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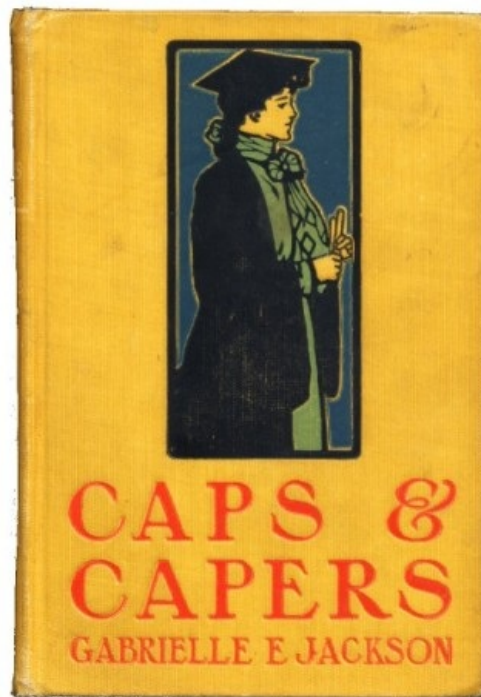
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BOARDING-SCHOOL LIFE \*\*\*



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CAPS AND CAPERS

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Frontispiece—*Caps and Capers*. "NOW, GIRLS,  
COME ON! LET'S EAT OUR CREAM." See p. 92.

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# CAPS and CAPERS

*A Story of Boarding-School Life*

by  
GABRIELLE E. JACKSON

*Author of "Pretty Polly Perkins,"  
"Denise and Ned Toodles," "By Love's  
Sweet Rule," "The Colburn Prize,"  
etc., etc.*

With illustrations  
by C. M. RELYEA

P H I L A D E L P H I A  
HENRY ALTEMUS COMPANY

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To  
THE DEAR GIRLS OF "DWIGHT SCHOOL,"  
WHO, BY THEIR SWEET FRIENDSHIP,  
HAVE UNCONSCIOUSLY  
HELPED TO MAKE THIS WINTER  
ONE OF THE  
HAPPIEST SHE HAS EVER KNOWN,  
THIS LITTLE STORY IS MOST  
AFFECTIONATELY  
INSCRIBED  
BY THE  
AUTHOR.

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## CAPS AND CAPERS

### CHAPTER I

#### WHICH SHALL IT BE?

"And now that I have them, how am I to decide? That is the question?"

The speaker was a fine-looking man about thirty-five years of age, seated before a large writing-table in a handsomely appointed library. It was littered with catalogues, pamphlets, letters and papers sent from dozens of schools, and from the quantity of them one would fancy that every school in the country was represented. This was the result of an advertisement in the "Times" for a school in which young children are received, carefully trained, thoroughly taught, and which can furnish unquestionable references regarding its social standing and other qualifications. 14

It was a handsome, but seriously perplexed, face which bent over the letters, and more than once the shapely hand was raised to the puckered forehead and the fingers thrust impatiently through the golden brown hair, setting it on end and causing its owner to look more distracted than ever.

"Poor, wee lassie, you little realize what a problem you are to me. Would to God the one best qualified to solve it could have been spared to you," and the handsome head fell forward upon the hands, as tears of bitter anguish flooded the brown eyes.

Can anything be more pathetic than a strong man's tears? And Clayton Reeve's were wrung from an almost despairing heart.

For ten years his life had been a dream of happiness. At twenty-five he had married a beautiful, talented girl, who made his home as nearly perfect as a home can be made, and when, three years later, a little daughter, her mother's living image, came to live with them, he felt that he had no more to ask for. Seven years slipped away, as only years of perfect happiness can slip, and then came the end. The beautiful wife and mother went to sleep forever, leaving the dear husband and lovely little daughter alone. For six months Mr. Reeve strove to fill the mother's place, but until she was taken from him he had never realized how perfectly and completely his almost idolized wife had filled his home, conducting all so quietly and gracefully that even those nearest and dearest never suspected how much thought she had given to their comfort until her firm, yet gentle, rule was missed. 15

Happily, Toinette was too young to fully appreciate her loss, and although she grieved in her childish way for the sweet, smiling mother who had so loved her, it was a child's blessed evanescent grief, which could find consolation in her pets and dollies, and—blessed boon—forget. 16

But Clayton Reeve never forgot, not for one moment; and though the six months had in a measure softened his grief, his sense of loss and loneliness increased each day, until at last he could no longer endure the sight of the home which they together had planned and beautified.

Unfortunately, neither he nor his wife had near relatives. She had been an only child whose parents had died shortly after her marriage, and such distant relatives as remained to him were far away in England, his native land. His greatest problem was the little daughter. Nursemaids and nursery-governesses were to be had by the score, but nursemaids and nursery-governesses were one thing with a mistress at the head of the household and quite another without one, as, during the past six months, Mr. Reeve had learned to his sorrow, and the poor man had more than once been driven to the verge of insanity by their want of thought, or even worse.

At last he determined to close his house, place Toinette in some "ideal" school, and travel for six months, or even longer, little dreaming that the six months would lengthen into as many years ere he again saw her. The trip begun for diversion was soon merged into one for business interests, as the prominent law firm of which he was a member had matters of importance to be looked after upon the other side of the water, and were only too glad to have so efficient a person to do it. 17

So, before he realized it, half the globe divided him from the sunny-haired little daughter whom he had placed in the supposed ideal school, chosen after deliberate consideration from those he had corresponded with.

But this anticipates a trifle.

As he sits in the library of his big house, a house which seems so like some beautiful instrument lacking the touch of the master hand to draw forth its sweetest and best, the sound of little dancing feet can be heard through the half-open door, and a sweet little voice calls out: 18

"Papa, Papa Clayton. Where is my precious Daddy?" and a golden-haired child running into the room throws herself into his arms, clasps her own about his neck and nestles her head upon his shoulder.

He held her close as he asked:

"Well, little Heart's-Ease, what can the old Daddy do for you?"

The child raised her head, and, looking at him with her big brown eyes, eyes so like his own, said, reproachfully: "You are *not* an old Daddy; Stanton (the butler) is old, you are just my own, own Papa Clayton, and mamma used to say that you *couldn't* grow old 'cause she and I loved you so hard."

Mr. Reeve quivered slightly at the child's words, and with a surprised look she asked:

"Are you cold, dear Daddy? It isn't cold here, is it?"

"No, not in the room, Heart's-Ease, but right here," laying his hand upon his heart. 19

The child regarded him questioningly with her big, earnest eyes, and said:

“Did it grow cold because mamma went so sound asleep?”

“I’m afraid so; but now let us talk about something else: I’ve some news for you, but do not know how you will like it; sit still while I tell it to you,” and he began to unfold his plan regarding the school.

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## CHAPTER II

### “A TOUCH CAN MAKE OR A TOUCH CAN MAR”

The school was chosen and Toinette placed therein. What momentous results often follow a simple act. When Clayton Reeve placed his little girl with the Misses Carter, intending to leave her there a few months, and seek the change of scene so essential to his health, he did not realize that her whole future would be more or less influenced by the period she was destined to spend there. No brighter, sunnier, happier disposition could have been met with than Toinette’s when she entered the school; none more restless, distrustful and dissatisfied than her’s when she left it, nearly six years later.

If we are held accountable for sins of omission, as well as sins of commission, certainly the Misses Carter had a long account to meet.

Like many others who had chosen that vocation, they were utterly incapable of filling it either to their own credit or the advantage of those they taught. While perfectly capable of imparting the knowledge they had obtained from books, and of making any number of rules to be followed as those of the “Medes and Persians,” they did not, in the very remotest degree, possess the insight into character, the sympathy with their pupils so essential in true teachers.

It is not alone to learn that which is contained between the covers of a book that our girls are sent to school or college, but also to gather in the thousand and one things untaught by either books or words. These must be absorbed as the flowers absorb the sunshine and dew, growing lovelier, sweeter and more attractive each day and never suspecting it.

And so the shaping of Toinette’s character, so beautifully begun by the wise, gentle mother, passed into other and less sensitive hands. It was like a delicate bit of pottery, the pride of the potter’s heart, upon which he had spent uncountable hours, and was fashioning so skilfully, almost fearing to touch it lest he mar instead of add to its beauty; dreading to let others approach lest, lacking his own nice conceptions, they bring about a result he had so earnestly sought to avoid, and the vase lose its perfect symmetry. But, alas! called from his work never to return, it is completed by less skilful hands, a less delicate conception, and, while the result is pleasing, the perfect harmony of proportion is wanting, and those who see it feel conscious of its incompleteness, yet scarcely know why.

