bea, “you borrowed mine and never brought it back. It’s being a——”

“But aren’t you going anywhere?” asked Robbie Belle who had been filling Berta’s plate and pouring her milk during the discourse.

Bea sent a bewitching smile straight into Berta’s eyes. “I’m ‘most sure she is going to give me a swimming lesson at half past four. Then if it is still raining this evening, we can all swim over to the chapel for the concert. Please, Berta.”

“All right,” acquiesced Berta carelessly. “I will do it because I am so noble and you are a literary person, though how in this world of incomprehensibilities you managed to get elected to that editorial board passes my powers of apperception. Robbie, will you be so kind as to reach me that saltcellar?”

“You ought to say, ‘Salt!’ at the beginning, and then while you are putting in the rest of the words, she can be handing it over,” advised Bea; “ah, what was the thought I was about to think?”

She paused in dispensing the main dish and rolled up her eyes vacantly for a moment before she dropped the spoon without a glance at the cloth to see if it left a stain and rising walked dreamily out of the dining-room.

The other girls stared. Robbie looked alarmed till Gertrude caught the likeness and explained: “It’s ‘sincerest flattery’ for you, Berta. Imitation, you understand. When an idea strikes you, you drop everything and wander away while Robbie or Bea picks up the spoon and goes on ladling out the stuff in the dish at your place. What a monkey!”

“No, a missionary,” corrected Berta, her eyes and mouth contradicting each other as usual. This time her eyes tried to hide a troubled spark in their depths while her mouth twitched over the joke of it all. “She is posing as an awful example.”

“Here I am again!” Bea appeared suddenly in her seat. “I find I’m considerably hungry still,” she vouchsafed in response to a chorus of taunts and jeers. “Ideas aren’t filling, so to speak. At least, mine aren’t—and they most of them belong to other people; hence I infer that other people’s aren’t either. Is that plain, my dear young and giddy friends? Now, somebody, applesauce!” she called, and added politely, “please pass it.”

Berta regarded her sternly. “Beatrice Leigh, you are running this scheme pretty far into the ground. When you reach bed-rock, something is likely to get a bump. Take care! Remember!”

“Thank you, yes, Berta. Half-past four at the swimming-tank in the gymnasium. I’ll be there. Trust me!”

“Trust you!” echoed Berta in withering scorn.

Bea lifted a face bearing a suitably wounded expression.

“I trust you,” she murmured in touchingly plaintive tones. “I shall be in the water at the stroke of the half hour—in the icy water. Promise that you will not fail me.”

“All right!” Berta dismissed the engagement from her mind with a heedless assent. An hour later while she was absorbed in looking over the week’s daily themes which she had found in the box, Robbie walked in rather disconsolately.

“Bea’s writing a poem, too,” she said; “she scowled at me.”

Berta frowned in abstraction. “Yes,” she muttered, “yes, yes.”

Robbie looked at her and then stared out at the steady pall of rain. “I think I shall go swimming with you, if you want me.”

“Do come.” It was a mechanical response while Berta’s eyes narrowed in the intensity of her application. “Now I wonder what that question-mark on the margin can mean. She is the vaguest critic I ever had. Suggestive, I reckon, and nothing else.”

Robbie sighed. “Bea always used to be interested in everything. I wish she wouldn’t write poems. She walked right past four girls and didn’t see them. They were astonished. They asked me if she was sick or anything. Her eyes were sort of rolled up in her head, as if she were being oblivious on purpose.”

“Um-m,” replied Berta brilliantly from the depths of her own obliviousness, “quite likely. Alas! there is another questionable question-mark. I do wish she weren’t so stingy with her red ink.”

Robbie sighed again and looked at the clock. “It will be half past four in two hours,” she volunteered.

Berta pushed back her hair with an impatient gesture. “Robbie Belle, the longer it rains, the more loquacious you become. Do go and write a note to Lila, or darn stockings or something. I have a committee meeting at three, and you bother me dreadfully, with your chatter. Do run along, there’s a dear.”

Robbie rose and wandered away forlornly. Even though she did not feel like studying, she half

wished that she had not finished the preparation of Monday's lessons. College on a rainy Saturday afternoon, when all your friends are writing poems, is not a very cheerful place.

At half-past four Berta was in the midst of a fiery argument about the program for the Junior Party to the seniors. The dispute concerned some fine point of æsthetic taste in the choice of paper and position of monogram. The stroke of the half hour reminded her of the engagement with Bea, but she lightly pushed aside the thought as of no consequence in comparison with the present emergency.

It was ten minutes to five when she seized an umbrella and scurried across the campus to the gymnasium. There in the dusk of fading light from the clouded sky outside she beheld the swimming-tank deserted, its surface still glinting in soft ripples as if from recent plunging.

At sound of a rustle in one of the dressing-rooms, Berta called Bea's name. It was Robbie's voice that answered her.

"Bea's gone out walking."

"Out walking?" echoed Berta scandalized and incredulous.

"Yes, she was here in the water at half-past four, just as she had said she would be. She waited for you, and tried to swim at the end of a curtain pole. I held it steady for her, but when she was the teacher, she let me duck under. And we weren't sure about the stroke anyhow. And we kept getting colder and colder."

"Oh!" the voice sounded as if suddenly enlightened. "At what time did you go in?"

"It was after three, and she waited for you till twenty minutes to five. Then she said she thought it would be interesting to go up to the orchard and gather apple-blossoms with rain-drops fresh on the petals. She said it would be poetic and erratic and a lot of fun. So she went. She said it would be more like a real genius if she went alone, and so I didn't go with her. Besides that, she took my umbrella, and it isn't big enough for two."

"It is queer that she did not wait longer," commented Berta wonderingly.

"She said it would be more whimsical and unexpected to stroll off in that eccentric way. She explained how she is being made over, Mother April, from the rag-bag of the world; and so she has to be different."

"I hope that she gets very wet indeed," said Berta, "and I don't see why I should worry."

Robbie's voice answered, "Bea worried about you that day last fall when you went off alone in that storm to find fringed gentians. The branches were crashing down in the wind, and one girl had seen a tramp out on that lonely road. You said you could take care of yourself, but we worried."

"Oh, that was different," exclaimed Berta. "I am perfectly capable of judging for myself. But Bea is such a scatterbrain that I can't help feeling"—she hesitated, then added as if to herself, "There isn't any sense in feeling responsible. She is old enough—"

"I can't hear when you mumble," called Robbie.

"Bea is an awful idiot," replied Berta in a louder key. "Did you catch that valuable bit of information, Robbie Belle?"

"It sounds," spoke Robbie with unexpected astuteness, "as if you are really worrying after all."

"Does it?" groaned Berta; "well, then I am an idiot too."

She sternly refused to look anxious even when the dressing-gong found the wanderer still absent in the rain. At six Berta started for the dining-room, leaving Robbie hovering at Bea's open door with a supply of hot water, rough towels, dry stockings, and spirits of camphor. In the leaden twilight of the lower corridor a draggled figure passed with a sodden drip of heavy skirts and the dull squashing of water in soaked shoes.

"Where are the apple-blossoms?" asked Berta in polite greeting as they met at the elevator.

"I've b-b-b-been studying b-b-b-bobolinks," Bea's teeth chattered. "It's original to follow birds in the rain."

"But"—Berta's eyes snapped, "I myself when I did it I wore a gym suit and a mackintosh and rubber boots. Of all the idiots!"

"'O wad some power the giftie gie us,'" chanted Bea's tongue between clicks,

"'To see oursels as ithers see us,
It wad fra mony a blunder free us,
And foolish notion.'"

Then as Berta took a threatening step in her direction, she broke into a run. "I think I'll take some exercise now," she called back mockingly as she fled up the stairs.

At midnight Berta was roused wide awake by an insistent rapping on the wall between her room and Bea's. Startled at last wide awake, she asked what was the trouble. Upon receiving no audible reply, she hurried around through the corridor to the door. She heard the key turned as she grasped the knob. An instant later she felt Bea sway against her and stand choking for breath, her hands to her chest.

"It's croup," she gasped. "The doctor! Run!"

Berta ran. She ran as she had never run before. Down the endless corridor and up the stairs, two steps at a time. Then a hail of frantic knocks on the doctor's door brought her rushing to answer. In four minutes they were back beside Bea's bed, and the doctor's orders kept Berta flying, till after a limitless space of horror and struggle she heard dimly from the distance: "She'll do now." Whereupon Berta sat down quietly in a chair and fainted.

The next day was Sunday. Berta carried Bea her breakfast.

"Good-morning, Beatrice," she said. "I've decided that I am tired of being a genius."

"So am I," said Bea.

"No more poems!" cried Robbie Belle and clapped her hands. "Oh, goodie!"

CHAPTER VI

A WAVE OF REFORM

Bea did her hair high for the first time in public on the evening of the Philaethean Reception in her sophomore year. As was to have been expected, this event of vital importance demanded such careful preparation that she missed the address in chapel altogether and was late for the first dance. When at last she really put in an appearance—and a radiant appearance it was, with cheeks flushed from the ardor of her artistic labors, she found the revelry in full swing, so to speak. The corridors and drawing-rooms were thronged with fair daughters and brave sons. Naturally the daughters were in the majority, most of them fair with the beauty of youth. The sons were necessarily brave to face the cohorts of critical eyes that watched them from all sides.

Two of the critical eyes belonged to Bea as she stood on the stairs for a few minutes and mourned that her handsomest cousin was not there to admire her new white crêpe, and also to be admired of the myriad guestless girls. She caught a glimpse of Lila in rose-colored mull as she promenaded past with a cadet all to herself. Berta and Robbie were walking together in the ceaseless procession from end to end of the second floor corridor, while the orchestra played and the couples whirled in the big dining-room. They were talking just as earnestly as if they had not seen each other every day for a year. Bea's dimple twinkled and she took a step forward under the impulse to join them for the fun of chaffing them about such polite devotion.

At that moment Gertrude touched her shoulder.

"Oh, Beatrice Leigh, have you anybody engaged for this number and the next? My brother has turned up unexpectedly, and I haven't a single partner for him. Won't you take care of him while I rush around to fill his program? Do! There's a dear!"

"All right," said Bea, "can he talk?"

"N-no, not much, but you can, and he's awfully easy to entertain. Tell him about the girls or college life or anything. He's interested in it all. Will you? Oh, please! There goes Sara now. I've got to catch her first thing."

"Bring on the brother," exclaimed Bea magnanimously, "I'll talk to him."

And she did. Twenty minutes later, when Gertrude in her frantic search through the shifting crowds explored the farthest group of easy chairs in senior corridor, she discovered Miss Bea still chattering vivaciously to a rapt audience of one.

"I've been telling him about our playing at politics last month," she paused to explain; "he was interested."

The brother smiled down at her. "It is certainly a most entertaining story," he said.

"Things generally are when Bea tells them," commented Gertrude, "that is one of her gifts."

"Oh, thank you!" Bea swept her a curtsy. "But don't hurry. Didn't you know that I promised him a dance as a reward for listening to my dissertation on reform. Some day I'll maybe tell you the story."

This is the story:

Did Gertrude ever tell you about our playing at politics when we were sophomores? Possibly you have heard politics defined as present history, and history as past politics. On that understanding, this tale is a history. It is the history of a great reform. When I sit down to reflect, a luxury for which I seldom have time even in vacation, it really seems to me that I have been reforming all my life. Lila has reformed a good deal since she entered college, and Berta has been almost as bad as I. Robbie Belle is the best one among us, but she does not realize it. That is the reason why she is such a dear. She never preaches—that is, never unless it is her plain duty as at that time in the north tower, when we were freshmen, you remember. If she disapproves of any of our schemes, she simply says she doesn't want to do it. That was what she said when the rest of us proposed to masquerade as a gang of wardheelers on election day.

You know what wardheelers are, I suppose. They are politicians who hang around the polls and watch the voting and see that people vote for the right party, or the wrong party, for the matter of that. It all depends on which side they belong. When they notice anybody going to vote for the other side, they sort of intimidate him, tell him to get away, or else push him out of line or punch him in the head or something like that. Sometimes they stuff the ballot-boxes, too, or go from one poll to another, voting over and over.

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Now Robbie Belle had joined in with all the other fun that autumn. There were imitation rallies and parades and receptions to candidates and mock banquets with real speeches and fudges and crackers to eat. She made a perfectly splendid presidential candidate at one of the meetings. She looked ever so much like him too as she sat gravely on the platform with her hair parted on one side, and a borrowed silk hat clasped to the bosom of her brother's dress suit. When all at once her face crinkled in a sudden irresistible smile, even the seniors said she was dear. But this time she said she'd rather not be a wardheeler. She wouldn't come to a banquet of the gang the night before election day either. She said she guessed she didn't want to.

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Berta and Lila and I collected butter and sugar and milk at the dinner table that evening. In our dormitory we are allowed to carry away bread and milk to our rooms, but we are not supposed to take sugar or butter for fudges. That seemed awfully stingy to us then; for in the pantry there were barrels of sugar, great cans of milk, hundreds and thousands of little yellow butterballs piled on big platters. We thought it wouldn't do any harm to use a tiny bit of it all for our banquet.

At dinner I slid two butterballs into my glass of milk, and Lila filled her glass with sugar from the bowl and then poured enough milk over it to hide the grainy look. Robbie Belle kept her eyes in another direction, but Berta said we had a right to one of the balls anyhow, because she had not eaten butter all day. Berta is the brightest girl in the class and she can argue about everything, and let the other person choose her side of the question first too. It was not until later that she reformed from that tendency to juggle with her intellect, as Prexie calls it.

Well, Lila and I marched down the long dining-room, past the seniors and the faculty table, with our glasses held up in plain sight. As soon as we reached the corridor in unmolested safety, Lila gave a skip so joyous that some drops splattered on the floor.

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She said, "Nobody caught us that time."

"Hush!" I jogged her elbow so that unluckily more milk splashed on the rubber matting, "there's Martha."

Martha, you know—or probably you don't know until I tell you—was a freshman who roomed with Lila and me that year. She was the dearest little conscientious child with big eyes that were always staring at us solemnly and giving me the shivers. She appeared to think so much more than she spoke that we respected her a lot and tried to set her a good example.

Martha was waiting for the elevator. She turned around and gazed at us without saying a word. She is considerably like Robbie Belle in her exasperating power of silence, but neither of them does it on purpose.

Unfortunately just then a senior behind her turned around too and said, "Nobody catches anybody here. This is a college, not a boarding school."

122

Now such a remark as that was distinctly unkind, not so much because either Lila or I had ever been to a boarding school, for we hadn't, as because we wished we had. We had devoured all the stories about them and envied the girls in them. We had hoped that we would find some of the same kind of fun at college itself.

Lila blushed, and I could not think of any repartee that would be appropriate, especially as Martha was staring so hard at the glass of sugar. I had noticed all the fall that she was an odd child about candy. She never would touch a mouthful of any that we made—and we made it pretty often—maybe four times a week. She always just shook her head and said she'd rather not.

It was a relief to hear the elevator come rattling up from the first floor. The dining-room is on the second, you see, though I don't know that this fact has any bearing on the story; still it may supply local color or realism or something like that. Well, we entered the elevator, and there stood a junior in the corner. This junior chanced to be an editor of the college magazine which had offered a ten dollar prize for the best short story handed in before October twentieth. She glanced at us and then stared hard at Martha till we had passed the third floor, and at the fourth she walked out behind us and spoke to Martha. She said, "Miss Reed, I think I am not premature in congratulating you upon the story which you submitted in the contest. You will receive official notice of your victory before very long." And then she smiled the nicest sweetest smile at sight of Martha's face. It was like a burst of sunshine—anybody would have smiled. I hugged her—Martha, not the junior, because I am not well acquainted with her, you understand—but I wanted to hug everybody. Lila squeezed Martha so hard that she squeaked out loud.

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"Oh," sighed the little freshman almost to herself, "now I can send mother a birthday present."

Wasn't that dear of her to think of giving it away first thing! Of course some girls would have thought of having a spread to celebrate and invite in all the crowd; but Martha was only a freshman and probably had no college spirit as yet. Her remark seemed to remind Lila of something, for she quite jumped and exclaimed, "Why, you baby, I had forgotten all about that two dollars and seventy-five cents I borrowed of you last month. And here it is only the sixth of November, but my allowance is nearly gone. Why didn't you poke up my memory?"

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"And I owe her ninety cents," said I.

The little freshman walked on with her hands clasped high up over her necktie. "Will they give me the prize soon?" she asked softly, "because the birthday is Thursday, and to-day is Monday, and it takes two days to get there."

Lila looked at me and I looked at Lila. "We can scrape it together somehow," she said. Then she touched Martha on the shoulder. "Do you want to buy it to-morrow?" she inquired, "because if you do, you shall. We'll manage it somehow. We'll pay you what we owe, and then you can buy a present even if the prize doesn't arrive in time."

"Oh, thank you!" It was strange to see how voluble happiness was making the child. "Will you really? I've wanted and wanted, but I couldn't ask. I've got an engagement down town to try on my gymnasium suit to-morrow afternoon and I shall be so glad. I can mail it then."

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"All right," said I, "we'll get it for you."

Then we forgot all about it till noon the next day. That was election day and full of excitement, even if we hadn't been late to breakfast, because the fudges kept us awake the night before. Martha had gone into her room early to study. Though she had closed the door I am afraid the girls made a lot of noise; and she woke up with a headache. Of course Berta and I and the others had a right to cut late if we wanted to do so, but we didn't mean to keep anybody from working.

Martha returned from breakfast just as I was catching together a tiny hole in my stocking above the shoe. It wasn't really my stocking, for I had lost mine by sending them unmarked to the laundry, and so I had borrowed these from Martha. They were her finest best ones, I believe, and very nice, though her clothes generally seemed shabby. This morning she told us to hurry down please, because the maid was feeling miserable. We did hurry and tried not to complain of the cold cocoa or the tough steak, though it is certainly the maid's duty to get fresh hot things no matter how late the girls are. She couldn't find our favorite crescent rolls in the pantry or down-stairs in the bakery or anywhere. Before we were through eating, the other maids had cleared away their breakfast dishes and had their tables all set for luncheon. Our maid was naturally slow, I suspect.

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After breakfast we had barely time to smooth the counterpanes over sheets and blankets that lay in wrinkles. They looked pretty well on top, but honestly I was relieved to have Martha and her big eyes out of the way. Though we snatched our books and ran through the corridors we were two minutes tardy in reaching the Latin room. The instructor was so irritable that she laid down her book and the whole class waited while Lila and I tiptoed to our seats in the middle of the last row.

With all the campaign excitement of course we had let our work get crowded out, and the other girls appeared to be in the same fix. When the most dazzling star in the class flunked on a grammatical reference, the instructor bit her lip and sent the question flying up one row and down another as fast as the students could shake their heads. As it came leaping nearer and nearer to us, Lila remembered a college story about a girl sliding from her place and kneeling behind the seat in front till the question had passed on over the vacant spot. Lila was so agitated that she forgot how conspicuous we had been in entering late. She slipped out of her seat and hid like the girl in the story. Then fell an awful stillness. The question stopped right there, hovering over the empty place. Everybody waited. The instructor set her mouth in grimmer lines, and waited, her eyes glued to the spot from where Lila had vanished. Those in front turned around to look. Lila knelt there waiting and waiting for the question to be passed on to me. I shook my head as vigorously as I dared, but nobody paid any attention. Lila waited and waited; the instructor waited; everybody waited and waited, till Lila's knees ached so that she lifted her face and peeked. She peeked straight into those grim waiting eyes on the platform.

127

Then the instructor said, "Miss Allan?" with the usual dreadful interrogative inflection, and Lila shook her head. She slid back into her seat with her cheeks as red as fire.

The minute we escaped into the hall at the end of the recitation, the girls gathered around us and giggled and teased Lila till she almost broke down and cried before them all. There is a lot of difference between playing jokes on another person and appearing ridiculous yourself. The first few weeks of the year we had teased Martha by telling her it was etiquette for freshmen to rise when addressed by sophomores and stuff like that. The little thing was so unsophisticated that we made up yards and yards of stories about the dangers of going walking alone or being out after dusk. One student really did have her purse snatched last year, and a senior saw a masked robber in the pines, and once a maid caught a glimpse of a face outside her window, and actually one evening six of us beheld with our own eyes a man jump through the hedge.

129

On this particular morning I had no time to waste, for my tutor in mathematics had warned me that she intended to charge me for the hour for which I had engaged her, no matter whether I arrived on the scene or not. That struck me as queer and rather mean, because on some days I did not feel like going, and I failed to see why I should pay her for tutoring that I had not received. She said that her time was valuable and an hour squandered in waiting for a delinquent pupil was so much loss. I guess it was a loss to me too.

While I was flying around, trying to find my notes and pen, I heard a gulp and a sob from Martha's bedroom, and popped in to find her with her head buried in the pillow. The little idiot was crying because she had flunked in English.

"Oh, but English is so easy to bluff in!" I exclaimed, "almost any string of words will do if the

teacher asks for a discussion of a tendency or of nature or vocabulary or poetic form or something. Didn't you make a try at some sort of an answer?"

"I said I didn't know," sobbed Martha, "and I didn't. My thoughts were all mixed up and I couldn't remember a line." 130

"You goosie!" I was disgusted. "If I said I didn't know at every opportunity where I could say it truthfully, how long do you think I would be allowed to stay in this institution of learning? When I don't know a fact, I use fancy. It is the greatest fun to catch a hint and elaborate it into a brilliant recitation without a jot of knowledge to back it up. It takes brains to do it. You've got to learn to bluff, and then get along without studying."

The little freshman raised her heavy eyes, all reddened about the lids. "Oh, but that isn't honest," she said.

"Not honest?" For an instant I was actually alarmed. Once when I myself was a freshman I nearly lost my faith in human nature because a senior whom I admired did something that looked dishonest. But sending valentines to yourself in order to win a prize is different from bluffing. So I said, "Nonsense!" and was just hurrying out of the door when she called in a quivery voice: "P-please, may I borrow a sheet of theme paper? Mine's all gone and I can't buy—I mean, it's due to-night." 131

"Help yourself," I answered, "there's a heap of it that I carried away from the last German test. Right hand drawer of the desk."

"No, no! I can't take that. Haven't you any that you bought with your own money? I'll pay it back. That paper—they gave it to you—didn't they give it to you just for the test?"

I stopped and walked over to feel of her head and tell her that she ought to see the doctor or take a nap or something. Then I gave her three sheets of the paper and told her not to be silly. I don't know whether she used it or not. At luncheon she appeared with her fingers inky and her hat on.

Berta said, "Whither, my child?"

She answered, "Down town." And then she looked at Lila with such anxious eyes that I jumped and clapped my hands together in contrition.

"Lila, we've forgotten to get that money for her!"

Martha turned her face toward me and sat gazing like a little dog. We asked all the girls at the table for contributions, but they were nearly penniless. I said, "Are you in a hurry, Martha?" And she said she had to be there at two o'clock. So we told her to hurry on, and we would get the money somewhere and meet her on the corner of Main and Market Streets at quarter past four sharp. She said, "Honest?" And I answered, "Yes, trust me. We'll be there, and I'll stand treat for soda water, if I can scrape up any extra pennies. You run along and pick out your present." 132

And then, do you know, in spite of all that and our promise to meet her, we forgot every bit about it till half-past four! You see, it was election day, and we were frightfully busy. After the fifth hour recitation we hurried into the ragged blue overalls that we had worn in one of the torchlight parades. Lila punched up the crown of an old felt alpine hat, and I battered my last summer's sailor till it looked disreputable enough. Then we rushed over to the gymnasium to join our gang of wardheelers.

We found the judges sitting at bare tables with their lists before them and wooden booths along the walls. And then—oh, I can't do justice to the fun we had! Some of us hung around outside and tried to scare away opposing voters by telling how the judges might make them sing scales or slide down ropes or wipe off their smiles on the carpets or chant the laundry list or write their names in ink with their noses, if they should be challenged. We actually succeeded in frightening away several timid freshmen. The rest of the gang pretended to stuff ballot-boxes and buy votes, just as we had read in the papers. 133

Berta, Lila and I voted while wearing our overalls. Then we dashed back to our rooms and dressed in our ordinary clothes and attempted to vote a second time. Such fun! The judges recognized us and refused to accept our ballots. Such an uproar as we raised! The other wardheelers stormed to the rescue; the lists were scattered, and the tables overturned. Of course it was only a joke, and most of us were too weak from laughing to clear away the disorder in time for the polls to close promptly.

