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Title: Elizabeth Hobart at Exeter Hall

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Release date: August 10, 2008 [eBook #26258]

Most recently updated: January 3, 2021

Language: English

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

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ELIZABETH HOBART AT EXETER HALL ***



Elizabeth raised her cup to the toast.

ELIZABETH HOBART AT EXETER HALL

BY
JEAN K. BAIRD,
AUTHOR OF

"DANNY," "CASH THREE," "THE HONOR GIRL," ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY R. G. VOSBURGH

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ELIZABETH HOBART AT
EXETER HALL.

CHAPTER I.

PREPARATIONS FOR SCHOOL.

Bitumen was what its name suggested. There was soft coal and smoke everywhere. Each day the clothes on the line were flecked with black. The buildings had the dull, dingy look which soot alone can give. The houses sagged on either side of narrow, unpaved streets, where during a rainy period ducks clattered about with their broods, and a few portly pigs led their shoats for a mud bath.

During a summer shower barefooted urchins waded knee-deep in the gutters, their trousers rolled to their thighs. Irish-Americans shot mud balls at black-eyed Italians; Polanders and Slavs together tried the depths of the same puddles; while the little boys of the Russian Fatherland played in a group by themselves at one end of the square.

The houses were not so much homes as places of shelter. Walls painted red were the popular fancy. Although there was room enough, gardens were unknown, while blooming plants were rare enough to cause comment. Each dooryard had its heap of empty cans and pile of ashes. Ill-kempt women stood idly about the doorways, or sat upon unscrubbed steps with dirty babies in their arms.

Bitumen was not a place of poverty. There was plenty of work for the men, and good wages if they chose to earn them. They lacked nothing to eat or wear. Money, so long as it lasted, was spent with a prodigal hand. The Company store kept nothing too good for their palates. Expensive fruits and early vegetables were in demand. The cheap finery bought for the young folk lasted but a few weeks, and was tossed aside by the next "pay day."

There was one saloon in the place. It did a thriving business in spite of some unseen influence working against it. Its proprietor was one Dennis O'Day, who held the politics of the little town in his palm. He was a little brighter, a little keener and much more unscrupulous than the other men of the place, but he felt at times the force of some one greater than himself, and it was always directed against his business. He perceived it when he received orders that, in fulfillment of the law, he must remove the blinds before his windows, and keep his place open to

the public view. He felt it again when he received a legal notice about free lunches, closing hours, and selling to minors. Never once had he stepped beyond the most rigid observance of the law but he was called to account for it. He knew some keen eye was upon him and some one ready to fight him and his business at every turn.

The great blow came when the Club House was established. An empty store-room had been fitted up with chairs and tables and a supply of books and magazines. Here the boys had the liberty of coming to smoke and talk together while Joe Ratowsky served coffee and sandwiches cheaper than O'Day could sell beer.

It was not Ratowsky's doings. There was some one else behind the scenes who provided the brains and money to keep the business moving. Dennis O'Day meant to find out who that person was and square accounts with him. But for three years he had been no nearer the truth than now. To learn anything from Ratowsky was impossible, for the man had a tied tongue when he chose.

In the midst of all the dirt and squalor there was one touch of dainty hominess and comfort. This was found near Mountain Glen, where the superintendent of the mines lived. The house was an unpretentious wooden building with great porches and big, airy rooms, but the windows shone in the sunlight, the curtains were white as snow, and the worn floors of the porches were always scrubbed.

In front and at the sides of the house was a lawn mowed until it looked like a stretch of moss. Masses of scarlet sage and cannas grew near the house, while at the rear a white-washed fence gleamed white.

The superintendency of the Bitumen mines was not the most desirable position, cutting off, as it did, the man and his family from all congenial companionship. The salary attached was fairly good, quite sufficient to provide a comfortable, if not luxurious, living. The present incumbent had begun his profession with other ambitions than living in a little mining town.

Twenty years before, Mr. Hobart, then newly married, had every prospect of becoming prominent in his profession. He had new theories on mining and mine-explosives. He had brought to perfection a substance to destroy the explosive gas which collects in unused chambers of mines.

Just at the time when the mining interests were about to make use of his discovery, his health failed from too close application. He was threatened with consumption, brought about by inhaling poisonous gases. He was ordered from the laboratory into the mountains. The Kettle Creek Mining Company offered him a position at Bitumen, one of the highest soft coal regions in the world. The air was bracing and suited to his physical condition. Confident that a few months would find him restored to health, he accepted. But with each attempted return to lower altitudes the enemy came back, and months passed into years, until he came to look upon Bitumen as the scene for his life work.

Here his only child, Elizabeth, was born. Here she grew into girlhood, knowing no companionship except that of her parents and Miss Hale, a woman past middle age, who, in her youth, had travelled abroad and had spent the greater part of her time in the study of languages and music. She had come to Bitumen with her father for the same reason that had brought Mr. Hobart.

She had a quaint old place just at the edge of town. Here, during the warm weather, she cultivated flowers and vegetables. In her home were unique collections of botanical and geological specimens, books, and music. She found recreation in painting both in oils and water colors, and in plaster-casting.

She paid little attention to dress. Most frequently she might be seen in a gown ten years behind the fashions, driving a dashing span of horses along the rough mountain roads in search of some member of the mission school in which she was interested. Most of the miners were Catholics, but here and there among them she found members of her own church and sought to bring and keep them together. Her appearance might cause a stranger to smile, but when once he heard her cultivated voice, and caught the varying expression of her face, he forgot all else.

Miss Hale taught Elizabeth French and music. Few days in recent years had been too cold or stormy to keep her from driving down the rough road to the Hobart home for the sake of the lessons.

The other branches of his daughter's education, Mr. Hobart took under his own charge. He taught her mathematics as conscientiously as though he expected her to enter his own profession.

This line of work had not been a burden to her. She had her father's aptitude for study, and took up an original problem in geometry as most girls take up their fancy work.

Elizabeth had no girl friends at Bitumen. Her father was the only really young person she knew, for although in years he was not young, yet in the joy he took in living, he was still a boy. He had the buoyancy of youth and the ability of manhood. No laugh came clearer or more often than his. No one could be dull in his presence.

His daughter took part in his pleasures. She was interested in his work; even his business affairs were not unknown to her. There was one subject, however, with which she was not acquainted. Many times while she was at her books, her parents with Miss Hale were deep in a discussion, which ceased when she joined them.

She had finished her second reading of Cicero, and reviewed all the originals in solid geometry. Her summer suspension of study was about to begin. She was conscious that something of importance to herself was brewing in which she took no part. Miss Hale had made unusual visits and had been closeted with her parents for hours. One day Elizabeth sat studying in an upper room, and from her window she saw Miss Hale drive away. At the same instant her father called, "Elizabeth, Elizabeth!"

She ran down-stairs. Her father and mother stood at the foot looking pleased.

"I know she will be glad," her mother said.

"Of course she will," replied her father.

She paused on the stairway in wonder. She was very good to look at as she stood so. Her soft hair was drawn loosely back from her face, and hung in a long, fair plait down her back. She was not beautiful, only wholesome looking, with a clear, healthy color, and large, honest eyes. Her dress was a simple, inexpensive shirtwaist suit, but every article about her was in order. There was no sagging of belts, or loose hooks.

Her father held out a book as she came toward them. He was brimming over with joy at the prospect of her delight.

"It is a catalog of Exeter Hall, Elizabeth. That is the school Miss Hale attended. I've looked over dozens of catalogs and this pleases your mother and me best. We want you to go in the fall."

"Oh!" was all she said then, but it was expressive enough to satisfy her parents. She had read stories of schoolgirl life which seemed more like fairy stories than experiences of real girls.

"Look it all over, Elizabeth. The course of study is mapped out. We think the classical course suited to you. Your mother and I are going to drive down to the mines. Study the catalog while we are gone and be ready to tell us what you think of it when we come back."

She needed no second bidding to do this. By the close of the afternoon, she had read and re-read the prospectus. She became so excited she could scarcely sit still. There was one matter which did not fully satisfy her. She had advanced beyond the course at Exeter in some branches and smiled as she read the amount of work laid out in botany for the Middle Class. She had far exceeded that, for she had found and mounted every specimen of plant and flower that grew for miles around Bitumen.

The cost of a year's schooling was a surprise. Her father and Miss Hale could teach her everything that the course at Exeter included. It seemed foolish to spend so much money when all could be learned at home.

That evening Miss Hale drove over to see how Elizabeth was pleased with the prospect of going away to school. The matter was discussed from all points of view. Then Elizabeth expressed the thought which had come to her while studying the catalog:

"But I have had more work than the Freshman and Middle Classes require. It would not take me long to complete the work for the Senior year. I want to go,—I think I have always wanted to go to school, but it seems such a waste of money. You can teach me more, I can really learn as much at home."

Her father laughed, "Impossible! The girls at Exeter will teach you more in one term than I can in a year. I do not expect you to be a Senior. I shall be more than satisfied with your entering as a 'Middler.' You'll need plenty of time for extras."

"Extras? What extras must I take?"

"Chafing-dish cooking and fudge making," replied Miss Hale, promptly. "It will take a full term for you to find your place among young people, and learn all they will teach you."

"But they will know no more than I do," said Elizabeth.

"Perhaps not so much; but what they know will bear no relation to what they teach you. I'm willing to promise that you will learn more from your roommate than you do from any instructor there."

Elizabeth glanced from one to the other. She failed to understand.

"We will have no more lessons after to-morrow," said Mrs. Hobart. "Elizabeth and I will begin putting her clothes in order. There will be a great deal to do, for she will need so much more at school than she does at home. We do not wish to hurry."

"Only eight weeks yet," said Elizabeth, "I wish I was going next week."

The day following the work on the outfit for school began. "Plain and simple," her mother declared it should be. But Elizabeth fairly held her breath as she viewed the beautiful articles laid out to be made.

"This pale blue organdie will do for receptions and any public entertainments you have," her mother explained. "Every girl at school needs some kind of a simple evening dress. You'll need a cloth suit for church and shopping. Then, of course, the school dresses."

Every morning Elizabeth on her way down-stairs to breakfast slipped into the sewing room to view the new dresses. She had never so much as thought, not to say expected, to own a rain coat and bath robe, and a soft eider-down sacque. But there they lay before her. Their existence could not be questioned.

"Do you think the other girls at Exeter will have so much?" she asked of Miss Hale. "I don't want to look as though I was trying to out-dress anyone."

"If you find they have less than you, keep some of your good things in your trunk. You do not need to wear them all," was Miss Hale's advice. "No doubt they are fixing themselves up, too," she added.

Elizabeth had never thought of the matter before. Now the mere thinking about it seemed to bring her into relation and sympathy with those hundreds of unknown girls who were, like her, counting each penny in order to spend it to the best advantage, all the while looking forward to the first of September.

It came at last. The big trunk was brought down from the attic. The new dresses were folded and packed. The books which she might need at Exeter were put into a box. The trunk was locked and carried into the lower hall, waiting for the drayman to call for it early the following morning.

At this juncture going away from home changed color. It was no longer something to look forward to with pleasure, but something to dread. Elizabeth was not the only one who felt the coming separation. She noticed through a film of tears that the best linen and china were used, and that her favorite dishes had been prepared for the last home supper.

Despite their feelings, each made an effort to be cheerful. Mr. Hobart told incidents of his own school-days, and rallied Elizabeth on being homesick before she had started.

Afterward, they sat together on the porch. The father and mother talked but Elizabeth sat silent. She was thinking that the next evening would find her far away and among strangers. She dreaded meeting girls who had been reared with others of their age, and who had been in school before, feeling that she would appear very awkward and dull until she learned the ways of school. She half wished that her father would tell her she need not go. She came closer and seating herself on the step below him, rested her head on his knee. "Father, I do not wish to go to Exeter. May I stay home with you and mother? Be a good daddy and say 'yes.'"

"I shall be good and say 'no.' Our little girl must go away to-morrow. I can't tell you how lonely we shall be, but we have had you so long that we were almost forgetting that you had a life of your own. We must not be selfish, so we send you off, bag and baggage." Her mother added: "Unless she oversleeps, which I am sure she will unless she goes to bed right away. It is later than I supposed. Come, Elizabeth."

As she spoke, Joe Ratowsky came across the lawn. In the moonlight, he looked like a great tawny giant. He spoke in English: "Mr. Hobart, that beeznez is no good. He no stay to-morrow. To-day homes he goes quick."

"Where is his home? Doesn't he live here?"

"Dennis O'Day, b'gosh, niver. So many as one children he have. Milton, he live."

"Why doesn't he bring his family here? I didn't know the man was married."

"Umh—yes, b'gosh. His girl tall like your girl. He no bring her. He proud like the tivil. Never he tell his girl what he do here—no, b'gosh, he don't."

"Well, come in and I will talk the matter over. We can't do much else than wait." Then turning to his daughter, "Good-night, Elizabeth, I must talk to Joe now."

Elizabeth ascended the stair. Joe's visit had taken her mind from her going away. She wondered what the Pole could have in common with her father. Joe was not even a miner.

CHAPTER II.

THE JOURNEY.

Only accommodation trains ran between Bitumen and Exeter. Elizabeth found herself in a motley crowd of passengers. To her right sat a shabbily dressed mother with a sick baby in her arms; back of her was a plain little woman of middle age dressed in a gingham suit and rough straw hat; while before her sat two young women, perhaps a year or two older than herself. They talked loudly enough to attract the attention of those about them. Elizabeth learned that the larger was named Landis, and her companion "Min."

They were handsomely though showily dressed. Min seemed to be less self-assertive than her companion. Landis evidently had confidence enough for two. She frequently turned to look around, gazing into the faces of her fellow passengers with a self-assurance that in one of her age amounted almost to boldness.

She had been careful to arrange her jacket that its handsome buckle and silk lining were in evidence. She was a girl of large physique, with broad shoulders, which she carried rigidly. This, with the haughty pose of her head, attracted attention to her even in a crowd.

Her companion was as tall, but more slender. It was evident that she looked up to Landis and depended upon her in every emergency. A reader of human nature could have seen at a glance that she was the weaker.

From their conversation, it appeared they knew all places and people of importance along the route. As the train stopped at Westport, Landis viewed the town with critical eye.

"Tacky little hole, isn't it? I should simply die if I were compelled to live here."

"You would never stand it. You'd run away, Landis, or do something desperate. Isn't this where the Gleasons live?"

"It used to be. But they live at Gleasonton now. They have a perfectly elegant place there. Of course, it is just their summer home. I'd like to take you down there sometime. I feel like taking the liberty for they are such old friends. They are in Washington during the winter. He's United States Senator, you know."

"Have you ever been there to visit them, Landis?"

"How could I, Min? I'll have to leave all such times until I've finished school and have come out. I don't doubt that Mrs. Gleason will ask me there for my first season. She's not a society woman. She hasn't much ability that way, and has sense enough to know it; so she goes in for charity, and temperance work, and all that."

A suppressed exclamation from the seat behind her caused Elizabeth to look around. She was just in time to see the plainly-dressed woman suppress a laugh. As Elizabeth glanced at her, she was pretending absorption in a magazine, but her lips were yet twitching with amusement.

The baby across the aisle began a low, fretful cry. The mother soothed it as best she could, holding it in her arms, patting it on the back, and trying all manner of devices to keep it quiet. A little boy several years old was on the seat beside her, and the instant the baby began to fret, he set up a distinct and independent howl of his own.

Landis made no attempt to conceal her discomfort.

"How annoying!" she exclaimed in tones that could be heard half the length of the car. "Anything but a crying baby! Why don't women with babies stay at home? It wouldn't matter so much if there was a decent train on this road, but one can't get a Pullman for love or money. If there is anything I despise, it's traveling with a mixed set. You never know whom you are getting next to."

Her companion agreed, offering her subtle flattery in sympathizing that one of her station should be compelled to mingle with such people.

Again Elizabeth, in her hurried glance, caught a twinkle of amusement in the eyes of the woman back of her. Elizabeth could form no opinion about the girls in the seat ahead. She had no precedent to guide her. All she knew was learned from her parents and Miss Hale.

The train had been advancing at a steady if not rapid rate. They had descended the mountain, and were moving close to its base through a country barren of vegetation and population. There came a sudden jolt,—then a creaking sound as the train gradually slowed and then stopped.

The passengers looked from the window. No station or village was in sight. There was a moment of uneasiness. A few men got up and went to see what the trouble was. An half-hour passed. The restlessness expressed itself in words. Some complained loudly; some grumbled, others walked up and down the aisle, every few moments looking at their watches, while their faces grew more expressive of displeasure and annoyance.

The baby across the way fretted. The little boy cried aloud. The tired mother worried over them until she herself was almost sobbing.

The half-hour lengthened into an hour. Then a trainman entered the car with the unpleasant news that they would be delayed yet longer. The air-brake had failed them, and they must wait until the wreck-train came down from Westport with another car, so it might be an hour before they would be able to proceed.

The girls, Landis and Min, left their places to walk up and down the aisle. Landis looked infinitely bored. She turned to her companion with deprecatory remarks about second-class traveling, where one could not have either a lunch or dinner.

The dinner hour had passed. Some of the travellers who had a day's journey before them had fortified themselves against hunger with a lunch.

The baby continued crying. The older child clamored loudly for something to eat. Elizabeth crossed the aisle.

"You look tired," she said to the mother. "Will you trust your baby with me?" She held out her arms, but the child clung closer to its mother while its fretful cry grew louder.

"Perhaps I can persuade her to come," said Elizabeth, going to her lunch box and returning with an orange. The bright color attracted the child at once. Elizabeth took her in her arms and began walking up and down. The other passengers, absorbed in their lunches or growling at their own discomfort, paid little attention to her.

The little boy continued his pleadings for something to eat. The mother endeavored to call his attention to other matters.

"Have you nothing for him?" asked Elizabeth.

The woman's face flushed at the question. She was a subdued, worn-out little soul whose experience with the world had made her feel that every one was but awaiting an excuse to find fault with her. Her manner as she replied was more apologetic than explanatory.

"No; I hain't. I counted on being home before noon. My man has a job in the brickyard at Italee, and we'd been there now if the train hadn't stopped. I was up to Leidy a-buryin' my mother," she added, as though she expected that Elizabeth might blame her for being on the train at all.

Landis and Min had gone back to their seats. Hearing this bit of conversation, Landis turned her head to look at Elizabeth and her friend. Judging from her expression, she had no sympathy with a girl like Elizabeth who could hob-nob on a train with a common-looking person like this woman.

Landis turned back to her companion, who had opened a small leather lunch-case and was spreading out napkins on the seat before her. The napkins were of heavy linen with drawnwork borders. The drinking-cup was silver. The lunch was in harmony with its service. There were quantities of dainty sandwiches, olives and pickles, fruits, the choicest bits of roast chicken, slices of meat-loaf, and several varieties of cake and confections. The sight of it was quite enough to make one's mouth water.

The lady back of them had also opened her lunch. She, too, had heard the conversation between Elizabeth and the woman with the babies. Arising with her lunch in her hand, and a traveling cape over her arm, she came over to where Elizabeth stood with the baby.

"The trainmen tell me we shall have an hour to wait," she said, addressing them. "I see a pretty little bit of grass out here, not far from the car. There is shade, too. Don't you think it would be pleasant to sit out there and eat our lunch together? It would be rest from the close car."

Undoubtedly she was one whose suggestions were followed, as she expected them to be now. Before she had ceased speaking she had the boy in her arms, and was on the way to the door. The mother and Elizabeth with the baby followed.

A narrow green bank lay between the railroad and the creek. A large forest oak stood there, making the one bit of shade within sight. The woman, with the boy in her arms, hurried to this. Spreading out her traveling cape, she put him down upon it, and immediately taking a sandwich from her lunch, placed it in his hands. His cries ceased. He fell to munching the sandwich, at intervals giving expression to his enjoyment.

Elizabeth trudged after with the baby. She had never carried such a burden before, and was surprised to find how heavy the frail little child was. It was all she could do to keep it from slipping from her arms, or jumping out over them. The uncertainty of what its next move would be caused her to clutch it so tightly that her muscles and nerves were at a tension, and she was glad to put it down on the cape also. The mother, with her eyes open wide at this unexpected goodness of strangers, was close at her heels.

"It's her sleeping time," she explained. "That's what makes her fret so."

"Will she eat a piece of orange?" asked Elizabeth, preparing to remove the rind.

"I don't know but what she will."

Elizabeth held it out. The baby knew whether she would or not. Instantly her fingers closed about it, and carried it to her mouth. It was only a few moments until the eyes closed and the child was fast asleep with the bit of orange tight in her hand.

"Your husband works at Italee?" asked the woman of the child's mother, as she was arranging her lunch for them.

"Yes'm, he works in the brickyard there. We hain't been there long. I was just up home buryin' my mother."

"What is your husband's name?"

"Koons—Sam Koons. He's a molder. They pay pretty well there. That's why we moved. He used to work up at Keating; but it seemed like we'd do better down here."

"There's no brickyard at Keating?"

"No; but there's mines. Sam, he's a miner, but he's takin' up the brick trade."

"Yes; I see. I do not wonder that you were glad to leave Keating. It surely is a rough place. I have never known a town so reeking with liquor. There's every inducement there for a man's going wrong, and none for his going right."

"Yes'm," said Mrs. Koons. Her deprecatory, worried expression showed that she appreciated the disadvantages of the place. "That's what I've always told Sam," she continued in her apologetic, meek voice. "When a man's trying to do his best and keep sober, there's them what would come right in his house and ask him to drink. A man may be meanin' well, and tryin' to do what's right, but when the drink's in his blood, and there's them what's coaxin' him to it, it hain't much wonder that he gives up. Sam, he's one of the biggest-hearted men, and a good miner, but he's no man for standin' his ground. He's easy-like to lead. We heard there wasn't no drinkin' places about Italee—they wasn't allowed—so we come."

"Yes; I've heard that Mr. Gleason tried to keep the place free from drink."

"Yes'm, but folks down there say that the Senator don't have much to do about that. It's his wife that does all the bothering. She's the one that tends to that. Her bein' a woman and trustin'-like,

mebbe, is what makes it easy to deceive her.”

“Oh, they do deceive her, then?”

“Yes’m. There hain’t no drinkin’ places open public-like. A stranger couldn’t go in there and buy a glass of anything; but them what’s known can get pretty much what they want.”

“Someone keeps a speak-easy?”

“Yes’m. Big Bill Kyler gets it every week, and the men get what they want.”

“Bill Kyler—um-m,” said the lady. “And where does he get it?”

“Dennis O’Day, the man what owns the brewery and the wholesale house, sells to him. Big Bill drives down in the afternoon and comes home after dark.”

“Each Saturday, you say?” asked the woman.

“Yes’m.”

During the conversation, Elizabeth had also been emptying her lunch-box. She listened eagerly to the conversation between her companions. This Dennis O’Day was the man who was doing all in his power to demoralize Bitumen. She was interested because she knew of him, and moreover, by the feeling that these questions were asked from more than passing curiosity.

“This O’Day is about at the end of his string,” continued the lady. “There are too many people watching him, eager to find him overstepping the letter of the law. I can promise you, Mrs. Koons, that he or his friend, Bill Kyler, will not be long at either Gleasonston or Italee. But come, let us dispose of the lunch while the babies are taking care of themselves.”

She had arranged the repast as daintily as her surroundings would permit. Several discarded railroad ties served as a table. Over these, she had spread napkins. Together the three sat at the improvised table until not a scrap of lunch remained.

“I didn’t know how hungry I was,” said Mrs. Koons. “We have to drive five miles to the station and that gets us up pretty early. An’ by the time I got the children up and dressed and got dressed myself, I hadn’t no time to eat much. I was just settin’ down when pap drove round and told me I should hurry up or we’d miss the train, and I couldn’t miss it, for Sam was expectin’ me to-day. He’s been gettin’ his own meals and he wanted me back home; so I didn’t scarcely finish my coffee. I was expectin’ that I’d be home in time for dinner, and I would if the train hadn’t been late.”

“You can’t get to Italee to-night, then,” said her benefactress. “There’s only one train a day from Gleasonston to Italee and it has gone by this time. They don’t wait on the accommodation.”

“Can’t I? Isn’t there?” Mrs. Koons’ countenance fell. “But I’ve got to get there! There hain’t no one I know in Gleasonston. If it wasn’t for carrying the children, I’d walk. It hain’t more than five miles, and mebbe I’d meet someone going up. The trucks come down pretty often. I’ve got to get there even if I have to walk.” Back of her years of repression, her native independence showed. She had set out to reach Italee, and she meant to. Difficulties like a walk of five miles with two children in her arms might hamper but not deter her.

“Do not worry about that. I get off at Gleasonston, and I’ll get someone to drive you over. The roads are fine now and it will not take long.”

“Yes’m. Oh, thank you! It will be kind of you, I’m sure, for walkin’ with two babies in your arms ain’t very pleasant. Do you live in Gleasonston, ma’am?”

“I’m not living there now. All summer I have been out on the Creighton farm beyond Keating.”

“Hain’t it lonely out there? I’ve driv by. It’s fixed up grand with big porches, and swings, and loads of flowers and all that, but there hain’t a house for miles about. I’d think you’d find it lonely?”

“Not at all. I take my children along, and I’m too busy while I’m there to be lonely.”

“Oh, you’re a married woman then, and have a family of your own. I was a-thinkin’ just that thing when you picked up little Alec here. You had a knack with him that don’t come to a woman unless she’s used to handling young ones. How many children have you? They’re pretty well grown, I suppose.”

Again Elizabeth caught the merry twinkle of amusement in the woman’s eyes. “Really, you may think it strange,” she replied, “when I declare that I really am not certain how many I have. There are so many that, at times, I almost forget their names. None of them are grown up; for when they are, I lose them. They go off into the world—some do well and some do not. One or two remember me; but the others forget that such a person as I ever lived.” It was not in a complaining tone she spoke, rather in a spirit of light-hearted raillery.

Elizabeth smiled. She understood the speaker, but Mrs. Koons did not. Elizabeth had been accustomed to hear Miss Hale speak thus of her mission boys and girls. Miss Hale looked upon them as a little family of which she was the head.

Mrs. Koons was amazed. She had heard, in a misty way, of a woman who had so many children she did not know what to do, but she had never heard of one who had so many that she did not know how many. Yet she supposed that such a thing might be true, and accepted the statement in good faith.

“Pap was tellin’ me when I was home that Senator Gleason had bought the farm, and it was him

that fixed it up so grand. Pap says they've only Jersey cows on the place,—no common stock—and chickens that they raise for layin', and some for hatchin', and some that's for eatin'. But the Senator don't never stay up there much. He farms just for fun. But he must work pretty hard to get any fun out of it. I was raised on a farm and stayed there till I was married, and I never saw no fun anywhere about."

Again the laugh and again the merry twinkle came to her eyes.

"It's just the way we're used to. If you had never been on a farm, perhaps you'd think it lots of fun to stay on one for awhile. I'm sure I thoroughly enjoy every minute I spend on the Creighton farm. The days are far too short for me."

"But perhaps you don't have no work to do. Gettin' up early is what makes it hard."

44

"I get up at daybreak, and I am busy every moment. I wash and dress and feed a dozen children. I have no moment to myself."

Suddenly Mrs. Koons seemed to understand. "It's too bad," she said sympathetically. "Life's pretty hard for a woman when she's a family and has to look out for herself."

When they had finished their lunch, and began gathering and folding the napkins, Elizabeth observed something which had escaped Mrs. Koons' notice. The left hand of their unknown companion bore a heavy gold band, undoubtedly a wedding-ring, guarded by a diamond noticeable for its size and brilliance. Her hands, too, were worthy of notice. They were white and soft, showing both good care and skilled manicuring. They were not the hands of one accustomed to manual labor.

As Elizabeth assisted her in clearing away the remains of the lunch, the conversation was directed toward herself.

45

"You got on the train at Bitumen," she said. "I took particular notice of you, for there one expects to see only foreigners board the car."

Elizabeth smiled. She knew how few were the times when an American-born woman or girl ever was seen near the station.

"We are mostly foreigners there," she replied.

"Don't you find it dull?"

"I never have so far. But then I never have known any life but that at Bitumen. This is my first trip away from home." Her companion looked at her keenly. "Expectant schoolgirl" was written from the top of Elizabeth's fair hair to the soles of her shoes. Her linen traveling dress was conspicuously new, as were her gloves and shoes.

"You are going to school, then?"

46

"Yes; to Exeter Hall." Elizabeth wondered in her own mind how she knew.

"You'll like it there. That is, unless you are the exception among girls. I was a student there over thirty years ago. I liked it, I'm sure. And every girl student I've ever met, and I meet them by the score, has no voice except to sing its praises."

"Do you know many of the students there now?"

"I met most of those who were there last year. Some I knew quite well. Of course, the Senior class will not return, and there will be many new students. Those I hope to meet."

"I've never had any girl companions," said Elizabeth. "I expect to like all the girls."

Again the smile. She shook her head decidedly in negation at Elizabeth's remark.

"No; you will not like them all," she replied. "Exeter Hall is like a little world. We have some fine girls there, but we have, too, some that are petty and selfish. Exeter Hall has sent forth some of the noblest women I have ever known, and it has also sent forth some that simply cumber the earth with their presence."

47

"I would think they'd be able to keep that last class out."

"Perhaps it could be done. But the Hall is for the girls—not the girls for the Hall. Some flighty, irresponsible girls, under the influence of the school, develop into strong characters, and leave there to do good work. But there are always a few who fritter their time, and leave the same as they enter. But even these must be given the opportunity for development, if they are capable of it. You know that is true even in public schools."

"I know nothing about it," was the reply. "I never went to school a day in my life."

"How then, child, do you expect to enter Exeter? The requirements are considerable, and the examinations rigid."

"I've been admitted. Miss Hale and my father taught me. Miss Hale said I was ready for the Middle Class, and they admitted me on her statement."

48

"And well they might. They would take Julia Hale's word for anything. Who that knew her wouldn't?"

"You know her, then?"

"I was a student at Exeter. That means I know Julia Hale by report, at least. But I was more fortunate than the most of girls. I really met her and knew her well. Your father helped Miss Hale prepare you for school? Who is your father? I do not know your name."

"Hobart! My father is superintendent of the mines at Bitumen."

"I've heard of him, but I have never met him. He's doing good work there."

"Yes," was the reply. "He hopes by Christmas to have every chamber supported by new props, and an exhaust engine which will pump out the gas and make explosions impossible."

"I was not thinking of the mines when I said he did good work," said her companion, and after a pause, "I think it is time we were getting into our car. I would not like the train to pull out without us. Look at the babies! Both asleep. Perhaps I can move them without waking them." But already Elizabeth had taken up the baby in her arms and was at the step of the car. As she waited for a trainman to help her on, she caught bits of the conversation between two men who stood on the rear platform of the smoker. They had been discussing the "coal-fields", and were looking up at the mountain which they had just descended.

"There's plenty there to supply the country for the next ten years. I wasn't thinking of the supply when I spoke, but of the possibility of not being able to get it out. You remember how the hard-coal region was tied up for eight months or more."

"There's little danger here. The miners are satisfied—"

"Yes—satisfied until an agitator comes their way. If I was the Kettle Creek Mining Company, I'd keep that man out of my community. He's bound to stir up bad blood."

"But he's left the mining business. He'll not trouble himself."

"Not unless he sees more money in it. Matters have not been going his way lately. Someone has been dogging his steps, and his business is falling off. You know there's really little money in that business if a man keeps within the law."

"Well, I pity that man Hobart if your friend begins his work. Hobart's a fine fellow, but is not accustomed to deal with men in the underbrush."

"Hobart will take care of himself. He's had his eye on—"

At this moment the porter came to her assistance and Elizabeth heard no more. She wondered at their talk, but she was not uneasy. She had unbounded faith in her father, and felt that he would be able to protect and take care of himself under all circumstances. Entering the car, she deposited her sleeping burden on the seat. The others followed with the boy and the wraps.

Landis and Min had finished their lunch. There were several sandwiches, a chicken breast, half a bottle of olives, and cake untouched. This Landis gathered together in a heap in her napkin. She arose and leaned toward the window. As she did so, the lady with whom Elizabeth had been talking touched her on the arm. But it was too late. The contents of the napkin had at that moment gone out the window.

"I beg pardon," she said, "I was about to ask you not to throw that good lunch away. There's a woman, a foreigner, with her children in the rear of the coach, who has had nothing to eat."

"I do not know that it is my place to provide it for her," cried Landis, with a haughty toss of her head.

"I am sorry that you see the matter in that light," was the rejoinder. "There are so many little mouths to be fed that I dislike to see good food wasted. Extravagance can be so extreme as to become a sin."

"I do not know that it is anyone's affair what I do with my lunch," was the response.

The woman smiled, not at all affronted by the lack of courtesy shown her.

"I make many things my affairs," she said sweetly. "I think it my duty when I see a girl as young as you doing what is not right to remind her, in a spirit of love and tenderness, of her error. I am sorry if my suggestion can not be received in the spirit in which it was given." Then she went back to her place.

From the conversation of the two girls, Elizabeth caught such expressions as "that class of people," "counting each penny," "bound down by poverty," and similar phrases.

The train had started on its way. A half-mile passed before it again slowed up. "This is Gleasonton," said the lady, arising and coming to Mrs. Koons to assist her with the children. With a farewell nod and smile to Elizabeth, they quitted the car. From the window she saw them try to make their way through the crowd of loafers which had gathered about the platform. Suddenly a young colored boy in snuff-colored suit and high hat appeared. He immediately took charge of the children, and with them in his arms pushed his way to where a carriage stood at the curb, the women following close at his heels.

As the train pulled out, Elizabeth saw them bowling down the country road in a wide-open barouche, with coachman and footman in livery.

It was not long until the trainman called "Exeter!" Elizabeth gathered up her wraps and magazines. She knew that she might expect a carriage from the Hall at the station to meet the students.