We will skip over those six miserable years, so fraught with small trials, jealousies, deceptions and an ever-increasing distrust, to a certain Saturday morning in December.

The early winter had been an exceptionally trying one, and Toinette, now nearly fourteen years old, had seen and learned many things which can only be taught by experience. She had seen that in some people’s eyes the possession of money can atone for many shortcomings in character, and that certain lines of conduct may be condoned in a girl who has means, while they are condemned in a girl who has not; that she herself had many liberties and many favors shown her which were denied some of her companions, although those companions were quite as well born and bred as herself, and with all the latent nobility of her character did she scorn not only the favors but those who showed them, and often said to her roommate, Cicely Powell: “If I chose to steal the very Bible out of chapel, Miss Carter would only say, ‘Naughty Toinette,’ in that smirking way of hers, and then never do a single thing; but if Barbara Ellsworth even looks sideways she simply annihilates her. I *hate* it, for it is only because Barbara is poor and I’m—well, Miss Carter likes to have the income I yield; I’m a profitable bit of ‘stock,’ and must be well cared for,” and a burning flush rose to the girl’s sensitive cheeks.

It was a bitter speech for one so young, and argued an all too intimate acquaintance with those who did not bear the mark patent of “gentlewoman.”

The six years had wrought many changes in the little child, both in mind and body, for, even though one had been cramped, and lacked a healthful development, the other had blossomed into a very beautiful young girl, who would have gladdened any parent’s heart. She was neither tall nor short, but beautifully proportioned. Her head, with its wealth of sunny, wavy hair, was carried in the same stately manner which had always been so marked a characteristic in her father, and gave to her a rather dignified and reserved air for her years. The big brown eyes looked you squarely in the face, although latterly they had a slightly distrustful expression. Hurry home, Clayton Reeve, before it becomes habitual. The nose was straight and sensitive, and the mouth the saving grace of the face, for nothing could alter its soft, beautiful curves, and

the lips continued to smile as they had done in early childhood, when there was cause for smiles only. The mother's finger seemed to rest there, all invisible to others, and curve the corners upward, as though in apology for the hardened expression gradually creeping over the rest of the face.

It is difficult to understand how a parent can leave a child wholly to the care of strangers for so long a period as Mr. Reeve left Toinette, but one thing after another led him further and further from home, first to Southern Europe, then across the Mediterranean into wilder, newer scenes, where nations were striving mightily. Then, just as he began to think that ere long his own land would welcome him, news reached him of trouble in a land still nearer the rising sun, and his firm needed their interests in that far land carefully guarded. So thither he journeyed. But at last all was adjusted, and, with a heart beating high with hope, he started for his own dear land and dearer daughter.

It must be confessed that he had many conflicting emotions as the great ship plowed its way across the broad Pacific, and ample time in which to indulge them. Many were the mental pictures he drew of the girl there awaiting him, and would have felt no little surprise, as well as indignation, could he have known that she was left in ignorance of the date of his arrival. But Miss Carter had reasons of her own for concealing it, and had merely told Toinette that her father was contemplating a return to the States during the coming year. It seemed rather a cold message to the girl whose *all* he was, for she had written to him repeatedly, and poured out in her letters all the suppressed warmth of her nature, yet never had his replies touched upon the subject of her loneliness and intense desire to see him, but had always assured her that he was delighted to know that she was happy and fond of her teachers. And Toinette had not *quite* reached the age of wisdom which caused her to suspect *why* he gave so little heed to such information, although it would not have required a much longer residence at the Misses Carter's to enlighten her. Happily, before the revelation was made she was beyond further chicanery.

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## CHAPTER III

### "A FEELING OF SADNESS AND LONGING"

The half year was nearly ended, and most of the girls were looking eagerly forward to the Christmas vacation, which would release them from a cordially detested surveillance. But Toinette had no release to look forward to; vacation or term time were much the same to her. She had spent some of her holidays with her schoolmates, but the greater part of them had been passed in the school, and dull enough they were, too.

The past week had been a particularly stormy one, and the outcome had reflected anything but credit upon the school. Consequently, the girls were out of sorts and miserable, and the world looked decidedly blue, with only a faint rosy tint far down in the horizon, where vacation peeped.

As in most schools, Saturday was a holiday. The day was wonderfully soft and mild for December, and shortly after breakfast Toinette threw her golf-cape about her shoulders and stepped out upon the piazza to see if the fresh air would blow away the mental vapors hovering about her, for she felt not unlike a ship at sea without a compass. Poor little lassie, although what might be called a rich girl, in one respect she was a very poor one indeed, for she had scarcely known the influence of a happy home, or the tender mother love which we all need, whether we be big daughters or little ones. True, she had never known what it meant to want those things which girls often wish to have, but which limited means place beyond their reach. But often amidst the luxuries of her surroundings, for her father provided most liberally for her, she would be seized with a restless longing for something, she hardly knew what, which made her feel out of sorts with herself and everybody else.

"What ails you, this morning?" asked her chum, Cicely Powell, joining her upon the piazza. "You look as solemn as an oyster, and I should think you'd feel jolly because it's Saturday, and that horrid Grace Thatcher won't be here to poke her inquisitive nose into all our plans," referring to the prime mischief-maker of the school, already departed for her vacation, with the admonition to think twice before returning.

"I don't know *what's* the matter with me: I wish I did. Somehow, I don't feel satisfied with myself or anyone else, and I half believe I *hate* everybody," was Toinette's petulant reply.

"Well, I like that, I declare!" was the sharp retort. "Perhaps you include *me* among those you hate, and if that is the case, Toinette Reeve, you may just do as you like; I don't care a straw."

Ordinarily Toinette's reply would have been as sharp as Cicely's, but this time she just looked at her with her big eyes—eyes suspiciously bright, as though tears lay not far back of them—and walked away, leaving Cicely to wonder what had come over her.

"Well, I never!" was her rather vague comment. "I don't see what has come over Toinette since that last flareup. Mercy knows, we've had so many that we all ought to be used to them by this

time. She has acted as though she were sorry that that horrid Grace was sent off earlier than the others, and I'm sure she has as much reason to be glad of it as any of us have. She did nothing but tell tales about all of us, and peep and spy upon her more than anyone else. Miss Carter would never have found out about half the things she did if it hadn't been for Grace, and we could have had no end of fun," and after this rather prolonged monologue Cicely went to join the other girls.

Meanwhile Toinette had drawn the hood of her cape over her head and strolled down to the lower end of the garden, where a rustic summer-house not far from the gate afforded a quiet little nook in which to indulge one's fancies, whether pleasant or painful. Curling herself up in one corner, she rested her cheek upon her arm, which she had thrown over the railing, and looked down the road toward the railway station. 33

Although a very beautiful one, it was a sad, wistful young face which turned toward the sunshine and shadows dancing upon the road. Poor little Toinette, now is the moment in which the mother-love you are unconsciously longing for would make the world anew for you. If, as you sit there, a gentle form and face could creep up quietly, slip an arm about your waist as she takes her seat beside you, and ask in the tender tone that only mothers use: "Well, Sweetheart, what is troubling you? Tell mother all about it, and let us see if there is not a sunny lining to the dark cloud that is casting its unpleasant shadow over this cozy nook."

Where is the daughter who could resist it? It would not be many minutes before the head would find a happy resting-place upon the shoulder beside it, and all the little trials and troubles—trials so very real and very appalling to young hearts—would be put into words, and lose half their bitterness in the telling just because love—that mighty magician—had come to help bear them. 34

A great man once said: "O opportunity, thy guilt is great!" and I have often wondered why he did not add, "or thou art very precious." So much depends upon an auspicious moment. A big door can swing upon a very small hinge.