And then we happened to remember Martha. 134

There it was half-past four and it would certainly be five before we could get ready and catch the car and reach the corner of Main and Market. So we let it go and decided that she would be tired of waiting by that time and start for home, and we might most likely miss her anyhow, even if we should collect the money and try to keep the engagement. And besides that we were having such a picnic telling about the turmoil at the polls that we hated to waste a minute away from the scene. Berta had a splendid idea about dressing up as policemen and borrowing the express wagon belonging to the janitor's grandson, and then tearing over to the gym as if we had been summoned to arrest the hoodlums and take them to jail in the patrol. It was so late, however, that we had to give this plan up and get ready for dinner. It was a dreadful disappointment.

Martha hadn't come yet. It was half-past five and dark, and then it was quarter of six, and then it was six, and we went down to dinner, but she hadn't come yet. And then it was half-past six, 135

and we went down the avenue to the Lodge to watch the car unload, but no Martha. We danced in parlor J for a while, and then we went to chapel at seven, but she hadn't come yet. And then we walked down to the Lodge again and watched three cars stop and turn around the curve, one after another, but she wasn't in any of them. And then we went back to tell Mrs. Howard, the lady principal, about it. And she was awfully anxious and asked all sorts of questions about Martha, and what kind of a girl she was, and if she had any money with her, or any friends in town, or any peculiar habits about running away from her friends, or any trouble lately or anything.

Then she began to telephone and went to see Prexie, and Lila and I wandered out to the stairs above the bulletin board where the students were waiting to hear the election returns. Between the successive telegrams the girls clapped and laughed and stamped and hissed at speeches by the seniors and juniors, or else they sang patriotic songs.

When Miss Benton, president of the Students' Association, the greatest honor in the college course, and she is the finest senior in the class too—was urged upon a chair to make a speech, Lila almost pushed me through the banisters in her excitement. She has admired Miss Benton ever since the first day when it rained, and we were so terribly homesick, and she smiled at us in the corridor.

"Hush!" whispered Lila, "listen! Isn't she beautiful!"

"Ouch!" said I, "she isn't beautiful, she's downright plain with her hair smoothed back that way." But I said it pretty low, because that staircase banked with girls was no place for distinctly enunciated personalities. It was a humorous speech, for one reason of Miss Benton's popularity is her fun under a dignified manner. In the middle of the cheering after she had finished, the messenger girl appeared with a new bulletin. Somebody read it aloud so that we could all hear. It reported the victory of the corrupt party machine in an important city. Nobody spoke. There was just the faint sound of a big sighing oh-h-h! and then a hush.

The next thing I knew, Miss Benton and some other seniors were coming up the stairs, and the girls were moving this way and that to open a path for them. Lila crowded closer to me so as to make way. A junior on the step below reached up her hand and stopped Miss Benton as she was passing.

"Do wait for the next telegram, Mary," she said, "perhaps that will be more encouraging. The country as a whole seems to be going right."

Miss Benton dropped down beside her with an awfully discouraged sort of a sigh. "You don't live there, and I do," she said. "You do not know how the reform party has worked with soul and strength to defeat that boss. Something is terribly wrong with the citizens and their standards of honesty. How could they? How could they?"

The junior bent nearer to speak in lower tones; but Lila and I could not help hearing. "Mary, something is wrong with us too," she whispered. "Did you know that to-day at our mock election some of the sophomores pretended to be corrupt voters and wardheelers? They intimidated voters, challenged registrations, played at buying votes, tried to stuff the ballot-boxes. There was a most disgraceful scrimmage! To turn such crimes into a joke! How could they? How could we?"

Miss Benton straightened herself with a movement that was sorrowful and angry and discouraged all at once. She drew a deep breath.

"I will tell you what is wrong with us as well as with the entire country. Our ideal of honesty is wrong. With us here at college the trouble is in little things; with the world of business and politics the evil is in great matters too. But the principle is the same. We are not honest. We condemn graft in public office. Is it not also graft when a student helps herself to examination foolscap and takes it for private use? Is the girl who carries away sugar from the table any better than the government employee who misappropriates funds or supplies in his charge? We cry out in horror at revelations of bribery. Ah, but in our class elections do we vote for the candidate who will best fill the office, or for our friends? I have known a girl who desired to be president of the Athletic Association to bargain away her influence to another who was running for an editorship."

"And some of us travel on passes which are made out in other names."

Miss Benton did not hear. "We exclaim—we point our fingers—we groan over the trickery of officials, scandals, bribery, treachery, lawlessness. And yet we—is it honest to bluff in recitations—to lay claim to knowledge which we do not possess? Is it honest to injure a library book and not pay for the damage? Is it honest to neglect to return borrowed property? Some of us rob the maids of strength by obliging them to work overtime in waiting on us at the table. Our lack of punctuality steals valuable time from tutors and teachers and each other. We cheat the faculty by slighting our opportunities and thus making their life work of inferior quality to that which they have a right to expect. By heedless exaggeration we may murder a reputation—mutilate an existence. We wrong each other by being less than our best. We are unscrupulous about breaking promises. Down town this afternoon at the corner of Main and Market Streets I saw a freshman waiting in the cold. She was walking to and fro to get warm. Her teeth chattered,—she was crying from nervous suspense. When I spoke to her and advised her to return to college before dark, she shook her head, and said no, somebody had promised to meet her, and she had to stay. Now that girl, whoever it was, who broke that engagement, is responsible—"

I leaned forward and clutched Miss Benton's shoulder.

"She hasn't come back yet," I cried; "do you think she is there still? I forgot—I thought it didn't matter. I didn't mean to—"

Miss Benton turned around her head to look up at me, and the others near us looked too, and down at the foot of the stairs the crowd packed in front of the bulletin board sort of quieted for a minute and seemed to be listening and watching us. And up on the wall over their heads the big clock went tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock, and its long pendulum swung to and fro.

Then swish, swish, swish, the lady principal came hurrying through the reception hall beyond, with her silk skirts rustling, and her face quite pale. And the girls turned their heads toward her. She raised her hand and said in her soft voice: "Are Miss Martha Reed's roommates here?"

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And then some more girls with their hats and coats on came running up the steps from the vestibule. The crowd was buzzing like everything when Lila and I pushed our way through to tell Mrs. Howard we were there. We caught scraps of sentences flying hither and thither.

"Run over?"

"Lying in the road——"

"Who found her?"

"Yes, right there in the loneliest part."

"Such a timid little thing——"

"Frightened and fell maybe——"

"Queer she didn't take the car."

"Is she dead?"

Lila pushed ahead, thrusting the girls right and left from her path. I couldn't see her face, but her shoulders kept pumping up and down as if she were smothering. You know she's more sensitive than I am, and I felt badly enough.

Mrs. Howard took her hand and said, "Miss Reed wishes to see you both and leave a message."

Of course such a speech would make anybody think she was dying. I rubbed my sleeve across my eyes and shut my teeth together and swallowed once, for the other girls around were gazing after us. Lila walked on with her head up. I couldn't see anything but the line of her cheek, and that looked sort of cold and stony. We followed on over the thick rugs into the second reception room. There sitting in a big chair, leaning back against a cushion kind of limp and pale but not dead at all—there was Martha.

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"Did you get the money?" she asked.

Lila didn't answer. She just dropped on her knees and hid her face against Martha's dress.

"It was a centerpiece I thought Mother would like. I chose it in the shop-window there at the corner while I was waiting. Maybe it will get there almost in time if it is mailed to-morrow, but the doctor says I must go to the infirmary for a day or two. If you would please send it away for me in the morning—if you have the money to buy it, Lila,—I'm sorry."

The doctor walked in alert and brusque as usual but gentle too.

"Now for my captive," she said, "time's up. Life in a study with two sophomores is hard on a freshman's nerves. A few days of the rest-cure will about suit you."

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Martha glanced at me, for Lila was still hiding her face.

"It was silly of me," she explained shyly, "but I grew so nervous when you didn't meet me that I cried and that made it worse. I watched every car and both sides of the street, and I waited till after dark. You see, I didn't have any money for car-fare. After they began to light the lamps, I started to walk out here to the college. Everybody was eating supper, and I was all alone on the road with dark fields on both sides. I could not help thinking of those dreadful robbers and maniacs and tramps——"

"What?" cried the doctor.

I drew a deep breath. "We told her," I said. "I—I'm afraid we exaggerated. I—I thought it would be more interesting."

"Oh!" said the doctor. It was such a grim sort of an oh that I repented some more, though indeed it was not necessary.

Martha smiled at me. I always did consider her the dearest, most sympathetic little thing. "It was my fault," she said, "I am such a coward anyhow. And then when I ran past a rock, I imagined I saw something move and jump toward me. I lost my wits and ran and ran and ran till I twisted my ankle and fell. I must have struck my head on a stone. I'm sorry. It was silly of me to run. Please don't worry."

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"That will do for the present," said the doctor.

Then they carried her over to the infirmary. Lila and I walked out past the crowd in front of the bulletin board. They were cheering.

"Listen, Lila," I said, "good news from somewhere."

"We promised to meet her," said Lila.

I hate regrets. "Well," I said, "that's all over and done with. There is no use in bothering about it now. But the next promise we make——"

Berta rushed up to us. "Oh, girls!" she exclaimed, "did you catch that last return? Reform is sweeping the country. Hurrah!"

CHAPTER VII

FOUR SOPHOMORES AND A DOG

The last recitation of the winter term was over, and the corridors were alive with girls hurrying this way and that, pinning on their hats, buttoning jackets, crowding into the elevator, unfurling umbrellas, and chattering all the time.

"Hope you'll have the nicest sort of a time!" "Don't stay up too late!" "Good-bye!" "Oh, good-bye!" "Be sure to get well rested this vacation!" "Awfully, awfully sorry you wouldn't come home with me, Gertrude, you bad child! But I know you won't suffer from monotony with Berta and Beatrice in the same study." "Hurry, girls, there's the car now. Just hear that bell jingle, will you!" "Good-bye, Gertrude, and don't let Sara work too hard!" "Oh, good-bye!"

Gertrude felt the clutch of arms relax from about her neck, and managed to breathe again. This was one of the penalties—pleasant enough, doubtless, if a person were in the mood for it—of being a popular sophomore. For a minute she lingered wearily in the vestibule to watch the figures flying down the avenue to the Lodge gates. How their skirts fluttered and twisted around them, and how their hats danced! Their suit-cases bounded and bumped as they ran, and their umbrellas churned up and down in choppy billows before the boisterous March wind. There! the last one had vanished in a whirl of flapping ends and lively angles beyond the dripping evergreens.

As she was turning languidly away, a backward glance espied two girls emerging from one of the dormitories far across the flooded lawn. They came skipping over the narrow planks that had been laid in the rivers flowing along the curving walks. The first was Berta swathed in a hooded waterproof; and the second, of course, was Beatrice, a tam flung askew on her red curls, her arms thrust through a coat sleeve or two, a laundry bag swinging from one elbow, and a tin fudge pan clasped tenderly and firmly beneath the other, while with the hands so providentially left free she stooped at every third step to rescue one or the other of her easy-fitting rubbers from setting out on a watery voyage all by itself.

"Hi!" she gasped after a final shuffling dash, as she caught sight of immaculate Gertrude, "I wore your overshoes. Hope you don't mind. They're not very wet inside, and I brought over your things so that we can move into our borrowed study right off now."

"Where are my things?" asked Gertrude with natural curiosity and perhaps unnatural calm.

"Here," jerking the laundry bag, "it holds a lot—brushes, soap, nightgown, toothpowder, fountain-pen, note-book, everything. Berta carried your mending basket. You needn't bother one bit."

"I'll run back and forth for anything you want," volunteered Berta hastily at sight of an irritable frown on the usually serene brow of handsome Gertrude.

"You're cross!" commented Bea with a cheerful vivacity that was exasperating to the highest degree, considering that everybody ought to be worn down to an unobtrusive state of limp inertia after the three busy months just concluded, "you've been cross ever since Sara——"

"Berta, lend me your gossamer and rubbers, please," when Gertrude was unreasonably provoked she had a habit of snapping out her words even more clear-cut than usual. An instant later she swept forth into the rain only to stop short and hurry in again before the door had swung shut. "We might as well look at the study first," she said in a more gracious tone, "and we can draw lots to see who is to have the inside bedroom. I dare say the change to this building will be a rest."

Berta took quick survey from the window to explore the cause for this amazing wavering of purpose.

"Ah!" she murmured in swift enlightenment, "it's Sara. She's coming over the path."

A peculiar expression flitted across Bea's ingenuous face—an expression half quizzical, half sorry. "Then we'd better follow Gertrude's example, and clear the track. She'll cut us dead again—that meek little mouse of a girl! And I don't blame her for it either, so there!"

Berta tucked a pensive skip in between steps as they moved through the gloomy corridor past rain-beaten windows. "It wasn't like Gertrude to burst out like that just because Sara came late to our domestic evening, but it did spoil the fudges and the game and everything."

"And not to give her a chance to explain!" fumed Bea's temper always ready to flame over any

injustice. "Before she could open her lips, Gertrude blazed up, cold as an icicle—"

"What?" interpolated demure Berta with her most deeply shocked accent, "an icicle blaze?"

"Oh, hush, you're the most disagreeable person! I wish Lila hadn't gone home. Well, she did just that. She said the artistic temperament was no excuse for discourteous falsehood—or she almost the same as said it—meaning breaking your word, you know, for Sara had promised she would come at eight, and there it was quarter to nine. She said that it might be wiser next time to invite somebody more reliable about keeping engagements. Sara did not answer a word—only went white as a sheet and walked out of the room. Now she even cuts us—because we were there—stares right over our heads when we meet her anywhere."

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"I'm sure Gertrude was sorry the minute she had spoken. And she's been working awfully hard over committees and the maids' classes and the last play. She was tired and nervous up to the brim, and then to wait and wait and wait for Sara. Why, I was getting cross myself."

"Well, why doesn't she beg Sara's pardon then, and make it all right?" demanded the young judge severely. "Sara has always simply worshiped her, but because she never has made mistakes nor learned how to apologize, and everybody admires her and flatters her, she is too proud to say she was wrong. It's plain vanity—that's what it is. She can't bear to make herself do it."

"She's unhappy,—that's what I think, though she sort of pretends she doesn't care."

"She's cross as a bear—that's what I think," snapped Bea, "and Sarah has dark circles under her eyes. It's dreadful—those two girls who used to be inseparable! Quarrels are—are horrible!" The impetus of this conviction almost succeeded in hurling its proprietor against the water cooler at the bathroom door. "Say, Berta, what if you and I should quarrel, with Robbie Belle and Lila one thousand miles away?"

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"I'm too amiable," responded Berta complacently, "sugar is sweet—"

The tin cup dropped with a flurried rattle against the fudge pan. "Oh!" a shriek of dismay, "my dear young and giddy friend, we're all out of sugar. What if we should want to make anything tonight? Let's run back to the grocery by the kitchen this minute."

Owing to this delay, Gertrude had been in the study for more than ten minutes, staring out at the trees writhing in the wind, when she was startled by the sound of a suffocated shriek, followed by a scamper of four thick-soled shoes, the heels smiting the corridor floor with disgracefully mannish force. The door flew inward vehemently, and Bea shot clear across the room to collapse in the farthest corner, hiding her face in the fudge pan while her shoulders quivered and heaved terrifyingly. Berta walked in behind her, and after one reproachful look, sat down carefully in a rocker and brushed her scarlet face before beginning to giggle helplessly.

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"You're the meanest person! Beatrice Leigh, you knew I was turning into the wrong alleyway, but you never said a word. You wanted to see me disgraced. The door opened like magic, and there she stood as if she had slid through the keyhole. She stood there plastered against the wall and—and—regarded us—"

"Oh!" moaned Bea in ecstasy, one fiery ear and half a cheek emerging from the kindly shelter of the fudge pan, "she glared. She wondered why those two idiotic individuals were stalking toward her without a word or knock or smile, when suddenly the hinder one exploded and vanished, while the other ignominiously—stark, mute, inglorious—fled, ran, withdrew—so to speak—"

"Why didn't you say something?" groaned Berta. "I simply lost my wits from the surprise. She was the very last person I expected to see anywhere around here. How in the world did she happen to borrow the next room to ours? She'll think we were making fun of her—that we did it on purpose. She's awfully sensitive anyhow!"

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"Well, you two are silly!" commented Gertrude, her face again toward the driving storm. "Who was it? Not a senior, I hope, or a faculty?"

Bea straightened herself abruptly, the laughter driven sternly out of every muscle except one little twitching dimple at the corner of her mouth. "It was Sara," she exclaimed, "and she is pale as a ghost. She has never been so strong since waking up on that boat and finding a burglar trying to steal the ring off her finger during the holidays. You know how she jumps at every sudden noise, and she's been getting thinner and thinner, and I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself clear down to the ground." Here the dimple vanished in earnest. "I know I'm ashamed of myself, and so's Berta. Even her lips were white. Now we've hurt her feelings worse. I didn't think. Nice big splendid excuse for a sophomore, isn't it?"

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"There's the gong for luncheon," was Gertrude's only reply as she moved toward the door.

Bea's flare of denunciation had subsided quickly in her characteristic manner. She sat absently nibbling the handle of the obliging pan, while staring after the receding figure, its girlish slenderness stiffened as if to warn away all friendliness. "She's sturber than ever. I say, Berta, let's reconcile them."

"Oh, let's!" in echoing enthusiasm, adding as the beauty of the plan glowed brighter, "they'll probably thank us to the last day that they live. I know I would, if it were Robbie and I who were drifting farther and farther apart."

"Very likely," responded the arch-conspirator, beginning at the lower edge of the tin doubtless

itself delicious from long association with dainties, "but the question is: How are we going to do it? One is proud, and the other is proud too. I don't see exactly how we can fix it."

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As Berta did not see either, they decided with considerable sound sense meanwhile to go to luncheon. The next day after many minutes of discouraging meditation mingled with a few hours of tennis in the gymnasium, an idea came to them. While they rested on the window ledge, watching Gertrude stroll to and fro in the sunshine balmy at last, Bea began to waste her breath as usual.

"To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow drags out its weary course from day to day," she quoted with mindless cheerfulness, only to interrupt herself good naturedly, "say, Berta, do you realize that the third to-morrow aforementioned is April Fool's Day? I wish something interesting would happen. This is the most monotonous place in vacation."

"To-morrow never is, it always will be," corrected the carping critic.

Bea with indifference born of long endurance paid no attention. "I say!" rapturously as the idea began to dawn upon her inward vision, "let's reconcile them with a joke."

"All right," agreed her partner with most charming alacrity, "what joke?"

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The question was rather a poser, as Bea was inclined to take only one step at a time and utter one thought as it obligingly arrived, without anxiety about the next. This tendency had occasionally landed her high and dry on the shores of nothingness in the classroom.

"Oh, um-m-m, I haven't determined that point yet. It isn't only great minds that move slowly." Gertrude's cape swung into view at the turn of the walk. "Berta, she looks awfully lonesome, doesn't she?"

"Well," argued the other, "nobody can expect us to do all the tagging around ourselves, especially where a contemporary is concerned. If she wants us to walk with her, she might omit a few snubs now and then. I'm tired of chasing after her."

"The trouble is that you are not a faithful friend, faithful friend," rattled Bea, "man's faithful friend, the dog. Oh, oh, oh, Berta, I have an idea!"

"Noble girl!" Berta patted her on the head. "I generously refrain from comment."

"Thank you, sweetheart. I feared you could not deny yourself that remark about keeping my idea, as I might never get another. But this one is an idea about a dog. Let's find a puppy to give Gertrude for a soothing companion this vacation. I love puppies."

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"The question is: does Gertrude also love puppies? Or is it a joke?"

"Let's get a dog and surprise her with it April Fool's morning. He will be such a friendly little fellow and so faithful that her conscience will sting her——"

"I must acknowledge that you are a humane, tender-hearted individual. To plot a stinging conscience——"

"Oh, hush, Berta! Do be nice and agreeable. I'm awfully tired this week, and I really need some distraction. The corridors stretch out empty and silent, and breakfast doesn't taste good at all, and—and I want to do something for Sara."

"Oh, all right!" Berta spied the glint of an excitable tear and shrugged the weight of common sense from her shoulders. "I'm with you."

Three days passed—three days of blue sky and fluffy clouds and air that sent Bea dancing from end to end of the long stone wall while Berta stumped conceitedly along the path in her new rubber boots. Gertrude wondered aloud why two presumably intelligent young women insisted upon spending every morning in foolish journeys over muddy country roads. Noting an unaccustomed accent of peevishness in the energetic voice, Berta began to worry a bit over the likelihood that such petulance was due to impending sickness. Bea jeered at this, though with covert side glances to detect any signs of fever. In her secret soul, where she hid the notions which she dimly felt looked best in the dark, she reflected that an attack of some mild disease might be a valuable form of retribution, and also afford the invalid leisure to repent of her sins. Still she did not quite like to mention this thought aloud, as it seemed too unkindly vengeful with regard to any one so obviously miserable as Gertrude.

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One day on charitable plans intent the two conspirators dragged Gertrude out across the brown fields to have fun building a bonfire, as they had done the previous spring. But somehow the expedition was not much of a success—possibly because the wood was too damp to burn inspiringly. On that other occasion Sara had been with them, and had kept them laughing. She could say the funniest things without stirring a muscle of her small solemn face. That stump speech of hers given from a genuine stump had sent them actually reeling home. This year—alas!—while returning to college rather silently, they saw Sara plodding toward them with an air of being out for sober exercise, not pleasure. The moment she spied them, she deliberately retraced her steps, and vanished through a hole in the hedge. This incident set Gertrude to chattering so excitedly about nothing in particular that the others knew she cared even more than they had fancied.

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On the evening of the last day of March, Bea and Berta came rushing into the dining-room twenty minutes late for dinner. When they both declared that they did not want any soup—their favorite kind, too—Gertrude sighed impatiently over countermanding her order to the maid. It seemed as if she were not getting rested one bit this vacation, though she did nothing but read novels all day long. She felt sometimes as if she were hurrying every minute to escape from

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herself and her own thoughts. Everything irritated her in the strangest way. In all her busy healthful life she had never been nervous before. It was not hard work that had worn upon her. The doctor told them when they were freshmen that no girl ever broke down from work unless worry was added. Gertrude knew perfectly well what torturing little worry was gnawing away in her mind. She kept telling herself that her speech to Sara had been true—it was so—Sara had broken her engagement—and she could not, could not, could not humble herself to apologize. In fact, Sara was the one who ought to offer apologies. And all this time wilful Gertrude refused to acknowledge even to herself that she was juggling with her conscience in the desperate determination to hold herself free from blame in her own esteem. She simply could not beg anybody's pardon, and she was not going to do it, because—well, because she had not been to blame—so there!

On this particular evening, after five solid minutes of silence on the part of her exasperating roommates, she raised her heavy eyes, and let them rest expressionlessly on the two wind-freshened faces, till Bea's roses blossomed to her hair.

"We're not doing anything," rebelliously, "you are so boss-y."

"Moo-oo," muttered Berta to her plate. "Bow-wow-wow." Bea choked over her glass and fled precipitately, leaving her partner to capture a pitcher of milk ostensibly to drink before going to bed.

Of course they would have regretted missing dessert as well as soup, if Gertrude had not asked permission to carry some of the whipped cream to her room. It was easier to do something unnecessarily generous than to beg Sara's pardon—which was merely plain hard duty. The girls were not in the study when she entered with her offering, but soon Bea dashed in and dropped breathlessly on the couch, with a conspicuous effort to act as if accustomed to arrive without her present double. Gertrude listened unsuspectingly to the flurried explanation that Berta was kept by a—a—a—friend, before she revealed the brimming trophy from dessert.

Bea clapped her hands. "Oh, you darling! the very thing! Won't that pup"—an abrupt and convulsive cough subsided brilliantly into, "that pet of a Berta be pleased! I'll take it to her this instant."

However, she did not invite Gertrude to accompany her, and upon her return after a prolonged absence, she conducted herself with odd restlessness. In the intervals of suggesting that they put up an engaged sign or read aloud or darn stockings or play patience before going to a certain spread, she stared at the clock. Promptly at eight she escaped from the door, near which she had been lingering for the past quarter-hour, with the carefully distinct announcement that she was going after Berta, and later she might attend the spread.

Five minutes later she was bending over a fluffy little creature nestling on Gertrude's best pillow in one of the partitioned off bathrooms at the end of the corridor.

"He's been pretty good," said Berta as she surrendered the spoon, "and he likes the cream, only the bubbles in it keep him awake, I think. Somebody hammered at the door so long that I had to stuff a lot into his mouth every time he started to cry."