Landis and Min had also gathered together their belongings. As the train drew into the station, they were first on the platform.

"There's Jimmy Jordan!" they cried together, as a young colored boy with an expansive grin came up to take their luggage.

"Jimmy, how's the Hall?"

Jimmy responded with a grin just a little more expansive than the previous one.

Elizabeth stood close at their side. "Are you from Exeter Hall?" she asked the boy. Having received an answer which she supposed an affirmative, she handed him her checks and the baggage which she carried in her arms. The girls whom the boy had addressed as Miss Kean and Miss Stoner led the way. Elizabeth followed at their heels, and in a few moments the three were being driven rapidly to Exeter Hall.

CHAPTER III.

THE DINNER EPISODE.

A drive of several miles through a beautiful country brought them to their destination. Elizabeth was surprised, for neither her father nor mother had prepared her for the beauty of the place; a long stretch of campus, with great forest trees, beyond which were the tennis-courts and athletic fields; then the Hall itself. The original building was a large wooden mansion with wide porches and spacious rooms with low ceilings. But for years this had served as a home for the president of Exeter, the school itself having been removed to the newer buildings of gray stone.

The carriage passed through shaded drives which led to the front entrance. Arm in arm, groups of girls in white gowns were moving about or sat in little groups beneath the trees.

During the drive Elizabeth's companions had chattered continuously. Elizabeth had paid little attention to them. Her eyes were on the new country about her.

"It must be nearly dinner-time," exclaimed Landis, as the carriage turned in at the entrance to the campus. "The girls are all out. I hope we'll be in time to go down with them. But we'll have to go in and do the 'polite' with Miss Morgan."

"Nora O'Day is back," exclaimed Miss Kean. "Isn't that she out there on the campus with Mary Wilson?"

"It can't be. Mary Wilson and she were never friends." As she spoke, Landis leaned eagerly from the window to get a view of the campus. "It can't be Miss O'Day," she repeated. "She and Mary are not the same style at all."

"I think Miss O'Day's swell looking. Don't you?"

"She has plenty of money and knows how to dress," was the rejoinder.

They had reached the entrance door. Jimmy Jordan, who appeared to be general utility boy, dismounted to open the door for them. Then he led the way into the great hall and on to the office, throwing open the doors before him with energetic officiousness, giving one the impression that he was the most important personage at Exeter Hall.

On entering the office, a woman advanced to shake hands with Miss Stoner and Miss Kean. With a few words of greeting, she dismissed them each with a bunch of jangling keys, and the information that they were to occupy the same rooms as the previous year. Then she turned to Elizabeth. "This is Miss Hobart?" she said, shaking her hand cordially, and drawing her forward to a chair. "Your father wrote me that you would arrive to-day. Jordan," to the boy who stood grinning at her side, "Miss Wilson is somewhere on the campus. Ask her to step to the office, please. Miss Wilson will be your roommate. She will take charge of you. If you will excuse me, I'll return to work which claims me." She turned to her desk and was soon absorbed in correspondence.

Elizabeth was thus given an opportunity to study her. She was a tall woman, so tall and slender that these qualities first impressed those who saw her. Yet later, when one stood beside her, you discovered to your surprise that she was merely the average woman in height. It had been her carriage, her manner of holding her head, which gave the impression of unusual height. One might have thought her critical and stern had it not been that the expression of her eyes, which were gray and unusually large, was gentle and shy. Her well-shaped head was crowned with coils of brown hair touched with gray drawn loosely back from a broad, low forehead. She was a woman who could not pass unobserved in a crowd, yet she was not beautiful. It was that her presence was felt, rather than she herself observed. She had said little to the new student; yet the direct effect of her presence caused Elizabeth to be glad she had come to Exeter.

"Oh, here is Miss Wilson!" Dr. Morgan arose. "Miss Wilson, Miss Hobart will be your roommate. I shall put her in your care."

The girl extended her hand. She was not nearly so tall as Elizabeth. Her yellow hair without ribbon or comb hung about her ears. She shook her head and flung back her locks like a spirited young horse tossing its mane. Her eyes were brown and dancing and her face was brimming over with fun. Her voice was high pitched and so cheery that her hearers were compelled to believe that she was at that minute having the best time of her life.

"I have been expecting you," she cried. "I was hoping you would come to-day so that we could get to housekeeping to-morrow, for lessons begin the next day."

60

She led the way into the hall. Here she stopped to clap her hands in order to call Jimmy's attention. "Here, Jimmy, take this lady's checks and bring her trunks up to No. 10. If they are there before we get back from dinner, Jimmy, there'll be a piece of cake for you."

Jimmy grinned and rolled his eyes, then swung himself down the hall in search of the baggage.

Miss Wilson never ceased her chatter as they entered the side hallway and mounted the stairs.

"The students must not use the main stairway, except during commencement week, under penalty of death," she explained. "That's reserved for the Fac and other Lord-Highs. Here's our room—quite close to the stairway. A nuisance, you'll find it. Every girl on her way up or down will drop in to see us. It won't be because we're popular, but one can't help wanting to rest after climbing stairs, and our chairs are particularly easy." Her voice, as she talked, had a ring of laughter in it which made Elizabeth feel, for the moment, that having your friends love you for your chairs alone was the greatest fun in the world.

61

She led the way into their apartment. There was a big sitting-room with wide windows overlooking the campus; an open grate with log and gas fixtures, ready for the cooler days of autumn, filled the space between the two windows. From this room a door led to a bedroom devoid of all furnishing except the simple essentials of a sleeping-place.

Miss Wilson drew forward a chair. "Sit here a moment to rest. Let me put your wraps away. I'll make a guest of you to-day. It isn't long until dinner-time. We are expected to change our dresses. But Miss Morgan will excuse you to-day as you have just arrived. I think you will like the girls here."

She chatted on while Elizabeth rested and prepared for dinner. She looked with admiration upon Elizabeth's linen frock and long braid of smooth hair. "I like the way you braid your mane," she laughed, giving a toss of her own. "It's the style of hair I've always coveted. A siege of fever a year ago is responsible for my new crop, short and curly. I look forward to the time when I, too, can appear with dignity and a coil of hair about my head."

62

"Do you think you could be dignified then?" asked Elizabeth shyly. She was standing in the middle of the bedroom with towel in hand. At her words Miss Wilson tossed her head.

"I'm afraid you will prove like the other girls here. They can not be brought to realize how much such trifles have to do with one's manner. Short curls bobbing over one's shoulders and dignity can never go together. But let me put my hair up high and get on a trained skirt and you will see what you will see. People are bound to live up to their clothes. That is why, on general principles, I disapprove of bathing and gym suits. They give the wearer such a sense of freedom." She laughed again. Elizabeth knew not whether she were serious or joking. She was so effervescing with good humor that her companion had no opportunity for a moment's dullness or homesickness.

63

"There's the ten-minute bell," she exclaimed, as they returned to the study. "That is our last warning, and gives no one an excuse to be late. You will find Exeter rigid in many ways, Miss Hobart. Miss Morgan is what I call a crank on development of character. She keeps track of the thousand little things that a girl is supposed not to do. In her lectures to us, which she gives twice a semester, she declares that these seeming trifles are neither sins nor crimes in themselves, but getting into the habit of yielding to trifles is detrimental to the development of strong character. Therefore," at this Miss Wilson drew herself up as tall as possible, and assuming Miss Morgan's best manner continued, "trifles must be made subservient to us. We must conquer ourselves even in these." Here Miss Wilson laughed merrily. "Being late; not having your necktie straight; letting your shoes run down at the heel; missing lectures—these, all these, and hundreds more, are trifles."

64

There was a hurried knock at the door. Without waiting for an invitation to enter, a young lady came in. Elizabeth's fear of out-dressing the other girls vanished at the sight of her. The newcomer was a girl of slender physique and delicate, regular features. Her skin was almost olive in hue; her eyes were dark, with brows so heavy and black as to be noticeable. They were too close together and her lips and nostrils too thin to permit her being beautiful. Her dress was handsome and showy. It was of white silk, elaborated with heavy insertions, and transparent yoke and sleeve-caps made it suitable for an evening gown. Her hands were covered with rings scintillating at every gesture. Each movement of her body suggested silk linings and petticoats. Her manner of speaking had a touch of affectation.

65

"Ah, Miss Wilson, I'm awfully sorry to intrude, but will you be kind enough to hook my waist? I can't reach the last two hooks on the shoulder. This style of fastening dresses in the back is such a nuisance."

"Surely," replied Miss Wilson. Elizabeth was surprised at the change which came to her roommate's voice. There was neither vivacity nor good humor in it. It was expressive of mere icy courtesy.

"You must bend your knees a little, or I'll be compelled to get on a chair. You're so much taller than I."

The girl complied. Miss Wilson put the refractory hooks to their proper use, then stood quiet. Her guest made some trifling remark as though to continue the conversation; but received no encouragement. Her dark cheeks flushed. "Thank you," she began hurriedly, "I'm sorry to

bother you so."

"It was no bother," in the same cold, conventional voice. "I can assist you any time. I understand how difficult it is to get into your clothes when you have no roommate to pull you together." Then with a smile she turned to Elizabeth. "Come, Miss Hobart, we must not be late for dinner the first evening at Exeter." So saying, she held open the door, allowing Elizabeth to precede her from the room. Miss Wilson gave no explanation to Elizabeth of her manner toward the girl; neither did she offer an excuse for not introducing her. As they passed the open door, Elizabeth caught a view of this girl's study. It was more than comfortable. There was a luxury of soft cushions and rich hangings. There were chairs and tables of carved wood.

From all the rooms the students came forth two by two, their tongues flying as they made their way toward the dining-hall. There were frequent stops to greet one another, and a babel of voices expressing pleasure at this reunion. There were handshakes for those who were newcomers, and embraces for old friends. Every one knew every one else or was going through the first process of meeting them.

The olive-skinned girl in the handsome gown came from her room and passed the others. Each girl was careful to nod and bid her good-evening, but none greeted her effusively or even so much as shook hands with her.

Miss Wilson was not lax in courtesy now. Drawing her arm through Elizabeth's, she came up to the group of girls at the head of the main stairway. "I wish you girls to meet Miss Hobart," she cried, "so that you may condole with her. She is to room with me this semester."

"Why this semester?" rejoined a tall girl in the group as she came forward extending her hand. "Why not the year?"

"She may not survive," said Miss Wilson. "If she's able to stand me one semester, then she'll be compelled to stay the year out."

"I am Anna Cresswell," continued the tall girl to Elizabeth. "Mary Wilson's introductions leave much to be desired. She rarely sees fit to mention the names of the people she introduces."

Miss Stoner and Miss Kean came up at this juncture. They had changed their traveling dresses, and were wearing light challis. They were introduced to Elizabeth, but neither made mention that they had seen each other in the car or had come up in the carriage together. Landis was most demonstrative in greeting Miss Wilson, chiding her for not writing during vacation, and declaring that they must make up for lost time by spending a great many leisure hours together now. Miss Wilson laughed merrily. She had been busy all summer, she said, and had written only to her own people. Elizabeth noticed that she expressed no desire to mortgage her future leisure hours by any promises.

"You busy?" exclaimed Landis. "Now, what were you doing—reading novels, dressing and driving about?"

"I should scarcely be content with such a summer, Landis. No; I played nurse-girl to Mrs. Gleason's large family. I was busy, too. The place was no sinecure, I assure you."

"Mrs. Gleason—from Gleasonton?" exclaimed Min. "Why, I thought she had no children."

"She hasn't—but she adopts them annually. During July and August we had a dozen babies at their home. We went for them in the morning and took them back at night, and I gave each one of them a bath every day." This last was said triumphantly.

"I've heard she was rather—eccentric!" said Landis.

"Don't you know her?" asked Elizabeth.

"No; I do not—not personally," was the response, "but we have mutual friends."

Miss Wilson would have quitted Miss Stoner and Miss Kean here, but was prevented by Landis telling her experience that day in the train, how a woman, a total stranger, had taken her to task for throwing away her lunch.

"She was a common-looking person," she added. "One could see she belonged to the middle class, and I suppose had been compelled to practice economy, so that my throwing a sandwich away seemed recklessly extravagant."

"Did you think she was common-looking?" asked Elizabeth. "Her skin was as fine as a baby's, and her eyes were beautiful. Didn't you see how expressive they were?"

"No, I didn't. All I could see was her gingham shirtwaist suit with its prudish white linen cuffs and collar, and her rough straw hat."

Miss Wilson put her arm through her roommate's to hurry her.

"Excuse us, girls, if we walk faster; I wish Miss Hobart to meet Nancy. She's the girl ahead with Anna Cresswell."

Elizabeth was borne along toward the dining-hall, at the door of which Miss Cresswell and her companion stopped.

"Nancy, I wish you and Miss Hobart to meet," said Miss Wilson, "and I intend that you shall be good friends. Nancy and I were brought up together, and she's used to me. When you want anyone to sympathize with you because of me, go to Nancy."

"Her name is Miss Eckdahl," added Miss Cresswell with a smile.

"But she should have known. Everyone should know Nancy without being told. What is the good of being famous otherwise? If your name goes not abroad, what is the good of being a champion in mathematics or anything else? When I say 'Nancy,' the intelligent person should know that I mean—"

"Nancy Hanks," added the girl herself. "I might be mistaken for the famous trotter."

So chatting, they entered the dining-hall. Tables set for six each filled the room.

"Miss Cresswell, will you take charge of Elizabeth—I'm going to call you Elizabeth; you don't look nearly old enough to be Miss Hobart." 72

"Yes; come with me, Miss Hobart. Nancy, I presume you and I part here. I shall be surprised if Miss Morgan permits you and Mary to be together much longer."

She led the way to a table by the window where she seated herself at its head, placing Elizabeth at her right.

"Miss Morgan never allows roommates to sit together at meals," she explained, "or two girls who have been reared together as Mary and Nancy have. She wishes us to know all the students, and tries to prevent our forming little cliques, as we're bound to do when we room and eat and study with the same people."

"But what if you should not like the other people?" asked Elizabeth. "It must be rather unpleasant to sit at meals with someone whom you do not like."

"That is one of the lessons Miss Morgan is giving us the opportunity of learning. We may discover on close acquaintance that one is more likable than we first supposed; and if that is impossible, then we learn to keep our dislikes to ourselves." 73

The dining-hall was rapidly filling. Landis Stoner and Min Kean came in among the last, the former taking her place at Miss Cresswell's table, sitting beside Elizabeth.

"Why, Anna Cresswell," she exclaimed, leaning forward, "did Miss Morgan put you at the head of the table?"

"How else should I be here? You surely did not think I came unasked."

"Oh, no, I spoke without thinking. Of course, you would not come unless she asked you to do so. I was surprised, that was all."

"Why surprised? You know I am a Senior, and it is customary to give them the head."

"Oh, yes, of course. But there are Seniors who haven't been given the head. That is what made me speak."

Miss Cresswell turned the conversation to other subjects. Elizabeth was the only new student at the table. She felt that some reason other than the one given had caused Miss Stoner to speak as she had. It was not until some days later that she learned that Landis was a Senior. She learned, too, that the girl was ambitious to be first, even in so slight a thing as sitting at the head of a table and playing hostess to five girls, generally of under classes. 74

"Are you on the second floor again this year, Landis?" asked a little pink-and-white, china-doll girl from the foot of the table.

"Yes, Mame. Min and I have the same rooms as before. The third time is the charm. I presume something good will happen this year."

"Perhaps Min will get through the preliminaries," was the rejoinder. "She won't pull through from any effort she makes herself. If her friends wish to see her graduate, they will be compelled to resort to something. Get her to pick four-leafed clovers and wear them in the toe of her shoe, possibly. That has been known to work where all else fails." 75

Landis looked serious at the jest. Her manner grew quite self-assertive as she replied, as though expressing herself quite settled the question. Yet throughout there was an assumed self-deprecatory air, as though she would not have her hearers think she was either maligning her friend or lauding herself too highly in the comparison suggested in her speech.

"Don't blame Min too much. Some work which would be possible for you or me, is impossible for her. I did not realize until we roomed together what a difference there can be in—in—minds. I could not have believed that any one would consider a theorem or a page of French difficult. But," with an arch glance, "these past two years have taught me a great deal. I am more sympathetic, and oh so much more thankful that I am—"

"Not as 'these publicans and sinners,'" finished the girl at the foot. As she spoke, her glance swept over the table to include among "these" all who sat there. 76

Even Elizabeth, though a stranger, could not suppress a smile.

"Who has No. 12—that big room, the one Miss Watson used to have?" continued Miss Welch, ignoring Landis' show of vexation at her words. Landis made no attempt to answer, although the question was addressed to her. After a moment's silence, a little German girl, Elizabeth's vis-a-vis, replied, "If I have not heard it unright, Fraulein—that is, Miss O'Day in it she will room."

She blushed prettily as she spoke, half in shyness and half in embarrassment that her German idioms would intrude themselves when she was trying to speak English. She looked up at Miss Cresswell, as though she sought encouragement from her.

"Why, Miss Hirsch, what have you been doing all summer? Spending all your vacation talking □

English? You have improved wonderfully. Now Fraulein Kronenberg will complain that you are losing your pure German accent."

"Oh, think you so? It is glad I am. A single German word the whole long summer have I not said. But about the room which on the second floor is; to me it was said Miss O'Day will—will—occupy? it."

"Who is to room with her?" asked Miss Welch.

"I believe she is to room alone," said Miss Cresswell.

"Why doesn't Maud Harris go back with her? They seemed to get along well last fall, and Maud is well enough to enter again!" said Miss Welch.

"Miss Harris with anything could—what you call it?—get along," said Miss Hirsch.

"My words seem to suggest that Miss O'Day is difficult to get along with. I did not mean that. So far as I know, she has a very even temper, and is more than generous with all her possessions. She isn't selfish."

"I can plainly see why Maud has another roommate. Of course you all do. It does seem a little hard." Here Landis' manner grew important. Her head was raised, and her lips curled. "But those of us who have a high sense of honor would not care to room with Miss O'Day. I hope I am not narrow-minded, but I feel that all my finer instincts rebel at the thought of—"

"Miss Stoner, if you please, we will drop the subject. Nothing can be gained by carrying it further." This came from Miss Cresswell. She spoke quietly but her manner and voice was that of one who expected to have her suggestions followed.

Landis tilted her head a little higher, but her face flushed. She was about to tell Miss Cresswell that she would discuss any subject when and where she chose when she remembered suddenly that Miss Cresswell was the head of the table and the one to whom she must pay a certain amount of respect.

The dinner had been brought in. Miss Cresswell served the plates with Maggie, the colored serving-maid, standing at her side. All conversation of a personal nature stopped while the servants were in the room. When the dinner was over, and dessert on the table, the chatter began. As they were about to quit the room, a bell rang. Quiet fell upon them. Dr. Morgan arose from her place at the head table.

She made a few general announcements. Then in her clear, decisive voice continued: "The students will not forget that they are expected to dress for dinner. If you are too indisposed to change your school attire for something fresher, you are too indisposed to come to the dining-hall. But you will bear in mind that this does not mean either dinner or reception gowns. Elaborate and extravagant dressing is not suited to girls in school. Miss O'Day has infringed upon this rule. Consequently she may pass immediately to her apartments, change her gown, and spend the evening in her room, without conversing with anyone. You may be excused, Miss O'Day."

From a table at a distant part of the room, Miss O'Day arose. As she moved through the room with her head high and eyes straight before her, her shoulders and arms gleamed through their transparent covering, and the rustle of her silken petticoats was audible.

As she disappeared, Dr. Morgan gave the signal for dismissal. The hum of conversation among the students began again, as in little groups they passed to the parlors or to the campus.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RECEPTION.

"What have you brought to fix up our quarters?" asked Miss Wilson, the day following Elizabeth's arrival at Exeter. Her trunk and box were in the middle of the study, while she and Miss Wilson stood and looked on as Jimmy Jordan unfastened straps and drew out nails.

"I do not know," was the reply. "Mother slipped in a whole box of extras. I wondered why she was doing it. She said I would see later. There were cups and spoons, and doilies."

"Sensible mother," rejoined Miss Wilson. "She realizes the necessity of frequent spreads in the strenuous life we lead. No doubt we'll find among your traps a glass or so of jelly, and some preserves. Mothers who have been at school themselves appreciate the situation."

Elizabeth laughed. She was beginning to understand her roommate's style of conversation.

Miss Wilson was not one to shirk. Work had no terrors for her. She was never idle, but when she was tired with study she found rest in some other form of occupation. Now, while Elizabeth was unpacking, she assisted her in every way, putting in order bureau drawers, and arranging books.

Elizabeth had depended more or less upon her mother. How much that "more" was greater than that "less" she did not realize until she was alone. Miss Wilson proved her right hand now.

The greater part of the day was spent in arranging their possessions. The pictures which Elizabeth had brought from home were hung; the bright cushions placed at a proper angle on the couch, over which had been placed a covering of gay tapestry. A table had been drawn up near the fireplace.

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This was a new experience for Elizabeth so she let Miss Wilson take the lead. She watched her arrange the tea-table. The dainty cups and plates, souvenir spoons, sugar bowl and creamer found their proper places. It was a small edition of their dining-table at home. The chafing-dish and swinging kettle with its alcohol lamp were too much for Elizabeth to bear without comment. She must and did ask their purpose.

"I'll show you in one minute," said Mary. She took a box of cocoa and a bottle of alcohol from a small cabinet. "I must borrow some cream from Anna Cresswell. I saw her get some this morning. But first I must put this water on to boil." She did so, then hurried from the room, soon returning with the cream.

After stirring the cream, cocoa and sugar in the cup, she poured on the boiling water. With a few additional manipulations of the spoon, she held out the cup to Elizabeth. "Here, girlie, drink to the prosperity of Exeter Hall in general, and these quarters in particular. May you get along with your roommate better than people generally do, and may all the scraps between you and her be made up before the retiring-bell rings."

84

Elizabeth raised her cup to the toast, then drank. "Why, that is fine—and made with such a little fire! I would not have believed it possible."

"You think that is good?" was the reply. "You will open your eyes when you see what can be done with the chafing-dish,—creamed oysters, fudge, soups of all kinds, Welsh rarebits. I hope, Elizabeth, that you spoke to your mother about boxes. At Exeter, boxes are acceptable at all times."

"Boxes?" in surprise. "No; I never mentioned the word to her. I didn't understand that they would be required. The catalog made no mention of them. I know because I looked particularly about the number of napkins and towels required. What do you *put in* them?"

"I don't know. It is what you *take out* of them that makes them valuable. Personally, I prefer roast chicken and cake."

85

"Oh!" cried Elizabeth. "How dull I am! But you know that I was never before at any school, and I never knew any girls my own age."

"They'll teach you a lot," was the response.

"You and father agree in that. He says that the students will teach me more than the faculty. But that is one of the things I cannot understand."

"You will sometime. I wouldn't bother my head much about it now. What do you think about this Gibson head? It doesn't fit in here with the other pictures."

"Let me try it on this side of the room," Elizabeth replied, placing the picture at a better angle.

So the day progressed in doing a score of little odds and ends of work which have the effect of making boarding-school quarters suggestive of home.

Several weeks later Elizabeth had one lesson in what the girls could teach her, something which was not found between the covers of books. At home, there had always been her mother to pick up after her. She might drop hat, gloves and coat anywhere about the house, and when she needed them, find them in their proper places, dusted, mended and ready for use.

86

During the first week at Exeter, Mary Wilson unconsciously dropped into her mother's place in this particular, perhaps because she was a year older than Elizabeth, and had learned this lesson in her own time. Certain it was, when they dressed for dinner, she looked about the bedroom and put in order each article which was out of place, or called Elizabeth's shortcomings to notice with, "Your dress will muss lying on that chair," or "Is that your slipper in the study, or did I leave mine there?"

During the month of October, the girls at Exeter gave their first reception. Guests came from all the little towns about, and the Hall was filled with flowers, lights and bright music.

87

Elizabeth and Mary had hurried from the dinner-table to get into their party gowns. Miss Wilson, as a Senior, was one of the reception-committee. Elizabeth was but half-way through with her dressing when Mary had finished.

"There, Elizabeth, I'm done. Look me over and see if my waist is together all right."

Elizabeth was standing before the mirror, pins between her lips, trying to reduce a refractory bow to submission. She turned to look at her roommate. "Sweet—your dress is beautiful."

"Thank you," was the response with a characteristic toss of her head. "With those pins in your mouth you talk like a dialect story. I'm off now. Dr. Morgan wishes the committee to meet in her parlor. I suppose she wants to get our mouths into the 'papa, potatoes, prunes and prisms' shape before we meet the guests. I'm sorry I can't go down with you, Elizabeth. A first reception is so trying. Nancy won't go down until late. Suppose I ask her to wait for you?"

88

"That may put her to trouble. I thought of asking Miss O'Day to go with me. She's just across

the hall, and has no one special to go with her since she rooms alone.”

Miss Wilson hesitated a moment, standing in the middle of the doorway. She looked quite serious at the mention of Miss O’Day.

“Miss O’Day might—not like to be bothered. Besides, you do not know her very well. I’ll send Nancy.”

With that she disappeared.

As the gaslight in the bedroom was not satisfactory Elizabeth went into the sitting-room or study, as the students were accustomed to call it, to finish her dressing. Nancy came to the door just as Elizabeth put on the last touches.

“We’ll be late,” she exclaimed. “I think it’s fun to go early and meet all the strangers. Judge Wilson and his friends will be here if the train was on time at Ridgway.”

Elizabeth caught up her fan and handkerchief and started forth. Her attention was claimed by the curious fan Nancy carried.

“It is odd, isn’t it?” exclaimed Nancy, unfurling it. “It is hand-carved. You know the Swedes are famous for that kind of work. This is quite old. My grandfather made it for my grandmother when they were sweethearts over in Sweden.”

Elizabeth looked her surprise at this statement. Her companion noticed her expression.

“You knew, of course, that I was of Swedish birth!”

“No, I did not. I knew that you made your home with Miss Wilson’s family. I took it for granted that you must be a relative.”

“Not the least bit,” was the response, given without a show of embarrassment. “I’m merely a dependent. My father was a Swedish minister, and worked among our people near the Wilson home. When he died, we were left with nothing to live on. Mother did sewing for the Swedish people. I was very strong and quite as able to work as she. So I went to live at the Wilson home where I helped with the little children and also went to school. I grew to love them, and they seemed to really care for me. When I finished the high school, Mrs. Wilson sent me here. I’m to be a teacher after I graduate at Exeter. I always count the Wilson home mine. Each summer I go back there and help with the children while Mrs. Wilson takes a vacation.”

She did not add that she had shown such an aptitude for study, and had proved so efficient and trustworthy that Mrs. Wilson had decided to give her the best advantages to fit her for a profession.

As they passed the open door of the room occupied by Landis Stoner and Min Kean, the voices of the girls came to them. They had evidently taken it for granted that the other students had gone to the parlors and that there wasn’t anyone to hear the conversation.

“Well, for my part, Min,” Landis was saying, “I do not think you look at all well in that blue silk. You look so sallow. You are so much sweeter in your white organdy with your pink sash.”

“But, Landis, I’ve worn it so often.”

“But not here. It will be new to the girls, and it looks perfectly fresh.”

“You said you liked the blue silk when I was buying it.”

“I did and I do yet, but it isn’t suited to you. Now for me, it would be all right, but—”

“I wish you’d come down, Landis. I always have a better time when you are there.”

“How can I? I haven’t a dress for a reception. You simply cannot get a dress made at home fit to wear, and my staying up in the country all summer with you made my going to the city impossible.”

That was all that reached the girls in the hall, and this was forced upon them. Nancy could not forbear a smile. Elizabeth with the guilelessness of an unexperienced child exclaimed, “Why, Landis seems to have so many beautiful clothes. Her father must be very wealthy. Her rings and pins are simply lovely. Isn’t that a diamond she wears?”

“Yes; but it’s Min’s. Landis has been wearing it for the last two years. Min is an only child. She has no mother and her father, who is a millionaire oil-man, allows her to spend what she pleases.”

“Is Landis’ father an oil-man?”

“No, he isn’t,” was the reply.

Elizabeth was learning how much could be said by silence. During her short acquaintance with Landis, the girl had suggested many of the possibilities of her future—a cruise on a private yacht, a year’s study and travel in Europe. She had not said that money was no consideration with her, yet Elizabeth had gained such an impression from her words.

“I am sorry Landis will miss the reception,” she said.

Nancy smiled. “She will not miss it. She enjoys the social side of school life too much to miss anything of this kind. She will be down after awhile.”

“But you heard what she said—that she had nothing fit to wear.”

“But she will have—or has now. She will appear in a gown that puts all other dresses in the

shade. Here we are. How fine the reception committee look. Poor Mary Wilson! this is hard for her. She's doing her best not to toss back her hair and laugh."

As she spoke, they entered the parlors. Jimmy Jordan, arrayed in full dress, announced their arrival to Dr. Morgan.

The girls maintained a dignified and elegant composure until they reached the end of the line where Miss Wilson stood. Nancy's appearance distracted her attention from her social duties.

"You've got too much powder on your nose, Nancy," and with a flutter of her handkerchief, she made Nancy presentable. Then she remembered where she was. Her face flushed. She looked about her. Her words had carried across the room. The smiles of the committee about her were almost audible.

Elizabeth in company with Nancy moved through the room. "Here is someone I wish you to meet," said Nancy, "that is, if you are really interested in people of strong, though peculiar character. She is a Miss Rice. She owns a little farm not far from where my father preached. She works the whole place herself."

They came up to Miss Rice, a woman far past middle age. Her features showed exposure to the sun. Her red-bronze hair was turning into a grizzled, faded gray.

"I'm glad to meet Miss Hobart," she said. "You are from Bitumen, I hear. I have planned to go there as soon as I get my potatoes in, and those odd chores done for the winter. I heard your father had a peculiar plant—something unusual hereabout."

Elizabeth repeated the story of his having found an odd seed in an importation of tea and having planted it. Miss Rice's conversation was interesting. Her voice was full and melodious, but even Elizabeth who was used to the eccentricities of Miss Hale's attire could not repress a smile.

Miss Rice talked of the wheat blight and the damaging effects of potato-bugs, then with equal interest quoted Browning, and debated the question whether there was a present-day literature worthy of the name.

"She's a quaint character," Miss Cresswell said later to Elizabeth. "She might have been independently rich, but she has no idea of the value of money, and she is the sort who always finds someone who needs it more than she. It's been years since she's had a respectable winter coat because she pledged herself to provide for several old ladies in the Home for the Friendless. She has a whole host of doless relatives, whom she props up whenever they need it, and," as though an afterthought, "they always need it."

"Do you know if Landis is coming down?" asked Miss Rice a few moments later, turning to Elizabeth. "I really came purposely to see her. We've been a little uncertain about her finishing the year, but last week I sold four hundred bushels of potatoes. That means she can stay. She'll be pleased, but no more than I'll be." Then in a confidential tone, "When I was a girl, I didn't have the advantages that I'm trying to give Landis. We were poor, and father and mother were getting on in years, and I couldn't leave them. What I learned I dug out of books and other people's minds. Julia Hale—you know her—got me interested in botany, and someone else came along with a book or so. I was ambitious to go to Exeter, and then be a missionary. That seemed to be such a beautiful life of self-sacrifice; but it seems it wasn't to be. There never was a day when someone right there at home didn't need me, so that after a while I didn't ever have time to think of going. But there was Landis. I mean to prepare her well and send her in my place. When the potatoes turned out better than I'd been counting on, I just sat down and laughed. Then I got ready and came down here to tell Landis. There she is now." She arose, a trace of pleasurable excitement showing in her manner and lighting up her weather-beaten face, and moved to where Landis, radiant and self-confident, stood with Min and others of her satellites.

Elizabeth's eyes followed. She gave a little start of surprise at the sight. Min was wearing an organdy plainly showing signs of service, while Landis was arrayed in a handsome gown of soft blue silk. Elizabeth knew not the reason for it, but as she looked at the girls she had a sensation of being out-of-sorts, and at variance with the world. She might have given up to her feelings had not her roommate joined her. Mary's eyes were a little brighter than usual. She was fairly bubbling over with excitement.

"I've been looking almost everywhere for you, Elizabeth," she cried, tucking her hand within Elizabeth's arm, and leading her into a small room adjoining. "I want you to meet the best father and mother this country ever produced."

"I've met them," responded Elizabeth. "They are in Bitumen at this minute."

Mary laughed and gave her arm a squeeze. "You're getting on, Elizabeth. A month ago you couldn't have made such a remark. You were too literally literal. But as to the best parents; I have them shut up in this room."

"Not my parents," decidedly.

"I should say not. My own. Why should I be wanting anyone's else?"

They entered the room where a little group of the older guests had gathered. Leading Elizabeth to her father and mother, "This is Elizabeth," Mary said. Both father and mother held out their hands to her. Elizabeth felt that they were not strangers. They knew of her father. She was very glad to note the tone in which all people spoke of him. Nothing was said of his being a brilliant man, although he had been that, but all spoke of him as a good man and doing good work.

"The liquor people are getting it strong up your way, Judge," said a little old man in the group.

"What is going to happen to our friend Bill?"

"It has happened," responded Mr. Wilson. "We finished him Friday morning—a year and six months in the workhouse."

Elizabeth looked about her in surprise. Miss Cresswell was near her. "Is Mary Wilson's father that famous Judge Wilson?" she asked.

"Yes, didn't you know it?"

Elizabeth shook her head slowly. "How should I know?" she said, sinking back into her chair as though overcome by the news. "No one told me," she continued, "and Mary herself never mentioned it."

"Why should she?" was the response. "She is so used to his honors that she thinks nothing at all about them."

"Isn't it strange," said Elizabeth, having slowly awakened to the condition of affairs in the little world about her, "that it seems to be the people who have the least and do the least that make the most fuss?"