As Toinette looked down the road with unseeing eyes, the whistle of an incoming train, brought her back to a realization of things around her. The station was barely half a mile away, and ere ten minutes had passed a man appeared in the distance. Evidently the owner of that athletic figure knew where he was bound, and was going to *get* there as quickly as his firm, long strides could carry him. He was a large man, sun-burned to the point of duskiness, bearded and moustached as though barbers were unknown in the land from which he hailed. Dressed in servicable tweed knickerbockers and Norfolk jacket, his Alpine hat placed upon his head to *stay put*, his grip slung by a strap across his broad shoulders, he came striding over the ground as though intent upon very important business. Toinette watched his approach in a listless sort of way, but as he drew nearer and nearer seemed to recognize something familiar. 35

"Who can he be, and where have I seen him, I wonder?" she said, half aloud, as she peered at him from behind the lattice-work of the summer-house.

On he came, quite unconscious of the big eyes regarding him so intently, and presently stopped to look about him, as though trying to recall old landmarks. He now stood almost opposite Toinette, when, chancing to glance toward the house, he became aware of her presence. 36

"Why, little lady, you could have popped me over from ambush if you had had a gun, for I walked straight upon you and never suspected that you were there. Can you direct me to the Misses Carter's school? The station-master said it was about ten minutes' walk, but it is so many years since I have been here that I find I've forgotten the lay of the land, and I don't want to waste much time, for I've a very precious somebody there whom I'm very anxious to see. Last time I saw her she was only about knee-high to a grasshopper, but I suspect I shall find a young lady now, and have to be introduced to her."

At the sound of his voice Toinette arose to her feet, her color coming and going, and her heart beating so loudly that she was sure he could hear it. As he finished speaking he regarded with very genuine surprise the young girl who, with parted lips and outstretched hands, was walking toward him like one who doubted the evidence of her own senses, and with a cry of, "Papa! oh, papa! don't you know me?" she was gathered into the strong arms whose owner had travelled half around the globe in order to win that one precious moment.



"YOU COULD HAVE POPPED ME OVER FROM  
AMBUSH."

## CHAPTER IV

### NEW EXPERIENCES

It did not take Clayton Reeve very long to gain a pretty clear idea of the condition of things at the Misses Carter's school, or to realize what influences had been brought to bear upon his only daughter. To say that he was keenly disappointed but mildly expresses it, and he reproached himself bitterly for having left her so long to the care of strangers. He remained with Toinette until the school closed for the holidays, and the time was the happiest she had ever known. Nor was it for her alone, for the other girls came in for their full share. He was a very liberal man, and it gave him genuine pleasure to make others happy.

The Misses Carter lost no opportunity of putting their establishment in a favorable light, for they had a strong suspicion that they were in a fair way to lose something of much more tangible value to themselves: a very handsome income. But Mr. Reeve easily saw through their little foibles, and was not deceived by the pretty veneer into believing that all was strong and firm beneath.

He had traveled about the world too much during the past six years not to have learned something of human nature, and to read it pretty correctly. Furthermore, his feeling of self-reproach made him keenly alive to every change upon Toinette's speaking countenance, and when he saw the look of questioning surprise which came over it when one or the other of the Misses Carter made some playful overture at petting her, or one of the other girls, he drew his own deductions.

When vacation arrived he settled his bill for the year, bade them a courteous farewell, and, with Toinette, "scraped the dust from his feet and left the mansion." Then came a two-weeks' holiday such as she had never even dreamed of. Mr. Reeve took rooms in one of New York's finest hotels, and gave himself up to the pleasure of renewing his acquaintance with his daughter. That holiday was never forgotten by either of them, but for very different reasons.

"By Jove," he said to himself more than once, "I've let a good bit of precious time, and many happy hours, slip away, if I'm not mistaken, and I don't know whether I shall ever catch up."

During their stay in the city Mr. Reeve went in quest of his old college chum, Sydney Powell, Cicely's father, and had an interview with him that was brief, but very much to the point.

"Go ahead, Clint, old chap, and find what is needed for the little girls, if you can. Cicely will never go back to the Carter school, and I should be glad to have the girls keep together. They seem fond of each other. How would you like to run out to Montcliff to look up that school? I've had fine reports of it from Fred Hubbard, whose daughter is a pupil there?"

And so it came to pass that directly after vacation the two girls were escorted to Sunny Bank, as the school was called, and, after a very satisfactory talk with its sensible principal, Mr. Reeve



left them to her care, feeling sure that this time he had not made any mistake.

Toinette and Cicely had adjoining rooms, and nothing could have been daintier than the room appointments. From their windows they could look out over a wide sweep of the western valley, where the sun was just sinking behind the hills, and leaving upon the sky a glorious promise of the day to follow.

They were still busy arranging their pretty trifles about the rooms when the soft chime of the Chinese gong in the wide hall below announced dinner. Thus far they had not seen any of the other girls, but as they stepped from their rooms they were met by Miss Preston, who said, as she slipped an arm about each waist:

"I do not forget how lonely *I* felt when I first entered a strange school, so let me try to make it easier for my new girls by introducing some of my old ones; *real* old," she added, laughingly, as she called to two girls who were curled up on one corner of the big divan at the lower end of the hall.

"Come here, chicks, and let me make you acquainted with Miss Reeve and Miss Powell. These are Miss Gordon and Miss Osgood, my dears, but as we are all sort of 'sisters, cousins and aunts' in this big home, I'll just hint right off that their home names are Ruth and Edith, who will be glad to welcome my Toinette and Cicely."

By this time they had reached the cheerful dining-room, and with a very significant exchange of glances Toinette and Cicely took their seats, the latter whispering under cover of the bustle caused by the entrance of the other pupils: "My goodness, if Miss Carter had ever spoken like that to us, we should have fallen flat, shouldn't we?"

Ruth sat upon one side, and Edith upon the other, and it did not take the new girls long to discover that the dinner hour must be one of the pleasantest of the day, for all talked and chatted in the liveliest manner, discussing various happenings, and again and again appealing to Miss Preston, who was not one whit behind in the spirit of good-fellowship which prevailed.

There were six tables, each accommodating ten people, and a teacher sat at the head of each. In every instance a teacher who was wise enough not to observe *too* much, but who in reality saw everything, although she could laugh and joke with the girls, put them at their ease, and at the same time set them so perfect an example that few girls would have cared to fail in following it. Far from exercising a restraining influence, they proved the jolliest of companions, as the repeated appeals to their opinions, or the requests for some anecdote or amusing story, evidently old favorites, amply testified.

When the pleasant dinner was ended the girls gathered in the big hall, where Toinette and Cicely were introduced to many of the others.

"What have we to do now?" asked Toinette, whose sharp eyes had been observing everything worth observing, and whose active mind had received more impressions within the past hour than it had been called upon to receive in a year. It is needless to add that she was quick enough to profit by them, and to appreciate that in *this* school were taught more surprising things than chemistry or science.

"Do?" asked Ruth.

"Yes; isn't there some RULE to be observed after dinner?" and a rather ironical tone came into Toinette's voice.

"Yes; come along, and Edith and I'll show you the rule, as you call it," answered Ruth, as she caught up the big basket-ball lying upon one of the chairs in the hall, flew through the door with it, across the piazza and into the gymnasium beyond.

After an instant's hesitation the two girls followed, joining her and Edith, who had run Ruth a lively race.

"You don't mean to say that the teachers let you run and romp like this, do you?" demanded Cicely.

"Let us!" cried Edith in surprise. "Why shouldn't they? We aren't doing any harm, are we?"

"No, I don't suppose there is any harm, but if we had done such a thing at Miss Carter's, what do you think would have happened, Toinette?"

Toinette pursed her mouth into the primmest pucker, rolled her eyes in a horrified way, clasped her hands before her, and said, in a tragic tone: "Young *ladies!* Such conduct is most *unseemly*," in such perfect mimicry of Miss Carter that Ruth and Edith shouted.

"Well, all I can say is, that I'm thankful *we* were not sent to that school; aren't you, Ruth?" said Edith.

"Better believe I am," was the feeling reply. "I get skittish even in this blessed place sometimes, but if I had been sent there I'd have been just like one of those little red imps that Miss Preston has standing on her writing table."

"Yes, you'd have felt all rubbed the wrong way, just as Cicely and I feel, and just hate the sight of a teacher, and want to do everything you could to plague them," said Toinette, petulantly.

"Well, you won't want to do that *here*" answered Edith, emphatically. "If you cut any such capers in *this* school, it won't be the *teachers* who will go for you, but the *girls*," with a significant wag of her head.

"The girls?" asked Cicely, with a puzzled expression.