Bea assumed her station of nurse with businesslike briskness. "Hurry back to Gertrude, and coax her to go to that spread if you can. She's terribly blue to-night. Be sure to get back here at nine, and I will take my turn at the party so that nobody will be too curious about this affair. At ten we shall both be here to decide about the night."

"Then we can hook the door on the inside, and climb over the partition. Won't it be fun! I wonder if I shouldn't better practice doing it now," and Berta looked longingly at the black walnut precipice.

"You trot along this instant, and don't let Gertrude suspect anything for the world. Be just as natural as you know how—more than ever before in your life. I reckon I shall put him to sleep in a jiffy."

"Try it," called the ex-nurse with laconic scorn, "I'll allow you the full hour for the experiment."

It must have been a very full hour indeed, to judge from Bea's feelings as the minutes dawdled past. It seemed to her that instead of flying with their sixty wings, according to the rhyme, each minute trailed its feathers in the dust as it shuffled along. At first, it was amusing to watch for the mouth to open, and then pop in a spoonful of cream. But this soon became monotonous, especially when she learned that no matter how long she sat motionless beside the pillow, the bright little eyes blinked wide awake at her slightest stir to rise.

It was lonesome in that end of the great building. Their suite and Sara's room next to it were the only ones occupied in that neighborhood during the vacation. This bathroom was as much as forty steps distant even from that populated spot, and not a single footfall had sounded in the corridor since Berta had disappeared into the gloom. The light from the outer apartment glimmered dully over the partition. At intervals in the stillness, a drop of water clinked from the faucet out there. Bea found herself holding her breath to listen for the tinkle of its splash. Outside the small window, a pale moon was drifting among fluffy clouds.

More than once Bea rose with exquisite caution, and stole to the outer door, only to hear a plaintive whine, while four clumsy paws came pattering after her. Then followed more minutes of soothing him with cream, and watching for the little woolly sides to cease heaving so piteously. Perhaps after all it would have been wiser to have left this troublesome joke with his mother on the farm.

By the time this vague suggestion had wavered into her consciousness, the strain of waiting and listening began to re-act on her temper. Of course, Berta had forgotten all about her watching there alone in the dark. Berta was selfish and thoughtless and heedless. That very afternoon, while they were bringing the puppy to college, she had almost tipped the buggy over into a puddle. Berta had no right to impose upon her like this, and make her do the worst part of the work every time. Why, even when they went calling together, Bea always had to do the knocking and walk in first and manage the conversation and everything. And now Berta was having fun at the spread, and it must be near ten o'clock, for the watchman had already shuffled softly past and turned the gas still lower. And she knew her foot was going to sleep, and she could never feel the same toward Berta Abbott again.

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Bea was so sorry for herself that her lip began to quiver over a sobbing breath, when steps came hurrying helter-skelter, the door banged open, and Berta dived in.

"Oh, Bea, I'm dreadfully sorry! I couldn't get away before. They held me—actually—and made me jig for them, and sing that last song I wrote. The preserved ginger was so delicious that I saved some for you. Nobody suspects a thing. How is the little dear?"

Bea rose with impressive dignity till the straightening of numb muscles inspired an agonized, "Ouch!" and a stiff wriggle. It was every bit Berta's fault, and she evidently didn't care a snap. She would show people whether they could walk all over her and never say boo! She would not lose her temper—oh, no! she would not utter a word—not a single one of all the scorching things she could think of. She would just be dignified and self-possessed and teach certain persons that she did not intend to be imposed upon one instant longer. Therefore, Miss Beatrice Leigh flung open the door and stalked away without a backward glance.

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"Hulloa!" ejaculated Berta, staring blankly after her, "what's your rush?"

No answer; merely a somewhat more defiant swing of the slender shoulders vanishing in the dusk of the deserted corridor.

"What shall we do with the dog? You borrowed him—you're responsible—it's your idea," following in a puzzled flurry as far as the threshold. "Shall I lock him in alone? I said all along it was silly."

Those insolent shoulders sailed silently around the transverse and out of sight.

After a petrified moment, Berta drew a deep breath, and threw back her head while the crimson of quick resentment flamed from neck to hair. That was a nice way to be treated, when she had simply done her best not to arouse suspicion, exactly as Bea had warned her. She took two steps hastily away from the spot; then turned slowly and glanced in at the soft heap of white showing dimly on the darker blur of the pillow. She certainly did not propose to spend the entire night in playing nurse to anybody, especially after Bea had insulted her so unpardonably. It had been Bea's idea all along too, and Berta had worked herself nearly to death to make it a success. The miles and miles she had tramped through the mud—and all to no result! Now everything was spoiled, and everybody had quarreled with everybody else. Whereupon Berta marched away to bed, leaving the swinging door unhooked and the outer door ajar. Bea was indisputably right in criticising her fellow conspirator as heedless.

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At midnight Gertrude sprang from her pillow, both arms flung out into the darkness, every nerve quivering as she listened for a second scream. She had chosen the inside bedroom that had a window opening on the corridor. Now in the breathless silence, she heard a swift creak ending in the bang of an up-flung sash. A swish of light garments, a thud shaking the floor outside, and then bare feet flying in frantic haste past her room and into the alleyway.

A crash against the study door, and the knob rattled wildly. "Let me in, quick, quick! Help, Gertrude, help!"

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There was a flash of white across the floor, the lock grated, and Sara was in Gertrude's arms. Portières rustled apart, and two more apparitions loomed pallidly in the dark.

"Hulloa!" gasped Berta's voice, while a woodeny click from Bea's direction told of Indian clubs snatched bravely in readiness for war.

"Light the gas, girls," ordered Gertrude quietly; "there, dear, don't be frightened now. See, we are all here. We will take care of you. What was it startled you?"

"I don't know. It was dark. Something moved. I heard something. I was afraid."

Gertrude felt her tremble, and held her closer. Over the bowed head she spoke with her lips to the other two. "That steamboat shock."

Bea caught the idea impulsively. "Oh, Sara!" she exclaimed, "you're only nervous. You've often waked up and screamed a little ever since that night on the boat. It's nothing. Crackie! but you frightened us at first!"

Sara lifted a white face. "This was different," she said; "this was something alive. Hark!"

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They leaned forward, listening. Yes, there was a footstep outside, muffled, stealthy. A board creaked. Something was breathing.

Gertrude and Berta looked at each other in quick challenge for mutual courage. All the other rooms at that end of the building were vacant; the long dark corridor stretched out its empty tunnel between them and available help. What could four girls do?

"We can scream," said Bea.

"Lock the door—and the inner window—quick!" Gertrude flew to one, Berta to the other. "Sara, take this Indian club. Now if it really is—anything, scream. But don't run. Don't scatter. Scream—scream all together. Ah!"

The footsteps were coming down the alleyway toward the door. Bea filled her lungs, and opened her mouth in valiant preparation.

"Wee-wee-wee, bow-wow!" Two little paws scratched at the door.

Bea's breath issued in a feeble squeak, as she dropped neatly down upon the floor and buried her face in her hands.

Berta swooped upon her. "The puppy!"

Gertrude felt herself freed from the encircling arms. She moistened her lips. "I am sorry, Sara, about the other night. I am—sorry."

The pale little face upturned toward hers began to glow as if touched with sunshine. "I was late because Prexie kept me. I should have explained, but—but it hurt. I knew you were sorry."

Berta sat up as if jerked into position by a wire, and briskly brushed the hair out of her eyes.

"Listen, Bea," she whispered to a small pink ear half hidden by red curls, "they're reconciled."

"So are we," said Bea, "please open the door for the puppy."

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CHAPTER VIII

CLASSES IN MANNERS

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Gertrude's brother paid another visit to his sister at Class Day. At least, he was supposed to be visiting his sister, but it was really Bea who took charge of him during all that radiant June morning while Gertrude, as chairman of the Daisy Chain committee, was busy with her score of workers among the tubs of long-stemmed daisies in a cool basement room. Bea had immediately enrolled the young man as her first assistant in the arduous task of gathering armfuls of the starry flowers in the field beyond the dormitories.

After that labor was finished, and even Lila had deserted her for the sake of an insensate trunk that demanded to be packed, Bea conducted her companion to the lake. There through the golden hour of midday they drifted in the shadow of the overhanging trees along the shore. Once they paddled softly around the little island at the end, and a colony of baby mud-turtles went scrambling madly from a log into the water. When the brother began to fish for one with an oar, Bea protested in a grieved tone.

"But you don't seem to realize that I am worrying about freckles every minute that we stay out here in the broad sunlight. What are trees for if not to provide shade for girls without hats? And anyhow it is unkind to seek to tear a turtle from his happy home. If you do that, I shall never, never consent to admit you to our highest class in manners."

"Highest class in manners," he echoed, "that sounds promising. Is it another story?"

"It certainly is," replied Bea, "and if you are very good indeed and will keep the boat close to the bank from the first word to the last, I will tell you all about it."

Berta called it our classes in manners, but Miss Anglin, our sophomore English teacher, said that it was every bit as bad as gossip. When Berta told her that she was the one who had started us on it by advising us to read character in the street-cars, she looked absolutely appalled, and groaned, "What next?"

This was the beginning of it. When Miss Anglin took charge of our essay work the second semester, she explained that we should be required to write a one-page theme every day except Saturday and Sunday. Lila almost fainted away, because she hates writing anything, even letters home. Robbie Belle looked scared, and I opened my mouth so wide that my jaw ached for several minutes afterward. But Berta kept her wits about her. She said, "Miss Anglin, we are all living here together, and we see the same things every day. I'm afraid you'll be bored when you read about them over and over. Why can't some of us choose intellectual topics?"

By intellectual topics she meant subjects that you can read up in the encyclopædia. Miss Anglin sort of smiled. "Do you truly think that you all see the same things day after day? How curious! Have you ever played a game called Slander?"

"Yes, Miss Anglin," said Berta, and went on to tell how the players sit in a circle, and the first one whispers a story to the second; and the second repeats it as accurately as she can remember to the third; and the third tells it to the fourth, and so on till the last one hears it and then relates it aloud. After that the first one gives the story exactly as he started it. It is awfully interesting to notice the difference between the first report and the last one, because somehow each person cannot help adding a little or leaving out a little in passing it on to the next. That is

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the way slander grows, you know. The gossip may be true at first, or almost true, but it keeps changing and getting worse and worse and more thrilling as it spreads till finally it isn't hardly true at all. That is how our classes in manners turned out.

Well, to go back to that day in the rhetoric section. Miss Anglin saw that we were discouraged before we had commenced and we didn't know how to start; and so she began to suggest subjects. For instance, she said, one girl might wake up in the morning—Oh, but I am forgetting her application of the illustration from the game of Slander. She said that if no two persons receive the same impression from a whispered story spoken in definite words, it is probable that no two pairs of eyes see the same thing in the same way, to say nothing of the ideas aroused in the different brains behind the eyes. One girl might wake up in the morning, as I was saying, and when she looks from the window she sees snow everywhere—provided it did snow during the night, you understand. Then she writes her daily theme about the beautiful whiteness, the shadows of bare trees, diamond sparkles everywhere and so forth. Another girl looks out of that very same window at the same time, and she doesn't think of the beautiful snow merely as snow; she thinks of coasting or going for a sleigh-ride or something like that. And so her theme very likely will prove to be a description of a coasting carnival or tobogganing which she once enjoyed. Another girl looks out and thinks first thing, "Oh, now the skating is spoiled!" Her theme maybe will tell how she learned to skate by pushing a chair ahead of her on the ice.

Berta raised her hand again. "Well, but, Miss Anglin," she said, "suppose it doesn't snow?"

Berta is not really stupid, you know, quite the reverse indeed, but she is used to having the girls laugh at what she says. They laughed this time, and Miss Anglin did too, because she knew Berta was just drawing her out, so to speak. She went on to give other examples about the things we see while out walking or shopping or at a concert, and finally she drifted around to character-reading. She said a street-car was a splendid field for that. The next time one of us rode into town, she might try observing her fellow travelers. There might be a working-man in a corner, with a tin-bucket beside him. Maybe he would be wearing an old coat pinned with a safety-pin. By noting his eyes and the expression of his mouth the girl could judge whether he was just shiftless or untidy merely because his wife was too busy with the children to sew on buttons. She told a lot of interesting things about the difference between the man who holds his newspaper in one hand and the man who holds his in both. Some temperaments always lean their heads on their hands when they are weary, and others support their chins. A determined character sets her feet down firmly and decidedly at every step—though of course it needn't be thumping—while a dependent chameleon kind of a woman minces along uncertainly. Why, sometimes just from the angle at which a person lifts his head to listen, you can tell if he has executive ability or not.

Before the bell rang at the end of the hour, we were awfully enthusiastic about reading character. The first thing Robbie Belle did was to stumble over the threshold.

"Oho!" jeered Berta, "you're careless. That's as easy as alpha, beta, gamma."

She meant a, b, c, you understand, but she prefers to say it in Greek, being a sophomore.

"But she isn't careless," protested Lila, "she's the most careful person I ever met. The sole of her shoe is split, and that is the reason she stumbled."

"Why is it split?" demanded Berta in her most argumentative tone; "would a nobly careful and painstakingly fastidious person insist upon wearing a shoe with a split sole? No, no! Far from it. If she had stumbled because the threshold wasn't there, or because she had forgotten it was there, the inference would be at fault. I should impute the defect to her mentality instead of to her character, alas! A stumble plus a split sole! Ah, Robbie Belle, I must put you in a daily theme."

Robbie Belle looked alarmed. "Indeed, Berta, I'd rather not. I was going to trim it off neatly this morning, but I have lent my knife to Mary Winchester."

"Ha! lent her your knife!" declaimed Berta sternly, "another clue! This must be investigated. Why did she borrow your knife?"

"To sharpen her pencil," answered Robbie. "I made her take it."

"Her pencil! Her pencil!" muttered Berta darkly, "why her pencil? Are there not pens? Mayhap, 'tis not her pencil. Alas, alas! Her also I thrust into a daily theme."

"She's snippy about returning things," said Lila, "she acts as if she didn't care whether you do her a favor or not. I don't like her."

"She's queer," I said.

Now I had a perfect right to say that because it was true. Mary Winchester was just about the queerest girl in college. Everybody thought so. But I shall say no more at present, as her queerness is the subject of the rest of this story. If I told you immediately just how she was queer and all the rest of it, there wouldn't be any story left, would there?

Well, as the weeks whirled past, we studied character and wrote daily themes till we were desperate. Robbie Belle grew sadder and sadder until Berta suggested that she might describe the gymnasium, the chapel, the library, the drawing rooms, the kitchen, and so forth, one by one, telling the exact size and position of everything. That filled up quite a number of days. When Miss Anglin put a little note of expostulation, so to speak, on the theme about the corridor—it was, "This is a course in English, not mathematics, if you please,"—Berta started her in on

the picture gallery. There were enough paintings there to last till the end of the semester. Of course, such work did not require her to read character. Robbie Belle didn't want to do that somehow; she said it seemed too much like gossip.

However, at first, it wasn't gossip. For instance one day Lila and I collected smiles. We scurried around the garden and dived in and out of the hedge in order to meet as many people as possible face to face. Then we took notes on the varieties of greeting and made up themes about them. Miss Anglin marked an excellent one on mine that time. For another topic we paid one-minute calls on everybody we knew. When they looked surprised and inquired why we did not sit down, we frankly explained that we were gathering material for an essay on Reading Character from the Way a Person says "Come in!"

After we had been grinding out daily themes for three weeks we began to long for something to break the monotony. My brain was just about wrung dry, and Lila said she simply loathed the sight of a sheet of blank paper. One afternoon while I was struggling over my theme, Berta threw a snowball against my window, flew up the dormitory steps, sped down the corridor, gave a double rat-tat-too on my door, and burst in without waiting for an answer.

"Listen! Quick! I have an idea. It struck me out by the hedge. Why not study manners as well as character? Why not divide——"

"Go away. That snowball plop against the pane spoiled my best sentence. This is due in forty minutes. I've written up my family and friends and books and pictures, my summer vacations—a sunset at a time, my little——"

"Why not divide everybody, I say——"

"——dog at home," I continued placidly. "I've composed themes about the orchard, the woods, the table-fare, the climate, the kitten I never owned, the thoughts I never had. To-day I was in despair for a subject till I happened to borrow one of your cookies and——"

"You did! My precious cookies! Burglar!"

"——bite it into scallops. Ha! an idea! I arranged myself on the rug with much care in order that I might stretch out the process to a whole page of narration. Thereupon I nibbled off the corners of the scallops till the cookie was round and smooth again. Next I bit it into scallops and then I nibbled off the corners; and next I bit and then I nibbled; and next I bit and then I nibbled; and next I bit——"

"You did! Oh, I wish I——"

"——and then I nibbled; and next I bit and then I nibbled, till there was nothing left but the hole. Now I am writing a scintillating and corruscating theme about it. Go away."

Berta turned toward the door. "Some day you'll wish you had listened," she declared in accents heavy with gloom, "some day when you can't think of a single thing to write about, and the hand keeps moving around the clock, and the paper lies there blank and horrible before your vacant eyes, and your pen is nibbled so short that your fingers——"

"I didn't mean go away," I said, "I meant, go on. Tell me about it."

"Nay, nay! To lacerate my feelings, spurn my proffered aid, insult my youthful pristine zeal, and then to call me back—in short, to throw a dog a bone! Nay, nay!"

"Oh, Berta, be sweet. Tell me. You know that I think you have the most original ideas in college." After I had coaxed her quite a lot, she told me her new scheme. It was something like advanced character reading and biology combined. Just as scientists classify trees and plants in botany, Berta proposed that we should divide the students into different classes according to their manners.

"It will be so improving and instructive too," she pleaded, "we'll be paragons of politeness before we finish them all. We'll be so particular about our highest class that we will notice every little thing and thus take warning." She paused a moment; then, "Did you hear me say thus?" she inquired. When I nodded, she gazed at me sadly. "People who belong to the highest class never gesticulate; they use spoken language exclusively. Furthermore, as to the thus. I wondered if an up-springing sense of courtesy persuaded you to refrain from hooting at such elegant verbiage. That would be a sign of benefit already derived from the classes. By the way, it was Mary Winchester who inspired the idea."

"Oh, but she has no manners at all!" I exclaimed before I thought.

"That is precisely the point. I met her flying along like a wild creature on her bicycle, eyes staring, hair streaming in the wind. At least, some locks were streaming. She gave the impression of a being utterly lawless. Then I thought——See here, Miss Leigh, are you interested in my thoughts?"

"Yes'm," I answered meekly.

"Then drop that pen and pay attention. Even the girls who are to belong to the second class in manners know how to do that. Well, I thought that she hardly ever accepts an invitation, and she looks as she didn't expect anybody to like her, and she minds her own business and does exactly as she pleases generally. My next important thought was that sometimes she cuts me in the hall, and sometimes she doesn't, just as she happens to feel. That led to the philosophic reflection that politeness is a question of law."

"Ah, pardon me, Miss Abbott, but I remember from a story which was read by my teacher about

forty years ago when I was in the fourth reader that

“Politeness is to do or say
The kindest thing in the kindest way.”

“That’s what I meant. The law of kindness—that’s what politeness is. Listen to the logic. Mary Winchester is lawless, hence she breaks the law of kindness, hence she has no manners, hence it will be fun to divide everybody here into various classes according to their manners.”

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So that is the way our classes began.

It was awfully, awfully interesting. Robbie Belle said she didn’t want to; but Berta and Lila and I talked and talked and talked. We sat in the windows and talked instead of dancing between dinner and chapel. We talked after chapel, and on our way to classes or to meals. And of course we talked while we were skating or walking or doing anything similar that did not demand intellectual application. Lila even talked about the classes in her sleep. We discussed everybody who happened to attract our attention.

Finally we had sifted out all the candidates for the highest class except three. One was the senior president, pink and white and slender and gentle and she never thumped when she walked or laughed with her mouth open or was careless about spots on her clothes or forgot the faces of new girls who had been introduced to her. The second was a professor who was shy and sweet and went off lecturing every week. The third was a teacher who looked like a piece of porcelain and always wore silk-lined skirts and never changed the shape of her sleeves year after year. Not one of the three ever hurt anybody’s feelings.

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Miss Anglin was obliged to go into the second class because she had moods. No, I don’t mean because she had them,—for sometimes you cannot help having moods, you know—but because she showed them. She let the moods influence her manner. Some mornings she would come down to breakfast as blue as my dyed brilliantine—(how I hated that frock!)—and would sit through the meal without opening her mouth except to put something into it; though on such occasions we noticed that she rarely put into it very much besides toast and hot water. On other days she made jokes and sparkled and laughed with her head bent down, and was so absolutely and utterly charming that the girls at the other tables wished they sat at ours, I can tell you. We three were exceedingly fond of her, but we agreed at last after arguing for seven days that true courtesy makes a person act cheerfully and considerately, no matter how she may feel inside.

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There were about nine in that second class, and fourteen in the third and twenty in the fourth, when we started in on Mary Winchester.

Lila and I were rushing to get ready for the last skating carnival of the season. Some one knocked at the door. It was Mary, but she didn’t turn the knob when I called, “Come.” She just waited outside and gave me the trouble of opening it myself. Then in her offish way she asked if we were through with her lexicon. After I had hunted it up for her, she happened to notice that Lila was wailing over the disappearance of her skates.

“I saw a pair of strange skates in my room,” she said and walked away as indifferent as you please.

Now wouldn’t any one think that was queer?

It made Lila cross, especially when she found that the skates had three new spots of rust on them. March is an irritable month, anyhow, you know. Everybody is tired, and breakfast doesn’t taste very good. She sputtered about the rust till we reached the lake where we found two big bonfires and three musicians to play dance music while we skated. Imagine how lovely with the flames leaping against the background of snowy banks and bare black trees! Berta and Lila and I crossed hands and skated around and around the lake with the crowd. When we stopped in the firelight, Lila looked unusually pretty with her rosy cheeks and her curls frosted by her breath. Berta’s eyes were like stars. Of course Robbie Belle was beautiful, but she did not associate much with us that evening. After one turn up and back again while we discussed Mary Winchester, she said she thought she would invite our little freshman roommate for the next number.

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We kept on talking about Mary. Lila was insisting that she ought to be put in the tenth class or worse, while Berta maintained that she wasn’t quite so bad as that. I kept thinking up arguments for both sides.

Lila counted off her crimes, and she didn’t speak so very low either. “Mary Winchester doesn’t deserve a place even in the tenth class. Why, listen now. You admit that she borrows disgracefully and never returns things. At least, she helped herself to my skates. It is almost the same as stealing. She has no friends. She always goes off walking alone, and sits in the gallery by herself at lectures and concerts. Everybody says she is queer.”

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“Miss Anglin thinks girls in the mass are funny,” I volunteered, “though maybe they are not any more so than human kind in the bulk. She says that we all imagine we admire originality, but when we see any one who is noticeably different from the rest, we avoid her. We call her queer and are afraid to be seen with her.”

“Mary Winchester’s independence is commendable,” protested Berta. “I envy her strength of character. She ignores foolish conventions——”

“As for instance, the distinction between mine and thine,” interrupted Lila, “you don’t live next to her, and you don’t know. Her disregard for the property rights of others indicates a fatal flaw ——”

"Fatal flaw, fatal flaw!" chanted Berta mischievously, "isn't that a musical phrase! Say it fast now, and see if it tangles your tongue."

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I was afraid Lila would feel wounded, so I remarked hastily that we agreed that Mary was not polite; the question was as to the degree of impoliteness.

"Even Robbie Belle acknowledges that she is not a lady," chimed in Berta; "she said it when Mary wanted to take that stray kitten to the biological laboratory. She declared it would be happier if dead."

"And it wasn't her kitten either," I contributed. "Robbie found it up a tree. It is necessary to weigh every little point in a scientific study like this."

"Don't you see, girls, that Mary Winchester does not come from good stock," began Lila, "of course she isn't a lady. Her attitude toward the rights of others is certain proof that her family has a defective moral sense. Perhaps her brother—"

"Oh, let's follow out the logical deductions," cried Berta. "That course in logic is the most fascinating in the whole curriculum. See—if a girl lacks moral judgment, she either inherits or acquires the defect. If she inherits it, her father doubtless was dishonest. Maybe he speculated and embezzled or gambled or something. If she acquired it through environment, her brother must have suffered likewise as they were presumably brought up together. So perhaps Mary Winchester's brother was expelled from college for kleptomania."