"One thing Exeter has taught you?" said Miss Cresswell with a smile. "The little tugs must make a noise or they may be run down, but the big liners are confident of their own power and so is everyone."

But Elizabeth had not heard this last remark. She was leaning eagerly forward listening to the conversation among the others. Judge Wilson was explaining to those who were interested what Big Bill Kyler had done to justify a year and a half in jail.

"You see," the Judge said, "all the land at Italee and Gleason belong to Mrs. Gleason. She won't sell, and leases and rents only under certain conditions. All renters are her husband's workmen. I suppose there's seven or eight hundred in the tannery and brickyard. She won't permit a licensed hotel on her land. Big Bill drives across the country, loads his wagon with contraband goods and retails them from his house. This is all on the quiet. I reckon he's carried this on for six months. But some time in August, Mrs. Gleason had his wagon stopped with the result," with a wave of his hand, "Bill is living at the expense of the State."

"A pretty smart woman, Mrs. Gleason." This remark came from the little old man in the corner.

"Very, but she would never have discovered this if someone had not given her a pointer; for Big Bill outwardly was an advocate of temperance."

"I am out of patience with the way in which justice errs," cried Mrs. Wilson, in the same spirited, sprightly way her daughter might have done. "We all know that Big Bill is not accountable. He has always been the tool of anyone who would make use of him. I doubt if he made any money by this work. There was a shrewder man back of him who planned this and took the money. And that man is the one who should be punished."

"Undoubtedly," responded the Judge. "But that man is shrewd enough to keep himself out of the toils. He has a wholesale license to sell at Westport. He does not obligate himself to question his buyers. He may ask Big Bill a trifle more than anyone else, but that is no infringement of the law. I think there was no doubt in anyone's mind who was the instigator of this 'speak-easy' business at Italee; but he was shrewd enough to keep within the letter of the law. We could not touch him, and he knew it."

"The whole business is nefarious! It is the curse of our country."

Judge Wilson smiled back at his wife. She was always so decided in her opinions, so fearless in expressing them.

"To be sure, to be sure," he responded calmly. "Most of us acknowledge that, but we have power only to interpret and judge. The people make the laws."

"I think this talk is a trifle too heavy for a boarding-school reception," exclaimed a young matron. "I shall return to the reception hall and listen to the chatter of schoolgirls. I haven't outgrown my taste for it." She laughed and passed into the adjoining room.

Her remark led to the general breaking up of the little group. "We had better go back to the younger set," was the sentiment of the elders.

"You must slip up now and see how nice our rooms look," cried Mary Wilson, clinging to her father and mother. "Elizabeth brought so many pretty things from home, our rooms look quite fine."

"Yes; do come," said Elizabeth. "We'll make you a cup of cocoa—or Mary will. I haven't reached such a high state of perfection that I make it for company."

"Well, just, for one moment then," said Mrs. Wilson. "We must not stay long enough to be missed. Mrs. Williams, will you and your husband come with us? We are going up to see the girls' rooms. They tell me that they are very fine."

Mrs. Williams gladly accepted. She was a little old Quaker lady, in Quaker garb, neat as the proverbial pin, and with the appearance of having just stepped from some old painting.

"It has been so many years since I have seen a schoolgirl's room," she said, "that I should love to see Mary's. In my day ours were plain—painted floors and wooden beds. It was not allowable to have aught else; but we were taught to be orderly—too much so, I thought."

"Dr. Morgan is particular about that. Mrs. Schuyler is preceptress, but she works under Dr. Morgan's orders," said Mrs. Wilson.

"That is well. Book knowledge means little if a woman is untidy and careless," was the response.

Elizabeth and Mary, far in the rear, acting as body-guard to the Judge, did not hear these remarks on neatness. To Mary it would have mattered little, for her conscience was clear so far as keeping her possessions in order was concerned. 105

"Oh, father, wait just one second," she cried. "There is Miss Watson from Muncy. I must speak with her, and ask her to go with us. She was at a German University all last year." She hurried away, and soon returned with a distinguished-looking young woman whom she introduced as Miss Watson. "She is going up with us," explained Miss Wilson, "to have a cup of cocoa. Oh, yes," as Miss Watson was about to demur, "we have eight cups now. Do you remember the time two years ago when I invited the girls in and forgot that I hadn't dishes enough? Yes; I have the same rooms but they're much nicer. We have so many new things that I'm sure you will not recognize them. Miss Hobart is my roommate. We have gotten along famously so far—haven't had the smallest kind of a difficulty. I'm sure we'll so continue, for I always think the first month is the hardest. We had to learn to adjust ourselves to each other. But there is no danger of a quarrel now. We have passed our rocks." 106

"Knock on wood, Mary," called back her father on hearing the remark, "that will exorcise the evil spirit of assurance. Knock on wood, I say, or you and Elizabeth will quarrel before the week is out."

Mary tossed her head and laughed. She thoroughly appreciated her father's witticisms.

"I shall not knock on wood—and we will not quarrel," she replied. "That is our room, mother. Yes; right there."

Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Wilson passed into the bedroom. The others of the party followed. Elizabeth and Mary at the end of the line had stepped aside to give precedence to the elders.

They heard Judge Wilson laugh. "It has been nothing less than a cyclone," he said, then laughed again.

"Why, this is not at all like Mary!" began Mrs. Wilson. Mary noticed the tone of apology in her voice. 107

She and Elizabeth stepped inside. Elizabeth's face grew crimson. In the middle of the floor lay her school shoes which, in her haste to dress, she had kicked off and left. Her coat and hat were on one chair. Stretched out on the end of the couch was her gym suit, glaringly conspicuous with its crimson braid. Every toilet article that she had used was in evidence, and in a place never designed for its occupancy.

Miss Wilson arose to the occasion. With a characteristic toss of the head, she crossed the room and drew forward a chair. "Sit, all of you, and I'll put the kettle to boil for cocoa. Father, tell your story about the boy illustrating 'The Old Oaken Bucket.'" She lighted the alcohol lamp while she was talking. She made no apology for the disorder of the room. One might suppose from her manner that all was as the most fastidious might desire.

Elizabeth sat quietly in the background, hoping that no one would speak to her. Her face was burning. There was a dimness about her eyes suggestive of tears. 108

Missing her, Mrs. Wilson turned, about. "Where is Elizabeth?" she asked. "Did she not come with us?"

"Yes; I came," said a voice choking with tears. "I'm here—and oh, I am so ashamed. Not one of those articles scattered about are Mary's. They're all mine." At this she could no longer restrain herself, but began to cry.

Both Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Wilson would have consoled her with well chosen words of sympathy. The men laughed and declared that they were so accustomed to dropping their shoes in the middle of the floor that they had not recognized the signs of disorder; that they supposed that the floor was the legitimate place for shoes. But treating the matter lightly did not rid Elizabeth of her shame and embarrassment. She was unable to control herself. Slipping into the bedroom, she threw herself face downward on the pillow and sobbed herself to sleep. 109

When she awakened, she found that the guests and Miss Wilson had departed. She prepared for bed and was standing in her night clothes when Mary came back into the room, a tearful little maiden. But Miss Wilson was unmoved.

"I'm so sorry and—ashamed," began Elizabeth.

"You should be," was the unfeeling response.

"It shall never happen so again," contritely.

"I'm sure it will not, for after this I'll see to it that the room is in order after you get through dressing."

"Oh, Mary, don't be so hard. Won't you forgive me? I'm sure I'm ashamed enough."

"It is no use talking further about it," was the grim response. "The thing's done and cannot be undone by any amount of talking. You mortified me before my best friends, and I can not forget it soon. When I can, I'll tell you. But please don't mention the subject to me again." 110

That was all, but it was enough. Elizabeth crept into bed and turned her face to the wall. She

had no desire to cry now. Anger and grief were holding equal places with her.

She was too young and healthy and sleepy to stay awake long. She had been sleeping uneasily when she awoke from a horrible nightmare. She had dreamed that a most formidable array of shoes and stockings, hats and coats in the form of grinning spectres were hovering about her ready to seize her. When she was wide awake, she remembered the cause of her dream. She remembered, too, that she had not put the sitting-room in order.

Crawling softly from bed, she crept into the study. It seemed as though each chair, in a conspiracy to make her efforts difficult, stood in her path. She turned on the gas and gathered together her possessions. Then she crept back to her nest again, hoping that the spectres of her negligence would not haunt her.

111

CHAPTER V.

A BOX FROM HOME.

113

For some days the relations between Elizabeth and her roommate were strained. No further words concerning the order of the room passed between them, but each time they dressed, whether for breakfast or dinner, Miss Wilson made a point of looking about both rooms to see that each article was as it should be. The very calmness of her manner was exasperating. Elizabeth was hurt more by it than by words. She paid no attention to Mary's vain efforts, for they had grown to be vain, as Elizabeth was keeping the tightest kind of a rein on herself.

Each article of dress was hung in its proper place as it left her hand. Each pencil went back to the pencil-holder even when she intended using it in a few minutes. She did not grant herself a second's grace. Her efforts were untiring during the first and second week. Many times she went back from the door of the class-room to be sure that every article in her room was where it should be.

114

Gradually she formed the habit of being orderly. It was but a few weeks until she discovered that she put her clothes away without thinking about it. She discovered, too, that she was actually saving time in not having to hunt for anything.

Mrs. Schuyler, the preceptress, generally looked in upon the rooms while the girls were at class. She was a dainty little widow, with a manner which she supposed to be pleasant and ingratiating but which the girls termed monotonously servile. Her expression was so exceedingly pleasant that the students named her Mrs. Smiles.

One Saturday morning as she made her daily rounds, she found both Elizabeth and Mary in their rooms.

115

"Miss Hobart, I must speak with you," she said, sweeping in, the long train of her black house gown trailing after her. "I wish to commend you on the improvement you have made in keeping your apartments in order. It has been weeks since I have found an article out of place on your dresser; and your closet has been in excellent order."

"You are very kind to tell me so," was the response. "But I take little credit to myself for the improvement. I've had such an example and mentor always before me that I could scarce be anything else but improved."

Miss Wilson stood by but gave no indication of hearing the remark until Mrs. Smiles, smiling and bowing, dragged her train from the room. Then she turned to Elizabeth.

"I scarcely expect you'll forgive me for the way I spoke that evening. But I was provoked and—and—humiliated. Miss Watson has always been my ideal and I did wish her to see me at my best."

116

"I think she did. You were all that could be expected of a girl. The Sphinx itself, could not have been more outwardly calm. I fancy Miss Watson went away in admiration of your self-control. If I remember, I was the only one who appeared to disadvantage."

There was a trace of bitterness in the girl's voice, for in spite of her effort to forget, the hurt of that evening still rankled within her.

"Now, Elizabeth, please do not speak in that tone. I was sorry for my words that evening the moment I spoke. But I am hasty. I try my best to keep quiet when I'm angry; but now and then I express myself before I realize it. You can't expect perfection in anyone. A quick temper is my besetting sin. I try to overcome it; but until I do my friends must bear with me. No one is perfection."

"Indeed," was the reply, "I'm rather surprised that you hold such an opinion. From the way you spoke that evening, I could not have judged you to be so liberal."

117

Miss Wilson knew her words were wasted. With a quick, impulsive movement she crossed the room to where Elizabeth stood, and throwing her arms about her, cried out, "You must not talk

like that, Elizabeth. You are not naturally sarcastic. Let me be the disagreeable one—if one there must be.”

She drew Elizabeth’s head down, kissing her warmly. It was impossible to be vexed long with such a whole-souled, impulsive girl as Miss Wilson. Elizabeth smiled and relented. From that time matters between the two moved smoothly as at first; but Elizabeth did not relax her vigilance. She realized how others might be inconvenienced and mortified by her carelessness. From an economical point of view, too, it was better to reform; for she had lost much time, and been tardy at class frequently on account of having to hunt for some needed article. 118

This week proved to be one of the most eventful of Elizabeth’s school year. She did not plan to go home for Thanksgiving. The Saturday previous she received a box from her mother. It was filled with all the good things a mother’s heart could devise and a cook’s skillful hands make ready. Miss Wilson carried the news of the arrival of the box to Elizabeth.

“The expressman’s on his way up with an immense box,” she cried, tossing back her hair, and talking as excitedly as though Exeter Hall were governed by a Board of Starvation.

Elizabeth hurried to the door. The expressman was already there, with about as much as he could carry.

Mary, as usual, arose to the occasion. She assisted to unpack. She expressed the proper amount of enthusiasm and admiration at each edible as it was brought forth. When the contents had been properly disposed of on every available window-sill, study-table and on the floor close to the wall where they would not be in the way of passing feet, she arose from her knees before the empty box. “You’ll have the spread to-night, I suppose. Some of the girls will be away to-morrow.” 119

Elizabeth had been long enough at Exeter to learn the meaning of that magic word “spread.” There are receptions, socials and spreads, but the greatest of these are spreads. A spread means slipping through dimly lighted corridors long after the retiring-bell has sounded its last warning; it means bated breaths, whispers and suppressed giggles. Its regalia is dressing-gowns or kimonos with bedroom slippers. It means mysterious knocks at the hostess’ door; a hurried skirmish within; and when it is found that one of the enlightened is rapping for admission, there is a general exodus from closets, from behind window draperies and from beneath study-tables.

Spreads have never been prohibited. Indeed, it is generally understood that the faculty would gladly grant permission for them, if the time and place were opportune. But never in the history of school-life has permission been asked. With permission granted, a spread would not be a spread. It would be a mere lunch—an opportunity to partake of delicacies. 120

Elizabeth’s eyes grew big at Mary’s suggestion. “We’ll have it to-night,” she exclaimed, “after the lights are out. Do you think we could have it here? Mrs. Smiles is at the end of the hall. We’ll have to be so careful.”

“So much the more fun. A spread is supposed to be risky, else it would not be a spread. Whom will you invite?”

Elizabeth began to name them on her fingers. “Anna Cresswell, Landis, Min, Mame Welch, and Miss O’Day.” Her acquaintance with the last-named student had not progressed far enough to permit calling her by her first name. As far as Miss O’Day was concerned, the Exeter girls knew not friendship. Elizabeth could see that the girl herself made no advances. From her attitude, it was impossible to judge whether she was proud or shy. Scarcely the latter, for she carried herself with a self-poise which was suggestive of confidence. Elizabeth had not learned the cause of the estrangement between her and the other students. No one had ventured an explanation to her and she would not ask. Now at the mention of her name, Miss Wilson grew dignified—a sure sign that she was half angry. 121

“I wouldn’t ask her,” she said.

“Why not?”

“Oh, simply because I wouldn’t. None of the girls ever invite her, or haven’t for the last year.”

“Oh, well, no doubt I do a great many things which none of the other girls do, so I might as well do this. I don’t object to being a little odd.”

“Well, if you do—if you take Nora O’Day up and make a friend of her, the other girls will surely cut you.” 122

“Cut me?” exclaimed Elizabeth, for the first time in her life fairly indignant. Her pride was aroused. “Cut me? Well, let that be as they choose. They’ll not have the opportunity, for I can let them as severely alone as they do Nora O’Day. If I cannot invite whom I please to my spread without asking the advice of a dozen other girls, then I’ll not have it at all. I don’t know and don’t wish to know why you girls snub Miss O’Day. As far as I can see, she acts quite as well as some others at Exeter.”

“We don’t snub her, at least I have never done so. I treat her with conventional courtesy.”

“Conventional courtesy! Deliver me from it, then. Why, the thermometer falls below zero whenever she comes where you girls are together. I know no evil of her. She has always treated me nicely, and I shall treat her so. When I discover that she is not fit to associate with, then I’ll let her alone.” 123

“But, Elizabeth, if you only knew!”

"But I don't know and I don't want to know." Mary hesitated. She was not tempted to tell Elizabeth the whole story of the year before. She was never tempted to tell news or bruit from one student to another what was no concern of hers. She hesitated because she was uncertain whether it paid to carry the discussion further. After a moment's thought, she decided that much talking would not be effective.

"Very well, Elizabeth, do as you please. Ask anyone you choose. Of course the spread is yours. But if you ask Nora O'Day, you may expect to find me occupied at that time. Landis will not mind if I go over to her rooms. I'm off now to geometry! Of course, I'll help you get ready and all that."

With this parting shot, she quitted the room. Elizabeth had a vacant period following, a time generally devoted to looking over her work. To-day she employed it in reviewing her conversation with Mary Wilson. She was gradually awakening to the knowledge that a certain independence of thought and action was necessary if one would not become a mere tool used by each and all of her friends. At Bitumen, her parents and Miss Hale had influenced her. But there had been such a sweet unselfishness in all they did, such an evidence that they were working for her good, that Elizabeth had allowed their will to become her own. As she considered the matter now, she could remember no instance when she had been conscious of feeling that any other course of action save that which they suggested would have been pleasing to her. She was fond of her roommate. Mary had helped her over many a little difficulty in regard to classes and gym work. She was one of those whole-souled girls who was more than ready and willing to divide both her good times and her possessions.

Elizabeth had not become so interested in Miss O'Day that her presence at the spread would cause her any great pleasure. Had Mary Wilson not shown such a spirit of authority, such a desire to have her own will in this, Elizabeth would have dropped the matter without a thought. But now she felt that she would ask Miss O'Day. If she did so, she *would* be an independent person; if she did not, she would be doing merely as her roommate wished, in a blind way, without knowing the reason for her action.

While she was pondering the matter, there came back to her the words her father had spoken when he had planned to send her to school. "The girls will teach you more than any of the faculty." There was one thing they would teach her, she decided instantly, and that was to form her own opinions of people, and to follow out her own course of action. She would ask Miss O'Day to her spread. Mary Wilson could come or stay away just as she chose. Mary should decide that matter for herself.

When once Elizabeth made a decision, there was no dilly-dallying, no going back and wondering if she had done the right thing. Taking up her pencil, she began to jot down the names of those to be invited. Nora O'Day's name headed the list with Azzie Hogan's tagged on at the last. The majority of the girls were at class. Her only opportunity for seeing them was immediately before dinner or during study-hour in the evening, providing Mrs. Smiles did not keep too close a watch.

She wondered what Mary Wilson would think of asking Azzie Hogan. Azzie did not take advantage of the social privileges of Exeter. Azzie was a genius—a boarding student who put in all her time with music—who sat for hours producing the most marvelous tones from instruments where other girls drew discords—who would sit all day at the piano, and not find the time long; and who spent her leisure in dawdling over sofas, or playing practical jokes on every one about her. She was a long-limbed, fair-haired girl, with a touch of wit from some remote ancestor who must have had O' tacked to his name, and a great inaptitude toward books. She could play. Exeter had never before boasted such skill as hers. Her fame had spread over the state. But other lessons were impossible.

The subject of the guests was not brought up again between the roommates. Mary had a successful interview with the matron, and returned to her rooms with cream for cocoa, and a few forks and spoons, borrowing cups and plates from the girls in the hall. Elizabeth had a class late in the afternoon. When she came back she found the work she planned already done. She started off immediately to issue her invitations.

The rooms occupied by Min and Landis were nearest her own. She stopped there first. She found the girls busy, Landis at the study-table, putting the last touches to a composition for the following day's rhetoric. Min was sitting on a low chair by the window, sewing braid on the bottom of a dress-skirt. Unconsciously, Elizabeth gave the article in Min's hand a second glance, and recognized it as the skirt Landis generally wore to class.

Landis, whose eye was quick to note all that occurred in her presence, caught the second glance. "Isn't Min good?" she asked. "She is putting a new braid on my everyday skirt. I caught my heel in it yesterday and ripped the binding almost off. If there is one piece of work which I detest above another, it is putting on braids."

"How about Min?" asked Elizabeth. "Does she enjoy it?"

"She doesn't *dislike* it," was the response. "She likes to be busy, and is quite as content to be at that as at some of the greater things of life. Min does that for me, and I'm left free to do a line of work which would not claim her." As she spoke, she arose and moved from the table. Before doing so, she was careful to lay a book across the top of the page on which she had been writing. She might have placed it there to keep the papers from being scattered over the room, but it looked more as though she placed it in a position to hide the title. She sank down in a low chair beside Elizabeth and watched Min work. Her speech impressed her hearer that she was

doing work of so high an order that common spirits like her own could not comprehend. Elizabeth had heard Landis make such reference before, but after having talked with Miss Rice, she concluded that Landis, when speaking in her own peculiar way, had in mind the life of a missionary which was to be hers on leaving school. Elizabeth had a great reverence for religion. So while Landis made these speeches, she listened with becoming attention.

But Min, to whom all things were material, and the nearest point the only one seen, blurted out in her slow, uncomprehending way, "Yes, I'd much rather sew on a binding than to do the work Landis does. What one of us likes to do, the other one don't. So we fit fairly well as roommates. This noon when she was complaining about the mending she must do, I told her I'd do it all if she'd get my thesis ready for to-morrow. We have a discussion on the Literature of the Elizabethan Period. As though I could write a thousand words on that! So we traded off."

A flush had come to Landis' cheek while her roommate talked. She stopped her as quickly as was consistent with tact. When once Min started it was impossible to tell when she would stop.

"Tell Elizabeth about the trip your father is planning," said Landis, breaking into Min's discourse.

But Elizabeth arose, declaring that she had no time to stay longer; she had merely stopped in to ask them both to come to her room for a spread that evening, any time after the lights were out.

"A box from home!" exclaimed Min. "Isn't that lovely? That is what it means to have a mother! Our housekeeper is as kind as can be and would be only too glad to send me a box if she thought of it. But that is the difference, a mother would think. If father was there, I'd go home to-morrow. But he won't be, so I would rather stay here than be in that big house alone with servants. Landis has an invitation to go out into the country for dinner. I'm sure I'd go if I were she. Miss Rice has asked her to come but she won't go."

"I do not think it would be kind to leave Min alone," she said, as though that were her sole motive in staying.

"Miss Rice!" exclaimed Elizabeth. "I know her. I met her the evening of the reception."

"Quite a character, isn't she?" responded Landis, as she might have spoken of one with whom she had but a passing acquaintance, instead of one on whom she was depending for all she had. "I often think she would make an admirable character for a novel. If my talent ran in that direction, I would certainly put Betty Rice in a book."

"Isn't she related to you?" asked Elizabeth in that innocent way which springs from the heart of one who has no guile and does not suspect others.

Landis drew down her eyebrows and pondered as though she were figuring out just what the relation was. The impression her manner gave to one who was merely a casual observer was that she deliberated and thought before speaking in order that her statements might not deviate by a hairbreadth from justice and truth.

"I was just trying to think if she really were related at all or if we call her so from mere courtesy. If she be related to us, it is so distant that I cannot explain it. I fancy we call her so without any blood ties at all. You know how it is with a family like ours—in fact all English families of the upper class. We've lived in one place for generations, and always have played the Lady Bountiful to the poorer folk until they grow to believe they have a claim upon us. Betty Rice is not the only one of these hangers-on. But I'm not complaining. She's a good soul and always does her best. I really have a fondness for her. You can be sure that so long as I have a home Betty shall have one too."

Min Kean had never talked with Miss Rice or Miss Rice's friends. She forthwith expressed her admiration of Landis' noble generosity of spirit and purse.

Elizabeth's lack of experience in meeting with people made her slow to comprehend and compare. Although she remembered Miss Rice's statements made the evening of the reception, and now heard those made by Landis, she did not reach a conclusion in regard to them. It was not until weeks later that her mind sifted these conflicting ideas, placing and ticketing each in its proper relation.

"But about the spread! You'll come?"

"It's useless to ask such a question! Of course we'll come. We have never been known to miss a spread."

The other girls accepted with the same readiness. It was not until Azzie was reached that any uncertainty arose.

Azzie was at the piano when Elizabeth found her. "It depends," she replied. "If Smiles will allow me to do overtime this evening, I won't be able to come. I'll be too tired. If she's cranky and locks up the music room, I'll come."

"Then I hope she'll be cranky. We want you," was the response.

"I don't. Professor Van Buren gave me the sweetest thing to-day—a little German composition. I want to work on it. It isn't hard, but the runs need practice." She turned back to her music.

Elizabeth went on to find Miss O'Day. Their acquaintance had not gone beyond that of classroom meetings and hall chats. She had never visited the girl's rooms. She was surprised at their beauty and elegance. All the Exeter girls had comfortable apartments, but this surpassed anything else at the Hall. The draperies between the doors were of imported India material; her

tea-table showed many pieces of Royal Worcester; her extra chairs were of fine cabinet woods. The occupant of the room was seated in a low chair by the fire. She was already dressed for dinner. Since the evening Dr. Morgan had sent her to her room because she had appeared in a low-necked gown, her dressing had been less elaborate, yet by no means could it be called simple.

Her hands were covered with rings. Her hair was piled high in quite the fashion of a grown-up woman. It was more noticeable, perhaps, because the younger students at Exeter wore their hair in girlish fashion.

She arose to greet Elizabeth, shaking her by the hand and leading her to a chair. She was pleased that Elizabeth had called, yet her manner had a certain icy courtesy about it which made her guest ill at ease.

"This is the first time you have come to see me," she said. "But I am glad you have come at last. Sit here. This low chair is the most comfortable." 136

"I haven't time," said Elizabeth. Nevertheless she took the proffered chair. "Your rooms are beautiful, Miss O'Day," she said. "As you say, this is the first time I have been in them, but I had caught glimpses from the hall of your pretty draperies and chairs. Your tea-table is a dream."

"Why haven't you come in before and seen it close at hand?" she asked.

Elizabeth knew no polite way of evading the question. She was not skilled in the little methods of saying much and meaning little.

"You never came to see me," she replied, "and I fancied you did not care to have me come, though you have always been very pleasant when I have met you in the hall. But I supposed if you wanted to know me better, you would have come to see me." 137

A peculiar expression passed over the hearer's face. She gave Elizabeth a quick, questioning glance, as though she doubted the good faith of this statement. But the glance satisfied her that her visitor was not acting a part. She leaned forward as though to warm her hands at the grate. In reality, she was taking time to consider well her words before she spoke.

"I really wished to call on you," she said, "but hesitated lest I intrude. Your roommate, Miss Wilson, would not be at all pleased to have me. That is why I did not call."

"But the rooms are half mine! She would have nothing at all to do with my callers. Surely that was a queer sort of reason to keep away."

"That was the first reason. Then there was another. How should I know that you would receive me? One girl influences another so. I knew Miss Wilson did not wish me to come. How was I to know that she had not filled your mind so with school gossip that you, too, would be glad to have me keep at a distance?" 138

The girl's manner of speaking was peculiar. It was difficult to understand whether she were hiding her arrogant pride by an assumption of humility or whether she truly felt that her calls would not be looked upon with favor. Her manner was not easy at any time. It was marked by a self-consciousness that gave her companions the impression that the little courtesies from well-bred people were something new to her.

Elizabeth flared up at her words. "Do you think I'm a handful of putty," she asked, "to be moulded any way my companions choose? I form my own opinions. So long as you treat me fairly, I would do the same by you. But really, you do Mary an injustice. She never told me anything against you. Of course, I knew there was some feeling that was not altogether friendly between you. But I learned that from *your* manner as much as I did from hers." 139

Miss O'Day made no response. Elizabeth waited a few moments for her to answer. Being disappointed in this, she turned the conversation to the object of her errand.

"Mother sent me a box. The girls will be in for a spread this evening and I want you to come. It will be at the usual hour—any time after lights are out and you can get rid of Smiles."

Elizabeth arose, moving toward the door. "I'll have less than ten minutes to dress for dinner. Do you think I can do it in that time? I haven't been late since I came to Exeter, so I shall not hurry now. One late mark will keep me in harmony with the rest of the girls." Her hand was upon the knob.

"Wait, Miss Hobart!" Miss O'Day had arisen. There was a sound of rustling petticoats as she moved. She twisted her hands nervously as though dreading to speak. "I should like nothing better than coming. I haven't been to a 'blow-out' this fall. But I hardly think I can come now." She hesitated. She spoke slowly as though she could not put her thoughts into the proper words. "I really wish to come, Miss Hobart. It is kind of you to ask me. I don't want to take advantage of your goodness, so I must tell you why the girls here do not care to know me. I did something wrong last year—something they look upon as dreadful. They all belong to the Christian Association. As an Association they are pledged to discountenance just what I did. I'm not a member. So since last spring I've been cut out of every social affair except those the school gives." 140

"Well, I call that mean," cried Elizabeth. "Why don't you—"

"No, they were right in one way. I tell you so much because I cannot accept your invitation if you do not know. If you wish me to tell you all about it, I will, although I have spoken of the matter to no one. I couldn't."

"No, I don't want to hear. I wish you to come to-night. I'd rather find matters out for myself. You'll come?"

"Does Miss Wilson know you intend asking me?"

"Yes, of course. I made out the list this morning." She did not add that Miss Wilson had expressed herself rather strongly on the subject.

"Well, then I shall come."

"I must go, or I shall be too late to get any dinner at all. This is roast beef night, too; and that's the night I always pay the cook a compliment by eating two portions—my own and Anna Cresswell's. She doesn't like roast beef, and I don't like rice pudding. So we trade. Good-bye. I'll see you then to-night."

"The mail has come," was Miss Wilson's greeting, as Elizabeth entered her room. "I have a letter from Mrs. Gleason. She writes to invite me to spend a Sabbath with her at my earliest convenience. I am to bring you along. I did not know you knew her. I've mentioned her so often and you never said that you were friends."

"I don't know her." Elizabeth was struggling into a white shirtwaist as she talked. "I never saw her. There must be some mistake about her asking me."

"No; there's the letter. Read it when you have leisure. I thought from the way she wrote that she knew you well. Odd, isn't it? But we'll go. It is the best place to visit."

"But we cannot go for several weeks. I'm to lead Sabbath evening."

"And I can't go until Anna Cresswell can be here. She has been going away on Saturday. They need a soprano. And she and I appear to be the only availables." Mary shook back her hair, as she adjusted the last pin in her cuff. "There's the last bell, Elizabeth, and you're not half ready. Well, I'll hurry on, and if you are locked out, I'll get Maggie to bring your dinner up here. She'll do anything if you give her a small tip."

CHAPTER VI.

HOW "SMILES" WAS SCALPED.

Azzie Hogan was the last to appear at the spread. The first course had been diverted to its proper use, and the ice which marked the manner of both Mary Wilson and Landis Stoner because of the presence of Miss O'Day had thawed enough to permit a feeling of ease among the girls, when Azzie arrived.

There was a motley array of every color of kimono that the mind of girl could conceive. Their wearers were being comfortable on chairs and stools so far as they held out. The girls in excess of the number had curled themselves up, Turkish fashion, on cushions on the floor.

"Smiles must have allowed Azzie to practice," said Mary Wilson, with a leg of chicken held aloft.

"Mary looks like Liberty enlightening the world," said Elizabeth. "The drumstick answers very well for a torch."

"Liberty *frightening* the world," said Mame Welch. "Whatever made her do it—get a red kimono with her hair that shade?"

"Nearest thing I could get to match," said Mary, laughing. "I got it at a bargain. I didn't need it. I have more lounging robes than I can possibly wear; but this piece was reduced from twenty-five cents to fifteen. I saved one-twenty by buying it. We—"

As she was speaking her voice ascended the scale until it might have been audible half-way down the hall. She was called to a halt by a most decided rap upon the door. An awesome silence fell upon the room. Instantly every girl except the rightful owners of the room disappeared. No word had been spoken. Only the moving of the couch draperies, the gentle swaying of the portieres, or the closing of the wardrobe door gave hint as to the places of disappearance. Again came the knock. Mary Wilson with suspicious haste opened the door. "He-he," giggled Azzie, entering. "You thought it was Mrs. Smiles. Come, girls. Come out. Mrs. Schuyler will not appear this night, or to-morrow either, if I am not mistaken."

At her invitation the girls came forth. Azzie was too tall, too long to seat herself with any grace of body. She had the effect of sprawling. That she did now. Her purple kimono, resplendent with green roses and bands, caused her to look like a great rag-doll with most of the sawdust missing. The others of the party arranged themselves on cushions and chairs about her, ready to fall, tooth and nail, upon the remains of the roast chicken. Azzie would not eat, but kept her hand hidden in the folds of her gown.

"You needn't be talking in stage whispers," she began, with a fine touch of Irish in her voice. "Smiles won't hear you—or at least she won't be coming here. Yell, if you choose, or dance a

clog. You're as safe as though Smiles was in Halifax."

"Don't be too sure. I never like to run a risk," said Landis. "I should not like to be called into the office to-morrow."

"I have found it this way with Mrs. Schuyler," explained Mary Wilson. "The moment you are sure she isn't about, that is the moment you can be sure she is ready to pounce on you."

"But she won't be here now. I'll yell and see." She yelled—a yell that must have reached to the end of the dormitory and pierced any number of closed doors. The girls suppressed their half-frightened giggles, and waited. Azzie was right. Mrs. Schuyler did not appear.

"Why doesn't she come?" asked Min Kean in a whisper. "She surely heard that."

"Because I've taken her scalp," said Azzie. So speaking, she drew forth her hand, dangling two sets of false fronts. 147

"Oh, you didn't dare!"

"How could you!"

"You'll be sent home, Azzie."

"How did you ever get them?" asked Elizabeth. To her, such an act was more than merely hazardous. It was recklessness itself.

"Oh, I got them," said Azzie coolly. "I had a bit of neuralgia. A wisdom tooth has been bothering me for a long time, and I stopped in after the retiring-bell rang to ask Mrs. Schuyler for a drop of medicine to put in it. She was ready for bed. Say, girls, did you ever see her when she wasn't rigged out? She looked like a fright. She hasn't much hair left, but what she has was done up in curling kids. And these," dangling the false fronts before their eyes, "these lay reposing on the top of the dresser. I brought them along to show you girls how fine they are—two grades, one for every day and one for dress-up days." 148

"Don't shake them so close over my cocoa, please," cried Landis, removing her cup beyond the reach of Azzie's scalps.