"Certain. We think our school about the best going, and we aren't going to let anyone else think differently, if we can help it; are we, Ruth? So, if a girl takes it into her head to be rude and cranky to the teachers, or other girls, she finds herself in a corner pretty quick, I can tell you."

"Suppose you break the rules?" asked Toinette.

"Aren't any to break," answered happy-go-lucky Ruth, as she pranced down the big room after the ball, which had gone bouncing off.

"No *rules!*" incredulously.

"Not a single one. All you've got to do is to be nice to everybody, remember you're a gentlewoman (or you wouldn't be here, let me tell you), and do your jolly best to pass your examinations. If you don't it is your own fault, and you have to suffer for it; no one else, that's sure; for you can have all the help you ask for."

Toinette and Cicely exchanged glances.

"Oh, I daresay you don't believe us," said Edith, who had correctly interpreted the glances, "but just you wait and see. All the new girls think the same, and I daresay that we should have, too, if we had come here from some other school; but, thank goodness, we didn't. There aren't any more schools like this, are there, Ruth?"

"Nary one; there's only one, and we've got it," cried the irrepressible Ruth, and two weeks later the girls found that, truly, no rules could be broken where none existed.

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## CHAPTER V

### TWO SIDES OF A QUESTION

It could hardly be expected that, after her training of the past six and a half years, Toinette would at once respond to the wiser, more elevating influences now surrounding her. The old impulses would return, and a desire to conceal where no concealment was necessary often placed her in a false light. She distrusted those in authority simply because they were in authority, rather than that they ever made it apparent. It seemed to have become second nature with her, and bade fair to prove a work of almost infinite patience and love upon the part of the teachers to undo the mischief wrought in those miserable years.

But, after making a toy of the poor child for all that time, fickle fate seemed about to make amends, and, although it was yet to be proven, Toinette was now launched upon a sunny sea, and destined to sail into a happy harbor.

She was sitting in her room one beautiful afternoon about a week after her arrival at the school, and, unconsciously doing profitable examples in rhetoric by drawing nice contrasts between her present surroundings and her former ones. Presently a tap came upon her door, and she called: "Come in."

In bounced Ruth, crying: "Come on down to the village with us, will you? Edith and Cicely are waiting at the gate."

"Which teacher is going with us?" asked Toinette, suspiciously.

"Teacher?" echoed Ruth. "Why, none, of course. Why don't you ask if we are going in a baby-carriage?" and she laughed as she slipped her arm through Toinette's.

"You don't mean to say that we will be allowed to go by ourselves?"

"Toinette Reeve, I think you've got the queerest ideas I ever heard of! Come on!"

In spite of Ruth's assurance, Toinette cast apprehensive glances about her, as though she expected a frowning face to appear around some corner and rebuke them. Instead, however, they came upon Miss Howard just at the end of the corridor, who asked in a cheery voice:

"Where away so briskly, my lady birds?"

"Only to the village; good-bye," answered Ruth, waving her hand in farewell.

"Pleasant journey. You will probably run across Miss Preston down there somewhere, and can act as bodyguard for her."

The girls walked briskly on, and presently Cicely asked:

"What are you going for, anyway?"

"Some good things, to be sure. I'm just perishing for some cream-peppermints, and my week's pocket-money is scorching holes in my pocket as fast as ever it can."

"Do you think Miss Preston would scold if I got something, too?" asked Toinette.

"What would she scold about? You didn't *steal* the money you're going to buy it with, did you? And your stomach's your own, isn't it? Besides, when you've been here a while longer you'll learn that Miss Preston *doesn't* scold. If she thinks a thing isn't good for you to do, she just asks you not to do it, and she takes it for granted that you've got sense enough to understand why."

"Oh, I guess you're all *saints* in this school," replied Toinette, sarcastically.

"Well, as near as *I* can make out, you had a pretty good supply of sinners where you came from," was the prompt retort.

When Ruth's pocket was saved from destruction the girls started homeward. They had not gone far when three of the boys from the large school at the upper end of the town were seen coming toward them.

"Oh, jolly," cried Edith, "there are Ned, Allan and Gilbert! Now we'll have fun; they're awfully nice. Allan has the dearest pony and trap you ever saw, and is just as generous as can be with it."

The boys were now beside them, and, raising their caps politely, joined the party and were introduced to the new girls. This was a complete revelation to Cicely and Toinette, for at Miss Carter's school boys had been regarded as a species of wild animal, to be shunned as though they carried destruction to all whom they might overtake.

But here were Ruth and Edith walking along with three of those monsters in manly form, and, still worse, talking to them in the frankest, merriest manner, as though there were no such thing on earth as schools and teachers. Toinette and Cicely dropped a little behind, and soon found an opportunity to draw Edith with them.

"Don't forget that Miss Howard said that Miss Preston was down in the village. I'll bet a cookie there'll be a fine rumpus if she catches us gallivanting with all these boys," whispered Toinette.

A funny smile quivered about the corners of Edith's mouth, but before she could answer Miss Preston herself stood before them. She had suddenly turned in from a side street. As though detected in some serious misdemeanor, Toinette and Cicely hung back, and Edith remained beside them.

With such a smile as only Miss Preston could summon, she bowed to the group, and said:

"How do you do, little people? Are you going to let me add one more to the party? I'm not very big, you know, and I like a bodyguard. Besides, I haven't seen the boys in a 'blue moon,' and I think it high time I took them to task, for they haven't been to call upon us in an age. Give an account of yourselves, young sirs. Before very long there is going to be a dance at a house I could mention, and you don't want to be forgotten by the hostess, do you?"

Toinette and Cicely found it difficult to believe themselves awake. Touching Edith's elbow, they indicated by mysterious signs that they wished to ask something, and dropped still further behind.

"What does it all mean, anyhow? She doesn't really mean to have the boys at the house, does she?"

Edith's eyes began to twinkle as though someone had dropped a little diamond into each, and, without answering, she gave a funny laugh and took a few quick steps forward. Slipping an arm about Miss Preston's waist, she said: "Miss Preston?"

"Yes, dear," turning a pleasant face toward the girl.

"The girls are planning a candy frolic for next Friday night, and were going to ask your permission to-day, only they haven't had time yet. May we have it over in the kitchen of the cottage, and may the boys come, too?"

A merry smile had overspread Miss Preston's face, and when Edith finished speaking, she said:

"Young gentlemen, I hope you didn't hear the last remark made by my friend, Miss Osgood; at all events, you're not supposed to have done so; it would be embarrassing for us all. But, since you did not, I'll say to her: Yes, you may have your candy frolic, and that is for her ears alone. Now to you: The girls are to have a candy frolic Friday evening, and would be delighted to have your company."

It had all been said in Miss Preston's irresistibly funny way, and was greeted with shouts of laughter. Toinette and Cicely had learned something new. All now crowded about her urging her to accept some of their goodies, and, joining heartily in the spirit of good-comradeship, she took a sweetie from first one box and then another. Possibly another person, with a stricter regard for Mrs. Grundy's extremely refined sensibilities, might have hesitated to walk along the highways surrounded by half a dozen boys and girls, all chattering as hard as their tongues could wag, and munching cream-peppermints; but Miss Preston's motto was "Vis in ute," and, with the fine instinct so often wanting in those who have young characters to form, she looked upon the question from their side, feeling sure that sooner or later would arise questions which she would wish them to regard from hers; and therein lay the key-note of her success.

She would no more have thought of raising the barrier of teacher and pupil between herself and her girls than she would have thought of depriving them of something necessary to their physical welfare. The girls were her friends and she theirs—their best and truest, to whom they might come with their joys or their sorrows, sure of her sympathy with either, and, rather than cast a shadow upon their confidence, she would have toiled up the hill with the whole school swarming about her, and an express-wagon of sweets following close behind. That was the

secret of her wonderful power over them. They never realized the disparity between their own ages and hers, because she had never forgotten when life was young.

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## CHAPTER VI

### DULL AND PROSY

It is to be hoped that those who read this story will not run off with the idea that I am trying to set Miss Preston's school up as a model in every sense of the word, for I am not. I am simply trying to tell a story of boarding-school life as it really was "once upon a time." And I think that I ought to be able to tell it pretty correctly, having seen with my own eyes and heard with my own ears many of the pranks related. The methods followed and the results obtained may be believed or not; that rests with the individual reading. Long ago, in my own childhood days, our "old Virginy" cook used to say to me: "La, chile, dey's a heap sight mo' flies ketched wid 'lasses dan vingegar," and I have come to the conclusion that she had truth on her side.