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"Then," said Lila triumphantly, "how can we possibly put her into even the lowest of our classes in manners?"

"Hi, there!" I started to scream before the breath was knocked out of me by colliding with some girls who had been skating in front of us. One of them had caught her skate in a crack, and we were so intent on our conversation that we bumped into them, and all tumbled in a heap. Nobody was hurt. That is, nobody was hurt physically. We picked ourselves up and went on skating as before. It was not until days later that we discovered what had been hurt then. It was Mary Winchester's reputation. Those girls in front had overheard part of our remarks. And they thought that we were talking about real facts instead of just analyzing character.

It was exactly like a game of slander, only worse. The rumor that Mary Winchester's father was a gambler and that her brother had been expelled from college for stealing spread and grew like fire. You know, as I said before, she was a queer girl—so queer in countless small ways that she was conspicuous. Even freshmen who did not know her name had wondered about the tall, wild-looking girl who had a habit of tearing alone over the country roads as if trying to get away from herself. Naturally when such a report as this one of ours reached them, they adopted it as a satisfactory explanation. They also, so to speak, promulgated it.

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The first we knew of the rumor was from Robbie Belle. It was the afternoon before the Easter vacation, and Lila and I were in Berta's room to help her pack her trunk. At least Lila held the nails while Berta mended the top tray and I did the heavy looking on. When Berta stopped hammering and put her thumb in her mouth, I remarked that nobody who squealed ouch! in company could belong to our highest class in manners.

Lila's expression changed from the pained sympathy of friendship to the scientific zeal of character study. "Girls, have you noticed Mary Winchester lately? It is the strangest thing! She seems more alone and alien than ever. The girls avoid her as if she had the plague. In the library and the corridor to-day it was as plain as could be. They stop talking when she comes around. They watch her all the time though they try not to let her know it. Of course, she couldn't help feeling it. They point her out to each other, and raise their brows and whisper after she has passed. She moves on with her head up and her mouth set tight. Her manners are worse than ever."

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"When I met her this morning, she looked right through me and didn't see anything there, I reckon," said I, "and, oh, Lila, you were mistaken about her borrowing your skates without leave. It was Martha who had them that morning. In rushing to class she got mixed up and threw them in at the wrong door, that's all. Our example is corrupting the infant."

Berta forgot her aching thumb. "Something is wrong. Mary's eyes are those of a hunted creature. Driven into a corner. Everybody against her. I wonder—"

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Robbie Belle walked slowly into the room, her clothes dripping with water.

"Mary Winchester fell into the lake," she said, "you did it."

In the silence I heard Berta draw a long sigh. Then she dropped her hammer.

"She broke through the ice," added Robbie Belle.

"But the ice is rotten. How did she get on it?" asked my voice.

"She walked," answered Robbie Belle, "I saw her." Then she crossed over to Berta, put both arms around her neck, hid her face against her shoulder, and began to shake all over. "I helped pull her out, and she fought me—she fought—"

At that moment little Martha, our freshman roommate, came running in. "That queer girl jumped into the lake. I saw them carrying her to the infirmary. She did it because everybody knows her father is in the penitentiary. They heard about it at the skating carnival. Her brother is an outlaw too—"

Robbie Belle lifted her head. "She hasn't any brother, but it is true about her father. The doctor

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knows. She wonders how the story got out. It was a secret. Mary changed her name. She—she fought me.”

I heard Berta sigh again. It sounded loud. Lila sat staring straight in front of her with such a horrified expression on her white face that I shut my eyes quick.

When I opened them again, Miss Anglin stood in the doorway. I never was so glad to see anybody in all my life. But we did not tell her then about our classes in manners. We waited till one day in June when she asked us how we had managed to win Mary out of her shell.

As I look back now I cannot possibly understand how we succeeded. It was the most discouraging, hopeless, hardest work I ever stuck to. Over and over again Berta and I would have given up if it had not been for Lila. She said that she dared not fail. Of course Robbie Belle helped a lot in her steady, beautiful way. Martha did her best too, partly because she was so sorry about her share in the affair of the skates. In fact all the girls were perfectly lovely to Mary after the doctor had persuaded her not to throw everything up and run away to hide. By and by she realized that it was no use to refuse to be friends.

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Indeed she is a dear girl when you get to know her real self. Her unfortunate manner—it was unfortunate, you know—had been a sort of armor to shield her sore pride. She had been afraid of letting anybody have a chance to snub her. That was the reason why she had seemed so offish and suspicious and indifferent and lawless and queer.

Do you know, I never heard Robbie Belle say a sharp thing except once. She said it that day when we were telling Miss Anglin about the classes. It was: “Whenever I want to say something mean about anybody, I think I shall call it a scientific analysis of character.”

CHAPTER IX

THIS VAIN SHOW

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It was the first evening at college in their junior year. Upon coming out of the dining-room Lila caught sight of Bea waiting at the elevator door. Dodging three seniors, a maid with a tray, and a man with a truck full of trunks, she made a dash for the new arrival who in a sudden freak of perversity danced tantalizingly just beyond reach.

“You imp! And I haven’t seen you for three months. Help me!” she beckoned to Berta who that moment emerged from dinner, “run around that side and catch her.”

But Bea, swiftly subsiding from her mischievous agility, stood still and regarded them with an air of surprised, sad dignity as the two flung themselves upon her.

“Young ladies, I am astonished at such behavior. Leading juniors—real, live, brand-new juniors—and to display such lack of self-restraint, such disdain of gracefulness and repose! Oh!” her voice changed magically, “oh, you, dear sweet, darling girls, I love you pretty well.”

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“Then why,” queried Berta, gasping as she released herself, “then why, I repeat, do you endeavor to choke us to death?”

“Because,” answered Bea, as she meekly allowed Lila to straighten her hat while Berta rescued her satchel from the middle of the corridor, “because you are so nice and noble and haven’t any false feeling about little tokens of affection like that. In fact, you haven’t any false pride or anything false, and I have a tale of woe to tell you by and by. Hereafter I intend to be a typical college girl, not an exception.”

The promised by and by proved to be the hour of unpacking after chapel services. While Bea was emptying her satchel that night she snatched up a little fringed napkin and shook it vigorously before the other girls.

“See the crumbs! Thereby hangs the tale. Now, listen.

This summer we have been feeling rather poor at home, you know. My father’s firm was forced to make an assignment. It wasn’t his fault, you understand; it was because of the hard times. Every few days we would hear of a bank closing its doors or a factory shutting down. People have been cutting off expenses in all directions. Of course my family has to economize. I am thankful enough to be able to come back to college. About a dozen girls in the class have dropped out this year of the panic. I knew that I could earn fifty dollars or more by tutoring and carrying mail, if I once got here. That will help quite a lot toward books and postage and ordinary personal expenses. Father said he could manage the five hundred for board and tuition. You had better believe that I do not intend to be needlessly extravagant, when my mother is keeping house without a maid, and my father is riding to his office on a bicycle.

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Now I rather suspect that this explanation is no excuse for the foolish way I behaved on the journey to college that September. But the summer has been so horrid, and two or three acquaintances changed around after the failure and treated us as if we had ceased to be worth noticing. Of course I know that such persons are not worth noticing themselves, still it did hurt

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a little. I guess the reason why I pretended to have plenty of money while traveling with Celia was because I was afraid of being hurt again. And then too I remembered how she had said one evening the year before when we were playing Truth that she despised stinginess beyond any other vice. That had made an impression on me because I was just going to say the very same thing myself.

Celia is a new student who is to join our class this year. We met her last spring when she came up from a boarding-school in New York to visit a senior. You remember her? It was at a fudge party in her honor that we played the game of Truth, to which I have already alluded. She is the kind of person who is generally asked to be an usher at a hall play or on Founder's Day. She is tall, holds her head high, has an air. The doctor herself said when she saw her in chapel the evening of her visit, "Who is that striking girl?" She dresses beautifully too; and I think I shall ask her to let me put down her name for two dances next month, if my cousin and his roommate come from Yale for the reception.

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Being new to the college atmosphere, she had an excuse for the way she acted on the journey. An excuse that I did not have, you know—and I know too. But as for that, more anon, anon! At present I start in and continue by stating that on a certain September day I was sitting by myself in the Union Station at Chicago, while I waited for my train. I had arrived two hours before, and I was hungry, and I was also, as explained above, strongly inclined to be economical. And therefore I was eating my luncheon out of a pasteboard box, instead of going to a restaurant.

On my lap was a fringed napkin upon which reposed one slice of chocolate cake with frosting, one big peach, and seven large white grapes each containing at least three seeds. Just at the very moment when I took a bite of the peach, hoping that none of the weary passengers around me was taking notes, for that peach was certainly juicy,—just at that exact moment, I happened to glance across to the door. There was Celia Lane, with her head higher than ever, looking up and down for an empty seat. And the only empty seat in the whole waiting-room was next to mine. And my lap was strewn with an economical luncheon.

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It was silly of me. I admit that once and forever, and shall not repeat it again. But like lightning her remark about stinginess flashed into my mind. Before she had taken the second step in my direction, I had crammed all those seven grapes into my mouth, bundled the napkin with crumbs, cake and pit into my satchel, shoved it under the bench, and rose nonchalantly swallowing the grapes whole as I haughtily lifted my chin in order to survey my worthless companions. Then of course my eyes fell upon her, and I started forward in vivacious greeting.

I don't believe she had recognized me before, for she said, "Oh!" with a queer little gasp. Then she put out her hand in that cordial way of hers. It made me think that I was the person she had been longing to find. She inquired what road I was going on, and said, "Ah, yes, what a charming coincidence!" But honestly it seemed to me that there was a worried expression in her eyes.

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And there I sat miserably shaking in my old shoes. It may appear funny to you, but it was an awful feeling. Even now months afterward I never want to smile at the memory. You see, it costs five dollars to ride in a Pullman car from Chicago to New York. I had planned to go into the common passenger coach until nightfall, and thus save two dollars and a half toward books for the new semester. That sounds a bit mean and sordid, doesn't it? And I know my family would have objected if I had told them, because the sleeping-cars are much safer in case of accidents. Oh, how I hated to say anything about it! You can't imagine. I wonder how Berta would express it with literary vividness. Maybe she might say that she "shrank in every fibre." But it was worse than that—I just didn't want to, I simply couldn't.



WE HANDED OVER FIVE DOLLARS APIECE

The hand of the clock kept moving around—oh, lots faster than it had done before Celia appeared. When it was nearly time for the train to be ready, I began to mutter and mumble and finally managed to remark that I thought I had better see about engaging my berth. What do you suppose? She gave a sort of astonished jump and exclaimed, “Why, I must too.” So we both marched over to the agent’s window and handed over five dollars apiece. I was dying to ask her to go shares with me, because one berth is plenty—or, I mean almost plenty—large enough for two. But though I opened my mouth a few times and coughed once, I absolutely did not dare to propose such a penurious plan. She might have thought me close-fisted, and perhaps she would not have slept very well either.

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No sooner had we settled ourselves in the sleeper, than I began to worry about the meals. Naturally she would assume that I intended to go into the dining-car every time. Most of the girls do as a matter of course. In fact I remember feeling condescending whenever I saw anybody eating from a box while the other passengers were filing down the aisle, or up, whichever it happened to be. This year I was to be one of the brave unfortunates left behind in their seats.

Well, very likely you understand that people while traveling really ought not to eat so heartily as usual. Much food in a dining-car clogs the system and ventilates the pocketbook, so to speak. I appreciated myself hard for being right and noble and abstemious and foresighted—with respect to the semester’s expenses, you perceive, and also self-denying and self-reliant. There are a number of selfs in that sentence, likewise in the idea and in my mind at the time. I don’t believe honestly that poverty is good for the character, though Berta says that she knows it isn’t good for anything else.

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Celia and I went out to sit on the rear platform of the observation-car. The scenery was not particularly interesting in comparison with Colorado; and consequently I had spare energy for meditating on Emerson’s essays and his observation that “What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think.” I wish I were strong-minded. To reflect sincerely, however, I don’t believe it is so much a question of a strong mind as of a weak imagination. If I had been unable to imagine what Celia might think, doubtless I wouldn’t have bothered about it.

But I was bothered. The sensation of botheration deepened and swelled and widened as supper time drew nearer and nearer, and every moment I expected to hear the waiter’s voice intoning behind me, “Supper is now ready in the dining-car.” What made this state of affairs all the sadder was the memory of springing gladness inspired by the same sound on previous journeys. I sat there dreading and dreading and dreading. And then, what do you think? Celia was asking me about Lila and Berta and Robbie Belle and the fun we have and incidentally something about the work. I was talking so fast that I forgot all about being poor. When the waiter’s voice suddenly rang out at the end of the car, I jumped up instantly just as I had always done on former occasions of the same nature. And I exclaimed, “I am simply starved to death.”

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Then I remembered and sat down so quickly that my camp-chair tipped against Celia and knocked her over so that she might have fallen off the platform if there had not been a railing around it. That catastrophe created such a flurry of anxieties, apologies, and so forth, that I succeeded in letting the crisis slip past unmolested. At least, that first crisis did. The second crisis arrived a little later when the voice behind us rang out again with, “Second call to supper in the dining-car.” I glanced sidewise at Celia just in time to catch her glancing sidewise at me. That made me spring lightly to my feet, I can tell you. Was she getting suspicious? Was she too

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courteous to suggest an extravagance the refusal of which might hurt my pride? Was she wondering why I seemed to have forgotten that I was starving to death, if not already starved?

So I said in a tone of patient consideration, "Shall we wait any longer, Miss Lane?" She jumped up like a flash, and her face was quite red.

"No, indeed! Not on my account certainly." She emphasized the my so distinctly that I was sure she suspected. That dreadful thought caused me to stiffen my manner, and as hers had been strangely stiff all the afternoon, we were awfully polite to each other during supper. Each of us insisted upon paying the bill and feeing the waiter. It was terrible. I couldn't afford to pay it all, and yet I was too silly to give in gracefully, especially as some other passengers were listening, and the waiter hovered near. Finally it resulted in his receiving twice the sum, half for the bill, and half for a fee. I hope he appreciated it.

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Then we talked politely to each other for an hour or two before going to bed. And in the morning, there was the problem of breakfast confronting me.

The problem woke me early. Being poor is bad for the health as well as bad for the character, I think. Probably it is bad for the soul also. Or maybe it is not the poverty so much as being ashamed of it that perverts a person's life. Well, actually I almost cherished the deceitful plot of getting up so early that I should be already dressed before Celia would appear, and then I could tell her that I had been so hungry that I had eaten my breakfast alone. It would have been true too, because I intended to nibble my malted milk tablets behind a magazine. But this plan came to naught; for when I poked my head out between the curtains I saw Celia herself staggering toward the dressing-room with her satchel. Thereupon I lay down again and nibbled the tablets in the berth. That would enable me to assert truthfully that I was not hungry and did not care for breakfast in the diner.

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Oh, dear! Wasn't it awful! I did tell her that very thing, and she said she didn't believe she was hungry either. Then we were polite to each other till noon. When the waiter's dreaded voice once more rang out, I made my little speech that I had been composing all the morning. It was as follows:

"Don't wait for me, Miss Lane. I consider that over-eating is a heinous fault among Americans, and so I have decided to omit the dining-car for the remainder of this journey. Pray, do not let me keep you."

She said, "Why, that's exactly what I think, too."

Just fancy! And there I was almost famished. I thought she would leave me at once, and I could have a chance to eat the luncheon spoiling in my box. Chicken sandwiches and jelly and olives and salted almonds and fruit and cake and everything good. I had been thinking of it for hours.

What could I do? There she sat, and there I sat in plain sight of each other, being in the same seat for the sake of sociability, though her section was the one in front of mine. She seemed rather quiet and formal—not so much stiff as limp, so to speak. Still there was no cordiality about it. Just as I felt I could not stand starvation another minute, she rose and said she believed she would go into the observation-car for a while. She did not invite me to accompany her, and I made no offer to go. I simply sat and smiled and watched her fumble in her bag for a few minutes before extricating what was apparently a rolled up magazine. Then she marched down the aisle. The instant she had vanished into the vestibule, I made a dive for my box. In just thirty seconds I had consumed half a sandwich and a slice of cake. I kept my eyes on the spot where she had disappeared, you had better believe. Oh, wasn't I silly? But then, I promised not to allude to that obvious fact again. That lunch tasted good. And I had plenty of time to eat all I wanted, though I cut short the chewing process.

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When it was all down to the very last olive, I brushed off all the crumbs I could see, and decided to walk into the observation car and be polite again. So I did. And what do you suppose? Through the glass at the rear I saw her sitting sort of sidewise so that one eye could watch the door where I was entering. It seemed to me that she gave a little quiver as I came within view, and then actually she threw something overboard. People always see more than you think they do. At least I saw that, and she thought I didn't, for when I emerged upon the platform she looked up with a surprised smile of welcome and said, "Isn't the river beautiful!"

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I said, "Oh, isn't it!" and then I gazed at it very hard and attentively so as to give her a chance to wipe the spot of jelly from her shirtwaist. She had been eating her luncheon too. She had carried it wrapped up in the funneled magazine. She had been ashamed to acknowledge that she needed to be economical, too. I saw it all in a flash. She had intended to ride in the common coach and save pullman fare, just like me. And there we had been racing, neck and neck, trying to keep up with each other.

"Oh, dear!" I said at last, "I wish we had taken a berth together and saved our two dollars and a half apiece."

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I heard her give a little gasp and I felt her staring at me. The next minute she said, "There are crumbs on your necktie too." And then she bent down her head and laughed and laughed and laughed till I had to laugh too.

"I hope it'll be a lesson to us," I said at last.

She wiped the tears from her lashes. "It will be. I expect to be repenting for weeks ahead,—at least, until my next allowance comes in. But, you! Why, Miss Leigh, it seems so queer. I thought the college girl was different as a rule—independent and frank and—oh, pardon me—and—and

so forth.”

“She is,” I assured her sadly, “as a rule. But I am an exception. I prove the rule.”

CHAPTER X

CONSEQUENCES

For her junior year Bea was fortunate enough to secure a mail-route, the proceeds of which helped to make her independent of a home allowance for spending money. To tell the truth, however, she enjoyed the work even more than the salary. While distributing the letters she felt a personal share in every delighted, “Oh, thank you!” in each ever-unsatisfied, “Is that all?” or the disappointed, “Nothing for me to-day?”

From her own experience and observation during the years already past, she was particularly interested in the different pairs of roommates who came within the scope of her daily trips. In a certain double lived two freshmen, one of whom always greeted her with, “Oh, thank you!” whether the mail was addressed to her or to her roommate. But when the roommate answered the knock, she invariably exclaimed, no matter how much was handed to her, “Is that all?”

More than once in her reports to Lila, Bea declared that it was about time for a wave of reform in the vicinity of Ethelwynne Bruce. Perhaps she might even have contemplated the possibility of engineering something of the kind herself, if she had not been too busy to spare the necessary thought-energy. In the course of events, fate with its machinery of circumstances added an extra lesson to Ethelwynne’s college course.

It happened one evening during the skating season.

Ethelwynne with her skates jingling over her arm came shivering into the room. “Oo-oo-oo!” Her teeth chattered. “Wynnie’s freezing. Do shut that window and turn on the heat, Agnes. It is hard lines to live in a double with a regular Polar bear direct from the land of Sparta. You ought to keep it up as high as forty degrees anyhow.”

“Sh-h!” The smooth dark head at the desk bent lower over the water-color before her. “Don’t interrupt this minute. There’s a dear. I’ve got to catch this last streak of daylight—”

“But it isn’t daylight,” fretted Ethelwynne, “the moon’s up already. And I’m so chilly! I wish you would help me make some hot chocolate.”

“Look at the thermometer. Ah, one more stroke of that exquisite saffron on the stem! Hush, now. Look at the thermometer, look at the thermometer,” she muttered abstractedly while concentrating all her mental attention in the tips of her skilful fingers.

Ethelwynne stared at her a moment before giving a little chuckle that ended in a shiver. “Look at the thermometer, look at the thermometer,” she echoed sarcastically, “I reckon that’ll warm me up, won’t it? Like somebody or other who set a lighted candle inside the fireless stove and then warmed himself at the glowing isinglass. Suppose your old thermometer does say seventy or eighty or ninety or a hundred? Maybe it is telling a story. Why should I trust an uneducated instrument that has never studied ethics? Now listen here!” She lifted her skates and poised them to throw from high above her head. “Hist! if you don’t drop those hideous toadstools of yours and begin to sympathize with me this instant, I shall hur-r-rl this clanking steel—”

Agnes still painting busily raised one elbow in an attitude of half-unconscious defense.

“—upon the floor-r-r!”

At the crashing rattlety-bang Agnes sprang to her feet with a nervous shriek. Ethelwynne dived for her skates and felt them carefully. “I tried to pick out the softest spot on the rug,” she complained whimsically, “but there wasn’t any other way to wake her up. And I simply had to have some sympathy. Oo-oo-oo, Wynnie’s freezing!”

Agnes had returned to her brushes and was wiping them dry in heartless silence.

“Wynnie’s freezing, I say.”

“Say it again,” counseled the other’s calm voice. “I am so provoked at myself for jumping at every little noise! It is shameful to have so little control over my own nerves even if I am tired. Ah! what was that?”

“Jump again,” advised Ethelwynne in a tone that was meant to be serene but proved rather jerky. “It was nothing but my teeth chattering and clicking together.”

“Generally it’s your tongue,” retorted Agnes with interest but broke off in this promising repartee to exclaim with genuine anxiety, “Why, Wynnie, child, you have a regular chill. Lie down quick and let me cover you up. Have you been out skating ever since I left you on the lake?”

“Yes, I have,” she replied with an air of defiance, “you needn’t preach. I couldn’t bear to come

in. Everybody out. We had square dances, shinney-on-the-ice, wood tag. Perfectly glorious! Such a splendid elegant sunset behind the bare trees! I simply had to stay. Beatrice Leigh and her crowd were there. A big moon came sailing up. We skated to music—somebody whistled it. I couldn't bear to stop. I wanted to stay, I tell you. I wanted to stay."

"Hm-m," said Agnes, "I wanted to stay too. But what with the Latin test to-morrow and this plate for the book on fungi to be sent off in the morning, I managed to tear myself away."

"You're different. Oo-oo-oo!" Ethelwynne shivered violently again. "You like to deny yourself. You enjoy discipline. It gives you pleasure to do what you hate. You love duty just because it is disagreeable."

"My—land!" Agnes clutched her own head. "The infant must have slipped up a dozen times too often. Did the horrid bad ice smite her at the base of the brain? Poor little darling! Is her intellect all mixedy-muddle-y? We will fix it right for her. We'll give her a pill."

"I think I have caught cold," moaned her roommate from the depths of the blankets.

Agnes looked judicial. "Our doctor at home has a theory that people take cold easily when they have been eating too much sweet stuff. He says that colds are most frequent after Thanksgiving. Now I wonder—I believe—why, you surely did go to a meeting of the fudge-club in Martha's room last night. Ethelwynne, did you eat it? Did you eat it even after all the doctor said to you about your sick headaches?"

"Of course I ate it. How do you expect me to sit hungry in a roomful of girls all digging into that plateful of brown delicious soft hot fudge with their little silver spoons, and I not even tasting it? I hated to make myself conspicuous before the juniors there. They would think I am a hypochondriac, and Berta Abbott might have said something to make the others look at me and laugh. I don't believe the stuff hurts me a particle. Doctors always want you to give up the things you like best."

"Oh, Ethelwynne!" groaned Agnes, "you never deny yourself anything. It is the only trait I don't like in you. Now you have caught a dreadful cold just because you could not refuse the candy. You must break it up with quinine." She fetched a small box from the bureau in her bedroom. "Here, open your mouth."

The other girl opened her mouth obediently. "I love pills. We're homeopaths, you know. Once when I was a baby, I got hold of mother's medicine chest and ate all the pellets. I thought they were candy. Sweet—oh, delicious! I used to enjoy being sick. And now this nice big chocolate-coated pill!" She sprang up suddenly, her face twisted into an expression of agony. "Oh, oh, oh!"

Agnes white as a sheet flew to her side. "What is it? Quick, quick, Wynnie! Is it your heart? Your head? A darting pain! Where, oh, where?"

"Crackie!" Ethelwynne ruefully rubbed her mouth. "I've been sucking that pill."

After a moment's struggle to retain her sympathetic gravity, Agnes gave way and dropping her head on her hands shook alarmingly for at least half a minute.

"I told you I was a homeopath," expostulated Ethelwynne, "how was I to know that allopaths always swallow their pills whole?"