"I felt safe about coming so long as I had these," continued Azzie. "Don't be afraid, Landis. A few hairs more or less won't hurt your supper."

"How will you get them back?" asked Elizabeth, who was fearful for Azzie's welfare.

"I hadn't got that far in my thinking," was the droll response. "I knew nothing could induce her to visit us without these," with another Indian flourish of the scalps in the air. "We are safe to-night. To-morrow Smiles will have a headache, and will not be able to come down to breakfast, and perhaps not during the entire day. Drop in to-morrow to ask her something and see if you do not find her with her head tied up."

It was impossible not to laugh at Azzie. There was such a droll dryness to her humor, a peculiar touch to her way of saying things which made her most ordinary expressions masquerade as wit. At times she lacked tact which caused her companions no little embarrassment. This trait was made evident by her turning to Miss O'Day with the remark: 149

"And, Nora, are you here? I'm as surprised to see you as I am to be here myself." Then turning to Elizabeth, she added as an explanation, "The 'Exclusives' had no time for Miss O'Day last spring, and I was always too much wrapped up in my music to be good company. So we were not invited to the spreads in the hall. I'm glad, Elizabeth, you broke over and invited us."

Miss O'Day's face grew crimson. Elizabeth, too embarrassed to respond, remained silent. Miss Wilson arose to the occasion, changing the subject with the question, "When is Miss Kronenberg going back?"

"Not until Monday," replied Landis, who was rarely embarrassed. These two, with the assistance of Mame Welch and Carrie Hirsch, diverted the attention from Miss O'Day. 150

"I do not German lessons take. Fraulein is not my instructor."

"Well, she is mine," responded Mary Wilson with a sigh. "As in a dream I hear her say, 'Fraulein Wilson, you have it unright.' I've taken lessons from her for three years, and that is the only remark she has ever made to me."

"She will be giving examinations soon," said Mame. "The Seniors and Middlers finish her work fully a week before the midwinter holiday. It gives us time to cram on something else. It won't be long now."

"Last year, indeed for several years, she has asked the class to write in German a description of a walk in the woods, or our Christmas at home, or what our college life has done for us. It is always the same. She lets you choose one of the three, but you must write a certain amount before she will accept it."

"Landis and I are ready for it," began Min Kean placidly. "We have ours written ready for her. I took a 'Walk in the Woods,' for my subject. I did want to take 'What Exeter has Done for Me,' but Landis persuaded me out of it. Of course, she was right about it. No one expects me to write on subjects as deep as Landis. We have ours all finished and ready." 151

"Nonsense, Min," cried her roommate. "One would think to hear you talk that we were expecting to pony through. You know such an idea is the one furthest from our minds. You leave such false impressions." Then turning to the girls, she explained, "I knew Fraulein Kronenberg

was in the habit of asking for such work in the examinations, so I told Min there would be no harm in our practicing at this work. It would be quite the same thing as though we were reviewing our lessons. Of course, we had no intention of handing them in." Landis always appeared several inches taller when she sought to justify herself.

"The day we are free of German, that day will Miss Brosius put us to extra work in elocution and oratory. If I read the stars right, I discovered a play in the corner of her eye when I saw her last. She has already begun to estimate each one of us, to see who will best serve her purpose. Anna Cresswell is already doomed. She is always dragged in for the beautiful, calm creature who doeth and thinketh no evil. I wonder why she is always selected when I——"

"I suppose they know you'd overdo it," suggested Azzie, lazily. "Thank goodness, there are some things I escape by not being quick to learn my part. They never tried me but once."

"But you always play. I'd rather any day get up and strut over the stage, shrieking 'Is that a dagger that I see before me?' than sit down and keep my fingers on the right keys," said Mame Welch.

"It is certainly wonderful how Azzie can play," said Min. "Every one seems to enjoy it; but, do you know, just for myself, I like popular airs best? Beethoven and Mozart may be fine, but I like the kind that the newsboys whistle and all the hurdy-gurdies play."

"Wouldn't Mozart turn in his grave if he heard her?" asked Mame. "Speak to her, Azzie. Reason with her. You are the only one who has artistic sense enough to be shocked. Tell her to keep quiet, like the others of us do, and pretend to revel in delight at Wagner."

"Will the Middlers be in it, too?" asked Elizabeth. Her heart failed at the thought.

"Yes," said Mary, seeing that Elizabeth was really concerned at the prospect of appearing in public. "Yes, they give the Middlers several parts. You see, their idea is to get the Middlers used to public speaking so that they will appear well when they are Seniors. All the experiences or lessons Middlers ever get are given them in order to fit them to be Seniors."

The lunch had been progressing during the chatter. A few drumsticks and several slices of cake remained to show what had been. Elizabeth and Mary, with true housewifely instinct, put away the remnants of the feast after their guests had finished.

"How economical you are becoming!" said Mame Welch. "If I become hungry to-morrow, I will visit while you are not here. If you miss anything, I think you may give Landis the credit of taking it."

Landis shrugged her shoulders. "To see how careful they are, one would think they never had much to eat before and don't expect much again. Now, I'd throw the whole lot of it into the scrap-basket and let Jimmy Jordan carry it off with the refuse. You bring to my mind that woman we met the day we came back to Exeter. She was horrified because I didn't take what was left of our lunch and run about offering it to some people who did not have any with them. She went outside and shared hers with such a common-looking woman and two dirty, crying babies."

"And me, too," said Elizabeth, not a whit abashed that she had been one of the party which Landis saw fit to criticise.

"Oh, yes," was the reply, "But I suppose you were forced into it."

"I wasn't forced into it," Elizabeth replied. "Indeed, I was glad to go. It was like a little picnic out there under the tree—"

"With two crying babies?"

"They did not cry after we went out. And the woman whom you laugh at was very agreeable. The wait did not seem at all long. It was rather like a pleasant party."

"Well, tastes differ," was the reply. "I am glad you enjoyed it. I'm sure I should not. Come, Min, don't you think we had better pick our steps back?"

"Walk as you please. The great Hokee Bokee Chief of the Night Hawks has taken the scalp of the pale-faced scout," shouted Mary Wilson, jumping to her feet and, seizing the false fronts, she waved them madly in the air while she executed a war-dance.

"Give them back to Azzie," said Mame. "Sometime early to-morrow morning you will find that the pale-faced scout is close on Azzie's trail."

Azzie took the trophies in her hand, examining them critically. "To-morrow I intend to go in and call upon her. I know she'll have a towel bound around her head."

The girls were about to depart when Mame Welch exclaimed, "There, I almost forgot! Anna Cresswell has been invited down to Gleasonton to visit at the Senator's. Mrs. Gleason is arranging quite a party of Exeter girls as soon as they can have a free Saturday."

"Elizabeth and I were invited to-day," said Mary. "We were to let Mrs. Gleason know what Saturday we would have free."

"They have fine times there—so they tell me," Azzie said. "I've never been invited to see for myself."

"I do not know Mrs. Gleason personally," remarked Landis, "but we have the same set of friends. No doubt if I should tell her that I'm Robert Stoner's daughter, she'd out-do herself to be kind to me."

"Why," said Elizabeth guilelessly, "was she such a friend of your father's?"

Landis shrugged her shoulders. "My father was a man of some prominence," was the response. "But how is it that she invited you? Did you not tell me that you did not know her?"

"I don't. I have never so much as seen her."

"She's very philanthropic—always trying to help people who need it. I suppose she knew you were a new student, and perhaps hadn't a wide acquaintance here, so she invited you that you might not find life too dull."

"Perhaps," was the reply, with a smile of amusement. Elizabeth was learning a great deal, not less important that it lay outside of classes and books.

The other girls had departed. Only Landis and Miss O'Day remained. Then the former with a whispered "good-night" went tip-toeing down the hall. Miss O'Day lingered.

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Much to Elizabeth's surprise she bent her head to kiss her. "It was very kind of you, Elizabeth, to ask me to come this evening. But the other girls did not like it. Come to see me. You and I will grow chummy over my tea-table. But you do not need to ask me again when you entertain. I will not feel hurt. If you persist in being good to me, they will drop you and you will find it very lonely."

"They may do as they see fit," she responded with determination. "I will entertain whom I wish. If they do not choose to come, then they have the alternative. Good-night! Don't worry about me, Miss O'Day. I'm learning to take care of myself." Then she put up her lips to be kissed again.

The following morning the preceptress did not appear at breakfast, as Azzie had predicted. The dinner hour, according to the custom for all holidays, had been postponed until two o'clock. Devotional exercises were held in the chapel at ten o'clock. Mrs. Schuyler's place on the rostrum was vacant.

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"She's been in her room all morning," giggled Min to Landis on their way to their rooms.

"I hope Azzie will see the error of her ways before dinner time," Mary Wilson said. "I should not like to miss a Thanksgiving dinner."

As though Mary's words had power to call her, Azzie at that moment came down the corridor, swinging herself lazily along.

"This is the sixth time I've started for Mrs. Schuyler's room," she began at the sight of the girls. "But the moment I reach the door, my heart drops down into my shoes, and it's so heavy, I can't move my feet an inch."

"Taking scalps is not all the fun it's supposed to be, is it?" asked Mame Welch.

"The taking is all right. The taking *back* is what hurts my feelings." Azzie sighed deeply as she began to unwrap the paper about the false fronts. "I don't know whether I'll have the courage to lay them inside her door or not. I'd put it off until to-morrow if it wasn't for the Thanksgiving dinner. Well, there's luck in odd numbers."

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"To me there would be something too subtle, too sly, in slipping them in at the door." The remark was from Landis.

As usual, Mary Wilson was the one quick to reply. "Then Azzie will not do it if there be but a suspicion of subtleness about it. Do you not know her well enough, Landis, to know when she is jesting and when she is not?"

"Oh, well, let us hope she was jesting then," was the reply.

The seventh venture had carried a charm for Azzie. Her heart did not go thumping to her heels again. She knocked at Mrs. Schuyler's door and then entered without waiting for permission.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Schuyler," she cried gayly. "I was sorry not to see you down to breakfast, though to be honest I did not expect you. Did you miss anything last evening after I was in? It was too good a chance—there they were lying right under my eyes. I'll leave them here," laying the budget on a table near her, "so you can come down to dinner."

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Her manner was not that of one who merited or expected a rebuke. There was such a big-hearted friendliness in her voice that Mrs. Schuyler's heart responded. She smiled in spite of the feeling of vengeance she had been cherishing against her tormentor. Before she could regain her austerity of manner, Azzie had departed and was half way down the dormitory hall, on her way to the music-room for an hour's practice before dinner.

Thanksgiving was not a day of unalloyed happiness to Elizabeth. The afternoon's mail brought her letters and papers from Bitumen. Her father wrote the home news with the same gaiety which marked his conversation. He mentioned, as though it were a subject to be lightly treated, that there was some talk of the miners "going out." He thought their grievance might be adjusted without resorting to extreme measures—a week or so would tell. Then he took up the little matters of the house.

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The letter was remarkably cheerful. Yet Elizabeth was disturbed in spirit. She had never lived through a strike; but she had heard the miners' wives tell of the dreadful happenings. So far she thought only of the suffering of the miners' families, with no money, starving and freezing in their little shanties. She had never heard how the lives of the operators and men in the position of her father hung in the balance at such times.

After reading the letter again, she mechanically took up the newspaper. The black headlines heralding the coming strike were before her. She read column after column hurriedly. The newspaper attached greater importance to the rumors than her father. They recounted the horrors of strikes past, and presaged them for strikes to come. No definite reasons had been given for the miners going out. The article hinted that only the grossest imposition of the operators had led them to consider a strike. The names of two men appeared frequently—Dennis O'Day and Ratowsky—who were opposed to each other. Strange to say, neither was a miner. Ratowsky could influence the men because he was foreign-born, a Pole, as the majority of them were. On the other hand, Dennis O'Day was a native American, a class of which the foreign element is suspicious. Yet at his instigation the miners had arisen.

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The article caused Elizabeth some uneasiness. She looked forward to the following day's paper, hoping it might contain a brighter outlook. But on the next day when she went to the reading room, she failed to find the papers. For many successive days the same thing occurred. Then at length, she gave up looking for them. It was not until a month later that she learned that they had disappeared at Dr. Morgan's suggestion, and the girls were aiding her in keeping the worrisome news from Elizabeth.

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The letters from home came at their usual times, but neither her father nor mother mentioned the trouble at the mines. Elizabeth, believing that no news was good news, took it for granted that the difficulty had been amicably settled.

A week later, in company with Mary Wilson, she set forth to visit Mrs. Gleason. From Exeter to Gleasonton is only an hour's ride. At the station, they found a sleigh with a coachman and footman waiting to convey them to Senator Gleason's home.

"It is the prettiest place in summer," said Mary, as they went flying over the snow-packed roads. "Everything is so beautiful that you can really believe it is fairyland."

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On their way, they passed several stately country residences, closed for the winter. Then came acres and acres of bark-sheds filled with bark for the tanneries; then the tanneries themselves. Then, at a distance, upon the brow of the hill were seen the stone walls of Senator Gleason's home.

"Isn't it beautiful?" whispered Elizabeth, as though should she speak aloud the spell would be broken, and the place, like Aladdin's palace, vanish in the air.

"Wait until you see it in summer, with all the vines and beautiful trees," was the response.

They turned into the driveway, and in a few minutes were brought to the front entrance. At the sound of the bells, the door opened and Senator Gleason appeared, smiling and affable, to welcome them, and following him was his wife.

Elizabeth gave a start of surprise. Although more richly dressed than when she had seen her before, Elizabeth recognized in her the plain little woman with whom she had eaten lunch on her journey to Exeter.

CHAPTER VII.

DEFYING THE POWERS.

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Both Fraulein Kronenberg and Dr. Kitchell announced tests for the week before the Christmas holidays. The Seniors and Middlers arose early and stayed up late to study. The hour for physical exercise was cut as short as Miss Brosins would permit. There was little time for anything that was purely social. There was no lingering in the hall after meals for chats. Carrie Hirsch was the only one who had leisure after Miss Kronenberg's announcement. She laughed as the girls hurried back to their rooms. "German is not so hard," she explained. "What one thinks one must say—so simple are the words. Not at all can I understand why they all look so like a frown because Fraulein Kronenberg gives them but one little story to write in the German."

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"Suppose Miss Berard should give you a simple little story to write in English," returned Mary Wilson. "Wouldn't you look like a frown, too?"

Miss Hirsch shrugged her shoulders. "It is true you speak; but English is so different."

Elizabeth felt the excitement attendant upon an examination. Had she paused long enough to analyse her feelings, she would have discovered that she had no fear of failing. She had read German with Miss Hale since she was old enough to read. The Middlers' work in German had been to her like an old tale, oft repeated. But the attitude of the other students and the novelty of an examination made her nervous. She was hurrying back to her room one morning when Anna Cresswell stopped her.

"You have the next period vacant?" she asked.

"Yes, but Wednesday is the German exams and I have been putting in this hour cramming for

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them.”

“Then I’ll do you a good turn by taking you away from them. Come, let us take a turn up and down the campus. We’ll walk fast enough to keep warm. There is something about which I wish to talk to you.”

Half-reluctantly, Elizabeth went with her.

“I feel as though I had been neglecting my work in regard to you,” began Miss Cresswell, as they crossed the campus. She tucked Elizabeth’s arm under her own. Elizabeth felt that something confidential was forthcoming. She was yet unused to the friendship of girls and any act on their part out of the ordinary made her feel shy and awkward.

“But you were with Mary Wilson, so I knew you were in good hands, although I should have come to you at once. But we had so many new girls this semester that I could not get around sooner. I’m president of the Young Woman’s Christian Association at Exeter, you know?”

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“Yes; or at least, I suppose so. I have always attended with Mary. You preside, so I took it for granted that you are president.”

“It was the public meetings you attended. We have some private conferences where no one is present but active members. We do this that we may talk over the needs of some special student, and act accordingly. Of course, we can not publicly diagnose such cases.”

“Yes?” said Elizabeth, feeling that Miss Cresswell had paused to give her an opportunity to reply.

“Part of our work is to interview each new student; to ask them to join us in active Christian work. We need you in the Association and I believe you will find, after you join us, that you have been needing us.”

“Perhaps so. There can be no doubt of the latter, but as to helping you, I am afraid I couldn’t do that. Not that I am not willing, but I do not believe I am capable of it.”

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“We’ll risk that,” with a smile. “I’m confident that you can do much. The mere coming out and announcing yourself as a member of a band of Christian workers will have a good influence.”

“Perhaps it will. To be frank with you, Miss Cresswell, I’ve never thought about such a thing. At home I studied a great deal, helped mother some, and rode about the country hunting flowers with Miss Hale. I never gave a thought to the matters that you talk of.”

“Then you are not a Christian?” The question was asked in surprise.

The girl looked with a puzzled expression into the serious face of her companion. Then she spoke slowly, as though the idea was for the first time presented to her.

“I do not know. I—never—really thought anything at all about it. You see it was just this way at home, Miss Cresswell. My father and mother with Miss Hale were all the friends I had. We could not go to church; the miners are foreigners, and when a priest was sent to them for services, he spoke Polish, or Slav, or Russian, so there was little use of our going. Miss Hale had a Mission Sabbath School for the younger people. I asked once to help her. She refused for some reason. She did not tell me why. At home, we read our Bible and have family prayers. Mother taught me a great deal, and I committed a great deal to memory; but as to my being a Christian, I never really thought of it before.”

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“Then let us think about it now,” was the response. She drew Elizabeth’s arm closer within her own. Slowly they retraced their steps from the dormitory door to the end of the campus walk, Miss Cresswell talking earnestly all the while. She spoke well on her subject; she believed what she said; and she was honest and simple-minded in her efforts to present these truths to Elizabeth’s mind.

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The hour passed quickly. With a start of surprise, they heard the bells for the dismissal of classes.

“Is it possible? I did not think the time was half gone. We must hurry. You will think on this matter, Elizabeth?”

“Yes; I will think of it. I can’t promise more. It seems so serious. I do not wish to undertake anything without being sure of what I really think and am.”

They parted at the door, Miss Cresswell hurrying off to Dr. Kitchell’s class-room, while Elizabeth, with tardy step and disturbed mind, went to recite to Miss Brosius.

The same evening Elizabeth accompanied her roommate to a special meeting of the Young Woman’s Christian Association. It had become a custom of the school to hold such meetings before the tests began, but Elizabeth, not knowing this, was wholly ignorant of the object of the meeting.

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Miss Cresswell as president went through the preliminaries of calling the Association to order. She was tactful and discreet. Landis, to whom public speaking was a coveted opportunity, immediately arose and moved forward to the front of the room where she could face her audience. She carried her head and shoulders unusually erect. Her clear, decisive manner of speaking indicated that she believed the mere stating of her opinion on the subject would forever settle it in the minds of her hearers.

“I regret,” she began, “to make such a statement before the new students at Exeter lest they form a bad opinion of us in general. But at Exeter Hall, as in other schools, all pupils do not

have the same ideals and views of what is right and wrong. It often happens, and has happened here within our knowledge, that a student who would scorn to take any property which was not hers, has taken another's ability, has actually copied work and handed it in as her own. This has happened and may happen again. So we," the speaker so placed her emphasis that "we" became the dominant spirit of the school, "determined to do as we did last year,—call together the members of the Association to take means to prevent a growth of the spirit of deception."

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Landis walked back to her place. Her manner had been forcible and had impressed many.

The president asked for expressions of opinions from the members. The remarks were not slow in coming. Immediately a half-dozen girls were upon their feet demanding recognition.

Mame Welch in her droll, half-humorous way was the first to speak.

"I do not see why we should trouble ourselves because from one to a half-dozen girls among several hundred see fit to copy and carry 'ponies' into class. If they are satisfied, let them do it."

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"But, oh," cried Carrie Hirsch, not waiting for permission to speak. "It is not fair. It may be so, one girl must hard work; another girl, work not hard. Yet one mark, oh, so high," she raised her hands to express how high the grades of the delinquent might be, "because into exams she carry papers, or from her friend's paper she learn all she wishes to write."

The other members could not suppress a smile as Carrie talked. She was so entirely in earnest, so carried away by her own enthusiasm, and so badly mixed in her English.

It was Landis who again responded. "That is not the spirit in which we have undertaken this correction. To the real student it matters little who may have higher marks than herself. She studies for the love of study and the hope of improvement. Neither should we say that it is nothing to us whether a half-dozen others are dishonest or not. It is something to us—or it should be. We have banded ourselves together as a set of Christian workers, and it should be something to us whether a half-dozen among us are not doing the honorable thing." There was a war-like tone in Landis' words. Whatever weakness there was in the girl's character, she possessed an overwhelming desire to have people believe that she stood on the side of right. She was ambitious to be thought an earnest Christian girl. She would have left no stone unturned to have been a leader among the girls. She was willing to cajole, to cater in order to win friendship. Yet in spite of all her efforts, she influenced only a few. Among those few were none of the stronger girls of Exeter. Min, to be sure, followed close at her heels, and one or two others; but they were not of the brighter lights from either an ethical or intellectual point of view.

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"It is our duty to go to them—to talk to them," she continued.

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"And have a hornet's nest buzzing about your ears," exclaimed Mary Wilson, disregarding all the rules of Parliamentary law which Dr. Kitchell tried to teach them. She was on her feet, moving to the front, talking as she went. "I really haven't the self-assertion to walk up to strange students and tell them the error of their ways. To me, that course of action savors too much of conceit of our own virtues. The best we can do is to be perfectly honorable about the examinations. Our mental attitude toward dishonorable proceedings ought to have its influence without our going about making ourselves odious by preaching."

Someone else took up the discussion. It grew warmer and warmer. Landis maintained the position she took in regard to personal work. In the excitement, several talked at once, forgetting that there was a chairman to whom a certain courtesy was due. Miss Cresswell used the gavel until its sound drowned out the voices. For a time peace reigned again.

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During the discussion, Elizabeth leaned forward. This was intensely interesting to her. Her lips were parted, and a flush caused by excitement came to her cheeks. She looked with admiration upon those girls who could talk in public. In her eyes they were gifted creatures more richly blessed than the ordinary mortal like herself. Hitherto she had been fond of spunky little Mary Wilson. Now she admired and looked up to her as one must look up to a person of talents.

Miss O'Day, dressed in a striking gown of imported material, sat by the side of Elizabeth. She must have heard the discussion, yet she made no show of interest, but seemed like one whose thoughts were far off.

Suddenly a sprightly little girl sprang up and made herself heard: "I think we had a fairly good plan last year—the plan we copy from the old Greeks—the plan of ostracising. Girls have copied and cheated in examinations ever since examinations were known, and I suppose they will do so as long as examinations are held. There are always a few whose bump of moral responsibility isn't developed. I agree with one of the previous speakers this far—let those half-dozen who desire to cheat, cheat. Let it be nothing to us. But I would add this much more—let *them* be also nothing to us. Let us ostracise them entirely, cut them off from all invitations."

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At her words, the discussion grew warmer again. It was as though she had let loose a swarm of bees. Parliamentary law went to the winds. For a moment, every common courtesy seemed to be forgotten. Her suggestion met with some favor. To the surprise of Elizabeth, Mary Wilson was its strongest advocate. Landis now also favored such a course, and consequently Min Kean. In her heart, Elizabeth disapproved, but she was not able to speak as the others had done. She could only sit silent. Popular opinion was in favor of the ostracism. Then another question was brought up. Landis, again, was the one to set the ball rolling.

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"But how are we to find out who does the cheating?" she asked. "If I should see some member of my class make use of a 'pony,' am I expected to cut her dead, while all the others are friendly

with her as usual? I do not see how she would be much affected by that, for she may care very little whether I ignore her or not."

At this Landis sat down but she bent forward and spoke to Min Kean. After a little encouragement, Min arose. She was not quick to grasp ideas even at her best. Now, as she stood upon her feet, she lost what little confidence she possessed, stumbling over her words, looking helplessly toward Landis for encouragement.

"We think—that is, I think—that wouldn't count much—I mean just having one person ostracise you. I think it should be told—I mean if we found anyone cheating, it should be told. Then we would get together and tell that person why we are going to act toward them like we are going to act. That's only fair. That's the way they treat criminals in court."

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Then she retired to let Landis take her place. "The speaker has said in part what I had in mind. I do not wish my hearers to believe I would countenance news-carrying or tattling. That, of course, is beneath any right-minded person. But we must—I say we *must*," Landis raised her finger impressively, and repeated the words as though she intended at that moment to root out the evil with tooth and nail, "We *must* get rid of this deceptive tendency. It will have an evil effect on Exeter. Perhaps, in time, destroy the school altogether."

"Umph! Exeter has stood a hundred years and will stand a hundred more in spite of anything Landis may do," said Miss O'Day, in a low tone to Elizabeth. This was the first she had spoken since they had entered the meeting.

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Landis continued, "For that reason, I think it would be wise if one sees another cheating, to lay her name before the members and let them act accordingly."

Elizabeth could never tell how it happened. Months after, in thinking the matter over, she could not justify herself in the thought that she had acted from honorable motives or for any good purpose. She had acted upon the impulse of the moment. This last speech was opposed to all Elizabeth's natural instincts. Her finer feelings were hurt, and like a child she must cry out.

"The idea is preposterous," she exclaimed, getting upon her feet and walking to the front of the room. Indignation had turned to crimson the pink which enthusiasm had brought to her cheek. "No good ever comes of using a wrong to make another wrong right. Like every one else, I think there should be no dishonor in examinations. But to my mind, tale-bearing is equally dishonorable. Consider the idea of our pledging ourselves to run and tell every one else when we find that someone has done wrong. I refuse to do such a thing even though I know it would stamp out every bit of cheating in our examinations."

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At this came a burst of applause, so that for the time Elizabeth was forced to discontinue. She saw Mary Wilson's eyes beaming upon her. Not another face could she distinguish. When the applause ceased, she began again. It was evident she was thinking of nothing else but the injustice and littleness of the act they had been contemplating. She felt deeply, and talked as she felt. For a moment she was an orator worthy the name.

"For this ostracising, I have as little sympathy. A student does wrong, and you would cut her off immediately from all who are trying to do right. If your purpose is to assist those weaker than yourself, you will never succeed by such a method. If every one was to be ignored for every bit of deceit they practice, I fancy most of us would be going around by ourselves, rather lonely." A smile passed over the faces of her hearers—a smile of amusement and surprise, for hitherto Elizabeth had been a quiet, shy girl, almost timid in company; and now upon the instant she had taken the lead. She had come forth alone when all the odds were against her, boldly declaring her opinion, and fearless to defend the course she believed to be right.

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"If we are going to begin this reformation, let us begin aright—at the root of the evil, and carry it through all its branches. Let us begin with the students who leave us under false impressions—telling us romances of their adventures, their powerful friends, their finances." To do Elizabeth justice, the girl with traits like these she mentioned had no definite form in her mind. She was only supposing a case. Yet, unconsciously, her mind had received during these months of school an idea of such a person. She could not embody these qualities with a human form. Yet more than one of her hearers recognized these as characteristics of one who had been foremost in the denunciations of dishonest examinations. "Let us begin with the girls who turn out their lights and go to bed long enough to deceive Mrs. Schuyler, and then get up again to prowl—and to the girl who gets a book from the town library and allows a dozen to read it before it is returned, when she has pledged herself to withdraw the books for her use alone."

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"We, as a set of Christian girls"—the expression was new to Elizabeth, but it does not take one long to become a Christian—"would ostracise any who did not come up to our standard of ethics! I say here so that you may all know where I stand"—her cheeks grew scarlet, and in the energy of her emotions she emphasized strongly—"I will not declare the name of anyone who 'ponies' in class, nor will I cut them from my list of acquaintances. I shall let them know I despise such deception, but I shall treat them exactly as I have always treated them."

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With that she went back to her place. To her surprise Miss O'Day was not there, having slipped away at the beginning of Elizabeth's talk.

The girls applauded heartily. Someone else arose to speak. Elizabeth's enthusiasm having died suddenly away, she felt very limp and weak. She was surprised at her own boldness.

"I'm going back to our room," she whispered to Mary Wilson. "I feel all gone."

"Yes, I can sympathize with you. I felt just so the first time I got up there. But you'll get over it

and enjoy a scrap. I'll go with you. A cup of cocoa will set you up all right."

Together they quitted the hall. As they crossed the campus, Mary continued: "I was afraid you were going to get personal, and hurt someone with your words; but you stopped just in time. One does not mind if the whole set gets a slap in the face; but one does not like to be the only one. It is just this way about the girls you meet at Exeter. We are like a little town. There will be a few whom you will like well enough to be genuine friends with; then there's a whole long line who will be pleasant acquaintances; and some whom you will care nothing at all about, although they will be good people in their way. Some here have opinions of their own, and some are mere copies. A girl must learn to think for herself, and express her opinion without getting angry or giving personal hits. The moment that is done, Miss Cresswell will request the guilty one to leave the room."

"Will they do it?"

"Do it? Haven't you learned that people generally do as Anna Cresswell suggests? She's a very poor girl—too poor to come to Exeter. But her influence over the younger set was so marked that they say Dr. Morgan makes it worth her while to stay."

"What does she do? She seems very quiet."

"She is—and isn't. She's quiet when it's necessary to be. As to what she does, if you keep your eyes open, you'll find her visiting the homesick girls, introducing the shy ones, tutoring the backward ones."

"It is a wonder she did not call upon me earlier in the term then. I might be classified under all three heads."

Mary tossed back her hair, and laughed. "But you had me, and when one has me to look after her she does not need even Anna Cresswell."

"Especially when it comes to keeping rooms in order," added Elizabeth.

"You haven't forgiven me for that yet."

"Yes; I have—long ago."

"Well, you don't need disciplining now. You are growing so particular that I'm almost ashamed of my own carelessness."

Elizabeth replied earnestly. "Well, with me, I must be decided one way or the other. I think I am naturally careless. So I dare not give up to myself even a little bit."

They entered their rooms as she was speaking.

"Just one cup of cocoa, and then we must get down to work. I'm afraid of Dr. Kitchell's mathematics."

"I'm afraid of everything. I never took an examination of any kind."

"Dr. Kitchell is very fair; but he scares you to death weeks before. He is always holding exams up before you like a death's head at the feast."

The decided stand taken by Elizabeth caused no little discussion. The meeting adjourned without any definite action being taken. The only point gained by the discussion was opening the eyes of a few to the fact that their point of view might not be the only one. Many felt as Elizabeth. The matter was dropped for the time.

The examinations began early in the morning, running through several class periods. Elizabeth, provided with a motley array of examination paraphernalia, entered Dr. Kitchell's class-room. The greater part of the class was already present, as were Dr. Kitchell and Miss Brosius. Dr. Kitchell was in the front of the room. Upon Elizabeth's entrance, with a gesture of his hand, he waved her toward a seat in the middle row. It was not her accustomed place of sitting. She looked about her. There seemed to have been a general scattering. Each member of the class sat alone, isolated so far as the size of the room permitted. The reason for this Elizabeth did not understand, but attributed it to the eccentricities of an examination of which she had heard much. The examination questions, printed upon little slips, were handed to each student. Previously each young lady had been cautioned about providing herself with all necessary articles. Elizabeth had conscientiously heeded the caution. The top of her desk had the appearance of a department of a small stationery store.

She began her work. Dr. Kitchell walked up and down the room, never once turning his eyes from them. Miss Brosius rubbed her eye-glasses, and seating herself at the end of the room, kept her gaze fixed upon the back of the students' heads. Such scrutiny was not calculated to make one feel at ease. For one hour no sound save the moving of pencils was heard. Then Miss Brosius spoke. "I have a class the next period, Dr. Kitchell," she said. "I can stay no longer."

"Miss Worden will be here in one moment to relieve you," was the reply. "She has a physical geography class in Room C. It will not detain her long."

Even as he spoke, Miss Worden, out of breath with her hurry, entered and took Miss Brosius' place, while that instructor hurried off to her class-room.

Elizabeth paused in her demonstration. Here was a problem new to her. Why could not Miss Brosius leave until Miss Worden came in, and why did Dr. Kitchell stride up and down, up and down, never for an instant removing his keen eyes from the class before him?

In the daily intercourse with her parents, she had asked questions freely. She did now as she

would have done with them. As Dr. Kitchell passed her desk, she spoke to him:

"I could not help hearing what Miss Brosius said to you about leaving the room, and wondered what she meant."

"It is impossible for me to see all the students. Unfortunately, I do not have eyes in the back of my head."

Elizabeth met his glance with a look of surprise.

Dr. Kitchell then spoke more plainly. "I am quite determined there shall be no cheating in my classes. My students will pass on their own merits—or not at all."

"And Miss Brosius then—" she paused, not feeling confident enough of the situation to put her feelings into words.

"Miss Brosius is here to assist me, and to see there is no copying, no cheating done in the class."

Now Dr. Kitchell was an excellent man, an able instructor, but he had a blunt way of expressing himself. Elizabeth's face flushed and then grew pale. For one instant her lips quivered and her eyes filled. But she quickly controlled herself, and began putting together her papers. Arising, she was about to quit the room.

"Have you finished, Miss Hobart?"

"No, I have not." Elizabeth spoke quietly. One could have no suspicion of the fire that lay smoldering beneath.

"Finish and hand me the papers before you leave the room. That has always been the rule at Exeter."

"I do not intend to finish, or to hand in my papers." Although she spoke quietly, her voice was heard over the class-room. Each student paused with uplifted pencil in her hand. For the most part, Dr. Kitchell was feared. Few would have dared oppose him.

"And why not, may I ask?"

"Because I will not stay and take an examination where we are treated as though we were criminals. Having a watch set upon us is an insult to every honest student in the class. Until I have proved myself to be either a liar or a thief, I insist upon being treated with respect. That is why I will not stay to take an examination under police supervision."