The girls were by no means saints. Saints, after all, are rather ethereal creatures, and Miss Preston's girls were real flesh and blood lassies, brimful of life and fun, and, like most lassies, ready for a good time.

As Ruth had said, there were no rules; that is, the girls were never told that they must *not* do this, or that they *must* do the other thing. A spirit of courtesy dominated everything, and a subtle influence pervaded the entire school, bringing about desired results without words. The girls understood that all possible liberty would be granted them, and that their outgoings and incomings would be exactly such as would be allowed them in their own homes, and if some were inclined to abuse that liberty they soon learned where license began.

No school turned out better equipped girls, and none held a higher standard in college examinations. A Sunny Bank diploma was a sure passport. When the girls worked they worked hard, and when playtime came it was enjoyed to the full. Naturally, with so many dispositions surrounding her, Miss Preston often in secret floundered in a "slough of despond," for that which could influence one girl for her good might prove a complete failure when brought to bear upon another. Never was the old adage, "What is one man's meat is another man's poison," more truly illustrated.

But Miss Preston had a staunch friend, and trusted Him implicitly. Often, when perplexed and troubled, a half-hour's quiet talk with Him close shut behind her own door would give her wisdom and strength for the baffling question, and when she again appeared among them the girls wondered at her serene expression and winning smile, for in that half-hour's seclusion she had managed to remove all trace of the soil from the "slough," and, refreshed and strengthened by an unailing help, could resume her "Pilgrimage."

She often said, in her quaint way: "The hardest work I have to do is to undo," and that was very true. Many times the home influence was of the worst possible sort for a young girl, or else there was just none at all. Such girls were difficult subjects. Many had come from other schools, as in Toinette's case, where distrust seemed to be the key-note of the establishment, and then came Miss Preston's severest trials. The confidence of such girls must be won ere a step could be taken in the right direction. It was a rare exception when Miss Preston failed to win it.

"You feel such a nasty little bit of a crawling thing when you've done a mean thing to Miss Preston," a girl once said. "If she'd only give you a first-class blowing up—for that's just what you know you deserve all the time—you could stand it, but she never does. She just puts her arm around you and looks straight through you with those soft gray eyes of hers, and never says one word. Then you begin to shrivel up, and you keep right on shriveling till you feel like Alice in Wonderland. You can't say boo, because *she* hasn't, and when she gives you a soft little kiss on your forehead, and whispers so gently: Don't try to talk about it now, dear; just go and lock yourself in your room and have a quiet think, and I'm sure the kink will straighten out. I could lie flat on the floor and let her dance a hornpipe on me if she wanted to."

It was not to be expected that all the other teachers would display such remarkable tact as their principal, but her example went a long way. Moreover, she was very careful in the choice of those in whose care her girls were to be given, and often said: "Neither schools nor colleges make teachers: it is God first, and mothers afterward." And she was not far wrong, for God must put love into the human heart, and mothers must shape the character. When I see a child playing with her dollies, I can form a pretty shrewd guess of the manner of woman that child's mother is.

Frolics and pranks of all sorts were by no means unknown in the school, and often they were funny enough, but what Miss Preston did not know about those frolics was not worth knowing. Her instructions to her teachers were: "Don't see *too much*. Unless there is danger of flood or fire, appendicitis or pneumonia, be blind."

Many of the girls had their own ponies and carriages, and drove about the beautiful suburbs of

Montcliff. If the boys chose to hop up behind a trap and drive along, too, where was the harm? The very fact that it need not be concealed made it a matter of course. Friday evenings were always ones of exceptional liberty. Callers of both sexes came, and the girls danced, had candy pulls, or any sort of impromptu fun. Once a year, usually in February, a dance was given, which was, of course, *the* event of the season.

During the week the girls kept early hours, and at nine-thirty the house was, as a rule, en route for the "Land o' Nod," but exceptions came to prove the rule, and nothing was more liable to cause one than the arrival of a box from home. Upon such occasions the "fire, flood, appendicitis and pneumonia" hint held good.

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE P. U. L.

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"What upon earth are you doing!" exclaimed Toinette, as she opened Ruth's door, in response to the "come in" which followed her knock, and stood transfixed upon the threshold at the spectacle she beheld.

"Cleaning house, to be sure. Didn't you ever do it?"

"Well, not exactly that way," was Toinette's reply.

Ruth threw back her head and gave a merry peal of laughter.

"It *is* rather a novel way, I will admit, but, you see, I hate to do things just exactly as everybody else does, so I sailed right in, head over ears. To tell the truth, now I'm in, I wish it wasn't *quite* so deep," and Ruth cast a look strongly savoring of despair at the conglomeration surrounding her.

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She was seated in the middle of the floor, and almost buried beneath the contents of every drawer and closet in the room. Not only her own, but Edith's belongings, too, had been dumped in a promiscuous heap on the floor, and such a sea of underclothing, stockings, shoes, dresses, waists, jackets, coats, hats, gloves, collars, ties, ribbons, veils, dressing-sacques, golf-capes and belts, to say nothing of the contents of both their jewel boxes, no pen can describe.

Not content with the contents, the drawers, too, had been dragged out to be dusted, and were standing on end all about her, a veritable rampart of defence.

"I shouldn't think you would know where to begin," said Toinette.

"I don't, and I think I'll leave the whole mess for Helma to tidy up in the morning," and up jumped Ruth, to give the last stroke to the disorder by overturning the tray of pins and hairpins which she had been sorting when Toinette entered.

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"There, now you have done it!" exclaimed Edith, "and I can tell you one thing, you may just as well make up your mind to put my things back where you got them, 'cause I'm not going to," and she wagged her head positively.

"Oh, dear me, this is what comes of trying to be a P. U. L.," said Ruth.

"A P. U. L.?" asked Toinette. "What in the world is that?"

"*That's* what it is! I found it stuck up in my room when I got back from recitations to-day. I've been in such a tear of a hurry for the last few mornings that my room hasn't been quite up to the mark, I suppose, but Miss Preston never said a word, and now here's this thing stuck here."

Toinette took the sheet of paper which Ruth handed to her, and began to read:

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### THE PICK-UP LEAGUE

Do you wish to join the P. U. L.?  
Then listen to this, but don't you tell,  
For it's a great secret, and will be—well—  
We *hope*, as potent as "book and bell."

A P. U. L. has a place for her hat,  
And keeps it there; O wonder of that!  
Her gloves are put away in their case;  
Her coat hung up with a charming grace.

School-books and papers are laid away,  
To be quickly found on the following day.  
Then, ere she starts, so blithe and gay,  
She tarries a moment just to say:

“Wait, just a jiff, while I stop to put  
This blessed gown on its proper hook,  
And tuck this ‘nightie’ snugly from sight  
Under my pillow for to-night.

“And all these little, kinky hairs,  
Which, though so frail, can prove such snares,  
And furnish some one a chance to say:  
‘Your comb and brush were not cleaned to-day.’

“Hair ribbons, trinkets, scraps and bits,  
Papers and pencils and torn snips,  
Left scattered about can prove *such* pits!  
And *in* we tumble, and just ‘catch fits.’

“And this is the reason we formed the league,  
And will keep its rules, you had better believe:  
To keep our rooms tidy, to keep things neat,  
So much that is ‘bitter’ may be turned ‘sweet.’”



“DO YOU WISH TO JOIN THE P. U. L.?”

When she had finished reading, she sat down on the edge of the bed and laughed till she cried.

“Great, isn’t it?” asked Ruth. “That’s the way Miss Preston brings us up to schedule time. When I came home from the school-building this afternoon I thought I’d do wonders; and,” she added, ruefully, “I guess I’ve done them. Good gracious, I’m so hungry from working so hard that I just can’t see straight. Isn’t there something eatable in the establishment?”

“If that much work reduces you to a state of starvation, what will you be when it’s all done?” asked Edith. “There *were* some crackers on the shelf, but land knows where they are now; you’ve dragged every blessed thing off of it.”

“There are your crackers, right under your nose,” said Ruth, triumphantly, as she pointed to a box of wafers half hidden under Edith’s best hat. “There’s some tea in that caddy, and you can heat some water in the kettle. What more do you want?”