"Wh-wh-why did you suppose it was coated with chocolate?" gasped Agnes.

"So as to improve the taste of course and tempt me to eat it. I am fond of chocolate. If it is my duty to eat a pill, I want it to be inviting. I don't want to do anything that I don't want to do, specially when I am sick. Well, anyhow, I shall never touch another."

However, by bedtime Ethelwynne was feeling so miserable that finally after long urging she consented to swallow another dose of quinine in the orthodox way. She allowed Agnes to put a hot water bottle at her feet and to tuck in the coverlets cozily; and then she tried to go to sleep. But that was another story. It was a story of fitful jerks and starts, of burning fever alternating with shivering spells, of terrifying dreams and wretched haunted hours of wakefulness. At last the longed-for morning stole in at the windows to find her eyes heavy, her limbs languid, her brain muddled and dull, her head roaring.

It was the quinine that had done it—she knew it was—unspeakably worse than the cold unattended. Worried Agnes acknowledged that the dose might effect some systems violently.

"But it has broken up your cold," she pleaded, "that's certainly gone."

"What?" said Ethelwynne fretfully, "don't mumble so and run your words together. I can't hear the gong very well either. And the Latin test is coming the first hour after breakfast. I haven't had a chance to review an ode. I feel so wretched! Oh, me! oh, me!"

Ethelwynne never forgot that Latin test. The very first line written by the instructor on the blackboard smote her with despair. She had never been able to translate from hearing anyhow. This morning when Miss Sawyer took her seat on the platform and opened her book, Ethelwynne bent forward anxiously, every nerve alert and strained. What was the first word? Oh, what was it? She had not caught it. It sounded blurred and mazy with no ending at all. And the next—and the next! And the third! Now she had lost it. The first was gone. She had forgotten the second. The voice went reading on and on. She floundered after, falling farther and farther behind. There wasn't any sense to it, and she couldn't hear the words plainly, and everything was all mixed up. The other girls seemed to understand. They were writing down the translation as fast as they could scribble—at least some of them were. But she could not make out a particle of meaning. It was Agnes's fault—it was all her fault. She had coaxed her to take

the quinine, and now she could not hear plainly or think or remember or anything.

In wrathful discouragement she turned to the rest of the questions. One or two were short and easy. She managed to do the translations already familiar. But when she reached the last part and attempted to write down an ode which she had memorized the week before, she found that many of the words had slipped away from her. The opening line was vivid enough, then came a blank ending in a phrase that kept dancing trickily from spot to spot in her visual imagination of the page. Here she recalled two words, there three, with a vanishing, vague, intangible verse between. The meaning had slid away utterly, leaving only these faulty mechanical impressions of the way the poem had looked in print. Struggle as she would, the thought frolicked and pranced just beyond the grasp of her memory.

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Ethelwynne bit her lip grimly and put the cap on her fountain-pen. It was not the slightest use. Miss Sawyer had always told them to learn the odes understandingly, not in parrot fashion. It was better to submit a blank than a paper scribbled with detached words and phrases. It was all Agnes's fault—every bit. She had forced her to swallow that pill—the pill that had muddled her brain and dulled her hearing—the pill which was causing her to flunk in Latin. She had known that ode perfectly only the previous day. It wasn't her fault—it was entirely Agnes's. She would go instantly and tell her so.

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And she went the moment class was over. To be sure, she did not go so fast as she wished, for her head had a queer way of spinning dizzily at every sudden movement. Once or twice her knees faltered disconcertingly in her progress down the corridor. But at last she reached the room and walked in with a backward slam of the door.

Agnes was putting the final touches to the water-color drawing of exquisite fungi before her.

"Sh-h," she murmured, "don't interrupt. Just one more stroke—and another—now this tiny one. There, it is finished. Professor Stratton sends her manuscript off to-day and she is waiting for this. Think of it! Thirty dollars for this sheet of paper! Thirty whole big beautiful dollars to send home for Christmas. They need it pretty badly. I've worked hours and hours, and now they shall have a real Christmas! I know what mother wants and couldn't afford——"

Ethelwynne stamped her foot. "It was all your fault. I couldn't hear. I couldn't think. I couldn't remember. The pill did it. You made me take it. You always think you know best. You're always preaching and advising. You wanted to make me flunk. You knew it would make my ears ring and my head whirl. You did it on purpose. I shall never forgive you, never, never, never!"

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"What!"

At the tone Ethelwynne suddenly shivered, threw herself on the couch, and fell to crying weakly. "I didn't mean it. I didn't mean it at all. I only wanted to say something horrid. I wanted you to suffer too. I just wanted to say it, and so I did say it. Oh, oh, oh, I am so miserable! I want to go home."

Agnes paid no attention. In her sudden sharp resentment at the preposterous accusation, she had swung around in her chair, and her elbow had tipped over the inkwell, spilling the contents over the desk. She sat staring in horrified silence at her ruined drawing.

Finally Ethelwynne puzzled by the continued stillness peered with one eye from the sheltering fringes. She sprang up with a jump.

"Agnes, your beautiful fungi!"

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A knock sounded at the door.

"Come," called Agnes in mechanical response. There was a pause; then the knob turned and the visitor entered with diffident step.

Ethelwynne hastily smoothed her hair with one hand and felt of her belt with the other. "Oh, good evening, Professor Stratton," she stuttered from surprised embarrassment, "I mean, good morning. How do you do? Won't you sit down?"

Agnes turned to look, and rose in sober greeting.

"You see it is spoiled," she pointed to the ink-splotched drawing. "It was an accident. You don't know how exceedingly sorry I am, Professor Stratton. The work on your book can go on without it, I hope."

The older woman forgot her incorrigible shyness in dismay. "What a shame! How distressing!" She hurried forward impulsively to examine the sheet. "Since you brought it to me last night I have been exulting in the thought of it. You have great talent for such work. The time you have spent on it! How distressing!" She stopped in thoughtful fear that she might be adding to the girl's disappointment. "An accident, you say? How did it happen?"

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"Something startled me so that I twirled around in my seat, and my elbow knocked the ink over. I—I am very sorry." Her lips felt stiff. Ethelwynne watching with miserable eyes saw her moisten them. They were drooping at the corners.

"It is my fault," she burst out hurriedly, "it is all my fault. I made her jump. I startled her on purpose. I said mean things to her because I felt like saying them. I felt like saying them because I had flunked in Latin. And I flunked in Latin because I took a p-p-pill—oh, no, no! I mean, because I caught cold from staying out on the ice too long. And I stayed out long because I wanted to. And the reason why I caught cold from staying out too long was because my digestion was upset from eating fudge when the doctor told me not to. And I ate the fudge because I wanted it. And it is all my fault. It is all because I do things just because I want to do

them and not because I ought to do them or ought not to do them. I ought to leave them undone, you know. And Prexie says that most miseries in life come from that attitude of I-do-it-because-I-want-to-do-it-and- I-don't-do-it-because-I-don't-want-to-do-it. And now Agnes won't have thirty dollars to send home for Christmas. And it is all my——"

"Hush!" said Agnes, "hush, now, dear! That'll be all right. It was my fault anyhow. I should have had better control of my nerves and learned not to let myself get startled." She smiled reassuringly across the bowed head into Professor Stratton's concerned eyes.

"I will see what I can do about holding back the manuscript till you reproduce the drawing," said the older woman, "it is barely possible that I can manage it."

As the door closed softly behind her, Ethelwynne lifted her tear-wet face.

"Agnes, do you think it was the pill that did it?"

"Did what? Everything?"

"Oh, no, no! Was it the pill that made me flunk in Latin?"

"I don't know," she answered doubtfully, "perhaps it helped."

"I want to say it was the pill. I want to believe it was the pill. I want to, but I won't, because it wasn't—not really way down underneath truly, you know. It was my own selfish self." She reached up both arms to draw Agnes closer in a repentant hug. "Wynnie's sorry," she said.

CHAPTER XI

A GIRL TO HAVE FRIENDS

"Laura!" It was a soft little call sent fluttering in through the keyhole. "Laura, are you there?"

Laura with her chin propped on her hands at one of the broad sills stirred uneasily in her chair and glanced sideways at her roommate who was seated before the other window. Lucine had stopped reading aloud and was regarding the door with an irritable frown on her vivid dark face.

"I do wish, Laura, that you would tell Berta Abbott that an engaged sign on our door means nothing if not the desire for undisturbed privacy. She is the most inconsiderate person in the junior class. This is the third time——"

"Laura!" called the voice again, "answer me! I know you are in there. I've simply got to speak to you one minute. It's awfully important."

Laura half rose with a pleading smile toward Lucine who motioned her indignantly back to her seat.

"Laura Wallace, stay right there. You promised to help me revise this essay. You know that I can't do it alone, because I haven't a particle of critical ability; and the editors say they cannot print it as it is now. You are exceedingly selfish to think of deserting me just when I most need your suggestions. The board of editors meets to-night to choose the material for the next number of the magazine, and if they decline this again I shan't be eligible for election next month. You promised."

"Laura, there's something I've got to ask you. If you don't come out, I shall have to take this sign down and walk in my own self. Laura! Ah!" The door swung open and tall Berta popped in. Slamming it behind her, she stood with both hands on the knob, her eyes fixed with an expression of innocent inquiry upon Lucine who had halted in the middle of her sudden dash across the floor, her hand still outstretched toward the key.

"Excuse me, Miss Brett. Were you just going out? I'm glad I did not disturb you. Shall I hold it open for you?" She stepped to one side and waited gravely without moving a muscle till Lucine after a withering stare had stalked angrily back to her window. The corner of Berta's mouth gave a quick, queer little twitch before settling back into proper solemnity.

"Come, Laura. You'd better. I shan't keep you long." At her imperious gesture Laura slid out of the room at an apologetic angle, her head twisted for a final shy glance back at Lucine who was apparently absorbed in her papers.

When safely outside in the corridor Berta seized her about the waist and whirled her away from all possible earshot through cracks and transom.

"Now then, exit the ogre, or rather eximus nos, leaving the ogre alone. For what particular reason is she trampling all over you to-day? I didn't catch all her last speech. You don't mean to say that you have promised to help her with her writing?"

"Yes," Laura nodded her rough curly head. She was a delicate little thing with the irregular features that generally accompany such hair. Her beauty lay in her expression which brightened charmingly from minute to minute since her escape. "Oh, how good the air smells!" she stopped

to lean from an open window. "Lucine shivers at every draught. It is hard to manage the ventilation to suit two persons in the same room. I smother—"

"Of course you smother—and you smother a good many more hours than she shivers. Trust her for that. Such a little ninny as you are! Don't forget that you have agreed to room with my best little sister when she enters next fall. You would not have been thrust in with Lucine Brett this year if I could have prevented it."

"Oh, but if I can't come back—you know, I'm almost sure I shan't come back. And anyhow I'm the only friend she has. I've got to stick to her. If you could hear her mourning over her loneliness! Nobody cares for her—nobody in all the world! And the girls don't like her. I promised to be her friend. She—she needs me."

"Humph!" growled Berta sourly, but somehow her arm was stealing around the slight shoulders so far beneath her own, "that's the silly kind of a person you are. If any creature needs you, from a lame kitten to a lion with a toothache, you'll cling. Idiocy, that's what it is! Your brother warned me last summer to restrict your charities. And now to help her with her writing, and she your most dangerous rival for the editorship!"

"Ah, but she doesn't know it, you understand. She doesn't know that I am eligible. The editors have been so awfully kind to me and gave me book reviews to do and reports to make, and they printed my verses and two editorials. Every freshman who has had so many words published is eligible for election on the board at their annual meeting next month. Lucine's last story was clipped so much that she is short about two thousand words; and this is her last chance to qualify by getting her essay accepted for the next issue. I've got to help."

"Yes, certainly you've got to help a rival qualify for a competition in which she is likely to defeat you. Do you realize that?" Berta swung Laura around in front of her and studied her curiously while she spoke. "You are a good steady worker, you understand. You have critical ability and a simple, sincere style. If elected you would make an excellent editor, but—now listen, but, I say, you are not a genius like Lucine Brett. She is brilliant. Oh, I acknowledge that, even if I do despise her for being selfish and disagreeable and ego—"

"Hush! She tries—she doesn't understand—You mustn't talk that way. I won't listen. I promised to be her friend. She wonders why the girls don't like her."

"And yet she expects you to help her defeat you! She is willing to accept that sacrifice from you! When it means so much to you that—"

"Oh, hush, Berta!" Laura slipped out of the range of that keen straight-ahead gaze and nestled under the protecting arm again. "She doesn't know that I am eligible, I tell you. My articles weren't signed usually except with initials. And she is not thinking about other girls' qualifications—she's bothered about her own. It's got to be a fair race with everybody in it, if they want to be. Of course she will be elected—there isn't a doubt—and I'll be as glad as any one."

"Yes!" Berta's voice veered from sarcasm to genuine anxiety. "You'll be glad—but you'll be glad at home. You can't come back to college—you told me so yourself—unless you are elected editor. That's why I called you out just now. Did your uncle really say that he was disappointed in your career here?"

Laura cleared her throat. "He doesn't like it because I haven't won any honors yet. Don't you know how almost every girl here came from a school where she was the brightest star and carried off all the prizes and things like that? My uncle doesn't understand. He thinks it is the fault of the college because I haven't done anything great. Oh, you know, Berta. I—I do hate to talk in such a conceited way. He doesn't realize that I am not brighter than the rest and can't dazzle. He wants me to win an honor that he can put in the papers at home. He says if I don't distinguish myself this year, I might as well stop and go to the Normal next fall. He thinks college is too expensive. This editorship is the only chance, because—because there isn't anything else for our class now that the offices are filled and committees appointed. He didn't like it because my articles in the magazine were signed with initials and not the whole name. He said, 'Well, niece Laura, let me see your name printed plain in that list of editors, and then we'll decide about next year.' He—he's disappointed."

"And yet," Berta spoke slowly, "you are going to help Lucine Brett with that essay. And you know how much my little sister cares about being at college with you."

Laura gave a startled jump and turned to run. "Oh, Berta, I had forgotten. She's waiting. I've stayed too long. She'll be so angry!"

"Let her," growled Berta; but Laura had fled.

Meanwhile Lucine when left alone had dropped the sheets of her essay in her lap and planting her elbows on the sill crouched forward, staring miserably out at the brown soaked lawn flecked with sodden snowdrifts in the shadows of the evergreens that were bending before a rollicking March wind.

"Nobody cares," she mourned, "even Laura doesn't care whether I succeed or not. I want the girls to like me, but they won't."

Tears of self-pity dimmed her lashes when Laura slipped timidly into the room and after a worried glance at the scattered papers resumed her former seat.

"Now, Lucine, if you will read that last paragraph once more, I will try to see where the

difficulty lies. It—it's fine so far."

Lucine looked down at her essay, then across at the attentive small face that appeared quite plain when fixed in such a worried pucker. "No," she said at last, "I won't. You are not interested in the essay or in my hopes of success. You offer to help merely because you think it is your duty. I refuse to accept such grudging friendship. You toss aside my affairs at the slightest whim of an outsider, and then expect me to welcome the remnant of your mental powers. No, thank you."

Laura bit her lip. "I'm sorry," she said, "you ought not to feel that way about it. I do truly wish to help you all I can. Please!"

Lucine made a half-involuntary movement to gather up the sheets; then checked herself. "No, I have too much pride to play second fiddle. Your neglect has wounded me deeply, and I do not see how I can ever forgive you. To forsake me for such a shallow, disagreeable person as Berta Abbott is an unpardonable insult."

Laura gave a little shiver and lifted her head sharply. "I have tried to be your friend. I have endured—things. But I won't endure this—I won't—I can't. Berta is my friend. You shall not speak of her like that to me. Say you're sorry—quick! Oh, Lucine, say you didn't mean it and are sorry."

"I am not sorry," said Lucine distinctly, "and I did mean it. I am glad I have dared to speak the truth about her. She is shallow and disagreeable."

"And what are you?" Laura sprang to her feet. "A conceited selfish inconsiderate——" She clapped her hand to her mouth with a quick sobbing breath. "Oh, Lucine, we can't be friends. I've tried and tried, but we can't."

From beneath lowered eyelids Lucine watched the slight little figure hurry to the door and vanish. Then rising abruptly she jerked a chair in front of her desk, slapped down a fresh pad of paper, jabbed her pen into the inkwell, shook it fiercely over the blotter—and suddenly brushing the pages hither and thither she flung out her arms upon them and buried her face from the light.

A few minutes later Laura entered noiselessly and stopped short at sight of the crouching form with shoulders that rose and fell over a long quivering sob. Laura took one step toward her, next two away; finally setting her teeth resolutely she glided softly across the room and patted the bent, dark head. For an instant Lucine lay motionless; then with a swift hungry gesture she reached out her arms and swept the younger girl close to her heart.

"Laura, I can't spare you, I can't spare you. You are all I have. Forgive me and let me try again. It is an evil spirit that made me talk that way. And, oh, Laura, dear, I want you to like me better than you like Berta. I need you more."

Laura put up her mouth in child-fashion for a kiss of reconciliation. "I like you both," she said, and freeing herself gently stooped to pick up the loose leaves of the essay. "Shall we go on with revising this now, Lucine? It is due this evening, you know. The board meets at eight in the magazine sanctum."

Lucine watched her with a wistfulness that softened to tenderness the faint lines of native selfishness about her mouth. "Laura, I want you to room with me next year. We can choose a double with a study and adjoining bedrooms. It will make me so happy. Do you know, last autumn when I lived in the main building and you away off in the farthest dormitory, I used to sit in a corridor window every morning to watch for you. I care more for you than for any one else. I shall teach you to care most for me next year."

Laura seemed to have extraordinary trouble in capturing the last sheet, for it fluttered away repeatedly from her grasp and she kept bending to reach it again. Lucine could not see her face.

"Will you," she repeated, "will you room with me next year, Laura?"

Laura coughed and made another wild dive in pursuit of the incorrigible paper. "Let's not talk about next year," she mumbled uncomfortably, "it is so far off and ever so many things may happen before June. Of course," she faltered and swallowed something in her throat, "I'd love to room with you, if—if I can. But now we must hurry with this essay."

"Well, remember that I have asked you first," said Lucine, "and I can't spare you."

Laura said nothing.

After the essay had been read and discussed by Laura whose critical insight was much keener than Lucine's, the older girl settled herself to rewrite the article before evening. Dinner found her still at her desk, fingers inky, hair disordered, collar loosened in the fury of composition. In reply to Laura's urgent summons to dress, she paused long enough to push back a lock that had fallen over her brow.

"Don't bother me now. I'm just getting this right at last. Go away. I don't want any dinner." The pen began again on its busy scratching.

"Lucine, you know the doctor warned you to be more regular about eating. Whenever you work so intensely, you always pay for it in exhaustion the next day. Do come now and finish the essay later."

The rumpled head bent still lower. "I wouldn't drop this now for thirty dinners or suppers. It's good—it's fine—it's bound to be accepted—it means the editorship. To sacrifice it for dinner! Do

go away. I wish you would leave me alone.”

Laura turned away silently. If the success of the article was in question, she certainly could not interfere further. Lucine wrote on, paying no heed to the gong except for the tribute of an impatient frown at the sound of many feet clicking past in the corridor, with a rustling of skirts and light chat of voices. At seven when the bell for chapel again filled the halls with murmur and movement, she only shrugged uneasily and scribbled faster. By half-past she had finished and was re-reading it for final corrections. Then folding it with a smile of weary contentment, for at last she knew that it was sure of success, she set out to carry it to the magazine sanctum.

Down the stairs and through the lower corridor she hastened toward the plain wooden door whose key she hoped next year to claim for her own fingers. The transom shone dark, and no voice yet disturbed the quiet of the neighborhood. Evidently the editorial board had not yet begun to assemble for the business session. Lucine decided to wait till they arrived, so as to be certain that the precious essay reached their hands in safety. If she should drop it through the letter slit in the door, it might be overlooked.

Curling up on a window ledge in a shadowy corner behind a wardrobe she waited while dreamily gazing at the moon which was sailing through clouds tossed by the still rollicking wind. Ever since her first glimpse of the magazine's brown covers, she had determined to become editor-in-chief some time. Now this essay would surely be accepted, and when printed this month would render her eligible for election as the first sophomore editor. From that position she would advance to the literary editorship next year, and then to be chief of the staff when she was a senior. Then—ah, then the girls would be eager and proud to be friends with her. And Laura would be glad she had not forsaken her in her early struggles. So far she had been too busy with her writing to make friends and keep them. It took so much time and was such a bother to be friendly and do favors all the while. But by and by she would have leisure to grow unselfish and show the girls how noble and charming and altogether delightful she could be—by and by. Meanwhile her work came first. She simply had to succeed in winning this editorship.

While Lucine lingered there, leaning her forehead against the cool pane, footsteps sounded from around the transverse; and two figures, arm in arm, strolled nearer. They glanced at the dusky transom, laughed over the tardiness of their stern editor-in-chief, and sat down on a convenient box to wait.

Lucine after an intent scrutiny to identify the two seniors as subordinate editors turned again to the moon, and listened half unconsciously to the low trickle of words till suddenly her own name roused her alert.

“Yes, they're the favorite candidates.” It was Bea's voice that spoke. “If Miss Brett completes her quota of lines this month she will undoubtedly have the best chance in the election, even if she is personally unpopular. She is exceedingly self-centred, you know, and does not trouble herself even to appear interested in anybody else. Her manner is unfortunate. However she is unquestionably the ablest writer in the class though little Laura Wallace is a close second. Berta knew her at home and is very fond of her. Laura and Berta's sister Harriet have always been special friends.”

“Is Laura eligible? I do think she is the sweetest child!”

“Didn't you know it? Her work has been mainly inconspicuous contributions signed only with initials. Stuff like that counts up amazingly in the long run. She is a better critic though not so original as Miss Brett. For my part I think the editor-in-chief ought to be primarily a critic, but perhaps I am wrong. Anyhow the theory is that the election goes to the best writer. I'm sorry. I half wish Miss Brett would fail to qualify. The editorship means such a heap to Laura.”

“How?”

“Her uncle who pays her expenses here is rather queer—thinks he ought to see more results of her career. He's disappointed because she doesn't gather in prizes as she did in the country schools. She may in her senior year, but freshmen don't have much chance to win anything more than an honorable record. He doesn't believe in college anyhow and consented to send her under protest. Now he threatens to stop it if she doesn't do something dazzling this year.”

“Poor infant! What a ridiculous attitude! But since that is the case, why not vote her in? Lay the circumstances before the board, and they'll elect her.”

“Oh, no, they won't. The board is altogether too scrupulous and idealistic this season to let personal feelings interfere. You're rather new to office as yet. Mark my words and trust me: if Miss Brett qualifies, she will be elected. I know—and that's why I wish she wouldn't.”

“There come the others. See that pile of manuscript. We'll be lucky if we get away at midnight. I only hope nobody will ask me to compose a poem to fill out a page; my head feels as if stuffed with sawdust.”

Lucine turned her head slowly to watch the group of girls wander into the office and light the gas amid a flutter of papers and dressing-gowns mixed with sleepy yawns and tired laughter. Then some one shut the door. Lucine was still sitting in the shadowy window-seat, her essay clutched tightly in her hand.

After a minute she rose, walked toward the door, and lifted her arm as if to knock. Then giving herself an impatient shake she swung around and hurried down the corridor as far as the transverse. There she hesitated, halted, half swerved to retrace her steps, stamped one foot down hard, brought up the other beside it, and clenching both fists over the essay fled from the

neighborhood.

When she reached her room, she paused to listen. Hearing no sound she slipped inside, threw the essay into a drawer, locked it, and put the key in her pocket. Then after a wistful glance around she stooped to pick up Laura's white tam from the couch, pressed it against her cheek for a moment, and laid it gently in the empty little chair where Laura had sat while listening to the essay that afternoon.

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"Laura," she whispered, "I can't spare you, Laura. You shall come back next year, and we shall room together again, you and I."

Without a backward look toward the drawer where the manuscript lay buried, Lucine gathered up note-book and fountain-pen and departed for the library. She walked slowly through the long apartment, glancing into alcove after alcove only to find every chair occupied on both sides of the polished tables that gleamed softly in the gaslight. Finally she discovered one of the small movable steps that were used when a girl wished to reach the highest shelf. Capturing it she carried it to the farther end of a narrow recess between two bookcases and doubled her angular length into a cozy heap for an evening with Shelley's poem of "Prometheus Unbound." That was to be the English lesson for the next day.