Dr. Kitchell was a big man. Elizabeth looked so childish and little as she stood before him that he could not suppress a smile. He rather admired the spunky little lady who dared to express her opinion so freely. Yet discipline must be maintained. "You will report to Dr. Morgan," he replied.

"I certainly shall," was the rejoinder, as she quitted the room.

In this whirl of indignation and hurt pride, she entered her room and found Mary there.

"I was coming for you, Elizabeth," she said. "Here's a telegram for you." She held out the yellow envelope. "I hope there is nothing serious the matter."

Elizabeth tore it open before Mary finished speaking, and read it quickly.

"It's from father," she said. "I do not understand it." She handed the paper to Mary. "You know I was to start for home Saturday morning."

Mary read it aloud:

"Do not start home. Letter follows. Every one well. Business reason for waiting."

"Nothing to worry about in that. My father has often sent me just such word. Perhaps business calls him away. You see he says every one is well."

"And he would not say that unless it were absolutely true," said Elizabeth with conviction.

"You'll have the letter by to-morrow's mail. It's something pleasant, depend upon it."

"I hope so." She sank down despondently into a chair and rested her head upon the study-table. "I wish something pleasant would happen. This is 'blue' week for me. Yesterday I became excited and almost said too much, and to-day I rush madly in and mix up affairs in the math. exams. I told Dr. Kitchell what I thought of his method of conducting them."

Mary's eyes grew bright. They fairly danced in surprise at Elizabeth's action.

"Why, even I would not have dared do that," she said. "I have dared everything at Exeter but Dr. Kitchell. I would as soon think of going to Dr. Morgan and telling her that I do not approve of her method of conducting Exeter."

"That is about what I will do next," said Elizabeth dolefully. "When one begins anything like this, there is no telling where she will end. Oh, dear, I'll be glad to get home where people know me, and don't act as though they expect me to lie or steal."

"No one thinks that here, Elizabeth. You've run up against a snag. We all have our blue days when we wish we were somewhere else, and when we have a poor opinion of every one, ourselves included."

"You never do."

"Yes, often, but I found it didn't pay to give up to them. Come, tell me all the trouble, and when

it's all told you may find there's very little of it."

"I wish I could think so. I'll tell you, Mary, and then I'll go and see Dr. Morgan. I'm to report immediately to her."

She proceeded with her tale of woe. And although her listener was sympathetic, she laughed heartily during the recital.

CHAPTER VIII.

MIDNIGHT CONFIDENCES.

On going to the office, Elizabeth found that Dr. Morgan had been called unexpectedly to the city, and would not return for several days. She was disappointed, as she much preferred having the thing over and done with than hanging fire for several days. The girls crowded about her, expressing both admiration and criticism and offering advice until Elizabeth did not know whether she was a culprit or a heroine. The maddening part of it was that she must wait three days to find out. Her own opinion in regard to being "policed" into honesty had not changed. She felt confident of the support of her father in the position she had taken. She knew how, from the bottom of his heart, he abhorred any questioning of one's honor. The more she listened to the talk of the other girls, the more indignant she was at the insult.

She was not one to give expression to her feeling in words only. After her remarks to Dr. Kitchell, the other girls did most of the talking while she listened, turning the matter over in her mind. She had her father's way of straightening matters out. "If a thing is wrong, make it right—if you can," she had often heard him say to Joe Ratowsky. Her four months at Exeter had taught her there were people of words and people of action. It was of the last-named class she selected her helpers. Landis was not to be considered. It is doubtful if she could have given a reason for the feeling that she would be of no assistance in a reform movement. It was merely intuition and could not be put into words. Min, too, who was but the shadow of Landis, was to be barred. There was enough to begin with—Anna Cresswell, Nancy Eckdahl, Mary Wilson, Mame Welch, Nora O'Day, strange to say, and herself.

At the dinner table, Elizabeth passed the word around asking the girls to come to her room immediately at the ringing of the study bell. Some of the students were already packing to leave for the holidays; and after the midwinter examinations, no strict observance was paid to study hours.

Miss Brosius heard the invitation and smiled. She was learning to know Miss Hobart. After the experience of the morning, she felt these summonses might be followed by a declaration of war. Her position in regard to overseeing examinations was more distasteful to her than it could possibly be to any of the students. But from time immemorial such had been the custom of most schools. There must have been a reason for it. No doubt, it had been forced upon the instructors by the attitude of the students themselves. New conditions may have arisen, but the old law still held.

"There's something brewing," Miss Brosius said to Miss Watson as they quitted the dining-hall. "If I read the stars aright, Exeter Hall will be reformed before Dr. Morgan returns from the city."

"She comes to-morrow."

"Maybe. Reforms have started in less than twenty-four hours. The fuel has been ready for several years, waiting for someone to apply the match."

"Who is doing that now?"

"Elizabeth Hobart, if I am not mistaken. Did you not notice the flash of her eyes and the message she was passing about to have the girls meet in her room?"

"Yes; but I thought it was nothing more than a taffy pull."

"It is a deep-laid plot to reform us all. I must give her credit in the selection of her colleagues. She has picked those who will carry her plans through if they once see fit to accept them. Oh, no, don't be alarmed," as she noticed Miss Watson's expression, "there may come some good from it; no evil at least, I'm sure. It may be a good thing to have them talk the matter over." Then she related the events of the morning.

The girls did not know the reason for their being called together. Nora O'Day, to Elizabeth's surprise, made no objections, Elizabeth having explained fully that it was not a social but a purely business meeting. Nora came in after the others had gathered. With a nod to them collectively, she took her place before the grate.

Elizabeth stated the reason of the gathering. She related the scene of the morning.

"You know I never was in an examination before," she said. "You have no idea how it impressed

me. To think of having two and three teachers in the room to watch us! Why, it seemed to me it was the most insulting thing possible."

"That is because it is new to you. It really was not meant that way," Miss Cresswell explained. "But you must bear this in mind—school life is just like outside life. There are some students who are dishonest. There's no getting around that fact. And because of those few, we must all be put under surveillance."

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Elizabeth was not to be convinced. "I do not see why. I felt this morning in class just as I would if I had gone into Dr. Morgan's room and she had immediately locked up her jewelry and her purse. Surely, the teachers themselves must have learned by this time who can be trusted and who can not! Suppose among the fifty girls in our room this morning, there were one or two who cheated. I think it would have been far better to allow them to go their way than have treated us all like criminals. What great difference would it make anyhow? They would be the only losers; and as to being watched, how is that going to make them any better?"

Mary Wilson shook back her hair. Her eyes were beginning to flash. As Elizabeth discussed the question, her enthusiasm grew.

"It makes them worse—far worse. If there is anything in the world that would make me cheat it is being watched to see that I didn't. I'd do it then just to prove that I could be sharper than they."

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They talked the matter over thoroughly, each one, with the exception of Nora O'Day, expressing herself freely. She sat silent; but her silence did not spring from lack of interest. She listened keenly to every word, and weighed it fully before she accepted it. Elizabeth wondered at her, for she was not naturally quiet. The others understood, and did not ask for her opinion.

Elizabeth had gained one point. The girls did not treat Miss O'Day with that studied formality which is more galling than open neglect as they had on former occasions. Mary, in particular, was quite agreeable, and Nora herself more at ease.

Elizabeth had a plan for this reformation. She was not attempting the impossible. Her idea was practical. Even Miss Cresswell declared it to be wise.

"Will you be secretary, Miss Cresswell, and jot down our plan?" asked Elizabeth.

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She moved to the study-table, taking up a pencil and tablet ready for work. "What have you decided to do about talking with the girls?" she asked. "Will you call them all together and present this plan to them?"

"No; my idea was to interview each one by herself. It seems so much more personal than talking to them all together. I think they will take it so; I'm sure I should."

"Perhaps so. But it will mean a great deal of work."

"We will not object to the work," said Mary Wilson, "if we only succeed in carrying out Elizabeth's idea."

The details were further discussed. Then they began to apportion a certain section of the Hall for each girl to visit.

"We need not visit them all. Each new recruit will be put to work to get other signers."

Anna Cresswell continued her writing. At last she spoke. "We will have this run off on the typewriter. Listen. Is this just what you intend, Elizabeth?" She read:

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"We, the undersigned students of Exeter Hall, not being contented with the present method of conducting examinations, believing that it casts reflections upon the honor of each student, do hereby suggest a means of reformation. We pledge ourselves individually to receive no assistance at such times. Furthermore, we will quietly but firmly discountenance among the students any methods not strictly honorable.

"We respectfully request Dr. Morgan to have examinations conducted hereafter without the presence of instructors, we pledging ourselves that under our supervision they will reflect credit both upon Exeter and the students."

"You have done it beautifully. My father could not have done it better," said Elizabeth. "Now we must get the names of the best girls at Exeter."

"Don't have a name of one who does not mean to keep her pledge," advised Miss Cresswell. "Fifty people in earnest are worth more than an hundred, half of whom veer with the wind."

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"But as Anna Cresswell said before," began Mary Wilson excitedly, "there will be some who will cheat. What will we do?"

"Most of the girls will agree to this, and the majority can be depended upon to do as they pledge themselves. If you keep your eyes open in the class-room, you can soon discover who has no sense of honor. These may be taken quietly aside and spoken to. If they transgress a second time, we will make the affair public." This advice came from Miss Cresswell.

At the close of her speech, Mame Welch arose. "If we don't scatter soon, the lights will be out, and I do not care to wander down the staircase in the dark. I did it once, and I had a bump on my head for a week. One's head is not the best 'lighting' place. Come, Carrie Hirsch, you go my way. If the lights go out, we will fall together." Slipping her arm through Carrie's, and bidding the others good-night, she quitted the room.

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Miss Cresswell and Nancy followed, with cheery words to encourage Mary and Elizabeth for to-

morrow's work. Nora O'Day remained. She was quite a striking figure as she stood leaning with her elbow against the mantel, looking down into the grate. As always, she was richly dressed. Her loose robe of crimson silk, her dark hair hanging in a single braid, and her olive-tinted skin presented a glowing picture.

"I waited until the others left," she said, "to speak to you alone, Elizabeth. I have been wishing to for several days, but you were so busy, I didn't feel that I could take you from your work."

"You can talk together here. I am going into the bedroom," said Mary, making ready to disappear.

"No; I do not wish to disturb you. I intended asking Elizabeth to walk to the end of the hall with me. I love to sit on the window-seat at the landing. The campus is beautiful in the moonlight. No one is disturbed by the talking there. I think Mrs. Schuyler will not mind late hours to-night, since we go home to-morrow. Will you come, Elizabeth?"

"Yes; wait one minute until I get a wrap. That window-seat is full of drafts, I know. I have sat there before."

Taking down a golf cape, she wrapped it about her. "Come," she added, drawing Miss O'Day's arm through her own. "We will be night-hawks until Mrs. Schuyler finds us. Don't lock the door, Mary. I'll slip in later."

A delightfully broad window-seat filled with cushions was at the turn of the stairway, where one had a view of the campus, now snow covered, beautiful in the glimmer of the moonlight.

Arranging the cushions here to her satisfaction, Nora began the conversation. "I heard you talk in the meeting yesterday, Elizabeth, and I wish to thank you."

"Why thank me? I only said what I thought."

"Some girls might have done considerably less—to my knowledge some of them have. You ran the risk of being unpopular, and yet you were willing to take that risk because you were my friend. That is the kind of friendship that is worth having. You do not know how pleased, how glad I was! Why, I had not been so happy for months."

"Take the risk! Because I was your friend! Well, I must be awfully dense, but really, Nora, I haven't the faintest idea what you are trying to say."

"You say that to escape my thanks—my gratitude. That is just your way. I might have expected as much. You do a generous, noble deed and then slip away from the gratitude that follows."

"Well, it may be my way, and it may not. I do not know what you are talking about. If I have done what you call a generous, noble deed, this is the first I have heard of it. If your mind is still upon the speech I made yesterday, you may be sure there was nothing noble about that. Why, you have no idea how angry I was! It made me so indignant to hear some explain what should be done and how. I didn't approve of their plans at all, so the only thing left for me to do was to say what I thought about it. It is news to me that being indignant and expressing yourself rather—well, rather forcibly, is noble and generous. Though," dryly, "I'm rather glad it is so, for it will be easy for me to be noble in that fashion."

Miss O'Day turned to look closely at her.

"Really, Elizabeth, upon your honor now, did you really not have me in mind when you made that speech yesterday?"

"I did not, 'pon honor," she laughed softly. Then she gave Miss O'Day's hand a very loving squeeze to mitigate the hurt her next words might contain. "It may be rather galling to your pride, but I did not even think of you after we entered the meeting, although I suppose you must have been sitting by me. I was all eyes and ears for what was going on up front. I suppose you might add all mouth, too, for that matter."

"Then you did not know what happened here last spring? Did none of the girls tell you?"

"I do not know what particular happenings you have in mind. But no one told me of anything that was unusual."

"Well, then I shall tell you. It was not until last evening that I felt that I could talk the matter over with any one; but after you spoke as you did, I knew that you could understand. I have borne it so long without letting any one know, that it is a relief to think I can tell just how I feel, and how awful these months at Exeter have been. I might have gone somewhere else this fall and not returned at all; but when I thought it over, it seemed to me that it would be cowardly to slip away like that. Last summer I wrote to Dr. Morgan that I intended returning. Then I made up my mind that I would stay here until I made every one at Exeter, from Dr. Morgan down to the dining-hall girls, respect me." She paused, then added slowly, "But I don't seem to have made much headway yet."

There was a sadness in the girl's voice which embarrassed Elizabeth. She knew that Nora O'Day was sad—had known that for a long time. She would have been glad to express sympathy, say some word which would show confidence in her companion, but she was so new to anything of this sort that she could do nothing but sit silent and look at her. Then she suddenly blurted out:

"I do not know what you are talking about! Tell me, Nora. I fancy it is not really so bad as you think."

"I do not see how it could be worse! Perhaps, when I tell you, you will feel as the others. If you do, don't stop to explain and give all kinds of reasons for your actions. Just walk off, and I will

understand that you do not care to be friends with me. I'll not be surprised. Indeed, I rather expect you to do just that thing—yet, after all, you have always been different.”

“Well, wait until I walk off. I may not. Dollars to doughnuts, the ‘awful’ thing you have done is partly imaginary. The girls are all right, and I love *some* of them; but even that doesn't make me think them infallible. But you sit there and hint about a dreadful deed you have done. One would think you were little less than a female Captain Kidd. There are cold chills running up and down my spine now, so begin quick and tell me everything.”

“Last spring, I went into the geometry examination and took my book with me. I copied three theorems, letter for letter, right out of the book. A half-dozen girls saw me—Mary Wilson, Nancy, Carrie Hirsch, Mame Welch, Landis and Min. That same evening the girls met and decided to cut me. We had all been friends.”

“I didn't think Mary or Nancy would have done that—meet and talk over such a matter in public.”

“They didn't. Neither would Carrie or Mame. I know none of the four were at the meeting. I think each one of them thought the matter over and decided for herself. They speak to me at the table and any school meetings. But that is a small part of Exeter life. They never enter my room or invite me into theirs.”

“Who called the meeting of the girls?” Elizabeth asked.

“Min Kean. I am positive of that, because the notices were signed by her. That is required before any meeting can be held. Then Dr. Morgan knows where to place the responsibility.”

Elizabeth gave a gesture of disapproval. She was about to speak, but checked herself, deciding that criticism was not going to help the matter. Nora noticed her hesitancy, and attributed it to a different motive.

“What were you going to say? Do not hesitate. I deserve criticism. I am not afraid to hear it.”

“It was not a criticism of you. I was thinking that Min Kean must have been a different person last term. I could not, although I stretched my imagination to its limit, think of her as taking the lead in any matter. What part did Landis take?”

“I do not know. No one ventured to tell me and I would not ask. Before we left Exeter in the spring, she came into my room and stayed almost all of the evening. She told me that she thought the girls acted impulsively, and that she had done what she could to have them wait and consider; but she was only one among many. She was acting-president at that meeting.”

“Where was Anna Cresswell?”

“She was here, but would not attend. Someone told me that she refused to be present.”

“Did Landis ever come again to see you?”

“Very often this semester. I have all the essays and papers my mother wrote when she was a student at Arlington Seminary. People who remember her say she was gifted in that line. Of course, I do not know, for she died when I was a baby. Somehow I never had the heart to read them, although I have saved every one. Landis says they are quite good, and Landis, you know, has some ability in that line herself.”

Elizabeth smiled. She was beginning to understand. New ideas burst upon her suddenly. Unconscious of the meaning which might be given to her words, she said, “I'm just beginning to learn that it is not wise to take any one's opinion in regard to any one else. You must trust and be deceived, and trust again, and just go on learning people for yourself. Did Anna Cresswell never come to see you? I should think she would since she refused to attend the meeting.”

“She came twice to ask me to go somewhere with her, once for a drive, and once to walk, but each time I refused. I felt so badly that I had no courage to go out among the girls. It was only a few weeks before we were to go home. I made up my mind to bear it until school was out and then not come back. But I changed my mind, as I told you. She did not ask me again. But I did not expect that for she is very busy with extra work. I suppose she thinks it has all passed away. She doesn't run about to spreads and high teas, so she may not have discovered that I am not among those present.”

Elizabeth was silent. She was thinking, not of her companion's misdeed, but of the part which Landis had probably played throughout the affair. Nora waited for her to speak, but receiving no answer put another question.

“Are you, too, so disgusted with me that you can't bear to speak of it?”

“No,” slowly, “I am not disgusted. But you certainly cannot expect me to grow enthusiastic or praise you for cheating. I don't like dishonesty in any form; but I do not know that it is my place to pass judgment on you. I may criticise that in you; someone else will find something to criticise in me. One thing I am quite sure of. You are sorry as sorry can be that you did it; and you will never be guilty of cheating again, even if you know that you will fail and be compelled to go to school here forever.”

“You may be sure of that. One experience ended such methods for me.” There was nothing conciliatory in her tone.

“I will be honest with you, Nora. I am disappointed in you, but I'm glad you told me. You may be quite sure this will make no difference in our friendship.”

Much to Elizabeth's surprise, Nora, instead of replying, began to sob, and it was some minutes before she could speak.

"I appreciate this, Elizabeth. I know I did wrong, and I have spent six months in being sorry. Yet I do not believe I should be censured so much as some of you if you had done the same thing. That is rather an odd thing to say, I know. But when I tell you all, you will understand just what I mean. My mother died when I was a few weeks old. She belonged to an excellent family, an only child. Somehow," the girl hesitated. It was difficult to explain without seeming critical of one parent. "Somehow, my father never cared much for what mother cared for most. He could not see anything wrong in cards, and wine-parties, and things like that. When mother died grandmother Loraine took me. But she did not live long. Then I went back home and lived with a housekeeper and the servants. Sometimes they were honest and sometimes not. Mrs. Gager took charge of me. She was a very clean old German woman and not afraid of work, but was not refined. She couldn't even read. I am not complaining, for she was as good to me as she knew how to be. Nothing that I wanted was too much trouble. She was really my slave, and made every one around the house step when I spoke.

"I was a little tyrant. Father spent a great deal of time from home, for he was a very busy man. But he spoiled me, too. I had but to stamp my foot and he would let me do what I wished. He really could not deny me anything, and he doesn't yet. You see, I am the only person in the world he has left, and he thinks I am simply wonderful." She laughed lightly. "I am always amused when I hear him talk to anyone of me. It is nice, though, to have someone think of you in that way. He is wholly sincere. He really believes I'm the brightest and most attractive girl at Exeter.

"Mrs. Gager used to drink occasionally. At such times—I must have been eight years old—she told me what excuses to make to father for her and how to keep Maggie, the second maid, from knowing it. Strange as it may seem, this old woman was my ideal. I never hesitated to carry her false messages, and there was a constant succession of small deceptions. When I was able to fool Maggie, I was commended.

"When I grew older, I met a great number of business men—some of whom were my father's traveling salesmen. And they always made a point of telling how sharp they had been in their transactions. I know now that they were merely dishonest. I do not know whether father approved or not. They told these stories to entertain me and not when they were talking business with him.

"Father was always liberal. I spend as much as I wish. He never questions how, but gives me whatever I ask.

"The conversation I generally heard among the servants—and I spent most of my time with them—was comments on how well or how shabby some one dressed, and how much or how little money people had. Don't blame my father for neglecting me. He hired the best servants he could, and did what he thought was for my good. I was well clothed and fed; and Mrs. Gager took excellent care of my health. His business kept him away from home. And, anyhow, men are not like women. A woman would have understood at once that I needed something more than clothes and food."

"I suppose we can't understand," said Elizabeth. "I'm sure I don't. I've always had a mother. She would punish me severely if I ever deceived anyone. My father, too, and Miss Hale are the same way. I was brought up to abhor anything that wasn't honest. But, then," reflectively, "I'll not take much credit to myself for that. It was my training—not me. If I'm truthful and all that, it's because of my parents."

"If I saw no great harm in copying my examinations, it is because I had been no better taught. It was a surprise to learn that every one looked upon such an act with contempt. I would not do such a thing now. Not because I wish to curry favor with Mary Wilson and her set, but because I feel it is wrong." She paused awhile and then continued, "I think I am like the Loraines in that. My mother would have died before she would have knowingly done wrong."

The talk went on in this strain for some time. Then Elizabeth spoke of the telegram she had received and suggested that she might not go home during the holidays.

Nora offered her sympathy. She did not ask Elizabeth where she lived. It was odd that, although they were friends, she never knew until the close of school that Joseph Hobart, the expert mining engineer of Bitumen, was Elizabeth's father.

It was quite late when Elizabeth slipped back into her bedroom. She undressed in the dark so that she might not waken her roommate, but Mary heard her and spoke:

"You and Nora O'Day must have had a great deal to say. 'Smiles' has trotted down here twice inquiring for you."

"What did you tell her?"

"That I was not your keeper. I think she will interview you privately to-morrow."

"Mary, there's something I wish to ask you. At the meeting last spring, who was it that worked up the case against Nora O'Day?"

"Landis. Why?"

"Oh, because. Are you sure? Did she take an active part?"

"Yes; I'm sure. Could you imagine a meeting where Landis didn't put in her oar? Why do you

ask?"

"Because I wanted to know."

"An excellent reason," was the sleepy response.

"But, Mary—" But Mary was asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

JOE'S MESSAGE.

After breakfast the following morning, Elizabeth was summoned to the reception-hall where Joe Ratowsky awaited her. He stood twisting his hat about as she entered. The expansive smile which covered his swarthy face was not so much one of goodwill as embarrassment. He stood in the center of the room so that by no possible chance could he touch any article of furniture. Joe was no coward. He had performed heroic parts when mobs of miners and the militia, during the big strikes, met in conflict. But the thought of sitting down on chairs upholstered in satin of dainty colors made the cold chills run up and down his spine.

It was cruel in Elizabeth to shake his hand so long and so vigorously, even though she was glad to see him. And it was worse than cruel to keep pushing easy chairs before him and insisting upon him sitting down. Elizabeth insisted, and in desperation Joe took a letter from his pocket and thrust it before her.

"Mees-ter Hobart, he write—he write heap—b'gosh."

"He isn't sick, Joe, is he?"

"Sick!" Joe grunted his disgust at the thought of anyone being sick. "He well, so well—he get fat, b'gosh, so fat, Meester O'Day, he look like pole he come long Meester Hobart, b'gosh."

Joe nodded his head vigorously, a habit he had of emphasizing any statement he wished to make particularly strong. Elizabeth could not restrain a smile at the comparison.

"Is mother well, too, Joe?" Joe nodded vigorously while he wiped his brow.

"She well like the tivil, b'gosh. Yes, b'gosh, she so well as that."

"Well, then, Joe, why is it they do not wish me to go home?"

Joe flung out his hand as though what he was about to say was a mere trifle, not worthy her consideration.

"The miner—not so glad, b'gosh. They no work—no—no work. They say they tear up railroad, b'gosh. Meester Hobart, he say, 'No tear up road.' Joe Ratowsky, he say, 'No tear up road.' All time keep watch so no tear up road. You not come. Mebbe no road, mebbe all right, b'gosh."

"A strike, Joe? Do you mean the miners threaten to destroy the road?" He nodded.

"No strike now, b'gosh. Colowski, he say, 'Strike.' Then all say, 'Strike.' Joe Ratowsky, he give him one between his eyes like this." He doubled up his fist, showing how peace had been restored. "He no say strike then. He crawl off. He no come round for day and day."

"Did they go back to work then?" Elizabeth was excited. All her life she had heard of the horrors of a prolonged strike. From childhood she had a dim recollection of someone taking her from her warm bed, and running across fields, seeking safety miles away. As in a dream, she could hear the roar of hoarse voices and see the flickering torches of the mob.

Joe shook his head slowly. "No, b'gosh. They mad like the tivil. They go back some day, so many tollars, every day for work. No more," shaking his head in negation, "No, no more, b'gosh."

Elizabeth grew anxious. She seized Mr. Ratowsky's coat sleeve.

"But, Joe, tell me truly, is my father in danger? They won't hurt him?"

"B'gosh, no. He safe like anything. They no mad like the tivil at him. Emery they mad at."

"Is Mr. Emery there?" Again Joe shook his head. "Meester Emery, he go over ocean. He no come back, mebbe so long till summer. When he come back, the miners so mad they treat him like the tivil, b'gosh."

This Mr. Emery, of whom he spoke, was one of the operators of the soft-coal region; a man who visited the miners once in a dozen years and of whom his workmen knew little.

Joe had evidently been instructed how much to tell Elizabeth in regard to the trouble. Being assured that her father was not in danger, her mind turned toward the letter, her eyes following her thoughts.

"I go back quick. I tell Meester Hobart you look well like everything." He shook his head vigorously to assure her how fine a message he would carry. "I will, b'gosh," he repeated.

He made his way to the door, keeping his eyes upon the chairs and tables in his path. He sighed with relief when he had passed them, and saw a line of retreat open before him. He continued to repeat the message he would carry to her father.

"Grow so tall likes nothing. He will be so glad like the tivil. I tells him so. Yes, he will, b'gosh." These were his parting words as the door closed upon him.

The greater number of the girls in the dormitory hall had packed or were packing their trunks. The hallway was obstructed with baggage of all descriptions, awaiting the coming of Jimmy Jordan and his train of helpers. 232

Mary Wilson was to leave Exeter immediately after lunch. She had begun her preparations before breakfast. Elizabeth, taking it for granted that their rooms would yet be in confusion, went down to the window-seat where she and Nora had sat the night before, in order to read her letter in quiet. There was nothing unusual in it—nothing to startle her, at least; the home news was told with her father's usual buoyant spirit. If he were harassed or annoyed, his letter writing did not show it. It was not until all the bright little bits of home life had been related that he mentioned the trouble at the mines—just a little local trouble, nothing general. Both her mother and he thought it best that she should not go up the mountain railroad this time of year. There was nothing at all to alarm her. She was to spend her holidays with any one of the girls whom Dr. Morgan advised. It was difficult on account of the snow to get the mails through. She must not be anxious if her accustomed letter did not arrive on time. 233

As was her habit with home letters, Elizabeth read and re-read it. She was slipping it back into its envelope when Landis and Min appeared. Both were dressed for traveling. They stopped to enquire of Elizabeth when she expected to leave Exeter, being surprised to see her sitting there in her school dress when the others were either packing or already leaving. She told them the possibility of her remaining at the Hall for the holiday season. At this Landis wrinkled her brow in perplexity, and pondered awhile in deep thought.

"I was trying to see my way clear to ask you to go with me to The Beeches—my home, so called because of the magnificent trees which grow near our residence. But I do not see how I can manage it now. I do wish I had known about this sooner. I might have been able to arrange matters somehow. I do not like the idea of your being here alone. Exeter is dull with the girls gone. It's really unbearable. But I have arranged to go home with Min until the day before Christmas. We always have a big family party for that day, and our home is filled. I suppose we could tuck you in somewhere—if you do not object to the third floor." 234

"Oh, do not think of it, I beg you," began Elizabeth hurriedly. Somehow Exeter without company seemed better to her than The Beeches with Landis. "I would not for the world cause you any inconvenience. Besides, the matter is in the hands of Dr. Morgan. I must do as she decides."

"Well, I hope she will see fit to send you off somewhere. Come to think of it, I do believe I could not let you have even a third floor room. Our cook always takes the privilege of asking in some of her relations, and that leaves no space unfilled. I wish it were otherwise." 235

"You are kind to think of it. But I could not go in any event. I must go back to my room now. Mary is deep in her packing and will need me. When do you leave?"

"Not until afternoon. But we are going into the city. Shall we see you before we leave?"

"I think not."

Good-byes were said, and Elizabeth went to her room. She was disappointed at not being able to go home, but had no fear of a possible strike, or any danger to her father. Joe Ratowsky had reassured her, and besides her faith in her own father made her confident. There was no question in her mind about his being popular with the miners. He had been not only their superintendent, but physician, friend and banker.

Having packed her trunk so full that the lid would not close, Mary was jumping up and down on it when Elizabeth entered. She hailed her with an exclamation of delight. "I'm so glad you weigh something! Come, sit on my trunk while I turn the key. I can get the lid down, but it springs open the instant I get off, and I cannot stand up there and turn the key at the same time. I have been bouncing on it for the last half-hour." 236

Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright from her strenuous efforts. Elizabeth did as requested. The trunk closed with a snap.

"And now," asked Mary, "when do you begin to pack? I suppose your Polish friend brought you news from home. I hurried to get my belongings out of the way that you might begin."

"Not until next June," was the reply. Then sitting down on the trunk beside Mary, she related the messages which Joe had brought, and the advice which her father's letter contained.

Mary listened without comment until the story was finished. Then she tossed back her hair, and without a word hurried to the door, flung it open with a great disregard for the amount of noise she was making and began hauling in Elizabeth's trunk. 237

"You have just three hours to pack, dress, eat and get down to the station," she said, unbuckling straps and removing trays as she spoke.

"But—"

"Don't stop to talk or ask questions, or say you can't." Mary stopped long enough to stamp her foot in order to emphasize her words. "You're going home with me. We'll talk it over afterward. We haven't time now. I'll hear the objections to-morrow. Put on your duds, and I'll pack, while

you get yourself ready.”

“But you—”

“I’m ready except my coat and hat.” She was carrying Elizabeth’s clothes from the wardrobe, and placing them in the trunk. Elizabeth did as she was told without questioning further. She was only too glad to be taken possession of, for the thought of Exeter Hall without the girls had not been pleasant. 238

The trunk was packed and her dressing about completed when Nora O’Day entered. She was dressed in a handsome traveling suit, the product of a city importer. As usual, she carried her lithe, slender body proudly, as though no one was quite her equal. Elizabeth understood the girl now and knew that her defiant attitude was assumed.

“I’ve come in to say goodbye. I haven’t a minute. The cab is waiting for me.” She shook hands with Mary. Then turned to embrace Elizabeth. There was a great deal of affection in her manner toward this new friend. “We were talking last night of mother’s theses. I put some together for you to take with you to read. I really think you will enjoy them. I know you will be careful of them. I mean to keep them all and some day read them over.” She kissed Elizabeth again, and with a hurried goodbye was gone. 239

Elizabeth appreciated this remembrance more than a gift of greater money value. Nora cherished these papers the most of all her possessions, and she gave her best when she confided them to Elizabeth. Slipping them into the tray of the trunk, she turned to the mirror to arrange her collar. At last turning to Mary, she said, “There, I’m clothed and in my right mind, and we yet have half an hour. Now we must report to Dr. Morgan.”

“You are evidently clothed,” was the response, “but I’m not sure about the right mind. Don’t you remember that Dr. Morgan does not return until to-night? By that time we will be home. I’ll speak to Miss Brosius as we go down to lunch. She’s the high-monkey-monk here when our Ph. D. is roaming. We have no time to waste. Jordan will see to the trunks and tickets. He always does. Put on your wraps. We’ll eat our lunch with them on. It is no use coming back up-stairs. There are but few of the girls left. We’ll bid them goodbye down-stairs.” 240

It was not until then that Elizabeth had time to think about going to Mary’s home. Then she stopped and suddenly put the question: “Perhaps your mother will not want me, Mary. She—”

“Come on! Of course, she’ll want you. She is always glad to have company. She would not be pleased if I came home and left you here alone.”

“But it might inconvenience her,” she began again.

“Nothing ever inconveniences my mother. She won’t allow it to. The only trouble we have is that our girls take sudden notions to go off and marry, and sometimes we do not have anyone to do the work. I think Fanny intended being married during the holidays. If she does, you and I will have a position as dishwasher. Can you wash dishes?”

“Yes; I always do at home.”

“Well, we may have to do it. But we will have a good time. When the servants take to themselves wings we all help, and such fun as we do have! A little matter like that never inconveniences mother. Once during court week, our only hotel burned. There was a big case on before father, and he brought all the witnesses and lawyers home. They were there three days. Mother seemed to think it was a joke.” Then with a look at Elizabeth, she added with conviction, “A little bit of a girl like *you* could not inconvenience *her*.” 241

The Wilson home was at Windburne, a two hours’ ride from Exeter with a change of cars at Ridgway.

It was extremely cold when the girls left the Hall, but before they reached Ridgway the mercury had gone several degrees lower.

The road to Windburne from the Ridgway junction is a local affair, narrow gauge, with little rocking cars in which a tall person could scarcely stand upright. Windburne is the county-seat and consequently a place of importance, but Ridgway has little traffic and the roads intersecting there take no pains to make close connections. 242

It was three o’clock in the afternoon when the girls reached the junction, a bleak little place with a low-roofed station, black and dirty. A hotel stood at the corner—a rough saloon. An engine with a coach usually waited on this narrow gauge track, but this afternoon there was none. Before she entered the waiting-room Miss Wilson looked about, expressing her surprise at the condition of affairs.