Edith scratched a match and held it to the little alcohol lamp under the tea-kettle, but no flame resulted.

“Every bit of alcohol is burned out. Have you any more?”

“Not a drop; used the last to get the pine-gum off my fingers after we came back from the woods last Tuesday. Here, take the cologne, that will do just as well,” and forthwith the cologne was poured into the lamp, which was soon burning away right merrily. The water was heated, the tea made, and four girls sat down in the midst of the topsy-turvy room to sip tea and munch saltines.

“I came in to ask,” said Toinette, “whether you girls have any secret societies in this school; have you?”

“Nary one, as I know of,” answered the irrepressible Ruth. “Wish we had.”

“Let’s start one,” said Toinette. “We had two or three at Miss Carter’s; they had to be secret or

none at all, and it was no end of fun. Papa wrote me that he was going to send me a box of good things before long, and when it comes let's meet that night and have a feast. He will no doubt send enough for the entire school, he always does, and I want some of the girls to have the benefit of it."

"Don't believe you will have to urge them very hard," said Edith, laughing.

"Good!" cried Ruth. "Which girls shall we ask?"

Toinette named eight girls beside themselves, saying:

"That will make an even dozen to start with. More may come later, but that is enough to begin; don't you think so?"

"Plenty. If we have too many there will be sure to be someone to let the cat out of the bag. Come on, Cicely, let's go hunt the others up," and, leaving Toinette and Edith in the orderly (?) room, off they flew.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### CAPS AND CAPERS

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The eight girls were quickly gathered in Ruth's and Edith's room and listening eagerly to the scheme afoot. It need not be added that it was unanimously carried, and it was only necessary to choose a name for the society.

"Let's all wear masks and caps and cut all sorts of capers. It will be just no end of fun," cried Ethel Squire, a pretty, bright girl of fifteen who was always ready for a frolic.

"Splendid!" cried Toinette, "and Ethel has given me a fine idea for a name; let's call it the C. C. C."

"C. C. C.? What under the sun does that stand for?" asked Helen Burgess, a quiet, serene little body, and a general favorite with the other girls.

"Guess," said Toinette.

"Cuffs and Collars Club," said May Foster; "mine cause me more trouble than all the rest of my toilet, so they are never far from my thoughts."

"Cake and Cackle Club," said another.

"Cheese and Cider; a delicious combination when you've acquired a taste for them!" said Marie Taylor.

"Clandestine Carnivori," was the last guess, which raised a shout.

"Good gracious! let me tell you quickly before you exhaust the dictionary," laughed Toinette; "how will the Caps and Capers Club do?"

"Hurrah!" cried Ruth, "just the very thing. We'll all wear our bath-ropes and white caps and masks. I've loads of white crepe paper, which will be the very thing to make them of, so let's sit down and make them right away. Come on, girls, help clear up this mess, and then I'll find the paper. I can give the finishing touches to the closets and bureau drawers to-morrow."

All turned to with more ardor than skill, and in a very few moments the conglomeration upon the floor had vanished. How it fared with Ruth and Edith when it came time to dress has never been disclosed. However, the room restored to outward order, twelve girls set to work to fashion caps and masks, and, as the last one was completed, the dressing-bell rang and all scattered to prepare for dinner.

The evening hours at Sunny Bank were very pleasant ones, for during the winter, while days were short and nights were long, there was not much opportunity for outdoor diversion. Immediately after dinner Miss Howard, the literature teacher, would place her snug little rocking-chair before the cheerful open fire in the big hall, and the girls would gather about her; some on chairs, some on hassocks, and some curled upon the large fur rug in front of the blazing logs, while she read aloud for an hour. A fine library in Mont Cliff supplied books of every imaginable sort, and the girls were allowed to take turns in selecting them; providing, of course, their selections were wise ones. But with Miss Howard as guide they could not go far astray, and many a delightful hour was passed before the fire. Just at present the books chosen were those relating to English history, and contained good, hard facts, but, when the girls grew a little tired of such substantial diet, historical novels came handy for a relish. As England was cutting a prominent figure in the world just then, the girls were encouraged to keep in touch with the current events, and to talk freely about them. The last book read, at least the one they were just concluding, was one which brought into strong contrast the reigns of England's two greatest queens, and the subject was discussed in a lively manner.

The book was finished shortly before the hour ended, and, laying it upon her lap, Miss Howard

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began to ask a few leading questions in order to get the girls started. As always happens, there were some girls not wildly enthusiastic over historical subjects, and such books did not hold their attention as a modern novel filled with thrilling situations would have done. But these were the very ones whom Miss Howard most wished to reach, and, feeling sure that her chances of doing so through such methods were far greater than could be hoped for if she pinned them right down to hard, dry facts, she took infinite pains to make her readings as interesting as much research and a careful selection of books could make them.

The conversation was in full swing, and Miss Howard, in high feather over the very evident impression the book had made, was congratulating herself upon her choice of that particular volume, when one girl asked:

"Miss Howard, what particular act of Elizabeth's reign do you think had the greatest influence upon later reigns?"

"That is rather a difficult question to answer, Natalia. It was such a brilliant reign and so fraught with portentous results in the future that it would be very difficult to say that this or that one act was greatest of all; although, unquestionably, the translation of the Bible was one of the greatest blessings to posterity. Who can tell me something of great interest which happened then?"

"I can!" cried Pauline Holden.

"I'm more than delighted to hear it," answered Miss Howard, for Pauline was at once her joy and her despair. Affectionate and good-natured to the last degree, she was never disturbed by anything, but I put it very mildly when I say that Pauline did not possess a brilliant mind.

"Yes," continued Pauline. "There are not many things in history that I care two straws about, but I remembered that because the names made me think of a rhyme my old nurse used to say when she put me to bed."

"Miss Howard's hopes received a slight shock, but she asked:

"Will you tell us what it is?"

"It was letting Matthew, Mark, Luke and John out," triumphantly.

"Letting whom out?" asked Miss Howard, wondering what upon earth was to follow.

"Yes, don't you remember they let them out during Elizabeth's reign?"

"Let them out of *where*?"

"Why, out of the Tower, to be sure, and it made such a difference in a history some man was writing just then, because they had had a lot to do with it somehow—I don't remember just what it was. Maybe one of the other girls can."

By this time all the other girls were nearly dying of suppressed laughter, and when poor Pauline turned to them so seriously it proved the last straw, and such a shout as greeted her fairly made the wall ring. It was too much for Miss Howard, and, with one last look of despair, she gave way and laughed till she cried.

When the laugh had subsided and they had recovered their breath, Miss Howard endeavored to explain to the brilliant expounder of English history that Queen Elizabeth had had more to do with keeping Matthew, Mark, Luke and John out of the Bible than *in* the Tower of London.

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## CHAPTER IX

### A MODERN DIOGENES

"Half-past nine. Sh! Yes, down in the old laundry."

"Who's coming?"

"The whole club. No end of fun."

This whispered conversation took place in the upper corridor. Many of the girls had come from schools where frolics were looked upon as an almost heinous crime, and strict rules and surveillance had made their lives a burden to them.

It was about ten o'clock when ghostly figures began to slip through the dark halls. Lights had been extinguished at nine-thirty and all was now silent.

Miss Preston was in her room in a remote part of the house, and most of the other teachers had rooms in the adjoining building. The laundry in this house was never used, and stout blinds shut out—and in—all light.

Tap, tap, tap.

"Who's there?" was whispered from within.



"C. C. C., open for me."

The door opened, and in skipped a figure arrayed like the six already assembled, in a warm dressing-gown and a high peaked paper cap, with white tissue mask and spy-holes.

All spoke in whispers, so it was almost impossible to recognize any one. But this only added to the fun and mystery. "Spread the feast, girls; the others will soon be here. Let's see, how many are there? Seven! Why don't the other five hurry? I wonder which ones here aren't here?" one girl laughingly whispered.

"They'll come, never fear, but their rooms are nearer 'headquarters,'" said another.

"What luck! Miss Preston doesn't suspect a thing. I met her in the hall just before 'lights' bell, and she said as innocently as could be, 'You look as though you were quite ready for the "land o' dreams," Elsie, but so long as you do not take a gallop on a "night mare" all will be well,' and I could hardly help laughing when I thought how soon I might be equipped for one."

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"This fudge is my contribution," said another.