As she read verse after verse, the music of the wonderful lines soothed her restless mood, and the beauty of the thought that love and forgiveness are stronger than selfishness lifted her to a height of joyous exaltation. The idea of Prometheus suffering all agonies for the sake of men came to her like a revelation. While she pondered over it, suddenly like the shining of a great light she understood the truth of "he that loseth his soul shall find it." The Christ-ideal of self-sacrifice meant the highest self-realization.

251

"My cup runneth over, my cup runneth over," sang Lucine in her heart, as she read on and on. "I have been blind but now I see. It has been always true, always, always. My cup runneth over. Listen:

"It doth repent me; words are quick and vain;
Grief for awhile is blind, and so was mine,
I wish no living thing to suffer pain."

"Laura!" Lucine raised her head dreamily. She was unconscious of how the evening hours had drifted past, leaving only a few lingering students here and there in the library. She could not see the two girls bending over the table on the other side of the bookcase behind which she was nestling. But their voices floated mistily to her ears.

"Laura, remember that you have promised to live with my sister next year. Don't let Lucine coax or frighten you out of it. You have promised."

252

"But if I don't come back?"

"Well, anyway you have promised to room with Harriet if you do. We'll choose a parlor away off at the other end of the campus from Lucine, so that I can protect you from her demands. You've been growing thinner and whiter all the year. Now, remember. Don't you give in to her selfishness. She is able to take care of her precious self without killing you in the process. Promise."

Lucine heard a sigh. "I've promised to be her friend and I do care for her dearly; but I want with all my heart to room with Harriet, if I can manage to get back for next year. I'm almost sure I shan't. Now, see here, does this verb come from *vinco* or *vincio*? I'm so sleepy I can't read straight."

Lucine very white about the lips was sitting erect in her corner. "My cup runneth over, my cup runneth over," echoed faintly in her brain. "My cup runneth over and Laura likes her best and the essay is up-stairs and I wish no living thing to suffer pain—suffer pain. My cup runneth over. 'Pain, pain ever, forever!' I won't, I won't, I can't do it, I can't, I can't, I can't! To sacrifice it all for her and then—and then to be forsaken!"

253

Lucine glided from the recess, passed swiftly from the library, climbed the stairs to her room, moved toward the drawer which held the essay, and felt for the key in her pocket. It was gone. It must have fallen out while she read, doubled up on the low step. In wild haste now, for the minutes were flying and the board of editors might even now have adjourned, she hurried back to search. The green baize doors swung open in her face, and Berta and Laura came loitering out, their arms around each other, their heads bent close together affectionately.

"Lucine, oh, Lucine!" Laura at sight of her slipped away from Berta, "what is the matter? What has happened? Didn't they accept the essay?"

Brushing her aside Lucine swept on into the library, turned into the recess, and dropped on her knees beside the step to look for the stray key. Her eyes fell upon the open book which lay face downward where she had forgotten it. Then she remembered. "I wish no living thing to suffer pain."

254

It was long past ten o'clock and the corridors stretched out their dusky deserted length from one dim gas-jet to another flickering in the shadows, when Lucine crept back to her room. Laura raised a wide-eyed anxious face from the white pillow.

"Lucine, I couldn't sleep until I knew."

The older girl sat down on the bed and drew the little figure close.

"When you are editor, Laura, will you try to like me still? And will you keep on forgiving me and helping—helping me to deserve to have friends? And will you—will you teach me how to make Harriet like me too?"

"Oh, Lucine!" Laura flung her warm arms around the bowed neck. "I know what we shall do next year, if I can come back. The idea has just struck me. You and Harriet and I shall room together in a firewall with bedrooms for three!"

CHAPTER XII

AN ORIGINAL IN MATH

When Gertrude's brother turned up at college just before the holidays of their senior year, he boldly asked for Bea in the same breath with his sister's name. When the message was brought to her, that fancy-free young person's first thought was a quick dread that Berta would tease her about the preference. But no. Miss Abbott, chairman of the Annual's editorial board, clasped her inky hands in relief.

"Bless the boy! He couldn't have chosen better if he had looked through the walls and discovered Bea the sole student with time to burn—or to talk, for that matter. Trot along, Beatrice, and tell him that Gertrude is coming the moment she has dug her way out of this avalanche of manuscript. I can't possibly spare her for half an hour yet. Go and distract his mind from his unnatural sister by means of another story."

"Tell him about your little original in math, Bea," called Lila after her, "that's your best and latest."

Bea retraced her steps to thrust back an injured countenance at the door. "I guess I am able to converse as well as monologue, can't I?" she demanded indignantly, "you just listen."

However, when confronted by a young man with a monosyllabic tongue and an embarrassingly eloquent pair of eyes, she seized a copy of the last Annual from the table in the senior parlor, and plunged into an account of her own editorial trials.

Gertrude is on the board for this year's Annual, you know, and Berta Abbott is chairman. At this very moment they are struggling over a deluge of manuscripts submitted in their prize poem contest. Of course, I sympathize, because I have been through something of the same ordeal. The Monthly offered a prize for a short story last fall, and we had rather a lively sequel to the decision. Shall I tell you about it from the beginning? At our special meeting, I read the stories aloud, because I happen to be chief editor. Nobody said anything at first. Janet, the business editor, tipped her chair back and stared at the piles of magazines on the shelves opposite. Laura, who does the locals, pressed her forehead closer to the pane to watch the girls hurrying past on their way to the tennis tournament on the campus. Adele and Jo, the literaries, nibbled their fountain-pens.

I spread out the manuscripts, side by side, in a double row on the big sanctum desk, picked up my scribbled pad, leaned back till the swivel screw squeaked protestingly from below, and said, "Well?"

Janet brought her chair down on all four feet with a bump. "Nary one is worth a ten dollar prize," she declared pugnaciously, "especially now that Robbie Belle has gone to the infirmary for six weeks and she can't help me in soliciting advertisements."

Laura turned her head. "Robbie Belle had promised to write up the first hall play for me. She was going to review two books for Jo and compose a Christmas poem for Adele's department. I think maybe there are perhaps a dozen or so girls who might have been more easily spared."

I brushed a hand across my weary brow. It did not feel like cobwebs exactly,—more like cork, sort of light and dry and full of holes. I had been up almost all night, studying over those fifteen manuscripts, applying the principles of criticism, weighing, balancing, measuring, arguing with myself, and rebelling against fate. If Robbie Belle had been there she could have recognized the best story by instinct. Ever since I became chief editor I had depended upon her judgment, because she is a born critic and always right, and I'm not. And now just when I needed her most of all and more than anybody else, there she had to go and get quarantined in the infirmary.

"Girls," I said, "do express an opinion. Say what you think. We simply must decide this matter now, because the prize story has to go to press before the first, and this is our only free afternoon. I know what I think—at least I am almost sure what I think—but I want to hear your views first. Adele, you're always conscientious."

Adele was only a junior and rather new to the responsibility of being on the editorial board. She glanced down at her page of notes.

"Every one of the stories has some good points," she began cautiously. "Most of them start out well and several finish well. Six have good plots, nine are interesting, five are brightly written."

Number seven is, I believe—yes, I think I consider it the best. The trouble is—”

“Altogether too jerky,” interrupted Jo, “a fine plot but no style whatever. This is a cat. See the cat catch the rat. That’s the kind of English in number seven. Now I vote for number fifteen.”

“Oh, but, Jo,” I broke in eagerly, for number seven was my own laborious choice also, and Adele’s corroboration strengthened me wonderfully. “Jo, it is the simplicity of the style that is its greatest recommendation. You know how Professor Whitcomb has drummed into us the beauty of Anglo-Saxon diction. It’s beautiful—it’s charming—it’s perfect. Why, a six-year-old could understand it. Fifteen is far too sensational for good art. Just listen to this—”

Jo was stubborn. “The use of short words is a mere fad,” she said, “it is like wearing dimity for every occasion. Now listen to this!”

She snatched up one manuscript and read aloud while I declaimed from the other. Adele listened with a pained frown on her forehead, Janet laughed and teetered recklessly to and fro on her frisky chair, Laura fidgeted at the window and filled every pause with a threat to leave us instant for the tournament positively had to be written up that day. Finally I put the question to the vote, for Jo is so decided in her manner that she makes me feel wobbly unless I am conscious of being backed up by Robbie Belle. I suppose it is because my own opinions are so shaky from the inside view that I hate to appear variable from the outside. It would have been horrid to yield to Jo’s arguments and change my ideas right there before the whole board. The rest of them except Jo had fallen into a way of deferring to my judgment, for I had seemed to hit it off right almost always in accepting or rejecting contributions. Nobody knew how much I had depended on Robbie Belle.

The board awarded the prize to number seven, my choice, you know. Janet was on my side because the story had a nice lively plot, and that was all she cared about. Laura put in a blank ballot, saying that her head ached so that it was not fair to either side for her to cast any weight upon the scale. Adele of course voted with me. Jo stuck to number fifteen till the end.

“Well, that’s over!” sighed Laura and escaped before any one had put the motion to adjourn. Janet vanished behind her, and Jo picked up the manuscript of which she was champion.

“By the way, girls,” she said, “I will return this to its writer, if you don’t mind. And I shall tell her to offer it to the Annual. The committee will jump at the chance. Find out who she is, please.”

I slipped the elastic band from the packet of fifteen sealed envelopes and selected the one marked with the title of the story. The name inside was that of a sophomore who had already contributed several articles to the Monthly. Then I opened the envelope belonging to number seven.

“Maria Mitchell Kiewit,” I read, “who in the world is she? I’ve never heard of her. She must be a freshman.”

Jo who was half way out of the room stopped at the word and thrust her head back around the door. “Did little Maria Kiewit write that? No wonder it is simple and jerky. She’s a mathematical prodigy, she is. Her mother is an alumna of this college. See! The infant was named after our great professor of astronomy. She wants to specialize herself in mathematical astronomy when she gets to be a junior. Her mother was head editor of the Monthly in her day. Maria rooms somewhere in this corridor, I believe. It will be a big thing for her to win the prize away from all the upper class girls. I didn’t vote for her. By-bye.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Adele, clasping her hands in that intense way of hers, “won’t she be happy when she hears! A little ignorant unknown freshman to win the prize for the best short story among eight hundred students! Her mother will be delighted. Her mother will be proud.”

“Hist!” Jo’s head reappeared. “She’s coming down the corridor now. Red cheeks, bright eyes, ordinary nose, round chin, long braid, white shirtwaist, tan skirt—nothing but an average freshman. She doesn’t look like a mathematical prodigy, but she is one. And an author, too—dear, dear! There must be some mistake. Authors never have curly hair.”

Adele and I poked our faces through the crack. Jo wickedly flung the door wide open. “Walk right out, ladies and gentlemen. See the conquering heroine comes,” she sang in a voice outrageously shrill. During the trill on the hero, she bowed almost double right in the path of the approaching freshman. Maria Mitchell Kiewit stopped short, her eyes as round as the buttons on her waist.

Jo fell on her knees, lifting her outspread hands in ridiculous admiration. “O Maria Mitchell Kiewit,” she declaimed, “hearken! I have the honor—me, myself—I snatch it, seize it—the honor to announce that thou—thee—you—your own self hast won the ten dollar prize for the best short story written for the Monthly by an undergraduate. Vale!” She scrambled upright by means of clutching my skirt and put out a cordial hand. “Nice girl! Shake!”

“Josephine!” gasped Adele in horrified rebuke. My breath was beginning to come fast over this insult to our editorial dignity when I caught sight of the freshman’s face. Her cheeks were as red as ever, but she had turned white about the lips, and her eyes were really terrified.

“Oh, I don’t want it!” she cried involuntarily, shrinking away from us, “I don’t want it.”

Jo’s mouth fell open. “Then why in the world—”

The little freshman fairly ran to the alleyway leading to her room.

Jo turned blankly to us. “Then why in the world did she write the story and send it in?”

Adele—I told you she was conscientious, didn't I? and inclined to be mathematical herself—stared at the spot where Maria had disappeared. "Such an attitude might be explained either by the supposition that she is diffident—sort of stunned by the surprise, you understand—she never expected to win. Or maybe she is shy and dreads the notoriety of fame. Everybody will be looking at her, pointing her out. Or—or possibly——" Adele hesitated, glanced around uneasily, caught my eye; and we both dropped our lids quickly. It was horrid of us. I think it is the meanest thing to be suspicious and ready to believe evil of anybody. But truly we had just been reading a volume of college stories, and one was about a girl who plagiarized some poems and passed them off as her own. And this Maria Mitchell Kiewit had behaved almost exactly like her.

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"Or possibly what?" demanded Jo.

Adele stammered. "Or p-p-possibly—oh, nothing! Maybe she is ashamed of the story or something like that. She lacks self-esteem probably. She didn't expect it to be published, you know, and—and she is surprised. That's all. She—I guess she's surprised."

"Come along, Adele," I slipped my arm through hers and dragged her away from Jo's neighborhood, "you must help me reject these fourteen others. That's the part I hate worst about this editorial business."

"Don't you want to reconsider the decision?" called Jo, "since she doesn't wish the prize herself, you'd better choose my girl. This is your last chance. The committee for the Annual will surely gobble number fifteen up quick. Berta Abbott knows good literature when she sees it. Going, going——"

266

"Let her go. Now, Adele," I said, closing the sanctum door with inquisitive stubborn Jo safely on the outside, "here are the rest of the names. You doubtless know some of their owners by sight, and I hope I know others. This is how we shall manage. Whenever you see one of them securely away from her room—maybe in the library or recitation or out on the campus or down town or anywhere—you tell me or else run yourself and take her manuscript and poke it under her door. I'll write a nice polite little regretful admiring note to go with each story, and that ought to take the edge off the blow. But be sure she is not at home. It would be simply awful to hand anybody a rejected article right to her real face and see how disappointed she is. I think it is more courteous to give her a chance to recover alone and unobserved."

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"But suppose she has a roommate?" said Adele.

"Oh, dear! Well, in that case we'll have to watch and loiter around till they are both out of reach. It may take us all the week."

And it actually did. It took a lot of time but it was exciting too in a way. We felt like detectives or criminals—it doesn't matter which—to haunt the corridors and grounds till we spied one of those girls headed away from her room (of course we had to find out first where each one lived), and then we scurried up-stairs and down and hung around in the neighborhood and walked past the door, if anybody happened to be near, and finally shoved the manuscript to its goal. Certainly I understand that we were not obliged to take all this trouble but I simply could not bear to send those long envelopes back through the post. Every student who distributes the mail would have recognized such a parcel as a rejected manuscript. And of course that would have hurt the author's feelings.

Naturally I was rushed that week because Thanksgiving Day came on Thursday, and I had an invitation to go down to the city to hear grand opera that afternoon. It was necessary to take such an early train that I missed the dinner. That evening when I returned I found the whole editorial board and Berta too groaning in Lila's study while Laura acted as amanuensis for a composite letter to Robbie Belle. You see, they had eaten too much dinner—three hours at the table and everything too good to skip. Each one tried to put a different groan into the letter. They were so much interested in the phraseology and they felt so horrid that nobody offered to get me crackers or cocoa, though I was actually famishing.

268

After poking around in the family cupboard under the window seat, I routed out a bag of popcorn. I lighted the gas stove and popped about three quarts, and then boiled some sugar and water to crystallize it. When you are starving, have you ever eaten popcorn buttered for a first course and crystallized for a second? It is the most delicious thing! I had just settled myself in a steamer-chair with the heaped up pan of fluffy kernels within reach of my right hand, when there came a knock on the door.

269

"Enter!" called Janet.

The knob turned diffidently and in marched Maria Mitchell Kiewit.

Lila pushed another pillow behind Jo on the couch, Laura lifted her pen, Janet exerted herself to rise politely. I carelessly threw a newspaper over the corn, and then poked it off. After all, editors are only human, and freshmen might as well learn that first as last.

"I wish to see Miss Leigh," said the visitor in a high, very young voice that quavered in the middle.

I straightened up into a dignified right angle. "What can I do for you, Miss Kiewit?"

"I wish to withdraw my story," she announced still at the same strained pitch, "I have changed my mind. Here is the ten-dollar bill."

"But it went to press three days ago," I exclaimed.

"And the Annual has gobbled up second choice," said Jo triumphantly.

"We jumped at it," corroborated Berta.

"To take out the prize story now would spoil the magazine," cried Adele.

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"Impossible!" declared Janet.

"Nonsense!" said Laura under her breath.

The little freshman stared from one to another. Then suddenly her round face quivered and crumpled. Throwing up one arm over her eyes she turned, snatched at the door knob and stumbled out into the corridor.

I looked at Adele.

"Yes," she replied to my expression, "you'd better go and find out now. It's for the honor of the Monthly. It would be awful to print a—a—mistake," she concluded feebly.

Just as I emerged from the alleyway I caught sight of the small figure fluttering around the corner of a side staircase half way down the dimly lighted hall. I had to hurry in order to overtake her before she could reach her own room. She must have been sobbing to herself, for she did not notice the sound of my steps on the rubber matting till I was near enough to touch her elbow. Then how she jumped!

"Pardon me, Miss Kiewit. May I speak to you for one minute?"

271

She nodded. I am not observant generally but this time I could see that she said nothing because she dared not trust her voice to speak. She went in first to light the gas. The pillows on the couch were tossed about in disorder, and one of yellow silk had a round dent in it and two or three damp spots as if somebody had been crying with her face against it.

Now I hate to ask direct questions especially in a situation like this where I wished particularly to be tactful, and of course she would be thrust into an awkward position in case she should dislike to reply. So I sat down and looked around and said, "How prettily you have arranged your room!"

The freshman had seated herself on the edge of her straightest chair. At my speech she glanced about nervously. "My mother graduated here," she explained, "and she knew what I ought to bring. Ever since I can remember, she has been planning about college for me."

"What a fortunate girl you are!" This was my society manner, you understand, for I was truly embarrassed. I always incline to small talk when I have nothing to say. She caught me up instantly.

272

"Fortunate! Oh, me! Fortunate! When I hate it—I hate the college except for math. My mother teaches in the high school—she works day after day, spending her life and strength and health, so that I may stay here. I—I hate it. She wants me to become a writer. And I can't, I can't, I can't! I want to elect mathematics."

"Oh!" said I.

"When she was a girl, she longed to write, but circumstances prevented. Then I was born and she thought I would carry out her ambition and grow to be an author myself. She's been trying years and years. But I can't write. I'm not like my mother. I have my own life to live. I—I hate it so. And—and——" The child stopped, swallowed hard, then leaned toward me, her eyes begging me.

"And if you keep my story for the prize, she will hear about it, and she won't let me elect mathematics for my sophomore year."

"Oh!" I said, and I was surprised to such a degree that the oh sounded like a giggle at the end. That made me so ashamed that I sat up a little more erect and ejaculated vivaciously, "You—you astonish me."

273

It was the funniest thing—she hung her head like a conscience-smitten child. "I—I haven't told her about it because it would encourage her and then later she would—would be all the more disappointed. I can't write, I tell you."

"The vote was almost unanimous," I remarked stiffly.

She stared at me doubtfully. "Well, maybe that story is good but I know I couldn't do it again. And anyhow my mother told me the plot."

"Oh," I said. It was really the plot that had won the prize, you understand, though indeed I had found the style eminently praiseworthy also according to all the principles of criticism. It almost fulfilled the rhetorical rules about unity, mass and coherence.

"So you will let me withdraw?" she questioned timidly, "here's the ten dollars." She held out the crumpled bill which she had been clutching all the evening.

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I thought I might as well be going. "It's allowable to use your own mother's plot," I assured her, "don't bother about that. Good bye."

Without looking at her I hurried through the alleyway into the corridor, flew past the sanctum, darted into the staircase, then halted, turned around, stopped at the water-cooler for a taste of ice water, then walked slowly back to her room.

I put my head in at the door. "You heard me say, didn't you, that the story has gone to press?"

She lifted her face from that same yellow silk pillow. "Yes," she said.

"All right." I started away briskly as if I thought I was going, but I didn't. This time I turned around, went clear into the room and sat down on the couch.

"And anyway," I said, "you haven't any right to deceive your mother like that. It is robbing her of a joy that she surely deserves. She has earned it. You haven't any right not to tell her that your story won the prize. Whether we let you withdraw it or not, it would be wrong for you to steal that pleasure from your own mother. You are thinking merely of your own selfish wishes." 275

"No, no, no! Don't you see?" She flung herself toward me. "It is like being a surgeon. I must cut out the ambition. I can never fulfill it. Never, never, I tell you. The news of this prize will make it grow and grow like a cancer or something, till it will hurt worse, maim, kill, when I fail at last. If she would only see that I love mathematics and can do something in that maybe some day. But in literature. Suppose I shut myself up for years, struggle, struggle, struggle to wring out something that isn't in me, while she wears herself out to support me. The publishers will send it back, one after another. I can't write, I tell you. I know it. It will be all an awful sacrifice—a useless sacrifice, with no issue except waste of her life and my life. Don't you see?"

"Don't you think," said I calmly, "don't you think that you are just a little foolish and intense?" That is what a professor said to me once and it had a wonderfully reducing effect. So I tried it on this excited little freshman. But the result was different. Instead of clearing the atmosphere with a breeze of half mortified laughter, it created a stillness like the stillness before a whirlwind. I got up hastily. "I think I had better be going," I said. 276

This time I heard the key turn in the lock behind me as I walked rapidly away. Actually I had to hold myself in to keep from scuttling away like a whipped puppy. That is how I felt inside. I didn't believe that she would ever forgive me. There were two compensations for this episode in my editorial career: one was the realization that the little freshman had plenty of dignity to fall back on, the other was that she would not be very likely to ask again for the return of the prize story.

Considering that this was my sincere attitude, you may imagine how amazed I was to hear my name called by this young person the very next morning. She came running up to me at the instant my fingers were on the knob of the sanctum door. Her hands were filled with those little cardboard rhomboids, polyhedrons, prisms and so forth which the freshmen have to make for their geometry work. 277

"I'm going to do it," she began breathlessly, "I'm going to tell my mother. Perhaps it would please her more if—if you should write me a note on paper with the name of the Monthly at the top, you know. She used to be an editor when she was in college. In it say that the board gave me the prize. I think it will please her."

"I shall be delighted," I exclaimed. Then something in the way she was gazing down at those geometrical monstrosities (I never could endure mathematics myself) made me want to comfort her.

"Why, child, it won't be necessary to sacrifice math entirely. You can elect analytics and calculus to balance the lit and rhetoric. Cheer up."

She raised eyes brimming with tears. "My mother thinks that math has an adverse tendency. She doesn't want me to take much science either. She says that science deals with facts, literature with the impression of facts."

"Oh," I remarked. You notice that I had found occasion to use the foregoing expletive several times since first meeting Miss Maria Mitchell Kiewit. 278

She nodded gloomily in acknowledgment of my sympathetic comprehension. "Yes, once when I described lights in a fog as 'losing their chromatic identity' instead of saying they 'blurred into the mist,' she asked me to drop physics in the high school. She said it was ruinous, it was destroying the delicacy of my perceptions."

"Doesn't your mother ever——" I hesitated, then decisively, "doesn't she ever laugh?"

Maria dimpled suddenly. "Oh, yes, yes! She's my dearest, best friend, and we have fun all the time except when she talks about my becoming a writer. She said that now at college I could show if there was any hope in me. She meant that this is my chance to learn to write. I—I——" She paused and glanced at me dubiously from under her lashes. "I sent in that story just to show her that I couldn't write. I was going to tell her I had tried and failed."

"Oh!" Then I chuckled, and the freshman after a moment of half resentful pouting joined in with a small reluctant laugh.

"It is funny," she said, "I think that maybe from your side of the affair it is awfully funny. But ——" 279

I turned the knob swiftly. "No but about it. I shall write that note this minute, and you shall mail it home at once. That is the only right thing to do."

"Yes." She heaved a deep, long sigh. "I know that. I have worked it all out as an original in geometry. For instance: Given, an unselfish mother with a special ambition for her rebellious selfish daughter. Problem: to decide which one should sacrifice her own wishes. Let the mother's desire equal this straight line, and the daughter's inclination equal this straight line at right angles to the other. To prove——"

"See here, little girl," I interrupted her kindly but firmly, "no wonder your mother dreads the effect of mathematical studies on your tender brain! I said farewell to geometry exactly two

years and four months ago. I did the examination in final trig three times. Comprehend? Now run into your own room and get that letter written quick. If you are very agreeable indeed, I may let you enclose the proof sheets, who knows?"