“The worst is yet to come,” cried a voice back of them. The girls turned to discover the ticket agent, just about to leave for home.

“The narrow gauge is storm-stayed. You will not be able to go through to-night.”

“Then we’ll turn about and go to Exeter.”

“Not to-night. The last train pulled out just before No. 10 came in. There’s a hotel over there—” 243

“Yes, we *smelled* it,” said Elizabeth seriously.

He laughed, and inquired where they were going. Then he suggested a plan. The hotel was not a suitable place in which to spend the night, and they could not return to Exeter; but he would find for them a trustworthy driver who would take them safely to Windburne.

There was no choice. Mary accepted his offer. The girls stayed in the dingy waiting-room until he returned with a sleigh, horses and driver.

"This man will take you there safely," he said, with a nod toward the driver. "He knows the road and knows, too, how to handle horses to get the most out of them." He assisted the girls into the sleigh, tucking the robes well about them. A moment later, they were speeding along the country road. The sleighing was fine but the wind had a clear sweep over the bare fields, and it had grown much colder. They began to shiver in spite of their heavy wraps. 244

"We are over half-way there," encouraged Mary. "The farmhouse we have just passed is six miles from Ridgway. I know the roads about here. This is beautiful in summer time. Landis Stoner lives in the last farmhouse along this road. After we pass there, we won't see another for five miles, and when we do it will be Windburne. There, you can catch a glimpse of the place now."

"Couldn't we stop and get warm?" asked Elizabeth, her teeth chattering. "My feet are numb!"

"Yes; perhaps it would be better. We'll get Mrs. Stoner to heat bricks for our feet. She's very hospitable, and will make us comfortable." She leaned over to speak to the driver, requesting him to stop at the Stoner place.

Elizabeth was too cold to look about her as they entered the house. She was conscious only that an immense beech was stretching its bare boughs before the doorway, then someone was leading her to an easy chair, removing her wraps and rubbing her hands to make them warm. In a few minutes she was herself. Mrs. Stoner had brought them hot coffee, and was now putting bricks into the fireplace. 245

Elizabeth looked upon her in surprise. This was not the style of woman she had pictured in her mind as Landis' mother. She was a faded, slender little body, mild and gentle in manner and voice. One felt that she was refined and had devoted the best of her life to serving others. She was dressed in a plain dark calico, which had seen better days, yet its absolute cleanliness and the band of white at her throat gave her an air of being well-dressed.

The room, evidently the best in the house, was homey and comfortable. There was an open fireplace big enough to accommodate a four-foot log, a bright rag carpet, and some wooden rockers with easy cushions. The windows had white sash curtains. In one were pots of blooming geraniums.

"I have never been at Exeter," Mrs. Stoner said. "Of course, I have heard of it all my life. As a young girl, I used to dream what a fine thing it would be to go there to school. But it was not to be. Landis, however, is having that privilege, and I am very thankful. Miss Rice—you have met her; every one hereabouts has—thinks that every girl should have a little more than they get in public schools. She's made it possible for Landis to go." 246

Their hostess then brought out some pictures Landis had sent home—kodak views of the girls, their rooms, and the campus.

"You see," she added with a smile, "although I have never been at Exeter, I know it well. Landis writes of the teachers and her girl friends until I feel I know them thoroughly."

As the mother continued, her pale face lighting up, Elizabeth saw Landis in a different light. The girl was evidently devoted to her mother, if one could judge from the numerous letters and the many little souvenirs from school displayed. 247

"It was dull for Landis here," she continued. "There is no company for miles, and only her father and I at home. She did not want to leave us. But I told her we were used to the quiet and were company for each other. I miss her, of course, but it would have been selfish to have kept her here. She must live her own life and have her own experiences, and I can't expect her to be satisfied with what satisfies me."

The hot coffee had made them comfortable; the bricks in the grate were hot, and the time had come to start. Solicitous of their welfare, Mrs. Stoner brought extra wraps, warming them at the open fire, then securely pinning them about the girls. She came to see them off and Elizabeth, with a sudden impulse, kissed her warmly.

When they were safely in the sleigh again and speeding over the frozen roads, she turned to Mary with the explanation: "Do you know, she's really homesick to see Landis? I couldn't help kissing her; she's so gentle and sweet that I could easily love her." 248

She turned her head to catch a last glimpse and to wave farewell to the little woman standing in the doorway of the humble home which Landis had called "The Beeches."

CHAPTER X.

CLOUDS AND GATHERING STORMS. 249

Dennis O'Day, as he stood at the door of his saloon this autumn afternoon, was an excellent advertisement for the line of goods he carried. He was big and flabby. The skin about his eyes had grown into loose sacks; his eyes were a steel-gray, cruel, keen, crafty, without a particle of humor or affection. He owned the largest breweries in the state, and controlled numerous retail houses where his products were sold.

His dealings were largely with the foreign element. He spoke ready German with its various dialects. His name indicated his nationality. Though an Irishman he lacked the great-heartedness of his countrymen. The humor which made their shanties brimming with life and fun was not for him. He drove the Poles and Slavs who lived about Bitumen like a herd of cattle. The few who voted, voted as Dennis O'Day told them. The labor problem was discussed over his bar. He fixed for them the length of day, and the rate per ton. He was the bell-sheep for all the foreign herd. In return for their allegiance, he bailed them out of jail when necessary. When Gerani in a drunken quarrel, had stabbed the fighting, ugly-tempered little Italian, Marino De Angelo, it was Dennis who established an alibi, and swore all manner of oaths to prove that Gerani, a law-abiding citizen, a credit to the commonwealth, could not possibly have done it. As to the guilty party, O'Day had shaken his head in doubt. He was not quick to remember the faces of these foreigners. There were many about—some new to him. It was impossible to point out the guilty man. He appeared really grieved that the death of De Angelo should go unpunished, and left the court-room with the avowed intent of bringing the murderer to justice. That had been some five years before, and De Angelo's murderer was yet unpunished. But from that time, Gerani was a slave to O'Day. There was no work about the hotel or town that he would not do at the saloonist's bidding. He made good wages in the mines and the proprietor of "The Miner's Rest" received the biggest portion of them.

It was not for love of Landlord O'Day the big Pole served so faithfully, for he muttered and cursed under his breath the instant he was out of range of the cold, steely eyes. O'Day was not in ignorance of this for Coslowski had warned him. The men had been drinking, Gerani among them.

"Keep your eye on the big Polack," he said to Dennis, yet loud enough for all to hear. "If you don't want to hand in your checks soon, don't let him get behind you on a dark night."

At that Gerani had scowled malignantly. O'Day laughed loud and mirthlessly, while he washed glasses and kept his eye on the scowling Pole.

"He'd do it quick enough. Dead men tell no tales; but confessions do. And I've left with Father Brady a nice lot of paper which he's to read when I'm gone. It will be hot enough around here to make more than one swing for a breeze. I'm safe with Gerani—so long as those papers are safe with Father Brady." The big Pole moved away from his place at the front. As O'Day ceased speaking, he disappeared into the darkness.

By such methods O'Day had gained his influence over the foreigners. He was lawless. His place was open on the Sabbath and until all hours of the night. Young boys entered sober and came forth drunk. There was no one to call him to account. Then from somewhere came Joe Ratowsky. And from that time, the troubles of Dennis O'Day began.

Yet big Joe was apparently innocent. He could smatter only a little English. No one seemed to know where he came from and he never furnished the information even when asked; he never seemed to hear the question. He was friendly with his countrymen, and stood by them whenever the need arose. He was often called upon to act as interpreter between the bosses and the men, but still he was different from those about him. He was a Pole, heart and soul, and his faith was bound to the homeland whose ultimate independence was his one dream; he had risen a grade higher in the moral scale than those whom his work made his associates. Joe took baths. Joe read a Polish paper; he did not drink except one glass of beer at his dinner. None of them had ever been able to persuade him to go further than that. Whether it were a wedding or a wake, Joe was staunch. This moderation, with the baths, set him, apart.

He did not mine at Bitumen, but worked his little patch of ground, interpreted when there was need for small consideration, and at last opened a little restaurant where lunches after the German style were served. His black coffee certainly excelled O'Day's beer, while the wienerwurst and "Schnitz-und-Knöpf" put to shame the meals at "The Miner's Rest."

Joe's place consisted of a great room with a bare floor, furnished with wooden chairs and tables. One weekly paper in German was always to be found. The German element at Bitumen could read their own language; and they passed the news on to the others. The innovation of the paper diminished the popularity of O'Day's place. Joe also introduced music, or what was passed for it. Then O'Day offered to buy him out at a price more than the place was worth. Joe smiled blandly, "Me know Slav—me know Polack talk. Me know no English like you say. Me no understand. Meester Hobart, he tell you vat you says. He tell you quick like the tivil." But Dennis O'Day had no desire to speak with Mr. Hobart. His efforts with Joe were futile. The big Pole had made up his mind not to understand.

The superintendent was liked well enough by the saloonist, and consequently by the greater portion of the men. Mr. Hobart was opposed to liquor, and had not hesitated to express himself to that effect. But O'Day cared little for that so long, as he said, the man knew his place and did not interfere. And his place, to O'Day's way of thinking, was to superintend the mines, and let the morals of the men alone. "I'll take good care of them," he was apt to add with a crafty look. His intercourse with Mr. Hobart began and ended with a bow of recognition in the street. So far as the liquor business was concerned, O'Day considered the superintendent harmless, and that

was as far as he concerned himself with anyone.

Some subtle influence was working against O'Day. From whence it came he was not able to determine. The time had passed, however, when he could break the law with impunity. He felt that keen eyes were upon him. He was cunning enough to know that his safety now lay in his keeping within the limits of the law. He made ostentatious show of closing at the prescribed hours. All the while he kept his eyes and ears open to discover his enemy. 256

Big Joe Ratowsky was the only probable one. He made frequent visits to "The Miner's Rest," but never drank. He knew the ages of all the miners. In this respect Joe's watchfulness was clear to O'Day's mind; but there the evidence stopped, and much could be said on the other side. So, still at sea, O'Day kept himself sober and his eyes and ears open to all that was said and done in his place of business. Finally, when his confidence was fully restored, he returned to his old way of doing business, and kept open one Sunday. His place was filled with drunken, riotous Poles and Slavs. In a spirit of recklessness, he sold freely to all. On the following morning a summons was served to appear before the court to answer to the charge of illegal liquor selling. The charge was brought by the Pole, big Joe Ratowsky. Even then O'Day's perception was dull. It did not come to him that Joe was merely the instrument in the hand of someone who would not act openly. 257

Raffelo Bruno, the little hunchback shoemaker, opened his eyes to the truth. He was by nature suspicious. He had faith in no man. When the summons came to O'Day, Raffelo quit his bench and made his way to the saloon. His dark, swarthy face, with stubby beard, was twisted and contorted. He gesticulated continuously, sawing the air with his hands. "Ye-s—Joe Ratowsky, he run and tell ze—ze. He ees—one—fool. He ze monkee on ze stick. Mees-ter Ho-bart, he meek hims—jump." 258

The suggestion was enough. Joe was the tool of someone, and that someone was Superintendent Hobart; such was the idea the Italian meant to convey. O'Day in forcible terms cursed himself that he had not seen this before. It was evident enough now. Mr. Hobart, as superintendent, dare not antagonize the drink-indulging miners with open warfare against the saloon. Joe was his tool, carrying out his plans. Joe Ratowsky with his smattering of English did not know enough to make himself a formidable enemy. Some keen mind with a knowledge of the liquor law was the power back of the Pole. The coffee-house and reading-room which Joe had opened were mere subterfuges to draw the men away from the saloon. The man could not and did not make enough to keep himself and family in the poor way they lived. 259

It was clear enough to O'Day now, though he ridiculed Bruno for suggesting that Mr. Hobart interested himself in such matters.

The summons was served in October. O'Day appeared before the November court. They might have brought half a dozen different counts against him, but they did not. The prosecuting attorney, with great confidence in his own judgment, had drawn up the papers specifically charging Dennis O'Day with selling to minors. He had evidence sufficient on that one count to have his license revoked. 260

The trial passed off quickly. Four boys, not over sixteen, testified that Dennis O'Day himself had sold liquor to them, not once but many times. It was proof positive without Joe Ratowsky giving his testimony.

O'Day himself sat hunched up in the prisoners' dock, glinting his keen eyes about from witness to juror. When the witnesses had testified against him, his attorney brought forth, in turn, the father of each boy, who declared that he had personally given the saloonist permission to sell liquor to his son. By this the Minor Liquor Law was, in effect, circumvented. That each father was the richer by some of O'Day's money was generally supposed. But that was not the issue at hand. The case was dismissed. O'Day went back to Bitumen wiser in that he knew whom to fear, and with the privilege of freely selling to the young boys who had testified against him. 261

Though to all appearances the matter ended here, the fight had just begun.

It would have been impossible for anyone, except O'Day, to tell just how the trouble began. But before a month had passed, there arose a feeling of dissatisfaction among the miners. It could be felt rather than expressed. Where once every Slav and Pole smiled at the mention of the boss's name, now there was only silence, a silence ominous to those who knew the signs. Joe Ratowsky understood and went at midnight to ask Mr. Hobart to go away somewhere for a time, until the discontent passed. But Mr. Hobart was not one to leave his work because a man of Dennis O'Day's stamp saw fit to disapprove of him. If there was trouble brewing, there was all the more reason for him to stand at his post. He laughed at Ratowsky's fears, and encouraged him to think that half the discontent among the men was of his own imagination. 262

A series of accidents, or what passed as such, began immediately after Dennis O'Day was acquitted.

The cable, which drew the coal cars up the incline, broke, letting them fall back at break-neck speed against the engine-house. Fortunately it occurred at a time when the men were not riding up the incline, so no lives were lost. This accident was the subject of discussion that night at "The Miner's Rest." O'Day was over-solicitous about the welfare of the men. He criticised corporations which risked the lives of the workmen for the sake of saving. "Anyone could see the cable was weak in spots," he said. "It wasn't a week ago that I walked up the incline—wouldn't trust myself to such a rotten chain. A new cable costs, of course, and the company used the old one till it fell to pieces. They hain't risking their lives. What does it matter to them if a few Slavs and Polacks hand in their checks? Huns and Dagos are thick as blackberries in

June, and about as valuable.”

At his words the men about the tables scowled. It mattered to them if a few lives were lost, providing their own were among them.

“I wish I had the corporations by the throat,” added O’Day vehemently, all the while watching the effect of his words upon his hearers. He could read these people like an open book, and he was keen enough to know when it was wise to stop talking and when continue. “I’d choke them into taking care of the men’s lives. You’re all just so many cattle to them. A Hun isn’t so much to them as a cow, and they would see you all in perdition rather than lose a good mule.”

The faces about him were scowling and malignant. Each man was ready to believe all evil against that great and incomprehensible body known as a corporation. They had heard the war-cry between capital and labor dinned into their ears since the day they set foot upon American soil. It meant nothing to them that their teachers were always men like O’Day, who, while lining their own pockets with the laborers’ earnings, cry out against the men who are getting more, though lawfully. It never came to their untrained minds that O’Day proved nothing. He said so, that was enough. O’Day listened to the muttered growls of dissatisfaction. 263

“But, I suppose,” he continued hypocritically, “that we shouldn’t blame the men who have put their money in the mines. They are only wanting a fair interest on their investment. That’s only right. No doubt they send money enough right into Bitumen to have things kept up first-class, better houses for the miners, and cables that don’t break. I’m thinking there hain’t one of those big ones in the city who knows how poor you men live, how little you get, and how you risk your lives every day you work. How should they know? They spend money enough to have things fine.” Then he added, “They hain’t to blame if the men they’ve put in charge hain’t honest.” 264

That was enough for one night. O’Day, still discreet and tactful, dropped the subject. Not so with the men. They rolled the idea about until it grew into immense proportions. A week passed, and yet they talked. If there had been one among them fitted to lead, there would have been open trouble. There was no one. Bruno had daring and sagacity enough, but he was an Italian—a Dago, in common parlance, and the Slavs and Poles hated the Dagos worse than they hated the smallpox.

Sometime later a small stationary engine blew up; and Colowski was hit on the head by a piece of flying iron. Ellis, the engineer, insisted that he was not careless. He had kept his steam-register down to one hundred and fifty pounds when the limit was three hundred. Superintendent Hobart was about to discharge him when Joe Ratowsky appeared. 265

“It’s the tivil’s own work, b’gosh, Meester Hobart. Gerani, he comes and he fools with the little boiler-clock. Me come like the tivil, b’gosh, or me could have stopped it quick.” He had picked up the steam-register and was holding it in his hand. It was what he called the boiler-clock. It had been hurled a great distance but yet remained whole.

Mr. Hobart took it from Joe’s hand to examine it. He had given little credence to Ratowsky’s words. He whistled softly to himself as he examined the register. He began to believe the Pole right. Affairs at Bitumen were assuming a serious aspect.

O’Day’s acquittal had taught him one lesson—to be prepared for any emergency. For that reason, he handed the register to Ellis. “Look closely at that,” he said. “There’s evidence enough there to free you from blame. But I wish you and Joe to see this for yourselves and not take my word for it.” 266

Ellis, too, whistled when he examined the register. Little wonder that he had not been able to put on a full head of steam. A strong but almost invisible steel rod had been driven in the face of the register at such a point that the hand moving under the pressure of steam would stop at the one-hundred-and-fifty-pound mark.

“It couldn’t have been driven there by the explosion?” asked Ellis.

“Impossible. We haven’t a steel brad like that about the place, and never have had. Joe saw Gerani prowling about before you came.”

“And I saw him leave, Mr. Hobart. I went up to Bruno’s shack to have my shoes fixed, and I came down over the hill instead of the usual way by the road. Gerani was just going up as I came down.”

Mr. Hobart made no further comment. But from that time Gerani was watched closely. Joe Ratowsky, while seemingly doing nothing but attend his little lunch-counter, shadowed the man. He knew when Gerani came and went. There was proof enough that he had been interfering with the engine. But it was not he alone whom Mr. Hobart wished to reach. It was the man back of the act who had sent the Pole to do the work. 267

The superintendent thought at first of dismissing Gerani. But this might bring on more serious complications. His fellow-workmen might object—the Huns and Poles, at least. The Italians were not in the mines but were employed about the dumps, and on the road which wound about the mountain. It was Joe again who thought of a means of subduing Gerani. He had heard enough of O’Day’s covert suggestion that he could tell much that Gerani dreaded. Joe undertook the same stratagem. One stormy night he met Gerani on his way home. Catching him by his sleeve, he detained him long enough to say in his native tongue, “I’ve a word to say to you in secret, brother. O’Day is not the only one that knows about the Dago. The superintendent, he knows, too; but he keeps quiet because you are a good miner when you are not drunk, brother. So a word of warning. Keep friends with Mr. Hobart, and whatever happens, don’t let it come to his 268

ears that Gerani went up at daylight to work at the engine. Just a word of warning, brother, all given in good faith, and for the sake of the land from which we came."

That was all. Joe Ratowsky strode on through the darkness without giving the other time to respond. In his own tongue, his speech was impressive. He saw now, from the frightened expression of Gerani's face, that his words had struck home.

The next morning, the big Pole was not at the mines, nor did he come to draw the pay due him. Joe Ratowsky chuckled to himself when several days passed. "Gerani—oh—he all right. We no fear him. Me scare him like the tivil, b'gosh."

Mr. Hobart rested easy again with Gerani at a distance and afraid of him. But men of O'Day's stamp can readily find tools to their need. 269

There was a week or more of quiet, then the engine and one car, which went down the mountain each morning to bring back the mail, was derailed at the second switchback and crashed into a forest of big oaks. The car was empty, and the train, being on the second switch, was moving backward. The rear end of the coach was crushed but the engine and engineer escaped unhurt.

"Gerani," said Mr. Hobart when he heard the news, but Ratowsky shook his head in negation. "You no see him no more. He be bad man at Bitumen no more, b'gosh." Then Joe laughed heartily and slapped his broad limbs with his hand. He never lost his first appreciation of the manner in which he had settled Gerani's interference. There had been a gang of a dozen Italians somewhere along the road, but they had neither seen nor heard anyone.

For several weeks communication between Bitumen and the rest of the world was cut off. It was then that Joe Ratowsky walked to the foot of the hill to telegraph Elizabeth to remain at Exeter. And the day following he called upon her, with a letter, putting the best construction he could upon the road being disabled. 270

There was a little mule-driver in the mines who bore the euphonious name of Ketchomunoski. He ate much wienerwurst and drank beer freely, and on holidays devoured, at one sitting, a half-dozen loaves of bread, the centers of which had been previously dug out and filled with melted lard. He visited "The Miners' Rest" and reeled home to his shack at a late hour. All these are mere preliminary details to the statement that his nerves were growing irritable, and his temper uncertain. He beat one mule until it was forced to return disabled to the barn, and a few days later mistreated a second until it was worthless and the boss in a humane spirit had the animal shot.

For such cases a precedent had long been established. The boy deserved to be discharged at once, and discharged he was. Had conditions been normal, discharging a mule-driver would have been of so little moment it would have passed without comment. But O'Day's quiet work had not been without its effect. 271

The same evening, a delegation of miners waited upon Mr. Hobart. Ketchomunoski was to be put back or the rest of them would go out. Mr. Hobart listened to their terms. He considered the question before replying. Again he felt certain that another brain had put the plan in operation. After deliberation, he spoke to them plainly. Such a movement on their part was ill-advised. First, the largest orders for the year had already been filled, and enough coal was at the dumps and in cars at the foot of the mountain to fill the orders which came in month by month. So far as The Kettle Creek Mining Company and its patrons were concerned, the mines could shut down until spring; as to the miners, they knew that they had neither money nor food to supply them for a month. 272

He tried to reason with them; but the Hungarians and Polack miners know no reason. Mr. Hobart's present method of talking with them, to their way of thinking, betokened not sound common sense and judgment, but fear.

They blustered and threatened and defied. At this, Mr. Hobart arose, declaring that they might take what course they would, he could *not* return Ketchomunoski to work. The delegation, expressing their anger in strong words, departed. Mr. Hobart immediately sent word to Ratowsky, Ellis and half a dozen other men whom he knew would stand by him. Together they talked over the situation, cleaned their firearms, and then sent Ratowsky, by moonlight, down the mountain to purchase and bring back a supply of ammunition.

By the following evening the strike at Bitumen was on.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PROUD, HUMBLED.

After the midwinter holidays, the question of conducting examinations came up. Dr. Kitchell had decided that, in view of Miss Hobart's refusing to take the examination, she could not enter his classes again until she had explained matters to Dr. Morgan and secured permission from her. Elizabeth dreaded talking matters over with Dr. Morgan no more than with her father. Upon her 273

return to Exeter, she immediately visited the president's office, and explained why she had refused to take the examination. Dr. Morgan was in a lenient frame of mind. She not only forgave Elizabeth her hasty act, but took time to explain to her that this was a custom old as examinations themselves, and a necessity. The explanation satisfied Elizabeth's wounded feelings but did not alter her view of the method. She told Dr. Morgan of the conference the girls had held in her room the night before the holidays and of the plan they had formed which, with the permission of the principal, they meant to carry out.

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Dr. Morgan listened to the plan as Elizabeth gave it in detail, then replied: "This much can be said of the plan, Miss Hobart. If it proves a success, it will be a benefit to the students and the school. If it fails, we are just where we were before—nothing gained or lost. You may try it. But just a word of advice. Select as your leaders girls in whom the others have confidence; those who may be trusted to do right; however unpleasant it may be. Young girls may laugh at and seemingly admire a smart bravado of manner and sly deceit, but when it comes to being led, they want none of these. A dozen trustworthy agents will be worth more than a hundred who are not."

Such advice Miss Cresswell had given Elizabeth the evening of the meeting. She had already acted upon it according to her best lights, though it was no easy matter to decide whom to choose. She and her friends worked slowly. They wished the reformation to be the outcome of deliberate thought, rather than of impetuous emotion.

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Nora O'Day was one of its staunch supporters. At every opportunity she advocated the acceptance of the new school creed which Elizabeth and Miss Cresswell had drawn up. Considering the part which she had played in the examinations the previous spring, her present position was a difficult one. She knew that her strenuous efforts were looked upon by some with suspicion. But she continued. She might have become discouraged had she not known that Miss Cresswell and Elizabeth both understood.

Since that night before the holidays when she had told Elizabeth the cause of her social ostracism, no mention had been made of the subject. There had been no change in Elizabeth's manner toward her. Nora began to believe that Elizabeth cared enough for her to forgive. Her greatest proof of love for Elizabeth was giving her the essays and theses which had been her mother's. The memory of this mother was the only bit of real sentiment that had ever come into the girl's life. She was fond of her father for he had always been kind to her. As a child, she had idolized him. But as she grew old enough to learn what character meant, the childish faith died. She could not put the feeling into words. She was scarcely conscious that her attitude toward him had changed. But at Exeter she had learned to blush at the way in which his wealth had been gained. She spoke of him, but never of his business. She looked upon the simple gifts and loving letters which Elizabeth received from home with a feeling very much like envy.

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Before the Easter holidays, Mrs. Hobart sent Elizabeth a simple school suit of her own making. Joe Ratowsky carried it down to Exeter. So many accidents had occurred on the dinky-road that it had been abandoned until spring. The mines were closed; and the operators were making no effort to open them.

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Nora was in the room when Elizabeth spread out her new frock on the bed.

"Look at the button-holes!" Elizabeth exclaimed. "Mother always did make beautiful button-holes. And here," seizing a smaller bundle and unwrapping it, "if she hasn't embroidered me two lay-over collars to go with it! Mother always seems to know what I want."

She was already before the mirror laying the bits of embroidered linen in place to see if they fitted.

Her companion stood by, looking on. She had made no comment. Her expression was not cheerful. Turning suddenly about, Elizabeth saw the dubious look.

"You don't like it?" she cried. Then, "I suppose it does look very cheap beside yours, but—" There was no complaint in her tone.

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"Cheap? I wasn't thinking of that. I was only wishing I had one made as that was made, by someone who took the trouble because they cared for me." Her voice was tearful. In a moment she might have been crying, but she hurried to her own room. Her new spring dress had come the day before. She had spread it out on the couch to show Elizabeth, and it still lay there. She took it up in her hands, inspecting with care every hook and bit of trimming. It was beautifully made and of handsome material. But Nora O'Day was not satisfied. She missed more and more the mother she had never known. She coveted the plain, simple gown which loving hands had made for her friend.

Elizabeth wasted no time in putting her frock into use. Dressing immediately, she went over to Landis' room to talk over the plan of examinations. Landis had been one of the last interviewed. She was not what might be called a "charter member." Therefore, it was not surprising that she had not shown a great amount of enthusiasm when the matter was broached to her. Playing second fiddle did not suit her ambitious temperament. She had promised to consider the matter.

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That promise had been given a week previously. Elizabeth, who decided most questions upon the spur of the moment, thought a week was sufficient. Upon entering Miss Stoner's room, she put the question at once.

"Well, Landis, what are you going to do about joining us?"

Landis looked serious. She sat silent for a few minutes, her gaze fixed upon a design in the rug,

as though she wished to consider well before replying. At last she spoke and her voice expressed self-confidence and authority.

"You know me well enough, Elizabeth, to know that I'm always on the side of what is right. I have thought the matter over and have decided that it is worthy of success. I do hope it will succeed. That, of course, depends upon those who are backing it. Yet I can not put my name to it. Now," with a serious and most impressive air such as Landis only could assume, "do not misunderstand me. It is not that I do not approve of your plan, think it needed and all that, but there is a personal reason why I feel that I cannot join the movement."

"Why,—because you feel that you can not live up to the requirements?" was the brusque question.

"Hardly. I fancy I do whatever I make up my mind to do. I'm sure living up to the requirements would be doing just as I have always done."

"Then what is it?"

Again Landis looked serious. Her expression was that of one who could tell much if they would. Her habit of seeming to weigh her words gave them undue value. Her hearers expected her to express lofty sentiments.

"I hesitated about speaking of the matter to anyone. It is so easy to be misunderstood. I would not have anyone think me a cad; but there are some among your signers whom I object to. I wouldn't care to have my name appear there with that of another girl whom I have in mind."

To Elizabeth who blurted out everything, and who was frank and out-spoken, there was nothing more distasteful than insinuations.

"Whom do you mean, Landis?"

"It is not necessary to say," was the response. "I mentioned the fact only to let you understand that it was not the policy to which I objected. As I said before, I am on the side of right. I wish my influence always to be for good."

"But it is necessary to tell. The girls who signed that first petition to Dr. Morgan are friends of mine. They are girls who stand well in school, and they're popular, every one of them. You cannot make such a statement and think that I'm going to let it pass. I'm not. You've insinuated something against either me or my friends, and you must come straight out and say what it is."

Min, who had been sitting by the window mending a pair of old gloves for Landis, gave a nervous giggle. Any little unpleasantness was painful to her. She stopped sewing to listen to the conversation between the girls. Landis was not nonplussed, whatever the circumstances. She was not offended now by Elizabeth's words, but was surprised. She appeared shocked that Elizabeth should be crude enough to show vehemence.

"What a little spitfire you are, Elizabeth! When you're a few years older you'll learn not to express yourself so strongly. As to your knowing who the girl is to whom I object, there is no reason for my keeping silent. I have not mentioned her name because I was considering her feelings and reputation. But since you insist, I'll tell you. I must emphatically object to having my name published over Exeter Hall with Nora O'Day's."

"Why?" Elizabeth asked calmly enough now, yet she was exceedingly annoyed.

"Why? What a question to ask! Surely you know how dishonorably she acted last spring! Someone must have told you. You and Mary Wilson are such friends."

"Yes; someone told me, but it wasn't Mary Wilson. She doesn't do that sort of thing. Nora O'Day told me. Are you afraid to join the same set with her?"

"Not afraid in one sense of the word. To be sure, she would not influence me an iota. I might mingle with her and her kind and be none the worse for it. Do not think I am considering myself in the matter. I have in mind the younger set of girls who are so easily influenced. They know the story of Miss O'Day's methods in examination. What would they think of seeing my name in connection with hers?—that I would countenance anything that was dishonorable! If not that, at least, like me, they might be suspicious of a reform that had among its leaders a girl who had been publicly reprimanded for cheating."

During the talk, Elizabeth had been leaning backward against the study-table, her hands behind her, supporting her weight.

She paused before replying to Landis. Then she asked: "Do you believe in treating every one who has done wrong as you intend treating Nora?"

"Surely. To treat them otherwise would be an open acknowledgment that we are willing to overlook deceit and fraud. No one can afford to do that. You must remember the stand Dr. Morgan takes on such matters. You have heard her lecture often enough to know that she does not countenance treating sin and crime lightly. Why, in her last chapel-talk she said that while some amusements might be legitimate and proper for us, we must refrain from them because of our influencing others who might be harmed. I'm sure I could find no better person to follow than Dr. Morgan."

"I do not think her words applied to this instance. At least I would not have taken it so. Nora did cheat last spring; but perhaps she is sorry for it. You do not know but that she looks upon it now with more scorn than you do."

"I hope so. I hope Exeter has had some influence upon her."

"Don't you think, Landis, the proper thing to do, when we know she is ashamed of what she did last spring, is to help her all we can? It seems so unforgiving to be remembering always the little mean actions. I think she has suffered enough as it is. I don't see what is to be gained by slighting her now."

"Perhaps you don't; but this is your first year at Exeter and you have lots more to learn. When you have been here two years more, perhaps your ethical standard will be higher."

"Until I am capable of *copying* other people's essays and passing them off for my own." Elizabeth's lips had grown white as Landis spoke. Never before in all her life had she been as angry as now. It was not alone Landis' words which hurt her, but the girl's manner and tone, which were most insulting.

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For an instant Landis' face grew crimson. Elizabeth's remark had struck home. Her embarrassment lasted only for a moment. She was her cool, confident self again.

"I hope you'll never be capable of that," was the rejoinder, spoken lightly as she moved to her desk and took up a pencil preparatory to writing. "Exeter is scarcely a place where one learns such methods. One must have brought the disposition for such things with her."

Elizabeth was not deceived by the light tone of the remark. Having entered into the discussion, she did not intend to retreat with lowered flag. However, it was scarcely fair to Landis to put her at a disadvantage in Min Kean's presence. While Landis was speaking, the situation presented itself clearly to Elizabeth's mind. She turned to Miss Kean.

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"Min, would you care to go over to call on my roommate for a few minutes? You'll find some home-made candy which mother sent with Joe Ratowsky. I wish to speak with Landis, and it's really too personal for even you to hear."

"Why, certainly! I'll take the gloves along and finish my mending there. But don't quarrel while I'm gone."

"Scarcely," was the reply from Landis. "I never have quarreled with anyone and I have no desire to begin now." She was much taller than before. She was really quite an impressive person when she was on her dignity.

"Well?" she asked, turning to Elizabeth as the door closed after Min. Her manner and facial expression added, "If you have anything to say, you little insignificant member of the Middlers, say it. Such an august personage as myself has no time to waste in conversation with a little girl."

Elizabeth did not falter. "I did not wish Min to hear what I have to say. She looks up to you as the literary light at Exeter, and I see no reason to undeceive her. I've known these little facts I'm about to mention since last holidays; but I've told no one. I would never have brought up the subject for discussion, even with you, if you had not been so bitter against Nora. It seems so perfectly ridiculous for you to criticise her for cheating once in examination when you've kept up the same system for months."

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"I don't know what you mean!"

"You will soon if you do not now. As I have already said, I would have kept this to myself had you not been insulting to me ever since I came in this morning. I won't be patronized by anyone that I have no confidence in. Every one at Exeter praises your fine essays. I used to, but I don't any more."