"Hold on, girls! I've a brilliant idea," said Toinette. "Who's got a long hairpin? Good! that's fine. Now prepare for something delectable," and, straightening out the pin, she stuck a marsh mallow on it and held the white lump of lusciousness over the one candle until it was toasted a golden if rather smoky brown.

Tap, tap, tap.

"It's the others. Quick! let them in, for it's half-past ten already."

The signals were exchanged, and in walked not five but nine more figures.

"Oh, girls, such luck! Just as I came out of my room I ran right into Maud Hanscomb's arms, and she *wouldn't* let me go till I'd told her what was up and promised to let her and the other girls share our fun. She said they suspected something was up, and they were bound to share it. And such a spread! Land knows how they got it! Just look."

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The tubs were now groaning under their burden of king apples, cookies, which bore a striking resemblance to those served at dinner; crackers, which had surely rested in the housekeeper's pantry, and, joy of joys, a huge tub of ice cream, to say nothing of what the original five brought.

"Now, girls, come on! Let's eat our cream and make sure of it in case of accidents," said the stout red ghost, in red cap and mask, who presided over the tub. "No time to get plates, so hand over anything you've got, and excuse the elegance of my spoon. It's cook's soup spoon, and may give the cream an oniony flavor, but that will add to the novelty," she said as she served it.

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"Who is she, anyhow?" asked one girl, who sat eating cream from a soap dish.

"Haven't the least idea. One of the old girls, I dare say, but who cares when she can conjure up such delicacies?"

As midnight struck appetites and feast came to an end.

"I vote," whispered one girl, "that we all take off our masks and have a good look at each other, so we'll know who's who when we meet in public."

"It's a go," whispered several others, and off they all came.

"Let's have more light," said the donor of the cream, and reached up and touched the electric button.

"Oh! Oh! Oh! Don't! Miss Preston will catch us!" cried dismayed voices, but Miss Preston herself stood before them, a red mask in one hand and a great spoon in the other.

"This isn't the first spread I've attended," she said, "and I hope it won't be the last. I've had too good a time. I had an idea the old laundry would prove an inviting place to-night, but I never attend a feast without my tub and candle—or electric light in this twentieth century—for, like another mortal who had a fancy for tubs and a candle, I am in search of honest folk."

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"Your spread was a great success, girls. Only next time let me know beforehand. I may not be able to be present in person, but I can still furnish the tub and light, and it will be a comfort to me to know the menu in order to guard against future ills. Good-night. I'm ready for my bed, and I shouldn't wonder if you were, too," and, with a flourish of her red cap and big spoon, Miss Preston slipped through the door.

Some very wise ghosts sped away through the dark corridors, and whispered conversations were held far into the "wee, sma' hours."

The next day the story was all over the school, and met with various comments. One of Miss Preston's combined torments and blessings was the teacher of chemistry, a thoroughly conscientious woman, and exceptionally capable, but a woman who took life very seriously. Miss Preston used to say that Mrs. Stone must have been forty years old when she was born, and consequently had missed all her child and girlhood. She was kind and just to the girls, but could not for the life of her understand why they *must* have fun, and that fun in secret was twice the fun that everybody knew about.

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Well Miss Preston knew that Mrs. Stone would take advantage of her privilege as an old friend, as well as one of the oldest teachers, and come in her solemn way to discuss the latest escapade, pro and con, so she was not in the least surprised when there came a light tap upon her door that afternoon, and Mrs. Stone entered. "Save me from my friends," quoted Miss

## CHAPTER X

### "THEY COULD NEVER DECEIVE ME"

"Well, Mrs. Stone, what can I do for you, and why such a serious expression?"

"My dear Marion," said Mrs. Stone, using Miss Preston's Christian name, as she sometimes did when more than usually solicitous of her welfare, "I've come to have a little talk with you regarding what happened last night, and I'm sure you will not take it amiss from one who has known you since your childhood."

"Do I often take it amiss?" asked Miss Preston, with an odd smile.

"Indeed, no; you are most considerate of my feelings, and I fully appreciate it, considering our business relations. Of course, I have not the slightest right to dictate to you, nor would I care to have you regard it in the light of dictation. It is only my extreme interest in your welfare that prompts me to speak at all."

"And is my welfare in serious peril now?" asked Miss Preston, half laughing as she recalled the previous evening's prank and her own very thorough enjoyment of the fun.

"No, my dear, not in peril, but I fear that you will never grow to look upon your position in the world with sufficient seriousness, for, I assure you, your responsibility is enormous."

"Would I could forget that mighty fact for one little fleeting moment," thought Miss Preston, but, aloud, she asked:

"And do you think that I am not fully conscious of it, Mrs. Stone?"

"Oh, most conscious! most conscious! You could not be more conscientious, I am sure, but you sometimes let a misdemeanor, such as occurred last night, go unpunished, and it establishes an unfortunate precedent, I fear."

"Did you ever know me to punish any girl placed in my charge?" asked Miss Preston, a slight flush creeping over her face.

"Certainly not! Certainly not!" cried Mrs. Stone, hastily, for she had touched upon a point which she knew to be a very sensitive one with her principal, and wished to smooth matters down a trifle. "I do not mean punishment in the generally accepted term, but do you think it wholly wise to let the girls feel that they can do such things and, in a measure, find them condoned?"

"Do you think that forbidding them would put an end to them?"

"Merely forbidding might not do so, but exacting some penalty for such disobedience would probably make them think twice before they disobeyed again."

"Did they disobey this time?" Miss Preston asked quietly.

Mrs. Stone looked a trifle disconcerted as she answered:

"Possibly it was not direct disobedience, but it certainly savored of deceit."

"I should be glad to have you ask any girl who has become a member of that comical C. C. C. if she thinks she has been guilty of deceit, and I'll venture to say that she will look you squarely in the eyes and say: 'Deceit! How could *that* fun be deceitful?'"

"Do you not think that it may lead to other undesirable lines of conduct?"

"It may lead to other sorts of innocent fun," was the dry remark. "Mrs. Stone, were you ever young? Surely, you have not forgotten what the world looked like then. Wasn't it invariably the thing you were least expected to do that it gave you the most satisfaction to do? Listen to me one moment, for, while I appreciate your sincere interest in my work and myself, I cannot allow you to run off with the idea that I regard my girls as prone to deceitful actions. It is just fun, pure and simple, and the natural result of happy, healthy girlhood. Far better let it have a safe vent than try to suppress it, and take very strong chances of directing it into less desirable channels. At the worst, a deranged stomach can follow, and a glass of bi-carbonate of soda-water is a simple remedy, if not an over-delightful one. I knew all about the feast several days ago, and took my own way of letting the girls know that I'd found it out. It was no use to forbid it for that night, for, just as sure as fate, they would have planned it for another, and devoured a lot of stuff far less wholesome than the contents of Toinette's box and my tub. As it was, we all had a good time, and I'll warrant you that the next time the C. C. C.'s meet I'll get a hint regarding the tub, at any rate."

"Perhaps it will prove so. I trust so, at all events. You are a far wiser woman than I am."

"Perhaps no wiser, but better able to recall the things which helped to make my girlhood a sunny one, and school frolics played no small part in them."

"I can but hope that the girls will refrain from practicing deceit. Of course, they cannot deceive *me*; no girl has ever yet succeeded in doing so, although many have tried to. But I can invariably detect the sham, and meet it successfully."

"I hope you may never find yourself undone," said Miss Preston, with a laugh. "Girls are pretty quick-witted creatures."

Girls are not blind to their elders' weaknesses and pet delusions, and it was an understood thing among them all that Mrs. Stone was easily "taken in," to use their own expression. Consequently, they told her things, and laid innocent little traps for her to walk into, such as they would never have thought of doing for a more wide-awake teacher, or, at least, one who did not make such a strong point of her power of discernment.

It was the very night after the Caps and Capers escapade that the girls were gathered in the upper hall talking about the previous night's fun.

"It's no use talking; you *can't* get ahead of Miss Preston," said one of the older girls. "You may think you have, and feel aglow clear down to the cockles of your heart, then—whew! in she walks upon you as cool as—"

"Ice cream!" burst in another girl. "To my dying day, girls, I shall never forget that red ghost."

"How did she ever find it out, I'd like to know," asked Toinette. "Not a soul said a word, and my box didn't come till the very last minute. I hardly had time to let the girls know, and how Miss Preston ever got her tub of cream in time is more than I can puzzle out. Maybe Mrs. Stores had it on hand."