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"Thank you," she exclaimed in impulsive joy, "that will be lovely. Mother will be so pleased." Then the vision of coming woe in exile from beloved calculations descended upon her, and she hugged the paper figures so convulsively that the sharpest, most beautiful angle of the biggest polyhedron cracked clear across from edge to edge. They were perfectly splendid clean edges, edges that even I could see had been formed by the carefully loving hands of a mathematical prodigy.

After that day came a pause in the drama (Adele declared that it was really a tragedy caused by one life trying to bend another to its will) until the day when the new issue of the Monthly arrived in the noon mail. As Robbie Belle was still in the infirmary of course, the rest of the board took hold of her share of the work. We divided the list of subscribers between us, and started out to distribute the magazines at the different rooms in the various dormitories.



SHE WAVED AN OPEN LETTER IN HER HAND

Part of my route happened to include the neighborhood of the sanctum. Just as I turned into Maria's alleyway to leave the three copies always provided for every contributor, she came dashing out of her room in such a headlong rush that I barely saved my equilibrium by a rapid jump to one side. As soon as she could control her own impetus she whirled and bore down upon me once more.

281

"Mercy, mercy!" I cried, backing into a corner by the hinges and holding my pile of magazines in front as a rampart, "don't be an automobile any more."

She waved an open letter in her hand.

"Mother says I may elect all the math I want. She says I can't write a little bit. She says that this prize story shows I can't. She says it is awful—all except the plot, and that isn't mine, you know. She says that the vocabulary, sentence structure, everything proves me mathematical to the centre of my soul. She says she has always been afraid she was making a mistake to force a square peg into a round hole. I'm the peg, you understand. She says I needn't struggle any more, and she'll be just as proud of a mathematical genius as of a mechanical author. She says she is grateful for the honor of the prize, but she thinks the board of editors made a mistake."

I walked feebly into the room, sank on the couch, and propped myself against that yellow silk pillow.

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"It's horrid to be an editor," I said, "especially when Robbie Belle has to go and get taken to the infirmary just when I need her most."

"My mother knows," chanted the little freshman, "and she says I can't write a little bit. She says I can elect mathematics. Whoopee!"

JUST THIS ONCE

Ellen drummed restlessly on the window pane. "I'm 'most sure it would not matter just this once. We've had the mildest sort of a fever, and I don't see yet why they keep us shut up so long away off here. I'm crazy to send a letter home."

Lila's thin shoulders gave an irritable little shrug under the silken folds of her dressing-gown, and her finely cut features screwed for an instant into an expression of impatient dislike. It was only for an instant—then the mask of her conventional courtesy dropped again between the two convalescents.

"Why not tell the doctor or the nurse what you wish to write? They will attend to it for you. Infection may be conveyed in a dozen ways, you know. We are beginning to peel, and that is the worst——"

"Oh, are we?" broke in Ellen excitedly, "are we really peeling?" She lifted one hand and examined the wrist. "No, I'm not even beginning. Every morning the moment I wake up I rub and rub, but it won't peel. It simply won't. And I've got to stay here till I do. Are you peeling? Really?"

She darted across to her companion and seized her arm without noticing the quiver of distaste before it lay limp in her eager grasp.

"Oh, oh, it is, it certainly is! You are peeling. You will get through first and be set free and go back to the girls. I shall be left here alone. It isn't fair. We both came the same day. Think of almost six weeks lost from college! My first spring in this beautiful place! It doesn't mean so much to you, because you're a junior. You don't care."

Lila had withdrawn her hand under the pretext of picking up a case knife to sharpen her pencil. Now though her lids were lowered as she hacked at the stubby point, she was perfectly aware of the hopeful curiosity in the freshman's side glance at her. Lila despised the habit of side glances. For the past few days she had felt increasing scorn of a childishness that sought to vary by quarrels the monotony of their imprisonment. Hadn't the girl learned yet that she—Lila Allan, president of the junior literary society—was not to be provoked into any undignified dispute by puerile taunts?

"You don't care," repeated Ellen from her old position at the window. "I guess you'd rather anyhow have all your time to write poetry instead of studying." She glanced around just in time to see Lila's lips set in a grimmer line as the lead in the short pencil snapped beneath a more impatient jab of the dull knife. She laughed teasingly.

"What's the use of writing all that stuff now? You're wearing out your pencil fast. Aren't you afraid the paper will carry infection? Or will it be fumigated? I think it is silly to bother about germs. Oh, dear!" She began to drum again on the pane. "I'm so tired of this infirmary. There's nothing to do. I can't make up poetry. My eyes ache if I try to read." Here she paused, and Lila was aware of another side glance in her direction.

"My eyes ache if I try to read," repeated Ellen slowly, "and there is an awfully interesting story over on the table." She stopped her drumming for a moment to listen to the steady scribble behind her. The little face with its round features so unlike Lila's delicate outlines took on a disconsolate expression. "Do your eyes ache when you try to read," for an instant she hesitated while a mischievous spark of daring danced into her eyes. Then she added explosively, "Lila?"

She had done it. She had done it at last. Never before through all the weeks of imprisonment together had she ventured to call Miss Allan by her first name. A delightful tingle of apprehension crept up to the back of her neck. She waited. Now surely something would happen.

But nothing happened except the continued scribble of pencil on paper in the silence. Oh, dear! this was worse than she had expected. It was worse than a scolding or a freezing or an awful squelching. It was the queerest thing that they were not even acquainted really after the many weeks. There was a shell around this junior all the time. It made Ellen feel meaner and smaller and more insignificant every minute. The freshman pressed her forehead wearily against the glass.

"Oh, look! There come the girls. They're your friends away down on the lawn. Miss Abbott, I think, and Miss Leigh, and Miss Sanders. See, see! The rollicking wind and the racing clouds! Their skirts blow. They hold on their tams. They are looking up at us. They are waving something. Maybe it is violets, don't you think? Once I found violets in March. Can't you smell the air almost? I'm going to open the window. I am, I am! Who's afraid of getting chilled?"

"I would advise you not to do anything so utterly foolhardy," spoke Lila's frigid voice. A certain inflection in the tone made Ellen shrink away instinctively. For an instant she looked full into the serene, indifferent eyes, and her own seemed to flutter as if struggling against the contempt she saw there. Then with a defiant lift of her head she hurried to the writing table and seized the pencil which Lila had dropped upon rising to approach the window.

A few minutes later when the older girl turned from the greetings and messages in pantomime with her friends below, she saw Ellen's rough head bending over a paper. It was a needlessly

untidy head. During the weeks of close confinement and enforced companionship, she had felt her dislike steadily growing. The girl was on her nerves. She was wholly disagreeable. Everything about her was displeasing, her careless enunciation, queer little face, coarse clothes, impulsive, crude ways, even occasional mistakes in grammar. She told herself that the child had no breeding, no manners, no sense of the fitness of things. There was no reason why she should admit her into the circle of her intimates merely because the two had been thrown together by the exigencies of an attack of scarlet fever. Such a fortuitous relation would be severed in the shortest possible time, completely and irremediably severed. Trust Lila Allan, president of the junior literary society, to manage that. Meanwhile she intended to leave the girl severely alone. Think of the impudence of calling her Lila! Lila, indeed! And that hint about reading aloud! The incredible impertinence of it! And to appropriate her pencil! Atrocious!

But of course she would keep on being polite. She owed that to herself, to her position, to her self-respect. Accordingly Miss Allan busied herself graciously about other matters till Ellen had finished her note, addressed an envelope, and advanced with it to the window.

She hesitated doubtfully, with one hand on the sash.

"It won't matter just this once," she said as if arguing, "somebody will pick it up and mail it for me. It concerns something important and private. People are silly about infection. I'm quite sure it won't matter just this once." She paused this time with rather an anxious little side glance toward Lila.

That young lady said nothing. She was engaged in contemplating with a studiously inexpressive countenance the stub of her precious and only pencil. It needed sharpening again.

Ellen raised the window half an inch. "The doctor here is so foolish," she commented with an injured air, "she's always bothering about infection or contagion or whatever you call it. It isn't necessary either. I know a doctor at home and he told a woman to wrap up her little girl and bring her down to his office, and the little girl was peeling too. He knew it wouldn't do any harm even if she did go in the street car. He was sensible."

Lila smothered a sigh of long suffering as she reached for the case knife again.

"And I am so tired," insisted Ellen with fretful vehemence. "I am bored to death, and nobody amuses me, and my eyes ache when I try to read, and my wrist won't peel, and all the other girls are enjoying themselves, and my letter is awfully important and private, and mother will be so glad to receive it, and my little sister will snatch it quick from the postcarrier, and they'll all be glad, and there isn't the least bit of danger, and I'm going to do it." She flung the sash wide and glanced around for an instant with a face in which reckless defiance wrestled with a frightened wish to be dissuaded. "I'm going to do it," she repeated, "I'm going to do it—Lila!"

Miss Allan raised her head with a politely controlled shiver. "Would you mind closing the window at your earliest convenience, Miss Bright?"

The younger girl gave her one look, then turned and leaning out over the sill sent the envelope fluttering downward till it rested square and white on the concrete walk far below. Lila shrugged her shoulder and finished sharpening her pencil.

In the course of weary time she was set at liberty. Fair and sweet and delicate in her fresh array she walked down the corridor in the centre of an exultant crowd of friends. In listening to the babel of chatter and laughter, she forgot utterly her companion in imprisonment. Just once she happened to look back from the entangling arms of Bea and Berta and Robbie Belle, and caught sight of a forlorn little figure staring after her from the shadows of the infirmary door. In the glow of her new freedom and heart-warming affection, Lila nodded to her with such a radiant smile that Ellen blushed with joy. On her journey to her room she told herself that Miss Allan liked her after all. It was a solitary journey, for Ellen had boarded in town till February. After moving into the dormitory she had barely begun to make acquaintances before the ogre of fever had swooped down upon her and dragged her away to his den in the isolation ward.

The vision of that smile must have remained with her through the troubled weeks that followed; for one April evening in parlor J she ventured to invite Miss Allan to dance. Beyond distant glimpses in the corridors and chapel, Lila had seen nothing of her fellow convalescent. To tell the truth, she had taken pains to avoid any chance association. Once she had found hardly time to take refuge behind an ENGAGED sign before the dreaded little freshman came tiptoeing shyly into the alleyway. Another time when she spied the small face waiting with an expectant wistful half smile at the foot of the stairs she turned to retrace her steps as if she had suddenly recalled an errand in another direction.

On this particular evening, Lila had been the guest of honor at a senior birthday table. The senior whose birthday was being celebrated was chief editor of the Monthly. She declared that she invited Lila because of the rhymes that came in so handy to fill up several pages in the last number of the magazine. As Lila, lovely in pale rose and blue and silver, sat at the table gay with flowers and shaded candles, she told the story of how she had written the verses in the infirmary. On her witty tongue the stubby pencil, the dull knife, and the teasing midget of an impudent freshman made a delightfully humorous tale. Even the explosive "Lila!" and its accompanying side glance of terrified joy in the daring developed into a picture that sent the seniors into tempests of laughter. Somehow she did not care to mention the letter which Ellen had dropped out of the window.

After dinner Lila pressed on with the others to the dancing in parlor J. The applause and admiration surrounding her made her look her prettiest and talk her wittiest, for Lila's nature

was always one that throve best in an atmosphere of praise. She felt as if whirling through fairyland. In the midst of the gayety of music, lights, and circling figures, she lifted her head in gliding past the great mirror and beheld her own radiant face smiling back at her from the flower-tinted throng. Just at that moment through a rift in the throng she caught a glimpse of two big troubled eyes in a queer small face atop of a drooping ill-clad form. Half a minute later as she leaned breathless and glowing against the mirror's gilt frame, she became aware of a timid touch on her arm. Turning quickly she saw Ellen beside her. Her smile faded to an expression of formally polite and distant questioning as she drew her skirts a few inches away.

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"Will you——" the freshman swallowed once, then pushed out the words with a desperate rush, "will you dance with me?"

"Oh, Miss Bright," exclaimed Lila in an overwhelmingly effusive manner, "I am so dreadfully sorry, but I regret to say that I am already engaged for every number. Good-bye!" She slid her hand about her partner's waist and propelled her swiftly into the concealing vortex of waltzers.

The partner in question happened to be a certain lively and independent young person called Bea by her friends. "Lila Allan," she scolded as soon as she could steer their steps to a sheltered eddy in a corner, "why in the world did you snub that poor child so unmercifully? After six weeks together in the infirmary too! I'm downright ashamed of you. You ought to be above snobbishness. And it isn't a point of snobbishness either. It is plain cruelty to children. Didn't you see how you hurt her? And the poor little thing has enough trouble without your adding to the burden."

295

"Trouble?" echoed Lila uneasily.

"Yes, trouble. Haven't you heard? Her little sister is desperately ill with scarlet fever. Infection conveyed in a letter, I understand. A telegram may come for her any hour. And then when she tries to cheer up, you treat her so abominably! Lila, you are growing more and more spoiled every day. People praise you too much. You were born with a silver spoon in your mouth. You've improved a lot since you first began to room with me, but still——"

Lila had vanished. Winding her swift way between the circling pairs, she hurried into the corridor where girls were strolling idly as they waited for the gong to summon them to chapel. Beyond the broad staircase Ellen's disconsolate little figure stood in the glare of the gas-jet over the bulletin-board.

Lila hastened toward her. "Miss Bright, oh, Miss Bright, I did not know. I am exceedingly sorry. You will keep me posted? If there is anything that I can do, of course—I feel—I feel—so guilty."

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Ellen raised her face. Her mouth was trembling at the corners. "I sent the letter," she said, "I'm waiting." She winked rapidly and her odd features worked convulsively for a moment. "If—if they telegraph——"

"Miss Bright." It was the voice of a messenger girl who had that instant emerged from an adjacent apartment. "Will you step into the office at once, if you please? There is a message——"

Ellen was gone like a flash. Lila walked across to the staircase and very deliberately seated herself with her head resting against the banisters. It was there that Bea found her a few minutes later when the stream of students was beginning to set toward the chapel doors.

Bea was startled. "Lila, what is it? You look like a ghost. Shall I get some water?"

Lila opened her eyes. "I think that her little sister is dead," she said.

"Oh!" Bea clasped her hands in pity. "How can we help?"

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"I think that I killed her," said Lila.

"What!" It was almost a shout. Then noticing that several girls turned to stare curiously in passing, Bea put out her hand. "Come, Lila, get up. It's time to go to chapel. You don't realize what you're saying."

She rose obediently in mechanical response to the gesture.

"It was my fault because I was the older and I knew the danger. She was only a freshman. She wanted me to persuade her not to drop that letter from the window. I could have kept her from feeling lonely. I made her reckless. It wasn't her fault. But now her little sister is dead."

"How do you know she is?" asked Bea.

"A message came."

"Hush!" They slipped into a pew near the rear of the chapel. During the reading of Scripture, Lila sat gazing blankly straight before her over the rows of heads, dark and fair. As if in a dream she rose with the others for the singing of the hymn. Still as though moving in a mist, she sank again into her seat and bowed her forehead upon the pew in front. While the rustling murmur was subsiding into a hush before the prayer, she stirred and lifting her face turned for one fleeting moment toward the wide doors at the back. Ah! She raised her head higher to watch, motionless, breathless. The doors were noiselessly swinging shut behind a girl with a queer small face atop of an ill-clad little figure. But the face instead of being crumpled in grief was alight with joy; and the little figure advanced with a lilt and a swing, as if just freed from a burden.

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The message had been a message of good tidings.

Lila watched the child slip exultantly into a convenient corner. Then with a sudden, swift

CHAPTER XIV

CLASSMATES

Bea reached for Robbie with one arm, grasped Lila with the other, and went skipping after the rest of the seniors over the lawn to their class tree. She dragged them under its spreading branches to the centre of the throng that had gathered in the June twilight. Berta was already there, mounted on a small platform that had been built against the trunk in preparation for the morrow's Class Day ceremonies.

"She looks pretty decent," whispered Bea to Robbie in order to frustrate the queer sensation in her throat at sight of the eager face laughing above them on this last evening together before the deluge of commencement guests. "I hope the alumnæ who are wandering around admire our taste in presidents."

"Maybe," Robbie spoke reflectively, "they're almost as much interested in their classmates as we are in ours."

"Um-m," said Bea, "why, maybe so they are. I never thought of that before. Robbie, you're my liberal education. Now, then, attention! Berta is raising her hand to mark time for the songs to be rehearsed for to-morrow."

300

But Berta's hand dropped at sound of a shout from across the campus. "There!" she exclaimed, "the sophomores are coming."

They certainly were coming, on a double-quick march, two by two, shouting for the seniors. As they approached the shouting changed to singing. When they reached the tree, they spread out and joining hands went skipping, still *viva voce*, around the seniors who watched them, silent and smiling. The air was sweet with the cool, spicy breath of spruces. Lila thought that she could even smell the roses in the garden beyond the evergreens. She lifted her face toward the soft evening sky, and her mouth grew wistful. Bea caught a glimpse of it, and immediately became voluble if not eloquent.

"This is impromptu," she commented, generous with her least thoughts. "I enjoy impromptu, except speeches—or that last lecture when the man couldn't read his own notes. Now my history which is to astonish the world to-morrow will doubtless glitter with extemporaneous wit which has cost me two weeks of meditation. Likewise this impromptu on the spur of the moment —"

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"I think it's beautiful," said Robbie. She was watching Berta's eyes as the last lingering strains died away. Oh, dear! why did they sing that good-bye serenade again? Berta was going to cry. Hark! A robin's twilight call rose melodiously from the heart of a shadowy spruce. In the thrill of it Robbie felt the sting of sudden tears. She turned to Bea.

"Now I know how Berta feels when she listens to music. I'm beginning to understand. But I think a robin is different from a brass band."

"Is it now? You astonish me." Bea squeezed her understandingly, nevertheless. "I know. Being with Lila has taught me a lot. She is like a windharp—every touch finds a response. Berta's a violin, I guess. It takes skill to play on her. And you—oh, I believe you're a splendid big drum. You've been marking time for the rest of us all the four years. As for me, I'm only an old tin horn. You need to spend all your breath to get any music. Even then it isn't sickeningly sweet, so to speak. Still for an audience in sympathy with the performer——"

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"That is what college has given us," put in Lila who had been listening, "it gives us sympathy. Being with different persons, you know, and loving them."

"Oh, yes!" Robbie's sigh of intense assent left her breathless, "loving them."

"Now, then, girls!" Berta's hand was lifted again to beat time as the clapping for the sophomores subsided. Then the seniors sang. They sang the songs that were to be interspersed as illustrations in Bea's class history. There was the elegant stanza which they had shouted all the way to the mountain lake that first October at college.

"Rah, 'rah, 'rah! kerchoo, kerchoo!
We are freshmen—
Who are you?"

From that brilliant composition the selections ranged through four years of fun and sentiment with an occasional flight to the poetry of earnest feeling as well as many a joyous swoop into hilarious inanity.

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When tired of standing around the tree, the class fluttered across the campus to the broad stone steps in front of the recitation hall.

Bea clung to Robbie's arm again and reached for Lila in their flight. "I'm 'most sure we look like nymphs flying through the glades, with our draperies blowing in the lines of swift motion. I love to run when I feel like it. Robbie Belle, shall we ever dare to run when we get home?"

Robbie did not hear her. From her seat on the steps she gazed at Berta who was standing before the ranks of familiar faces, her eager face alight with the exhilaration of the hour. Once she threw back her head, laughing at some ridiculous verse. Her eyes sought Robbie's for an instant, smiled, then danced away again. Robbie swallowed once, unconsciously, and moved closer to Bea.

In a semicircle sweeping around the group of singers, sophomores and stray juniors and many a wandering alumna in a flower-decked hat had gathered to listen. In a pause between the songs. Robbie surveyed them gravely, unrecognizing any of the older guests until presently one face stood out vaguely familiar in the clear twilight. It was a beautiful face, framed by dusky hair beneath the wreath of crimson roses on her hat. The eyes were dusky too and deep-set. They were staring at Robbie with an intensity of grieving affection that contrasted sharply with the stern, almost resentful, expression of her finely cut mouth.

As Robbie gazed back in fascinated perplexity, the face suddenly curved into a smile so tenderly radiant that Robbie felt quite dazzled for a moment. Involuntarily she smiled back, while striving to grasp the dim recollection. Who could it be? She had surely seen her before somewhere. But where? At college? At home? Where was it? Slowly a vision grew distinct in her groping memory. It was a vision of Elizabeth, her sister, lifting a photograph from a pile of others. "This," she had said, "is my Jessica. She knows all my family from their pictures, and some day she shall come home with me and meet you your own selves. She wishes Robbie Belle were to enter college before we finish. Robbie will be a senior when we go back for our fifth year reunion."

Robbie's chest heaved abruptly under the shock of identifying the face amid the encircling throng. It was Jessica More, Elizabeth's best friend at college. This was the June of her class reunion. Robbie Belle was a senior. But Elizabeth was not there, as she had planned. Jessica had been expelled before she graduated, and Elizabeth had died.

Before the singing was over, Jessica had disappeared. Then in the rush of last things Robbie forgot her for a time. Some of the seniors hurried away on hospitable duties bent, for numerous relatives had already arrived. There were to be informal gatherings in different rooms. A few went to the Phi Beta Kappa lecture in the chapel. To tell the truth, however, these were but few indeed, for to the seniors the last evenings were too precious, to be wasted on mere scholarly discourse. Probably Jessica had gone there with the rest of the alumnæ, reflected Robbie Belle as she sat beside Berta and the others in the soft sweet darkness. With arms intertwined they talked low or fell silent, lingering over this farewell to the dear college days.

"I love everybody in the class," whispered Lila once.

"In the college," amended Bea promptly.

"Oh, in the whole world!" exclaimed Berta.

Robbie nodded assent so solemnly that Bea leaned down to peer at her more closely. "A regular Chinese mandarin," she teased, "or are you nodding in your sleep? You approve of Berta's breadth evidently. Why do people always speak about the value of being broadened? I think it is nobler to be deep than broad, I do. I'd rather divide my heart in four pieces than in forty billion."

"There are two hundred in the class," said Robbie, "and there were only one hundred in my sister's class, but I am quite sure that they did not love each other any more than we do."



SHE HELD BOTH HANDS, SMILING

The next morning saw the seniors assemble at the amphitheatre which had been prepared for the Class Day exercises. Berta was already on the platform, assisting the committee in the arrangement of seats for the class. Among later comers who were hurrying across the campus Bea caught up with Robbie Belle.

"I am hastening across the sward," she announced in cheerfully inane greeting, "what is a sward anyhow, and why isn't it pronounced the same as sword?"

"It's grass," said Robbie Belle. Bea felt a speaking silence fall and glanced up to catch the direction of her gaze. Between them and the expanse of mingled chairs and girls around the platform against the wall of the nearest dormitory, a stranger was moving rapidly toward them, her eager eyes on Robbie.

"Little Robbie Belle! I knew you last night from your picture." She held both hands, smiling.

Bea considered the two pairs of shoulders on a level. "Little!" she sniffed to herself, "it must be a very old alum."

Robbie turned to introduce her. "This is my friend, Beatrice Leigh, Miss More. Bea, this is my sister's best friend. I remembered you too, last night, Miss More. I remembered—I—I wondered ——" Robbie's tongue stumbled in embarrassment at the verge of candor.

Miss More's mouth hardened slightly, though her eyes still smiled. "You wondered how I happen to be here for the reunion of a class from which I was expelled. Is that it? Perhaps you are unaware that I have been reinstated. The faculty has at last reconsidered their unjust decision. They acknowledge that it was based upon a misunderstanding. I have made up the work at home. To-morrow I shall receive two degrees, the Bachelor's with your class, the Master's with the post-graduates. I am sure you congratulate me."

"Oh!" gasped Robbie Belle, "oh, yes!"

Bea succeeded in depressing somewhat the round-eyed stare with which she had listened to this extraordinary speech. "I think it is perfectly lovely, Miss More," she said. "Your class must be delighted. It is a triumph—a splendid triumph. Oh,—ah!" She turned at the sound of a faint call behind her: "Jessica!"

From a group of alumnæ under a cluster of spruces, somebody was walking quickly toward the three. Bea recognized in her a brilliant young instructor at the college.

"Jessica, I am—glad. How do you do?" She put out her hand.

Miss More lifted her eyes, coolly scanned the other woman from the tip of her russet shoes to the crown of her sailor hat, then gazed vacantly over her head, before addressing Robbie again.

"Then to-morrow, Robbie. Don't forget that I wish to see you after the commencement exercises for a few minutes. There are questions I desire to ask. Your mother is well, I hope."