"What is the matter with you this morning, Elizabeth? I insulting to you! The idea was farthest from my thoughts. I'm nervous. I suppose that accounts for my speaking so you misunderstood me. I'm really working very hard. I'm anxious to make a creditable passing mark, and then I have Min to coach. You know she does not grasp lessons so quickly as you and some of the brighter ones."

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But the open flattery did not lead Elizabeth away from the subject. She had grown years wiser in the six months spent at Exeter. Her knowledge had cost her much of her girlish confidence.

"I—" she began.

Landis, determined to ignore unpleasant subjects, interrupted with, "Have you ever been out to the Adams' farm? I suppose you haven't, since this is your first spring at Exeter. There's a big woods near the house. It is filled with arbutus. I suppose it is beginning to leaf now. Min and I go out every spring to spend a day and night. We come home laden with arbutus. We're going again a week from this coming Saturday. I wish you and Mary Wilson would go along. We get a livery rig and drive out. Can't you go with us?"

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"No, I—"

"It shall not cost you a cent. Min and I will pay the livery bill."

"Oh, I think I could manage to pay my share," dryly. "It was not that which made me refuse to accept. I feel in this as you do about Nora O'Day. I wish to tell you about what I learned last holidays." She talked hurriedly, allowing Landis no opportunity to interrupt. "Nora O'Day by chance mentioned that you came to see her and read some of her mother's theses. Nora did not suspect you. She thought you were inclined to be literary, and felt pleased that you approved of the work her mother did years ago. That is all she thought about it. I did more thinking while Nora was telling me. I thought that Landis Stoner must be a little mite deceitful or she would not be critical of Nora when others were present and yet slip in to see her during study-hours. It seemed—well—it seemed downright deceitful to me."

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"I heard you deliver an oration in the chapel. You know that you speak well, and so you are in every public affair. At least, you have been ever since I've been at Exeter. Your orations have been fine. I thought you were wonderfully bright until the Christmas holidays. When I was leaving, Nora brought me some of her mother's essays to read. I read them while I was at Windburne."

She paused and looked straight at Landis. Landis had no words to reply. She stood, dignified and erect by the study-table, toying with a silver paper-knife. The silence lasted for some minutes. Then feeling that Elizabeth was waiting for some word she gave a non-committal, "Well?"

"But it isn't 'well.' It is anything but 'well'. It's what I call decidedly bad. The instant I read those essays, I discovered that your work was cribbed. You had read—"

"What a fuss you make about nothing at all, Elizabeth! To hear you talk, one might think that I was guilty of wholesale robbery, or murder, or some other horrible crime. You young girls who are new to school-life and have had no experience outside your own little town do not understand these matters. You are, if I may say it, a little narrow in your views. You know only one way, and have the notion that there can be no other. You say I read those essays. Why, of course I did. They were good, too, and I received a great deal of help from them. Every one who writes even a little bit makes an effort to read all the good things along the same lines. That is the only way one can develop talent. I got some excellent ideas from Mrs. O'Day's essays. Is there anything criminal in that? If there is, then we must lock up our histories and reference books when we have any article to prepare for classwork."

"If it were receiving ideas merely, I should scarcely mention the matter to you; or even had you taken the ideas wholesale and expressed them in your own words, I should have said nothing at all. But you did not do that. Landis, you know you did not, and you cannot convince me by a few fine words that you did. The oration you delivered in chapel, the last rhetorical before the holidays, is almost word for word like the original. You gave me your copy to write up for our society paper. I have it, and also the original. If you are still doubtful of my statement, I'll go with you to Dr. Morgan and give them to her to read."

"Oh, I believe you," was the reply given in an indifferent manner. "That was the one 'Character Sketches in Shakespeare.' I had forgotten about that. We were rushed with work. I remember now. I had no time to write an oration suitable for a public affair. I remember I did commit one of those old ones. But I do not think I claimed it was original. You people just took that for granted. If you had taken the trouble to ask me, I would have told you. I do not know that it is my fault that you were deceived."

"Well, Landis," said Elizabeth slowly, "you are surely an adept in slipping out of trouble. Now, Nora O'Day did wrong and made no attempt to deny it. She bore her punishment without a complaint. Your words do not deceive me one iota. They would have done so six months ago. But that time's gone. It really does me good to speak so plainly to you now. I have felt deceitful all along in knowing about those papers, and then listening quietly while you criticized every one else at Exeter—girls who would not be guilty of doing what you have done. We will not discuss the subject further, but do not think that you are deceiving me. You are not. You copied, not one, but most of your orations and theses. But do not worry. Continue to copy if you wish. It is none of my affairs, and I shall tell no one. Now I'm through talking with you, and I feel a great deal better for telling you what I know." Turning, she walked toward the door. "I'm going back to my room to get to work now. I'll tell Min that she can come back if she wishes to."

"But, Elizabeth, you came to talk about the method of examinations," said Landis sweetly. She did not lift her eyes to meet the direct glance of her caller. She still continued to play with the paper-knife, running it up and down the felt of the table, making depressions in geometrical designs. "Since you feel as you do about Nora O'Day, that she is sorry and all that, and since she is a friend of yours, I'll withdraw my objections to her. Of course, I feel as you do. It is not right to judge anyone. I'll not remember her past deeds against her. Bring along your paper when you go into class, and I'll put down my name, and I'll promise for Min, too."

Elizabeth wheeled suddenly about. "I do not wish you to sign it. We shall manage the affair very well without you."

"Just as you please." Here Landis' self-confidence forsook her. She could not believe it possible that any girl would be generous enough to keep to herself such a matter as that of the essay-copying. Should Elizabeth tell but one or two, the affair would soon become public property. Her name would be mentioned with scorn throughout Exeter. Already she saw herself ostracized as she had helped to ostracize Nora O'Day. But if such a condition would result from her dishonesty, she would leave The Hall at once. She was much too proud, too ambitious, to allow anyone to ignore her. She stepped toward Elizabeth, holding out her hands appealingly. "Elizabeth Hobart, don't, I beg of you, let anyone else know of this. Promise me you will tell no one and I'll do whatever you ask me to."

"All I ask of you is to let my friends go free of your criticism. You lead a certain set. Whatever you do, they will also do. I wish you to make them drop that old, worn-out subject of Nora O'Day's cheating."

"I will—I promise you that."

"You and Min need not sign our petition to Dr. Morgan or the pledge we send in. They are to be ready before to-morrow—but you are to give me your promise to live up to the requirements."

"I'll do that. I have never taken advantage in examinations. They have always been easy enough without that."

Elizabeth knew this to be quite true. Landis was one of the strongest members of the Senior class and she worked hard.

"Then we understand each other," said Elizabeth. "From this time on, we'll be just as before. No one need know we have had this talk." She passed into the hall at these words, leaving Landis alone to reflect upon their conversation.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SENIORS OUTWITTED.

When the Seniors and the Middlers, at the close of the spring semester, entered the class-room to take their examination in trigonometry, they found Dr. Kitchell the only member of the faculty present. He remained long enough to pass the small, printed slips of questions, and to explain the manner in which he wished the work done. A smile of relief passed over the class as he took his departure. Soon pencils and rulers were busy. The sound of their moving was all that was heard in the class-room. No word was spoken. The work continued for over an hour. Then one member, having finished, arose and, placing her papers on the table which stood near the front, quitted the room. One by one, as they completed the examination, the others followed her example.

Elizabeth was among the last to leave. Her face was beaming with satisfaction at the spirit in which her plan had been carried out. In the main hall she met Dr. Kitchell.

"The girls are all through," she exclaimed, a thrill of pleasurable excitement showing in her voice. "There was not a word spoken, nor communication of any sort."

"It is truly the only way to conduct an examination," he answered, turning to walk with her down the hall to the dormitory. "The credit should be given to you, Miss Hobart. This police-duty, which so insulted you last fall, was not pleasant work for a teacher; but custom makes slaves of us all. Nothing will please us better than knowing that Exeter can have honest examinations without faculty supervision. We have wished for just such conditions as this, but they seemed rather to be dreamed of than realized. An instructor can do little in such matters. The desire must come from the students. We give you, Miss Hobart, the credit of this change."

"I do not know that I should have it," was the reply. "It is not that I was more sensitive or had higher ideals than the other girls. It was that they were accustomed to such supervision since the days when they entered school, while it was all new to me. And being new, it impressed me greatly. You see," she added, looking up at Dr. Kitchell as though she did not wish him to misinterpret her leaving his class-room that day of the first examination, "outside of class, you would not have thought of such a thing as questioning our word or our honesty, yet by your way of conducting an examination, you did both."

"That is true in part. I questioned the honor of some. *Class honor*, I should say. But there is yet another side to that. Students who would scorn to be other than strictly fair and upright outside of class have stooped to all manner of subterfuge to pass an examination. All sense of moral responsibility evaporated the instant they took that little slip of printed questions in their hands."

"So I have learned," said Elizabeth. She could not refrain from smiling. Dr. Kitchell had a jocular manner. His words, even in the discussions of the most serious matters, had a touch of humor. "That is what surprised me most. The girls are Christians, that is, the greater number are. But one would have thought it was a reform school. I think those days are gone. Every Senior and Middler is pledged to conduct examinations as they were conducted this morning, and we are heartily glad."

"So say we all of us," was the cordial response.

They had come to the hall leading to the girls' dormitory. So far and no farther could Dr. Kitchell walk with Miss Hobart. Elizabeth hurried to her room. Loud tones came from her apartment. Opening the door quietly, she peered in as though half afraid of what she might encounter. Mary Wilson was pacing up and down the room. Her head was high. Her chest was expanded. A glow of rhetorical enthusiasm was upon her cheeks and in her eye. In one hand, she held several sheets of typewritten paper toward which at intervals her glance wandered. The other hand sawed the air in impressive, if not graceful, gesticulations.

She heeded not the entrance of her roommate. She continued orating in tones which she was striving to make full and round. She gave a hurried glance at her paper, strode up the room, flung out her hand and roared forth, "I'm *charged* with pride and ambition—"

"What did they *charge* you for it?"

"The charge is true—"

"Well, then, Mary, all I can advise is to pay the bill and not say anything more about it. If you haven't change enough, I can lend—"

"And I *glory in its truth.*"

Sinking back in her chair as though this was too much to be borne, Elizabeth sighed deeply, then said, "I'm surely surprised at you, Mary. Affairs have come to a pretty pass when you're in debt and take glory in it."

Mary laughed, tossed aside her paper, and coming over to her roommate, sat down beside her. "It's my new oration. Miss Brosius called me into her office, and gave me this to learn. It is really very fine—effective, if my voice was not quite so high-pitched. Listen, I've learned so much already." She tossed back her locks and assumed a rostrum manner, "'I'm charged with pride and ambition. The charge is true and I glory in its truth. Whoever achieved anything great in letters, art or arms who was not ambitious? Cæsar was not more ambitious than Cicero, it was only in another way.' That's all I've learned. Miss Brosius went over so much with me that I would get into the spirit of the piece. I wish you might hear her read it! She's such a dainty little creature, but she looked tall when she was rolling this out."

"What is it for? You've had all your oratory work long ago."

"This is especially for commencement. You see, we don't have the old-style exercises. The Dean from some other school or some eminent divine comes to deliver a lecture. There's music wherever there's a loophole to slip it in. Then the class in cap and gown parade across the stage and receive their diplomas from Dr. Morgan. Oh, it's all very fine and elegant and all that. But there's no fun in it. The element of humor is lacking, and after an hour of it, the simple dignity of it palls on one. And as for the dresses! Most of the girls wear simple white shirtwaist suits under their gowns. There are receptions, to be sure; but the Middlers and Freshmen attend them, and dress as much as the Seniors do. The only opportunity a Senior has to trail a long gown after her is on Class-day. Then we have all the old orthodox orations and music with a two-act farce thrown in, and we may wear what we please. And let me announce right here, Elizabeth Hobart, your roommate will appear in the handsomest white evening dress she can get—train, short sleeves, high-heeled shoes, and hair piled on top of my head."

Elizabeth looked at the short locks, barely touching the speaker's shoulders. She laughed.

"You think it can't be done!" exclaimed Mary, with the characteristic toss of her head. "But it can. I'm going to have a hairdresser. Yes, indeed. When I assume the role, I mean to carry it out. Wait until you see Mrs. Jones. She can take two hairs and twist them about until they look like nothing else so much as Paderewski. She has fine switches, too." This was added after a moment's thought, and confidentially, as though it was not information to be passed around. Then with a sigh of satisfaction, "One can work wonders with switches."

"You're not to mention to anyone what I am to do for Class-day. Those matters are supposed to be secrets. Of course, you could not help knowing, for I must practice here."

In the days following, it was made plain that Elizabeth could not have been kept from the knowledge of what Mary was doing. From morning until evening, at all times, opportune and otherwise, Mary orated. When her throat grew husky from her efforts, she compared samples of white tulle, and point d'esprit, and embroidered mull. She insisted upon Elizabeth's opinion in regard to each one of them.

"I've learned one thing," said Elizabeth. "I never knew there were more than a hundred varieties of white material. But—"

"There are thousands of them. I've discovered that this last few weeks. One thing is gained. You do increase your vocabulary. You must have different adjectives to express your admiration of each kind. What do you Middlers plan to do commencement week?"

Elizabeth looked down her nose. She could appear very innocent when she chose. "There was some mention made of a banquet," she replied. "There was talk also of having a caterer from town."

"Well, I guess not!" exclaimed Mary, arising. Her eyes were flashing with the spirit of school warfare. "I think you Middlers will think again about having anything so fine. Never in the history of Exeter have the Middlers given a banquet, and they shall not now. We shall keep them from it. We'll treat you as the Seniors treated us last year. We, too, had a notion that we would give a banquet. We were so confident that we telephoned our order to the caterer; but we didn't have the banquet."

"Didn't he receive the order?" The question was asked in such an innocent, seeking-for-information manner that Mary ought to have been suspicious, but she was not.

"Oh, yes, he received the order and the money to pay for it. We waited in the gym, all togged out in reception gowns, but the caterer came not. Suddenly it came to us that there must be some mistake. We set out to hunt for the banquet. We found its remains up in the laboratory where the Seniors had been feasting at our expense. No, indeed, Elizabeth," Mary shook her head slowly, "no Middlers hold banquets at Exeter Hall. It isn't countenanced."

"We may try it, anyhow."

"I hope you will. I should like to feast my friends at the Middlers' expense."

Elizabeth brought up the subject of the banquet again and again. Apparently inadvertently, she

let drop many little points about the affair which were eagerly seized upon by her roommate. Mary was surprised at Elizabeth's want of discretion. She seemed prone to let many a class secret escape.

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It was evident the Middlers were laying plans for something. In groups of two and three, they surreptitiously visited each other. They gathered in hallways for whispered conferences. The Seniors were not blind. Each had her appointed work, and when the Middlers gathered together, there was a Senior concealed near by, with ears and eyes open. If the Middlers suspected that they were being shadowed, they made no signs.

"It's a banquet, I'm sure," confided Mary Wilson to Landis and Min. "We have our class exercises on Tuesday evening. The time was set for then, but Elizabeth Hobart and some of the others had that changed. They wish to attend our exercises. So it will be Wednesday evening. Elizabeth was writing when I went into the room. Like a flash, she covered the letter; but I saw enough to help us out. The letter was addressed to Achenbach. I saw the word 'Wednesday.'"

"That settles it; for Nancy Eckdahl was making out a menu in chapel yesterday, and the Middlers who take water-colors are painting place-cards."

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"What had best be done? I'd like to have them send on the banquet and lead the delivery men off somewhere else."

"But, Mary, that will not be possible. Most of the Middlers know what happened last year. They'll keep a watch on us, and if they are wise, they'll send out scouts to meet the caterer at the train," said Mame Welch.

"They shall not banquet if we take it from them by force!" Then suddenly her face lighted up. "I have it. Landis, you must do this part. You have such a don't-interfere-with-me manner that Achenbach will do exactly as you wish. Get permission to go into town. Go to Achenbach's and tell them that the Seniors have discovered where the banquet is to be served, that you have come to give new orders, as the Seniors are determined to appropriate the banquet for themselves."

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There were a dozen Seniors in the room. They all gave their approval to Miss Wilson's plan. Then they discussed it in detail. The laundry, big and bare, would be an unsuspected place. There were ironing boards and folding tables that would do to serve on.

"And if they are not enough," exclaimed Mary Wilson, "there's the floor."

Landis received her instructions. She was to go into the city the following morning and visit Achenbach, the caterer. She was to be as self-confident as possible. He might have been instructed not to tell anyone where and when his services were ordered. Landis was not to be led off by his assumed ignorance. She was to tell him plainly that she referred to the order sent in by Miss Hobart the day before.

"Just raise your head high and look straight at him," advised Mary Wilson. "Scare him into it, Landis."

The following morning, according to plan, Landis, dressed in the trimmest of tailor-made gowns, went to the city. She visited Achenbach's and did as the girls had directed. As had been expected, the clerk pleaded ignorance of such orders as she mentioned. Landis insisted. The clerk then called the proprietor to verify him. If the order had been received, both proprietor and attendant acted their parts well. Landis could obtain no information from them. Yet, to fulfill her errand, still suspecting that they knew more than they would tell, Landis, just as she was going, left orders to have the banquet served in the laundry. "You may think it rather an odd place, Mr. Achenbach; but the Seniors stole the banquet last year. They will do the same now if the opportunity is given them. They will do all they can to mislead the men you send to serve. Pay no attention to orders after this, but have your men go directly to the laundry. They must go around the back way, of course. One of the class will be watching for you."

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Still Mr. Achenbach protested that there must be some misunderstanding. He had received no orders from Exeter.

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Landis went back to school at once, and recounted her experiences to the girls. Mary Wilson was confident that Elizabeth had sent in the order. They would be on their guard that particular evening, and permit no caterer to enter the Hall unless under their orders.

The Middlers had some plan afoot. If not a banquet—what then? But the Seniors were agreed it was that. Nancy's roommate had found a carefully-written menu. And Landis had surprised another Middler painting menu and place cards. That it was to take place, was evident. But where—when? The group of Seniors separated, each admonishing the others to watch the Middlers, and not permit them to talk together alone.

Mary Wilson's especial duty was to restrain Elizabeth from holding communication with the others. With true diplomacy, she kept her roommate busy so that she had no time to visit other rooms.

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"Just hear me go over my oration once more, Elizabeth, please," she would say. "I'm apt to get careless if I recite without an audience. Sit over there by the window. I'll stand here. Now, don't be afraid to tell me if you think I might improve any part."

And Elizabeth would patiently sit and listen. She showed great interest. She followed closely every word. She lost no gesture, no facial expression. "I think I could repeat it word for word," she said, when Mary had practiced for the last time, the morning of Class-day. "I could make

every gesture you do. I'm really looking forward to this evening."

Mary's face flushed with pleasure. "I'm glad you like it. I hope it will pass off well. You see, the chapel will be crowded. The galleries are always filled; and, visitors are glad to get standing room below. It's our best day, and I wish to do myself and the school credit." Then suddenly remembering that she was to find out what she could of the Middlers' plans, she asked suddenly, "Have you any engagement for to-morrow evening, Elizabeth? What do you say about getting up a tally-ho party, our own set and a few visitors, and driving out by moonlight?"

Elizabeth turned her head aside as though she did not wish Mary to see her embarrassment. She hesitated before replying. "I—I—don't believe I can, Mary."

"Have you any engagement?"

"Well,—Oh, I don't know what to say. Please don't ask me."

Mary smiled to herself, then turned back to the mirror for the better arrangement of her hair. Her convictions were strengthened. Whatever the Middlers had on hand, to-morrow night was the time for the doings. When to-morrow night came—! Mary smiled at the thought. To-morrow night would find every Middler followed by a Senior.

The week had begun with the excitement usually attendant upon commencement. Relatives and friends began to appear on Monday. The continuous flow of guests taxed to the limit the accommodations of the Hall. Bedrooms were doing double duty. Meals were taken in relays. Every one bore with exceedingly good humor the little inconveniences incident to such an overflow.

Dr. Shull of the Irvington Female College lectured to the class Tuesday morning. This was followed by the presentation of diplomas. The graduates in caps and gowns marched through the chapel and across the stage. So far as commencement proper was concerned, this was their first and last appearance.

"But wait until this evening, and the Thursday night promenade! We'll shine then," Mary Wilson had whispered confidentially to her friends. "Every girl in the class has done herself proud about her new gowns—one for the prom and one for to-night, not to mention a few extras for the tree-planting and the rose parade."

The eventful evening came at last. Mrs. Jones bearing extra switches and fancy combs, her ebony face wreathed in smiles, had already arrived, and stood waiting Miss Wilson's pleasure. The much-talked-of dress of shimmering silk, over which point d'esprit hung like a cloud, lay over the bed ready for its wearer.

The girls were hurrying, as the time was growing short. Elizabeth stood ready to slip into the simple white frock which Joe Ratowsky had brought from Bitumen a few days before. She took up her dress and then laid it down again, and turned to the mirror pretending to put a stray lock in place.

"Hurry, you'll have no time to waste, Elizabeth. You must get in early if you wish a seat."

Just then a knock came at the door. Without waiting an invitation, Nancy thrust her head in. She had not yet dressed; but was wearing a bright kimono, her yellow hair streaming over her shoulders.

"Mary, hurry up to the chapel anteroom. Oh, don't wait to dress. There's a change in the program and every one who is to take part must come at once. Hurry! They are waiting for you."

Picking up the belt she had just discarded, and fastening it as she walked, Mary hurriedly quitted the room. The anteroom was a small place fitted up like a parlor, at the side of the stage and on a level with it. A single pane of glass fixed solidly in the wall gave the occupants a view of the stage, yet they could not be seen by the audience. It was here the teacher of oratory sat during the performance. At times, it served as a dressing-room.

The curtain was down. In order to save time and steps, Mary ran across the stage, between the scenery. At her hurried knock a key was turned, and the door of the anteroom opened wide enough to allow her to slip in.

"Hush!" the doorkeeper whispered, carefully locking the door after admitting her.

Landis, Mame, Anna Cresswell and a dozen others were already there.

"Are we all here now?" whispered the doorkeeper. They began to count. The light was so dim that they could barely distinguish faces.

"Fourteen," said Landis. "That is all."

"Be sure," admonished the keeper of the keys in sepulchral tones. "I would not for worlds have one absent."

"That's all." "Fourteen." "We're all here." "Do tell us so that we can hurry back to dress!" came from the members of the group.

At this, the girl with the keys drew her chair close to a second door leading into a dark, unfinished attic. Over the door which was nailed shut was a small transom. As she mounted the chair, Mary Wilson for the first time recognized her as a Miss Bowman, a special student in music, neither a Middler nor a Senior.

"Then," said Miss Bowman, lifting her hand with the key in it to the open transom, and turning to face the girls, "then we'll stay here." With that she dropped the key into the attic. They were

prisoners; she, with them.

"It's those Middlers," groaned Mary Wilson. "We might have known; and my little innocent Elizabeth is at the bottom of this."

"Console yourselves," advised Miss Bowman. "When the curtain goes up, you will have a fine view of the Senior exercises. They will be well worth the price you've paid for admission."

CHAPTER XIII.

IMPRISONMENT.

Elizabeth turned the key in the lock the instant Mary stepped from the room. Then, as quickly as possible, she got into her roommate's white gown. Mrs. Jones, with a broad smile playing over her ebony features, stood by with pins and ribbons. From her mysterious boxes, that Mary supposed contained the switches with which one could do wonders, she brought forth a wig of yellow-brown hair.

"Pears like this 'ud do. The other young lady hab hair what just come to her shoulders."

"It is just fine," exclaimed Elizabeth, "as near the color of Miss Wilson's as I can hope for." She studied herself in the mirror as Mrs. Jones adjusted the wig. "I know every gesture that Mary makes except this." She gave her head a toss, shaking back the fringe of hair about her shoulders.

She hurried dressing for it was almost time for the curtain to rise. "There!" she cried. "I'm ready. I hope the way is clear for me."

Hastening to the door, she peered into the hall. Not a 'noble Senior' was in sight. The girls flitting through the dormitories were Middlers and Freshmen. Confident that she was safe from interference, Elizabeth, her white gown trailing after her, started forth for the chapel. Nancy Eckdahl and Mame Welch joined her at the foot of the stairway.

"Don't I look like a boiled lobster?" cried Nancy. "But this was the only dress anywhere near my size. It's Nora O'Day's. Isn't it handsome? It is unfortunate that she is so dark and I so fair. But it was this or nothing. Think of a yellow-haired girl in an orange-colored gown."

The effect was startling. Nora, with her dark eyes and coloring, would have looked like a picture in this vivid orange; but Nancy, with her blue eyes and flaxen hair, looked anything but picturesque.

"But you are comfortable," gasped Mame, in short breaths. "If Min Kean had had a little more flesh on her bones when this dress was fitted, I would have felt better now. Nancy had to use a shoe-hook to fasten the buttons."

"Have you seen Laura Downs? She looks exactly like Landis. The dress fits except it is a little short in the waist; but Azzie pinned up the skirt. It doesn't look bad. She was in our room before she went down. And she 'did' Landis to perfection—that same haughty manner that Landis has when she means to impress one."

As they moved along, their number increased. The leading spirits of the Middler class were there, each decked out in the new gown that some Senior, whose manner and tricks of speech she had been studying for weeks to impersonate, would have worn had she not been locked up in the little greenroom near the stage of the chapel.

There had been no Middler of sufficient height and dignity to impersonate Dr. Morgan. Yet she was a light of so great magnitude that she could not be ignored. Miss Hogue, a special student, a girl devoted to the classics, and a writer for all the school papers, had been pressed into service. Dr. Morgan when she had appeared upon the rostrum during the commencement exercises had worn a gown of black lace, its sombre tone relieved by cuffs and collar of cream duchess. She was very slender and erect. Her mass of brown hair, touched with gray, was always dressed in the same style. During all the years she had been at Exeter, it had been worn in a great coil on the top of her head. Dr. Morgan was no longer young. During the last year, she had been compelled to use eye-glasses. These were attached to her bodice by a gold chain. As she talked they were held in her hand the greater part of the time. In physique, Miss Hogue was Dr. Morgan's double. Robed in the black gown, which she had borrowed from Dr. Morgan's maid, and with her hair powdered, she could have easily passed as the doctor herself.

Miss Bowman, in company with her fourteen Seniors, sat in the greenroom and waited. There was no lack of conversation, although Miss Bowman took little part in it. However, she was an interested listener, and laughed heartily at the remarks of her charges. They threatened her; they cajoled; they flattered; they offered her all the good things that could be laid at a Senior's feet during Commencement. When these availed nothing, they expressed themselves strongly. At intervals of a few minutes, one of the girls would try the doors, shaking them, and pounding with her fists on the panels.

"There are other Seniors somewhere," cried Mary Wilson. "If we could make them hear, we 'd soon be out of here. We'd stop the Middlers' banquet."

Miss Bowman laughed. "Do you still think it is a banquet? Well, it isn't. They hadn't the least idea of giving one."

"But I saw the letter that Elizabeth Hobart sent to Achenbach, the caterer. Isn't that proof enough?" And Mary looked as if, had this been a legal case, she had Blackstone on her side.

"I saw the orders myself," she asseverated.

"Of course you did! Elizabeth intended you should!"

"But if there was not going to be a banquet, why should they take all the trouble to make us believe there was?"

"Because, while you were hunting on the wrong scent, they could go on with their plans. You poor Seniors," compassionately, "how you did work to stop that banquet! Landis had her trip to the city for nothing. Do you know, I don't believe you could have had it served in the laundry! It gets chilly and damp there in the evening."

"I'll get out of this! I won't stay locked up," cried Mary. "Come, girls, let's all yell together and pound on the floor."

Pandemonium reigned for a few moments. Miss Bowman, exasperatingly cool, sat smiling. When the clamor ceased, she said, "Really, you are very childish. Why not accept this with the spirit of philosophers? You are here—you cannot get out until the Middlers see fit. Why not sit down and converse sweetly? There's the weather. It's a safe subject. Nothing personal about it. Or if you wish—"

"Shut up!" cried Mary, stamping her feet, and wholly losing her temper. "If you had that key we'd fall upon you tooth and nail."

"And take it from you!" It was Landis who finished the remark.

"So I thought!" responded Miss Bowman complacently. "That's why I haven't it."

It was Min Kean who first showed the spirit of a philosopher. "Oh, what's the use of fussing about it? We're here, and I suppose we shall stay here until those Middlers see fit to let us out. The more fuss we make, the more fun for them."

At this Landis drew herself erect. "That is just what I was about to say. A great deal of their fun will vanish when they discover that it is all one to us whether we get out or stay here. I'm about as well satisfied. My throat was a little husky anyway. Perhaps I would not have been able to make that high note. How mortified I should have been!"

She spoke in seeming sincerity. Mary Wilson eyed her suspiciously. She sighed. "Landis believes that we are what we make people believe we are. You would make a capital actress, Landis. The only fault you have is that you would always be playing to the gallery."

Her hearers laughed, accepting the remark as a bit of pleasant chatter. Mary did not fully grasp how much truth her remarks contained. Landis alone appreciated the words. Her face flushed and she turned her head aside for an instant that the girls might not see she was hurt.

"I don't know but that it is a good thing," Mary rattled on. "We're sure of an audience, at least. What shall we do now?"

"What can we do!" wailed a meek-looking little Senior from the darkest corner of the room. "There's nothing except ask conundrums. I'll begin. Why did we ever—?"

"What more do you want?" asked Landis, turning about quickly to face them. "I'll begin. What goes around a—"

"Hush hush," came a chorus of whispers. From the chapel below music could be heard. It was the Germania orchestra of twelve pieces from the city, to secure which the Seniors had heavily taxed themselves.

"All that music going to waste," wailed the little figure from the dark corner.

"It's not going to waste, dearly beloved," came the response from Miss Bowman. "The Middlers will enjoy it even more than you would have done. They are not paying the bill."

The instant the music ceased, the drop went up. Again a groan arose from the prisoners. They could see all that was enacted on the stage, yet could not hear the words.

"There's Dr. Morgan," whispered Mary. "She can't know that anything is wrong, and that we are locked up here. When she turns toward us I'll tap, and she'll see to it that we are set free."

A tall and stately figure, in an imported gown of black lace, crossed the stage. Reaching the center she paused, raised her eye-glasses and swept the audience with her characteristic glance. She began her remarks, and had said but a few words when she was stopped by a round of applause. The Seniors who had not been booked for that evening's performance understood that something had gone amiss. There were hurried remarks—"It isn't the Doctor;" "It's that Miss Hogue;"—"That's the girl that's in our classics;"—"This is the Middlers' work."

Miss Hogue, following Dr. Morgan's manner, gave almost word for word the address of the morning. She did it well. A round of applause followed her from the stage. She returned to receive the flowers which were intended for Dr. Morgan, then announced as the next number an oration by Miss Wilson.

"Well, I couldn't hear what she was talking about," sighed Mary from her place in the greenroom. "But it was just the way Dr. Morgan would have done. Did you notice how she raised her glasses, then turned her head to look sharply? The Doctor does that every time. Who's this dressed in—" She didn't finish her question. She paused to look closely. Then exclaimed, "Oh, Elizabeth Hobart, you little Spaniard! And with my dress on, too."

Elizabeth swept across the stage. She paused a moment, then tossed back her hair.

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"Miss Wilson!" "Miss Wilson!" came the appreciative cries from the Freshmen and specials sitting below. The Seniors, in little groups of twos and threes, had their heads together arranging for a general action. They were so scattered throughout the house that quick planning was impossible.

"I am charged with pride and ambition," began Elizabeth, in the same tones and with the same gestures she had heard and seen Mary use hundreds of times while practicing. Even those in the greenroom caught her words.

"I've another charge against her," exclaimed Miss Wilson. "She's purloined my dress. Oh, I wish she would look this way."

But Elizabeth was wise. She let no glance wander toward the greenroom. She tossed back her locks again, threw out her hands and continued, "The charge is true, and I glory in its truth. Whoever achieved anything great in letters, arts or arms who was not ambitious? Cæsar was not more ambitious than Cicero. It was only in another way." She went through the oration without a pause, and bowed herself from the stage in the midst of a round of hearty applause from the delighted audience.

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Dr. Morgan, with her usual dignity, announced that Miss Landis Stoner from Potter County being absent by *foreseen* circumstances, Miss Mame Welch would sing the "Jewel Song" from Faust.

Mame, resplendent but uncomfortable in the finery belonging to Landis, then appeared. She raised her head, straightened her shoulders, looking unutterably bored and weary, although self-confident enough for a score of such songs. But the instant her voice arose, the Seniors who had gotten together started to sing. Their voices filled the chapel, drowning out even the laughter and applause.

"Where, oh, where are this year's Seniors,
Where, oh, where are this year's Seniors,
They are not in the cold, cold world.
Every one sing for the grand old Seniors,
Every one sing for the grand old Seniors,
For they're not in the cold, cold world."

The moment there was a lull, Miss Welch caught her own tune and started bravely on her song, only to be again drowned out. She did not give up. She sang in spite of all opposition, for the most part out of the tune. Then with the airs and manner of one who had succeeded beyond all expectations, she left the stage, in some disorder but not vanquished.

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The pseudo Dr. Morgan then arose, and with the dignity born of her position and years, requested order, saying that if there was further interruption she must ask the watchmen present to expel the disturbing element. Her speech was a master stroke. Exeter then had a dozen special officers about the grounds and buildings. Most of them had never been in Dr. Morgan's presence. Those in attendance, not understanding the state of affairs, took the request in good faith, believing that it was the real Dean of Exeter addressing them.

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Then the farce which the Seniors had prepared was played.

Nancy, or the "boiled lobster," as she had nicknamed herself, was last to appear.

She played on Nora O'Day's guitar "The Spanish Cavalier," the only selection she could pick out, and sang it in a weak, trembling soprano. Nora both sang and played well. Nancy, in her vivid orange gown, did her best. Her audience, by this time conscious that there was something amiss, could no longer be suppressed.

"Oh, say, darling, say,
When I'm far away,
Some times you may think of me, dear—"

"Could he ever think of anything else?" came in a stage-whisper from below. Every one heard, and every one smiled. Nancy sang on:

"I'm off to the war—"

"I don't blame him," came again. Laughter swept over the hall.

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"To the war I must go—"

"Don't bother about returning—"

Nancy laughed aloud. The curtain fell. The program for the evening was finished.

CHAPTER XIV.

RETALIATION.

The Seniors accepted the Middlers' fun in good part. Even Mary forgave Elizabeth the wearing of her new gown.

"Oh, well," Mary had exclaimed after the affair was over, and a group of girls had gathered in her room, "'Every dog has his day.' We had ours last year; and next year you will pay the fiddler for a new set of Middlers."

"If they don't pay before that," said Landis, sententiously.

"It's a long lane that has no turning," said Min.

"But we will leave before the turn comes," laughed Elizabeth.

"What will you do?"

"Jump the fence and take to the fields," was Elizabeth's reply.

"If I wear my orange gown to-night will I look like Nancy?" asked Nora O'Day.

"I hope not," said Nancy, while a chorus of strong negatives arose from the other girls.

"Then I'll wear it," said Nora.

The excellent spirit with which the Seniors took their imprisonment was quite enough to awaken suspicion in the minds of Middlers had they been in a cautious mood. But they were too uplifted with their recent success to think of aught else. Beside, there was little time now for planning and executing vengeance. Dr. Morgan gave a tea to the Seniors and their friends late that afternoon. Thursday evening was the date for the ball and banquet. Friday the general exodus would begin.

"What have you on hand for this morning?" asked Mary, as she and Elizabeth were dressing for breakfast.

"There's plenty. I'm undecided what to do. One party is going boating; another plans to take a tally-ho ride, and have lunch under the trees which mark the place of the Wyoming massacre. The Freshmen are having a small "feed" down in room B. Everyone in this hall is invited. It's a mild affair. Just drop in, eat a sandwich and salad, exchange addresses, and bow yourself out. I think I'll go out boating first and then attend the Freshmen's 'drop-in.' And you?"

Mary sighed. "I must rest a little for Dr. Morgan's 'at home.' I haven't had enough sleep for a week. I know I look like Medusa. I'll start my packing, sort of get my personal belongings into shape. If I have time, I may walk down to the boat-house. But don't wait for me. Any one of a score of trifles may delay me."

This conversation took place about eight o'clock. That was the last the two girls saw of each other until Mary, decked out in her new gown, came down the hall on the way to Dr. Morgan's apartments. Elizabeth, dusty and tired, had that moment returned from the day's outing.

"You've been out in the sun, with only that brimless cap on your head," was Mary's greeting. "I should have warned you how sunny that boat ride is. I see two new freckles on the bridge of your nose now."

"Well, if there's only two, I shan't mind. When will you be back?"

"In half an hour or so. Put on your cream colored dress for dinner. There's to be doings afterward, and you'll be ready. Were any of our girls with you?"

"No; I haven't seen one to-day; neither at the boat-house nor on our ride."

During commencement week, the regular order of meals was infringed upon. Dinner began earlier and lasted later than usual. The students took second place, giving precedence to the guests and Seniors. So it came about that the Middlers and Freshmen had scarcely finished before time for the beginning of the evening festivities.

"Every one is to go to chapel after dinner," someone started the order. It was passed on and on until all the girls of the first and second classes received the word.

The dresses which they had worn to dinner answered for such an informal affair as this must be, to judge from the manner of issuing the invitations.

As they quitted the dining-hall, Elizabeth looked about for Mary, but could not find her. Nora, Landis, Min and Anna Cresswell also were among the missing. Then she hurried to join Nancy and Mame.

"Mary is not to be found. Perhaps she has already gone to chapel."

The audience hall was almost filled when they entered. Bright fans on the wing looked like a swarm of gay butterflies. The subdued hush of conversation came from all parts of the room. Elizabeth looked about but could not see her roommate.

"How perfectly awful the stage looks!" whispered Mame, who possessed the artistic

temperament. "I think I could have decorated it better than that. I feel mournful at the mere looking at it."

The stage had been robbed of its furniture. A high-backed chair and reading-desk of black walnut were the only pieces in sight. White roses were there in profusion but not one bit of color.

While conversation buzzed, and fans fluttered, Azzie, dressed as somberly as the rostrum looked, walked slowly down the main aisle. Her gown was of some thin black stuff. She suited her walk and expression to match the color of her dress. She wore no flowers. A big roll of music was in her hand.

"She's going to play." Each one straightened her shoulders and leaned eagerly forward, fairly holding her breath in anticipation, for Azzie's fame as a pianist was far-reaching.

Moving slowly to the front of the rostrum, she seated herself at the piano. So she sat for a few moments without touching the keys.

Slowly following her came Anna Cresswell, in gown but no cap. Her linen collar and cuffs showed white against the dead black of her student's robe. With glances neither to right nor left, she slowly advanced, mounted the rostrum, and solemnly seated herself in the high-backed chair of polished walnut. Then Azzie touched the keys and gave expression to the most melancholy dirge one could conceive. So sympathetic was her music that a hush fell over the chattering audience.

"What has possessed the girl?" whispered Mame Welch, almost in tears but determined to keep a brave front. "I feel as though I was about to attend my own funeral. This is so unlike Azzie. Her music is generally brilliant."

Still the wail of sorrow sobbed itself out from beneath Azzie's fingers. In a moment more, the audience would have been in tears. She sat for a moment silent. When she touched the keys again, it was to give expression to a march, measured, heavy, solemn. At this, emerging from the rear of the chapel came the Seniors, in caps and gowns, two by two, with heads bowed, and "faces as long as the moral law," whispered Mame to Elizabeth.

The first six carried between them a long narrow box, over which the Middler class colors, green and white, had been draped, and on which rested a stiff wreath of white artificial flowers tied with streamers of vivid green. Advancing to the front, the six bearers deposited their burden before the rostrum, then took their places with the other robed figures upon the front seats. All the while Azzie played her solemn dead march.

At the conclusion, Miss Cresswell arose to announce they would begin the services by singing the popular ballad "Go tell Aunt Nancy." At this, the mournful singers, with Azzie accompanying them, sang in wailing, heart-broken voices:

"Go, tell Doc Morgan,
Go, tell Doc Morgan,
Go, tell Doc Morgan,
Her Middler Class is dead.

"They're unreliable,
They're unreliable,
They're unreliable,
Is what she's often said.

"Their heads illustrate,
Their heads illustrate,
Their heads illustrate,
What a perfect vacuum is.

"Ofttimes she said this,
Ofttimes she said this,
Ofttimes she said this,
Teaching the Seniors 'phis.'

"Go, tell the doctor,
Go, tell the doctor,
Go, tell the doctor,
Wherefore the class is dead.

"An idea came floating,
An idea came floating,
An idea came floating,
And struck its empty head."

Each Senior did her part well, maintaining an expression which was the picture of grief. At the close of the song, Miss Cresswell advanced to the reading-stand. She assumed an oratorical tone. There was a note of pathos in all she said. "There came to Exeter Hall some ten months ago," she began, "the class whose early demise we are now making famous with these ceremonies. They were young then. They continued to remain young—"

"So young," came in a sad-voiced chorus from the singers.

"They were green,—they remained so until their passing away. I repeat, they were green—"

"Oh, so green," came the sobbing chorus.

"The faculty looked upon them and sighed, a great sigh of disappointment. Yet with that noble heartedness, that philanthropic desire to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, minister unto the feeble-minded which marks our honored Dr. Morgan and her fellow workers, they took up the burden, determined to do their best. Yet, despite their great efforts, the class did not advance as other classes have done. Nor yet could it retrograde for it stood in a position where any backward movement was impossible. It was known throughout Exeter as the 'caudal appendage' class, being 'away back.'

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"The Seniors, too, did all that lay in their power to enlighten these Middlers both intellectually and morally. But our efforts were like 'casting pearls before swine.' The Middlers were not only no better for our efforts, but seemed wholly unconscious that they stood in need of moral and intellectual support.

"Yet none of us regret the work that we did in their behalf. We planted the seed, but the soil was barren. Our efforts toward their cultivation was like breathing a concord of sweet sound into a vacuum. There was no volume of matter to perpetuate and carry it forth. It is not that we wish to censure them. Lacking the capacity to enjoy the higher life of school, we can not blame them that they amused themselves with mere toys. We Seniors who wear the philosopher's cap and gown must bear in mind that it would ill become the clown or jester. We listen to the music which rolls down the ages; but the tinkle of the bells won the ears of the Middlers. It is ever so. The world cannot be all of the higher ideal element. They cannot all be Seniors."

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She paused to touch the colors of the Middler class—green and white.

"These are the symbols of the late lamented Middler class. How appropriate! The white represents the conditions of the examination sheets they habitually handed in—not a line, not a letter. Blank, quite blank. It is the opinion of the faculty that this also represented the condition of their brains. I do not fully agree with this. I believe that at rare intervals, and when under the influence of proper environment, for example, the presence of some Senior, the minds of the Middlers did receive some impression;—slight, we acknowledge. Yet we hold an impression, a faint suggestion of an idea, was there.

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"The second color! Green! How beautiful, how appropriate. It represents our lamented Middlers as they stood before the world. They were so verdant!

"As to the age of the departed class, both much and little might be said. The records show that as a class they existed just ten short months; to the faculty and Seniors it seems like ten long years.

"During their sojourn, the hospital of Exeter has been filled with—teachers suffering from nervous prostration. Dr. Morgan's ebony locks have turned silver. During the holidays Miss Wilhelm, who tried to teach them classics, in a fit of desperation sought refuge in matrimony. We might speak more fully of the effects of their being among us were it not that we believe in interring the evil they have done with their bones.

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"With this short eulogy, I close. Miss Stoner, a Senior, who has suffered much because of the shortcomings of the Middlers, will sing a solo appropriate to the occasion, the others joining in the chorus."

Landis advanced. Azzie struck up an accompaniment, while the whole class of Seniors came out strong on the refrain.

"They were so young, this Middler class of ours.
They brought to mind the newly-opened flowers.
They to the grasses closely were related.
They were so green, so unsophisticated.

(Refrain)

Softly speak, and lowly bow your head,
We are alone. The Middler class is dead.

"We did our best. No duty left undone
Weighs on our hearts at the setting of the sun.
What though their choice was weeds instead of flowers
Censure not us. The fault was never ours.
From early dawn until the dim twilight
We were to them a bright and shining light.

(Refrain)

Weep if you can; slowly, lightly tread.
They are gone. The Middler class is dead.
Th' Middler—class—is—d-e-a-d."

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With this, the Seniors arose. Six again took possession of the long box. The procession filed slowly from the room, while Azzie played a dirge.

The Middlers and Freshmen followed after them, and the laughing and chattering began again. Every one was humming "The Middler—class—is dead."

The line of girls passed down the main hall, the audience following them to see what new thing was to take place.

The members of the faculty, with Dr. Morgan, stood here. At the sight of their smile-wreathed faces, the gravity of the Seniors gave way. Landis laughed aloud. The others followed her example. The lines broke. The girls gathered about the teachers, talking and making merry over their escapade.

"I never realized what a nervous strain it is to control oneself so long," said Nora, joining Dr. Morgan. "I felt as though I must shriek and laugh, and there I had to sit and pretend to be overcome with sorrow."

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Dr. Morgan had been glancing over a special edition of the evening paper. She folded it quickly as Nora came up to her. "You did admirably, Miss O'Day," she said. "I could not be present all the while."

Nora O'Day did not hear. She was leaning forward, her lips parted; her eyes, bright with excitement, were upon the paper.

"May I see this for a moment, Dr. Morgan?" she asked excitedly. "What is it about the strike?"

She had the paper in her hand, reading the article before Dr. Morgan had time to reply. It was a full resumé of the trouble at Bitumen from early fall until the present, telling of the threatened attack upon Superintendent Hobart and the new miners and the call for State troops. The correspondent prophesied that the militia could not arrive in time to prevent bloodshed, the capital being two hundred miles from the scene of trouble, and the railway up the mountain having already been destroyed by the miners.

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Nora grasped the meaning instantly. There was no mention made of the name of Dennis O'Day. He was not a miner. In the eyes of the world, he had no power. Miners themselves did not realize that it was he alone who instigated the strike, and that their leaders had been his choice. Outwardly, Dennis O'Day had washed his hands of the whole affair. So long as he escaped legal responsibility, he would shrug his shoulders, and stand by to watch the fight. He could be eliminated without effecting the result. But Nora O'Day, who understood her father as no one else had ever understood him, saw his work here. She knew that for years he had been the unseen moving power.

The bubble of laughter and fun was about her. She looked up piteously into Dr. Morgan's face, her lips trembling with emotion. She loved her father. Shame and fear for him overwhelmed her.

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"I—I know—some—some people there. That is why I—I was anxious."

"I wish you would not mention the matter to anyone. We see no reason to distress Miss Hobart unnecessarily. Her knowing the condition of affairs would result in needless worry without helping matters any."

"Why—Elizabeth—is she—has she—"

"Her father, you know, Miss O'Day, is the superintendent of the Bitumen mines."

At that Nora O'Day gave a startled cry, and buried her face in her hands. "I didn't—know—I didn't know. Poor Elizabeth—" she sobbed.

Her behavior was claiming the attention of others. To shield her from the attention of the passing throng, Dr. Morgan drew her within the private office. She anticipated comforting an hysterical girl. But in a moment Miss O'Day controlled herself.

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"When will the troops reach Bitumen?" she asked, drawing herself up, afire with purpose.

"Not before to-morrow night. That is the earliest possible time. It is presumed the miners, hearing of the call for help, will bring matters to a climax at once."

"Dr. Morgan, will you telephone McCantey's livery? They know my father down there. Tell them to send the man Jefferies if they can, and fast horses. Elizabeth Hobart and I will go to Bitumen to-night. I'll stop the trouble."

"Dear child, you're—crazy," said Dr. Morgan, surprised by such a suggestion.

"Far from it. I'm going, with or without your permission. Please telephone now, and I'll explain while I await their coming. Tell them it's a matter of life and death. If I kill the horses with hard driving, I'll pay twice what they're worth. Every minute counts! Won't you telephone?"

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Dr. Morgan obeyed the peremptory request. She believed that news of the strike had affected Nora until she did not know what she was about. She would accede to her request, and perhaps by the time the horses were at the Hall, Miss O'Day would listen to reason.

"Now," said Nora, the order having been given, "I'll tell you some facts about myself and my family you never knew. I know who has brought this strike about, and I know how to stop it." She spoke calmly, methodically. Dr. Morgan seated herself to listen. Miss O'Day began her story. When she had finished, the horses were at the door, Jefferies with them. Dr. Morgan hesitated.

"I've known Jefferies for years. He is a friend of my father. He will take care of us," said Nora, studying the expression of Dr. Morgan's face.

"Then go, Nora. My prayers go with you."

A few minutes later, Elizabeth, the center of a laughing group, was drawn hurriedly aside by Nora.

"Here's a long storm coat. Put it on over your light dress. We have no time to change. Put on the cap, and tie a heavy veil upon it. It is raining; but it will matter little." The speaker was enveloped in a long, dark, travelling cloak, beneath which her orange colored gown showed. A soft hat swathed in a heavy veil hid her head and face.

Elizabeth did as she was bid, being wholly carried away by the excitement and force in the speaker's voice.

"Why—what—" she began.

"Don't waste time talking. There, you are ready. Come!"

"Go with your friend," said Dr. Morgan. "She will tell you on the way."

She walked with them to the door. The girls passed out into the storm and the night.

CHAPTER XV.

VICTORY.

The country roads were almost ankle deep with mud. The soft drizzling rain had resolved itself into a steady downpour. The carriage seemed swallowed up in the darkness. It was well that Jefferies knew the way and the horses he was driving. He chirruped and called them by name and they went plunging on through the mire.

No sooner were the girls seated in the conveyance, the storm-ropes being drawn about them, than Elizabeth turned to her companion with eager questioning. She was quivering with suppressed excitement.

Nora, on the contrary, was quite calm. She had made her plans, and now saw her way clear to carry them out. Her self-confidence spared her unnecessary alarm. However, appreciating Elizabeth's state of mind, she at once explained the condition of affairs at Bitumen. She was sufficiently tactful to tell her only that which was necessary for her to know. She also warned her to be careful what she said should anyone stop them on the road.

"If we meet the strikers, they will help us along because I am the daughter of Dennis O'Day. But they must not know who you are. On the other hand, if we meet anyone else, you are to impress them with the fact that you are Superintendent Hobart's only child, and that you *must* reach Bitumen to-night."

Turning to Jefferies, she urged him to keep the horses moving. "I know the carriage will be ruined, and the horses laid up with stiff joints for a week or more; but I'll pay for that. Get us to Bitumen before daylight, and Mr. McCantey may make the bill what he chooses."

Although they were moving as fast as it was possible it seemed but a snail's pace to Elizabeth. She could realize nothing but that her father was in danger. After hearing Nora's reasons for this sudden journey, she spoke no word but sat rigid, her hands clasped tightly in her lap. She was leaning forward, trying to pierce the darkness of the road before them. The rain beat into her face. Her cap and veil were drenched but she heeded them not.

Determined to make the journey a trifle less strenuous for Elizabeth, Nora kept up a continuous flow of talk. It mattered little about what; only that there was no silence, but Elizabeth might as well have been a wooden girl so far as listening to her companion was concerned. They left the flat country roads, and began ascending the mountain. The road was so narrow that heavy logs had been placed for safety along the outer side.

For the first time since the beginning of their journey Jefferies spoke: "We should make better time here. The roads are well enough trained, and we would if I could see a yard ahead of me. I'll let the horses go their own gait—they're sure-footed enough. All we've got to do is to trust in Providence. I'll get you there or kill the horses in trying."

At last, at the opening of a small ravine, the road broadened. The horses sprang forward.

Suddenly Elizabeth, still looking eagerly ahead, exclaimed, "I see a light! It looks like a lantern."

The click of the horses' hoofs upon the stones rang loud and clear. Jefferies drew them up. He leaned over sidewise to peer about. "I was trying to see just where we are. Oh, we're all right. That light hain't no lantern. That's where Ketchomunoski lives. We'll go on. He may come out if he hears us go by. I'll go slow and whip up just as we reach his shanty."

"Is he a miner?" It was Nora who asked the question.

"Yes."

"Draw down your veil, Elizabeth, and don't say a word to him. I'll do the talking."

Scarcely had she spoken when the flickering light moved out into the road, directly in their way. Ketchomunoski, lantern in hand, barred their way.

Jefferies could have urged the horses on, letting the big Polander run the risk of getting beneath their hoofs. But Jefferies was a peaceful man, so long as peace served his purpose. If strategy served, he preferred it to war; if not, then he was ready for the last. At the flourish of the lantern, he drew rein, calling out in friendly tone: "That you, John?" By that name every foreigner was known. "Come here, I want to speak to you."

The Pole came to the side of the carriage. "We've got to get to Bitumen, John, and get there to-night. How's the road?"

"No one go to there to-night," he replied, in his broken English. He was to watch the road. Men were above. He would fire his gun if any one suspicious passed. They could not go on. This was the purport of his speech.

Leaning forward, Nora touched the man's arm. "Don't you know me?" she said. "I'm Dennis O'Day's daughter. Listen! I must reach my father at once. *At once*, do you understand? I have a message to give him which will affect the strike. But *I* must give it to him. Fire your gun, and let the miners meet us. I want them to take me to my father."

She kept her hand on the man's arm as she was speaking. She looked him directly in the eye, as though by force of her own will she would compel him to do her bidding. Her words threw a new light upon the case. Yet in times like this, one can trust the words of no one.

"Where have I seen you?" he asked, scrutinizing her closely.

Her face flushed, but she answered bravely. "Do you remember two years ago, you came to my father for help? One of your people was in jail—someone had been hurt, killed, perhaps. An Italian named De Angelo. And my father went to court with you to tell that Gerani, I think that was his name, was not present when the Italian was hurt. I was at home when you came."

The man nodded. There was no question now in his mind. She was Dennis O'Day's daughter, the daughter of the man, who, although himself not a miner, stood shoulder to shoulder with them when they needed a friend. She saw him hesitate.

"If you are afraid to allow us to pass, fire your gun, and let the miners know we're coming. I am not afraid of them. They will befriend me."

He stepped aside. At that instant Jefferies brought down his whip upon the backs of the horses, and they started forward.

"We're rid of him," exclaimed Nora. "I'm not afraid of anyone else. I'll reach Bitumen and see my father before daylight."

"And save mine," said Elizabeth.

"Elizabeth Hobart, your father is perfectly safe. No doubt, he's home warm and comfortable in bed, while we, poor mortals, are out in the night, drenched and forlorn."

They had not gone up the mountain road more than a mile, when the sharp report of a gun was heard. There was a moment's silence, followed by a second report.

"Ketchomunoski is sending word of our coming," said Nora. "I begin to feel that I am of some importance. This is the first time my appearance has been heralded." Then more seriously, "I would like to know what two shots mean. Why wasn't one sufficient? Do you know, Jefferies?"

But Jefferies knew nothing. He would not even express an opinion on the subject. He had no time to give to mere surmises. His work was to keep the horses moving. This he did, encouraging them with chirrups, or touching them lightly with the whip.

Though on the mountain road there was no mud, for the steep ascent was well-drained, it was hard traveling even for strong and swift horses. Jefferies' heart smote him as he urged them on. He knew the horses he was driving would be useless for weeks, but if a man's life hung in the balance, the horses must travel their best, though they drop dead at the end of the journey.

The road from the foot to the top of the mountain was between three and four miles long. It had been cut along the side of the hill, and was so narrow that teams could not pass except at certain places, widened sufficiently to give 'turning-out' room.

Jefferies had stopped at one of these places to rest his horses. Upon the instant they reared and would have plunged the carriage backward over the side, had not their driver retained his presence of mind to speak to them, leaning over to pat their sweating flanks. After quieting them, he called out: "Now you fellows attempt to seize the bridle again, and I'll let you see how close I can shoot to the mark. The horses won't stand strangers fooling about them. If you've anything to say, come alongside and say it. But bear in mind, we'll not put up with any funny business. Are you coming? If you don't, I'll drive on."

"Have you a revolver?" whispered Elizabeth.

"You don't think I would take a drive like this without one, do you?" was the reply.

At his invitation, dark forms emerged from the bushes and from behind the trees. As they advanced, it seemed as though the road was filled with men. They came close, swinging their lanterns high to see the occupants of the carriage. They were a sorry-looking set. The winter had been hard upon them, though the fault was their own. They had had little to eat; they had

grown thin and haggard; their eyes were sunken; their features pinched. They jabbered in their own tongue, turning from one to another. Elizabeth noticed with alarm that some bore firearms, while others carried clubs and even stones. She was so frightened that she could not have spoken a word had her life depended upon it. Fortunately Nora was different. Elizabeth crouched back in her seat. Nora leaned forward, and with a manner indicative of her ability to protect herself, and her confidence in them, she addressed them.

"I'm glad we met you," she exclaimed. "You are miners? Then you can tell me how to reach Mr. Dennis O'Day. I must reach him to-night—within a few hours. I have a message for him."

They talked among themselves.

"What's the message?" one asked in broken English.

"It's not to be told to every one," she replied. "If you will tell me who your leader is, I'll whisper it to him."

"Ivan," they cried, pushing a Slav forward, and retreating into the shadows.

Bending over, Nora mentioned "Militia." The word was magic. Then she grew impatient. "Why do you try to keep us here?" she exclaimed. "Didn't Ketchomunoski fire two guns? Wasn't that to let you know we would come this road and that you should let us pass? We are wasting time. I must reach my father with this message. Good night! Jefferies, drive on."

The men made no effort to detain them as the carriage started. It was past one o'clock when they reached the top of the mountain and came to the outskirts of the town. "The Miners' Rest" was less than a mile distant. But the horses were tired out. Jefferies could not get them out of a slow walk.

"We'll go at once to 'The Miners' Rest,'" said Miss O'Day. "I'll see my father there. If the miners are planning any trouble, they'll be there, too."

Driving into a little wood, Jefferies drew rein. Climbing down from his place, he took out a strap and tied the horses to a tree.

"They wouldn't let us drive through town," he explained. "The streets will be filled with the strikers. We'll walk, keeping in the shadows. It's a blessed good thing for us that it rains."

He helped the girls to alight, then strode on ahead, skirting the edge of the wood.

"If you see me stop, then you stop," he said. "Don't come on until I say so. If you hear me talk to anyone, wait and don't speak."

Clasping hands, the girls slowly followed. The side of the road was filled with clods. The road itself was mud to the shoe tops. Many times they stumbled and almost fell. Only at intervals could they see the form of their guide.

When they reached the main street, Jefferies paused. It was filled with miners, each with his lantern. These lights helped Jefferies to determine his next move. He saw in which direction the crowd tended. The murmur of many voices could be heard; but there was no uproar.

"The women will either be out in the street with the men, or home asleep," he said at last. "Either way, we're safe. We'll cross here and get behind this row of houses and keep on until we're close to 'The Miners' Rest.' They'll see us then. But no matter."

Slowly they pushed their way through backyards. Fortunately there were no division fences. The winter's crop of ashes and tin cans was beneath their feet. They stumbled, ran into barrels and boxes, waded through mud holes, yet Nora's spirits never flagged.

As they came to the last of the houses, Jefferies again paused until Nora and Elizabeth came up to him.

"There at the corner is 'The Miners' Rest,'" he said, pointing to a low, wooden building.

"That ramshackle affair!" cried Nora. "Somehow I had the impression it was a big hotel."

"They don't need that kind among miners," was the reply. "This is just a drinking-place, nothing more. Every miner in Bitumen is there. Look at those women. They're worse than the men."

A group of women with hair hanging, dressed in dirty wrappers, and shawls about their shoulders, stood together under the flickering corner lamp. To judge from their gesticulations, they were much excited. They were all talking at once and shaking their clenched fists in defiance.

"Are you afraid to go through that mob?" asked Jefferies.

"No; we dare not be afraid of anything now. Push ahead, Jefferies, straight to the door, and on through until I find my father. Don't stop. We'll keep at your heels. Draw down your veil, Elizabeth, and put up your collar. Don't speak or tell who you are. Remember the miners know you."

Following her suggestion, Jefferies crossed the street, pushing his way through the throng, as though he was expected. The girls kept close to him, so close that Nora could have reached forth and touched his arm. The mob of men scarcely noticed him. Indeed, few knew that the two girls had slipped through the crowd. They were talking in half a dozen different tongues and dialects. The effect was like a pack of dogs snarling. No attempt was made to stop the three. They reached the door and Jefferies entered, followed by the girls. Nora's cheeks were crimson with embarrassment. She was trembling. Her nerves had been so wrought upon that she was

ready to cry. But that would spoil all. She must control herself.

Behind the bar was a room devoted to conferences of the leaders of the strike. Toward the door leading to this Jefferies made his way. The men in the bar-room stopped talking to look at the girls. It was unusual to see women in this place.

Nora, feeling herself conspicuous, with a desire both to justify her presence there, and to protect herself and companion, exclaimed, "My father is in that room, Mr. Jefferies. Ask for Mr. O'Day. Tell him his daughter has come with an important message." 377

The men stepped aside, leaving her way clear. Her words had carried into the inner room. The door was flung open from within, and Dennis O'Day stood there.

"You!" he exclaimed. "Good heavens, Nora, how did you get here at such a time? Come here," and he drew the girls into the inner room. He dismissed at once the half dozen men gathered there. "In half an hour," he said significantly as they passed out. "Not a minute before that. I must see what has brought my daughter here."

Elizabeth, drenched and with draggled skirts, sank into a chair. She had not raised her veil. Dennis O'Day did not recognize her as the little girl whom he had seen many times playing about the superintendent's yard. She was so nearly exhausted that she could not stand. She let her head fall over upon the table.

Dennis O'Day glanced from the drooping figure back to his daughter as though asking an explanation. "My dearest friend at Exeter, father," was the reply to the unspoken question. "No one else in the world, except yourself, has been so kind to me." She came closer to Dennis O'Day, touching his sleeve with her finger-tips. His little world had always trembled in fear of him. His daughter alone stood fearless in his presence. She was the only being in the world he loved. For an instant he looked into her face. Her perfect features and rich coloring delighted him. He was glad that she was beautiful. 378

"Well, Nora, what is it that has brought you to Bitumen at this of all times?" he asked, putting his arm about her and drawing her close to him.

"The strike."

"The strike! It is just the reason that you shouldn't be here. I've a notion to cart-whip Jefferies for bringing you. You might have been shot by the miners."

"So I might. But Jefferies wasn't asked anything about it, daddy. I told him he *had* to bring me here before morning, and if he killed the horses by hard driving, you'd pay for them." 379

Dennis O'Day laughed. He liked her audacity. "But suppose I wouldn't?"

"But you would. You have never failed me yet, daddy, and you never will. It doesn't matter much what happens, you'll stand by me. That is why I felt so sure about coming. Dr. Morgan did not wish me to. She said it would be useless. But she yielded when I insisted that you would do what was right. And you must do it now, daddy." She drew down his head to kiss him. "You must keep the miners from attacking the mines to-night."

"I? I'm no miner! What have I to do with the strike? If the men attack that miserable little sneak of a superintendent, what have I to say?"

"Everything. You are not a miner, but they do as you say. They do not know it is so, but you do. I want you to go out there; tell them—tell them anything, only so they do not make the attack to-night." 380

"Nonsense. Even if they should do as I say, what's the odds? I've no love for that man Hobart. He's been fighting me for years. He'll get no more than he deserves. No, no, Nora. Girls mustn't meddle."

"You won't go?"

"No; ask me anything else than that."

"Then I'll tell you what I'll do. The National Guards are on their way now. When they come, I'll give them all the information they wish. I know who urged this on. I know who killed the Italian. Oh, I know lots of things that I've kept to myself because my telling would harm you. But—" She was excited. Whether she pretended this high state of emotion, or whether it was real, was difficult to tell. She had flung open her coat. The vivid coloring of her gown, her crimson cheeks and flashing eyes made a brilliant bit of coloring in the dark room lighted by a solitary, smoking oil-lamp. Her tones were clear and decisive. 381

"Why, Nora, listen to reason. How—"

"No, I will not listen to anything but your promise to go and stop that mob. Listen to them yelling like a pack of hyenas. I'm not through yet. You must choose and choose quickly. Stand by the miners or me. If you forsake me, I'll never see you again. I'll never let you do anything for me. I'll be as though you never had a daughter. Then what will be the good of all your money and your saving? There'll be no one to waste it on; no one to care about you. You know that mother left me enough to live on. Besides, I can work. Will you go?" She fairly blazed her words at him. She stamped her foot until the chairs and tables shook.

Dennis O'Day had been her slave since babyhood. She had always had her way, and had done as she had threatened. He knew, too, that she was the only one who had a bit of tenderness for him. The men outside cared little for him. Fear of the consequences was the sole reason that many a miner had not quietly assisted him into the next world. 382

Nora came up to him again. She rested her head against his shoulder. "Listen, daddy, to what I tell you," she said gently, her anger disappearing. In a few words she told him of her isolation at school, and how Elizabeth Hobart had befriended her. Her eyes filled as she talked. Her hearer, too, was moved. When she had finished, she kissed him again. "I'll be to you the best daughter a man ever had. Go now," pushing him toward the door. "And tell them that I have brought you news which changes the program. I'll go with you, daddy. If they harm you, I'll bear the blows too."

He told her to stay, but she followed close after him. He had no fear of bodily harm. There would be growls and snarls, and perhaps threats, but the trouble would end there. Gerani, Colowski, Raffelo, Sickerenza, were the bell-sheep. He could control them.

Pushing his way to the front of the saloon, he stood in the doorway and shouted with the full force of his lungs. He spoke Slavic, and they listened. There were mutterings and growls as might have been expected. He gave no reason for the delay of the attack, but his words suggested much.

Gerani, in the background, in low tones was urging a group of Slavs to answer O'Day, and declare that they would go on. O'Day's eyes were on the big Slav. He understood the conditions. Nothing would please Gerani better than to have the miners rush upon the speaker and kill him.

O'Day understood. He called out, "Take my word for it, Gerani. We won't get into this to-night. They've filled the cars on the incline with dynamite. The moment we set foot there, down comes the car. Do you want your men blown to pieces? Besides, my daughter," he drew her against him, "brings news of the militia close at hand. Go back to your homes, men—back to bed. Let the National Guards find you all asleep, and their work for nothing. If they see all quiet, they'll leave. Then will come our time. While I think of it, Gerani, Father O'Brady still keeps safe in the church those papers you know of."

"Sickerenza, you haven't forgotten, have you, about the breakers being burnt up at Wilkes-Barre? Seeing you, put me in mind of them."

"Colowski, I know a man who's looking for Sobieski."

The three men thus addressed swore beneath their breath. Thus O'Day forever kept the noose about their necks. They slunk from sight.

"Speak to the men, you curs," commanded O'Day in English which but a few understood. "Tell them to go back home, Gerani."

Thus admonished, the man cried out in Slavic, ordering the men home, to meet the following night. The other two leading spirits followed his example. There was a movement toward dispersion. The flickering lights in their caps moved slowly away in groups of threes and fours.

The distance grew greater until to Nora O'Day they looked like fire-flies. The light from the open door was upon her. The vivid orange of her evening dress gleamed in the shadows. She had stood there fearless, erect, looking straight into the eyes of the mob, until one by one they had disappeared in the darkness.

Then she turned and leaned heavily against her father.

"I'm tired, daddy dear, but I'm happy. I have my father, and Elizabeth will have hers. Come, take me to her. We must tell her the good news."

THE END.

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