Two minutes later Robbie had reached one of the chairs and dropped into it with a limpness strangely inharmonious with her statuesque proportions. "Bea, they belong to the same class."

Bea sank down beside her. "That was awful—awful. Those others were watching her from the path. Why did she do it? I don't understand."

Robbie passed her hand across her forehead. "I don't quite remember everything," she said,

“but I have an impression that it was Miss Whiton who was to blame for having Miss More expelled. She was class president, or something, and felt responsible. Elizabeth said she thought it was for the honor of the college. She meant to do right. And now to think it was all a mistake! Miss More will receive her degrees to-morrow.”

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“Did Miss Whiton accuse her of any wrong or make complaint?”

“No, not exactly. I think she believed that Miss More’s behavior somewhere reflected on the college, and she considered it her duty to report the circumstances. Or maybe it was appearances—it seems now that it must have been only appearances. That started the trouble, and Miss More resented it. She was stubborn or indifferent about some requirements. I don’t remember quite what, and Elizabeth never liked to talk about it. Elizabeth wrote to her every week until she—until she left us.” Robbie’s lip twitched suddenly. Bea saw it and gently passing her arm through the other’s arm drew her on to join the class assembled at the amphitheatre.

The next day brought commencement. Bea from her place among the rows of white-clad seniors in the body of the chapel could by bending forward slightly catch a glimpse of Miss More’s profile at the head of the front pew at the right. When she raised her eyes she could see Miss Whiton’s coldly regular features conspicuous in their clean-cut fairness among the younger instructors in the choir-seats behind the trustees on the platform. Bea had never liked Miss Whiton. It seemed to her now, as she studied the immobile face, that she had always recognized there a suggestion of the self-righteous Pharisee. There could be nothing but misunderstanding and antagonism between the possessor of such a countenance and Miss More with those eyes of hers, that nose and that mouth. Bea’s labors over the classes in manners had included some research in the subject of physiognomy. Now she leaned forward to secure another view of that profile in the front pew. Then she settled back with the contented sigh of an investigator whose surmise has proved correct. Miss More’s features certainly expressed an impulsive, reckless and lovable temperament as opposed to Miss Whiton’s conscientious and calculating prudence. Oh, yes, there was conscience enough in the icily handsome face among the instructors. It was conscience doubtless that had driven her across the campus to speak to Miss More on Class Day morning. Bea sighed again, this time with a faint twinge of sympathy. She generally meant well herself. A conscience was a very queer thing—she thought so still even if she had heard it all explained and analyzed in senior ethics.

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“Surgite.” That was Prexie’s voice. The class rose in obedience to the word. Bea found herself standing with the others while the Latin sentences rolled melodiously over their heads. She never could translate from hearing. Absently her glance sought the front pew where Miss More had turned to watch them. The girl’s wistful gaze caught the expression of passionate regret in her deep-set eyes, and clung there fascinated for an endless moment before tearing itself free.

After it was over, after the class had filed upon the platform to receive their diplomas, after Prexie had delivered his annual address and the procession of graduates, alumnae and faculty had marched out into the golden sunshine, Bea drew aside to wait under an elm. Berta spied her and beckoned, then came hurrying.

313

“Lila is over at the doors on guard to capture the various relatives and start them toward the cottages for dinner. The trustees entertain the alumnae in the main dining-room. The seniors will go to Strong Hall. Aren’t you ready?”

“I’m getting an impression,” answered Bea, “gothic portals, graceful elms, bare-headed girls in white, sun-flecked lawns and glimpse of the sparkling lake beyond, groups intermingling—”

“I’ll help give you that impression.”

Bea slipped nimbly out of reach in time to escape the promised pinch—or it may have been a squeeze.

“I’ve got it already—a hundred of them. You’re in two or three. And Robbie—do you see Robbie anywhere?”

Robbie approached at the moment. “Bea, have you noticed Miss More pass? I found something last night in my sister’s college scrapbook—her memory-bill, you know. It is something for Miss More.”

“Yes, over there half way to the main building. Look—that one in white all alone. You can overtake her if you hurry, Robbie. Oh, Berta!” Bea turned and held out one hand impulsively. “If you could only have seen her eyes while she watched us in chapel! She was thinking of her own class, how she had been driven away from them in disgrace. It was tragic. She—she—” Bea gulped and caught herself back from falling over the brink into the pit of palpable emotion. “In fact, I am almost sure she—hm-m,—envied us.”

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She glanced apprehensively at her companion in dread of the usual quick teasing rejoinder; but Berta was soberly gazing after Robbie.

“Robbie has dropped a paper, Bea,” she said, “I saw it flutter. Come.”

Bea flitted across the grass, her bright hair an aureole in the sunlight. Her fingers seized the bit of white; her eyes read the message:

“Sunday evening after Bible lecture.

“Jessica and the rest of us are choosing mottoes to live out just for experiment this week.

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“Marian: ‘Love seeketh not her own.’ (She always gets to places first.)

"Alice: 'Is not easily provoked.' (Oh, oh!)

"Louise: 'Is not puffed up.' (Ah!)

"Jessica: 'is kind.' (And when she is good, she is very, very good.)

Elizabeth: "envieth not." (My brain doesn't suit.)

"Jessica says hers is the easiest because it means just to keep from hating anybody, and she loves the whole college."

"Oh, I didn't mean to read it." Bea almost clapped her hand over her impetuous eyes. "Robbie," she broke into a run, "Robbie Belle, here is something you dropped."

As Robbie turned at the call, one of the trustees, an elderly woman whose white hair seemed to soften the effect of her energetic manner and keen gaze, paused to speak to Miss More. The two seniors strolled on at a leisurely pace while waiting for an opportunity to ask attention without interrupting a speech. The distance intervening lessened step by step till Bea could not help overhearing the trustee's distinct low tones.

"—exceedingly difficult to choose between the two candidates. Their qualifications balance distractingly. Personally I incline to Miss Whiton, and I should very much like to see her win this unusual position. Her original work certainly deserves it. However I know her so slightly that I am reluctant to give my decisive vote until I learn more of her from her contemporaries. You were in her class, Miss More, I understand."

"Yes."

At the smothered intensity of that simple word, Bea's head rotated swiftly to stare at the source of it. She had never seen that beautiful face like this before. On the campus Class Day morning it had been friendly though with the hint of hardness about the mouth. In chapel it had been tragic with regret over the irrevocable. Now the dusky eyes were blazing with the light of coming triumph over an enemy at last delivered into her power.

"It is an exceptional distinction for so young a woman," continued the trustee, "and because it means so much to each of the rivals, a feather's weight of evidence may turn the scales for one or the other. I am anxious to be impartial. I invite this discussion merely to assure myself of Miss Whiton's irreproachable record. I wish sincerely to see her win."

"You never heard the exact circumstances that led to my expulsion from college?"

The defiant ring of this abrupt question brought Bea to her sense of the situation. She put out one hand to draw Robbie beyond earshot. But Robbie did not notice her. She was already touching Miss More's arm.

"Miss More, pardon me. I have hurried to give you this. I—I think Elizabeth would have enjoyed showing it to you. I—wish—she could have been here to-day. She would have been—glad."

Miss More took the paper mechanically. "Thank you, Robbie Belle. Will you wait one moment, dear? I want to speak to you." She turned again to the older woman. "It may be an enlightening little tale," she began, "and Miss Whiton plays a part in it. These are the facts."

Bea watched her, fascinated. The eyes seemed to be gazing away beyond the evergreens at old, unhappy, far-off things. Slowly they returned to nearer objects, dropped suddenly and caught for an instant upon some one passing by. At sight of the swift gleam of bitter recognition, Bea followed the direction, and beheld Miss Whiton. She looked back again in time to see a wonderful change as Miss More's glance traveled unconsciously to the paper in her hand.

Robbie's wistful regard was also lingering upon the paper.

"Elizabeth loved it all—the class—the whole college."

The trustee was evidently in haste. "And this enlightening little tale of yours, Miss More? Pardon me for urging you on. The importance of the issue—ah!" Bea saw her nod acquiescence in response to a gesture from some one who was waiting at the porte cochere. "I fear I shall not have time for it now. May I consult you later? You are sure, Miss More, that the story is something that I ought to hear?"

Miss More hesitated. "I don't know," she said slowly. "It may have been merely a schoolgirl misunderstanding. I will—think it over and let you know after the dinner. In any event, I thank you for your confidence. Miss Whiton certainly merits the honor."

It seemed to Bea that Miss More looked after the older woman with an expression of half-puzzled surprise at her own indecision. Then she turned to Robbie.

"I remember that evening," she spoke in a curiously softened tone. "Elizabeth sat in the glow of the drop-light and scribbled this card, while the rest of us watched her idly, and talked, half serious, half in fun over the novelty of choosing our mottoes. It was Elizabeth who had proposed it. She had such a shy, sweet, humorous way of being good. Everybody loved her."

Robbie nodded speechlessly. After a moment she said, "The rest of your verse is 'Love suffereth long and is kind.'"

The deep-set eyes clouded again under the dusky hair.

"I—have—suffered," she said slowly.

Bea pinched her own arm in a quick agony of vicarious embarrassment. How could a person show her feelings right out like that before anybody? What was the use of going around talking

about such things? It was not very polite to make other people uncomfortable. Bea smothered a quick little sob and walked on, staring straight ahead.

It was Robbie who turned to look into the face so near her own. She saw the clouds lift before the dawning of an exquisite smile like a ray of sunshine after a stormy day.

“Love suffereth long and is kind,” repeated the oddly gentle voice. “I have suffered, and I will try—to be kind. I think Elizabeth would have been glad.”

“Elizabeth is glad,” said Robbie Belle.

CHAPTER XV

VICTORY

At her escape into the corridor Berta paused for a moment in the shadow of the staircase to brush the excitement from her glowing face. She winked rapidly once or twice in hopes of smothering the sparkle in her eyes, but succeeded only in nicking a happy tear drop from her lashes. Then she smoothed the dimple from her cheek and tried to straighten her lips into the sober dignity proper for a senior who was on the honor list and had just come from an interview with the critic of her commencement essay.

Her efforts were all in vain, however, for at the very minute that the dimple came dancing out again and the rebellious mouth quivered back into its joyous curves, somebody with a swift tap-tap of light heels flew down the stairs in a rustle and a flutter and darted toward Berta.

“They’ve come! They’re here! The Board of Editors is going to meet in the lecture room immediately to open the boxes. Four big beautiful boxes full of splendid great books all in green with gilt lettering. Hurry! Hurry quick yourself! You’re head literary editor. It’s really your book—the ideas, editorials, verses, farce, everything! The sale opens at five. Everybody’s crazy to see the new senior Annual. Our Annual! Oh, Berta!” She seized the taller girl around the waist and whirled her down the hall till loose sheets of paper from her dangling note-book flitted merrily hither and yon.

“Bea, take care! You’re crumpling my essay.”

“Your essay? Oh, that’s so! Senior president, Annual editor, honor girl, commencement speaker, graduate fellow-heigho! She ‘bore her blushing honors thick upon her.’ No wonder you look uplifted. Listen! Behold! Tell me, do her little feet really touch the solid humble earth?”

As mischievous Bea stopped, with anxiety and awe written large on her saucy features to investigate Berta’s shoes, a door near them opened and a slender woman with fast-graying hair and a curiously still face emerged. There was the ghost of a twinkle in her gray eyes. The transom had not been entirely closed.

“Miss Abbott, may I take that essay again, for a few minor suggestions? If you will drop in after chapel I shall have it ready for you. Permit me once more to congratulate you on its excellence and originality. It has never been my pleasure to read any undergraduate work of greater promise.” She withdrew after the nicker of a quizzical smile in Bea’s direction.

That young lady gasped and then happening to notice that her mouth was ajar carefully closed it with the aid of both hands.

“Berta Abbott! To have your essay praised by Miss Thorne the terrible, who never approves of anything, and yet you stand there like a common mortal! You live, you breathe, you walk, you talk, just the same as you used to do! She says it has promise. I do believe that she never said as much before about anybody except maybe Shakespeare when he was young. Oh, just wait until she sees the Annual!”

Berta had colored hotly. “Bea, don’t tell anybody, please. Of course, I care what she says. I care most of all—I care heaps—about her opinion that the qualities are—are promising. But if I should fizzle out and never amount to anything! It’s all in the future, you see, and I’d be so ashamed to have the girls quoting her now. If I shouldn’t win the fellowship, if I had to go to teaching next year and give it up—”

Bea pounced upon her. “You’re a nice sweet girl, and I love you to distraction. Don’t you worry about that fellowship, but trot up-stairs with me this instant and help hammer the covers off those boxes. You’ll be surprised!”

“Shall I?” said Berta idly, as she followed in Bea’s eddying wake, “I don’t see how, since I read the proof and corrected the lists of names.”

“Hm!” Bea turned confidentially and shot an alarming sentence toward her companion. “Well, I’ll tell you; everything you wrote is signed. The other editors did it last thing—sometimes your initials, sometimes your name. It’s for the sake of your reputation.”

“My reputation!” exclaimed the victim. “Oh,” she groaned, “they did that? Oh, my land! My

name on everything. I shall sink through the floor. Run, run quick!"

The corridors were almost deserted during that recitation period. There was no stray freshman in sight to gaze scandalized at the vision of two reverend seniors racing toward the lecture room door. Berta dashed in just as the chairman of the board, with hair flying and cheeks flushed from the exertion, was brandishing a hatchet in one hand and a splintered fragment of wood in the other. The business editor hammered away with characteristic energy at the ragged remnants. The rest stood around waiting as patiently as possible in their weaponless zeal. Several glanced up and grinned provokingly at the appearance of their head literary editor.

"So you've heard the news, have you?" began the artist, "you look wild. We knew you'd never consent to sign the things yourself, and it was rank injustice to let you do the work and receive no special credit. Even the ideas are yours, but we couldn't tag a name to them. Wish we could. That one for the main feature—the pictures of distinguished alumnæ—"

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"Hold on!" the chairman backed into a convenient corner before Berta's frenzied reproaches, "it's all right. We added a note of explanation. Nobody will blame you for writing so well. And the initials are very small anyhow. Here, look!" She made a dive for the box, ripped off a second board with quick blows, snatched away the wrapping paper underneath, and dislodged a handsome green volume from its snug nest. She thrust it into Berta's hands. "It's your book really more than anybody's—your first published book."

Berta took it, sat down in a desk-chair near by, and turned the leaves slowly with fingers that trembled from nervousness.

Bea bent over her shoulder. "It seems as if that name of yours is on every page," she teased, "pretty name, don't you think? And isn't it a beautiful, beautiful book! Wide margins, heavy paper, clear print, fine reproductions. Won't the girls be delighted with those pictures of the basket ball teams! See, ah, there is the page of photographs. You suggested that the editors should appear as the babies they used to be forty years or so ago. What a dear little curly-head you were at the age of two, Berta! I want to hug you."

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The embarrassment began to fade from Berta's expression as she gazed at the baby faces before her. "That's the great thing I miss at college, don't you, Bea? There aren't any babies here. We ought to borrow some once in a while to vary the monotony of books. I have three little nieces at home, you know. Such darlings! I wish I had one here now this minute."

"Which do you choose—the baby or the book? Oh, Berta! Would you sacrifice this book for a mere child? This beautiful, splendid, green book with gilt lettering and your name scrawled everywhere?"

"The oldest baby looks a good deal like that photograph of me," continued Berta softly, "she is named after me, too. I wish you could see her. The way she holds up her little arms and clings to you! I haven't seen her since last September."

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"Hark!" Bea sprang from her perch on a desk-arm. "There are the girls now clamoring for admission. It must be the hour for the sale to begin. Isn't it fun! Fly, Berta Abbott, flee and bury your blushes. The play is now on."

Berta fled. She felt an impulse to creep away into some dark corner till all the excitement—and criticism—had subsided. Of course, it was rather pleasant, she acknowledged reluctantly to her candid self. There was something down underneath tingling and glowing. Very likely it was gratified vanity. Everybody liked to be praised and admired, but not too much, for that was uncomfortable. It was like being set upon a pinnacle and stared at. And she did care. She had worked hard and long for success. She had proved that she could work. Now if she should be granted the foreign fellowship, she could go on and on, step by step, till some day perhaps she might become a famous college professor or maybe the president of a university. That would be accomplishing a career worth while.

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Berta never quite remembered how she screwed up resolution enough to enter the dining-room that night and face the storm of congratulations, affectionate jests, and laughing taunts over her eminence. The last copy of the Annual had been sold before the gong whirred out its summons to dinner; and dozens of dilatory students were already besieging the chairman for an extra edition. After dinner Berta was captured for a dance in parlor J till chapel time. The lilt of the music was still echoing in her ears, her heart beating in happy rhythm to its harmony, when at last she slipped into the back pew and leaned her head against the wall, her lips relaxing in happy curves, her hands lying idle in her lap.

Prexie's voice sounded soothingly far away. Generally he read a chapter first, then gave out the hymn, and after the singing he always led in prayer. It hardly seemed worth while to listen when one's own thoughts were so pleasant. Berta dropped her lashes to hide the shining light of gladness. Weren't they dear, dear unselfish girls to rejoice with her and for her! She loved them and they loved her. The best part of any triumph was the consciousness that victory would please her friends and her family. Her mother would be glad, and her father, the small brothers and sisters, and even the pretty little sister-in-law. Eva would not understand entirely, for she hated to read and cared about nothing but the babies since Robert had died. Robert would have sympathized, since he had loved study almost as much as he had loved Eva. When he decided to marry, he gave up his science and went into a bank. He chose a wife and children instead of congenial ambition. If he had lived, he would have been glad in Berta's success. Maybe when the baby nieces grew old enough to understand, they would be proud of their famous aunt. It was very, very sweet to feel that people were proud of her.

330

Listen! Berta straightened suddenly and then leaned forward. What was Prexie saying? Why, he hadn't even opened the Bible yet. "—and so, as the essays submitted in competition were all remarkably good, the judges would have experienced great difficulty in reaching a decision if it had not been for one exceptional even among the dozen most excellent papers. The prize for the best Shakespearean essay has been unanimously awarded to Miss Roberta Abbott."

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A low murmur swept over the bright-hued congregation. Several faces in the pew before her turned to smile at Berta. She smiled back half involuntarily and gripped her fingers together, conscious only of a smothering sensation and a wonder that her chest kept heaving faster and faster. It frightened her to have things happen like this one after another. She had won the Shakespearean prize. How much was it? Thirty dollars? Fifty? It didn't matter. She could take baby Berta to the seashore with her. She had won. The girls would get tired of congratulating her.

Hark! Prexie had gone on speaking.

"Accordingly," he was saying as Berta braced herself once more to attention, "I am sure you will agree with me that the faculty acted justly and wisely this afternoon in electing Miss Roberta Abbott to hold the European Fellowship this coming year."

The murmur this time swelled to a soft tumult of fluttering and whispering, which broke here and there into a muffled clapping, for everybody liked Berta. But when more faces turned in joyous nodding toward the back pew they found no answering smile. Berta in panic had slipped down the aisle and vanished through the swinging doors into the dusky corridor.

332

"Ah, Miss Abbott!" The messenger girl overtook her at the foot of the broad staircase. "Here is a special delivery letter for you. It was brought from town five minutes ago."

Berta glanced at the address. Yes, it was from her sister-in-law as she had expected. Eva was always falling into foolish little flurries and rushing to consult friends and relatives by mail or wire or word of mouth. Possibly this important communication was a request for advice about the babies' pique coats. It could wait for a reading till Berta had found a safe refuge from the girls who would certainly surround her as soon as chapel was over. They would follow Robbie and Bea.

Where could she go to escape the enthusiasm? Her room would be the first point of attack, and Bea's the second. Ah, now she recalled Miss Thorne's speech about calling for the commencement essay at this hour. She might as well go there now and wait till her critic should return from services, if indeed she had attended them to-night.

333

At the door Berta knocked and bent her head to listen, then knocked again. Still no answer. She waited another minute, her eyes absently hovering over the plants that banked the wide window there at the end of the transverse corridor. The evening breeze sweet from loitering in clover fields drifted in through the open casement. Miss Thorne was very fond of flowers. That was a queer trait in a person who seemed to care so little for persons. There always seemed something frozen about this gray-haired, immobile-faced woman with her stern manner and steely eyes. Sometimes Berta thought of her as like a dying fire that smoldered under smothering ashes.

Berta turned the knob gently and entered. A faint rosy glow from the lowered drop-light shone on the piles of papers and scattered books on the library table. The curtains rippled in the sudden draught caused by the opening of the door, and a whiff of fragrance from a jar of apple-blossoms on the bookcase floated past the visitor. Berta glanced around with a little shrug that was half a shiver. A room frequently partakes of the nature of its occupant; and the atmosphere of this one always made her heart sink with a quiver of loneliness over the strange chill of lifelessness there in spite of the rosy drop-light, the fluttering curtains, and the drifting breath of flowers. It was a large room with many easy chairs in it—and they were all empty. Even when Miss Thorne was there it seemed lonesome, perhaps because she was such a slender little woman and so icily quiet.

334

Berta chose one of the empty chairs and read the letter. Then she let the sheets fall loose in her lap and sat there without moving while the minutes went creeping by and the transparent curtains rippled now and then in the evening breeze. Through the window she could see a great star hanging above the peak of a shadowy evergreen that stirred softly to and fro against the fading sky. Once the twilight call of a distant robin sounded its long-drawn plaintive music, and Berta felt her lip tremble. She raised her hand half unconsciously to soothe the ache in her throat.

335

Miss Thorne glided in. "Good evening, Miss Abbott. May I add my congratulations, or am I right in concluding that you have taken refuge here from the persecutions of your friends? It is a great pleasure to me to know that you will have the opportunity to keep on with your studying this next year. You must allow me to say so much at least. And now, with regard to the essay —"

Berta watched the slight figure move noiselessly about in the act of making tea.

"I wished to call your attention particularly, Miss Abbott, to the qualities which strike me as most promising. A vast amount of futile effort is wasted every year by workers who have not yet recognized their special talents. There is continual friction between the round peg and the square hole, and vice versa. Now in your case, when you are ready to plan your course of study for your graduate work abroad—"

"Don't!"

The tone was so sharp that Miss Thorne lifted her head quickly and shot a keen glance at the girl before her. The attractive face had grown strained and the eyes were burning restlessly.

336

"What is it, Berta?" No student had ever heard her voice so soft before. "You are in trouble."

Berta looked at her for a moment without replying. Then she picked up her letter, folded it carefully in its original creases, and fitted it into the envelope. "Yes," she said at last, "I am in trouble. My sister-in-law has lost her income from a foolish investment, entirely her own fault, and she is utterly helpless. My parents have no money to spare. There is nobody else but me to support her and the three babies. She writes that a position in the high school will be vacant next year and I ought to apply at once."

Miss Thorne sat silent. "And there is no other way?" she asked after what seemed a long, long time.

"None," answered Berta.

"You will give up the fellowship, your hopes of doing exceptional work? You will sacrifice all your ambition and take up the drudgery of teaching in an uncongenial sphere for the rest of your life?"

337

"Well, I can't let the babies go to an orphan asylum, can I?" demanded the girl brusquely to conceal the pain, "there is no one else, I tell you."

The woman rose and put both arms around the girl. "Berta, dear," she said, "you are right. Once I hesitated at the point where you are now. I had to choose between the demands of home and the invitation of ambition. I let the home-ties snap, and—here is my empty room. Now there is nobody that cares."

Berta glanced around again with a little shiver. "There isn't any question about it for me," she said, "I've got to take care of the babies. And"—she straightened her shoulders suddenly as if throwing off a weight, "it won't be so hard when I get used to the idea, because, you see, I—love them."

Faithful Robbie Belle had found out her refuge somehow and was waiting in the corridor. With that comforting arm across her shoulders, Berta poured out the story of her sudden disappointment.

At first Robbie was silent. Then she spoke gently: "But, Berta, you have had the four years at college, you know, and four years are a good deal. There are thousands and thousands of girls who never have even that."

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"I know," answered Berta, her voice smothered against the convenient shoulder. "And that thought helps—at least, I think it will help to-morrow."

Robbie's strong, warm hand sought and clasped Berta's nervous fingers. "All right," she acquiesced cheerily. "Now who do you suppose wrote that epilogue in last year's Annual?"

"We go to meet the future, strong of soul,
In sunlight or in shadow, holding fast
The inviolable gift the years enroll;
The Past is ours; nothing can change the Past."

END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BEATRICE LEIGH AT COLLEGE: A STORY
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