"Mrs. Stores! Yes, I guess so," cried the girls, scornfully. "You don't for one moment suppose that *she* would let us have a whole tub of ice cream, do you? Not much," said Lou Perry.

"Why, if Miss Preston wanted it it would be different, you see," answered Toinette.

"No, it wouldn't, either. Miss Preston never bothers with the housekeeping or the housekeeper, although she is always just as lovely to her as she can be—she is to everybody, for that matter."

"For my part, I'm glad she found it out," laughed Cicely, "but if I'd suspected beforehand that she would, wild horses wouldn't have dragged me into that laundry. It's pretty easy not to be afraid of such a teacher; she seems just like one of us. Wasn't she too funny with that big spoon and the red mask?"

"Are all the other teachers so quick to 'catch on?'" asked Toinette.

"Most of them are sharp as two sticks," replied Ethel, "but they never let on. There is only one who makes the boast that she has never been deceived by any girl, and we've all been just wild to play her some trick, only we've never yet hit upon a really good one."

"You ought to get Toinette to do the scene from 'Somnambula,'" said Cicely, laughing.

"What is it? What is it? What is it?" cried a half-dozen voices.

"The funniest thing you ever saw in all your born days," said Cicely.

"Oh, tell us about it; please, do," begged the girls.

"Let her do it for you; it will be ten times funnier than telling it."

"When will you do it?"

"To-night, if I can manage it; it will be a good time after last night's cut-up."

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## CHAPTER XI

### "LA SOMNAMBULA"

When the bell for retiring rang at half-past nine that night, it produced a most remarkable effect, for, instead of suggesting snug beds and dream-land, it seemed instantly to banish any desire for sleep which the previous study hour from eight to nine had aroused in several of the girls.

They all went to their rooms, to be sure, but once within them a startling change took place. Instead of undressing like wise young people, they slipped off their dresses, and put on their night-dresses over the rest of their clothing, then all crawled into bed to await the first act of "La Somnambula."

They had barely gotten settled when footsteps were heard coming softly down the corridor, as though the feet taking the steps were encased in wool slippers, and the owner of those feet wished to avoid being heard. A few steps were taken, then a pause made to listen, then on went the cat-like tread from door to door.

Toinette's and Cicely's rooms communicated, and just beyond, with another communicating

door, was the room occupied by Ruth and Edith, but the door was always fastened. Perhaps Miss Preston considered three communicating rooms altogether too convivial, and decided that "an ounce of prevention was always worth a pound of cure."

As the stealthy footfalls passed on down the hall, a light tap fell upon Toinette's door, and, springing out of bed, she flew to give a corresponding tap, and listen for what might follow.

"Sh-h!" came in a whisper from the other side.

"Yes," was the low reply.

"Did you hear the 'Princess' walk down the hall?" The Princess was the big Maltese house cat, and a privileged character.

"A pretty big *cat*," was whispered back.

"That was Mother Stone, and she was just as anxious to avoid being heard by Miss Preston as she was anxious to hear what might be going on in our rooms. If Miss Preston caught her listening at anybody's door, she would be angrier than if we sat up all night."

"What does she think we're up to, anyway?" whispered Toinette.

"No telling, but she knows we had a frolic last night and is on the lookout for another to-night, I guess."

"Maybe she won't look in vain," laughed Toinette, softly.

Twelve o'clock had just been struck by the tall clock in the lower hall, when a white figure walked slowly down the corridor. Her hair fell in long, waving ringlets far below her waist, her pretty white hands were outstretched in front of her, and the great eyes, wide open, stared straight before her with a strange, unseeing stare. As she walked along she whispered softly to herself, but the words were hardly audible. On she went, through the long corridor, down the little side hall, which led to the pantry below, still muttering in that uncanny manner.

It had long been a standing joke in the school that Mrs. Stone slept like a cat, with one eye open and one ear alert for every sound, for she was continually hearing burglars, or marauders of some sort or other. So it is not surprising that before that ghost had gone very far another white figure popped its head out into the hall and uttered a smothered exclamation at sight of number one.

"Dear me! dear me!" she murmured, "my suspicions were not amiss. Poor, dear Marion, is so very self-confident. I was sure the last night's folly would lead to something else. Such is invariably the case," and she followed rapidly after the figure which was just vanishing around the turn in the lower hall.

"Those children are certainly planning another supper, and, what is far worse, are adding to the discredit of such an act by resorting to dishonest means of procuring the wherewithal for it. Oh, it is shocking, shocking! And yet Marion cannot be convinced that her girls are capable of deceit. Poor child, poor child, it is fortunate for her that there is someone at hand to come to her rescue at such a crisis," and Mrs. Stone reached the bottom of the stairs just as the evil-intentioned ghost slipped into the housekeeper's pantry.

"Really, I must be quite sure before I speak, or I may bring about still greater trouble. But what *can* she want here at this hour of the night if it be not some of Mrs. Store's provisions?" and she wrung her hands in despair.

A dim light burned in the lower hall, rendering everything there plainly visible from above; and if Mrs. Stone had not been so distressed by that which was before her, she might have been aware of certain happenings just above her. Why did not some good fairy whisper in her ear just at that moment: "An' had you one eye behind you, you might see more detraction at your heels than fortune before you," but there were apparently none out of Dream Land.

As her foot touched the lower step, five or six heads peered over the banister railing above, and what mystery of gravitation prevented as many bodies from toppling over after them I am unable to say.

"Do look! Do look! She is after her full tilt, girls," whispered Cicely. "Didn't I tell you it would be the funniest thing you ever saw?"

"Sh! She'll hear us, and the whole thing will be spoilt," said Ethel.

"No, indeed, she won't," answered Ruth, "she is too intent upon catching Toinette."

"O, why *can't* I stretch my neck out a yard or two so that I may see what is going on in that pantry? Come on girls, I'm going downstairs if I die for it," and down crept Lou, followed by all the others, for there was no lack of bedroom slippers at Sunny Bank.

Meantime Toinette had entered the store-room, and, going straight to the corner where some smoked hams and bacon were hanging, took a monstrous ham from its hook, then, muttering, "Crackers, too, crackers, too," opened the cracker box and drew forth a handful.

Mrs. Stone was thoroughly scandalized, but, just as she was about to speak, Toinette turned full upon her and said:

"Yes, I will have some mustard, and a beefsteak, and baked beans, please. Mrs. Stores had some on the table to-night."

By this time Mrs. Stone began to realize that the girl was not accountable for her actions, for

never was there a better bit of acting for an amateur. Yet she dared not wake her, for stories of the serious harm which had befallen somnambulists, when wakened suddenly in unfamiliar surroundings, flashed through her brain, and she was nearly beside herself with anxiety.

"What shall I do? what *shall* I do?" she said aloud in great distress; and, as though in answer to her question, Toinette answered:

"Go, tell Mrs. Stone that she isn't up to snuff as much as she thinks she is."

This was too much, and, laying her hand gently on Toinette's arm, she said, softly:

"My dear child, hadn't you better come back upstairs with me?"

Without changing her expression, Toinette replied:

"How oats, peas, beans and barley grow, nor you, nor I, nor Mrs. Stone knows," and began to dance around in a circle with her ham tightly clasped in one arm, and the crackers scattering from one end of the pantry to the other.

Now thoroughly alarmed, and almost in tears, Mrs. Stone said:

"Oh, my dear, dear little girl, won't you come back to your room with me?" and, grasping hold of Toinette's arm, endeavored to lead her from the pantry.



"GO, TELL MRS. STONE SHE ISN'T UP TO SNUFF."

But my lady was having altogether too good a time to end her frolic so soon, while the audience upon the stairs were nearly dying from their efforts not to scream. So, without changing that dreadful stare which she had maintained throughout her performance, she said, as though repeating Mrs. Stone's own words:

"Come back—come back—come back, my Bonny, to me," and turned to leave the pantry. She had barely gotten outside the door, however, when she paused, and, muttering something about lemons and pickles, slipped away from Mrs. Stone's grasp and disappeared within the pantry again.

Trembling with excitement, Mrs. Stone stood for one instant, and then saying, "Miss Preston must be called, Miss Preston must be called," turned and literally flew up the stairs, for once too lost to everything but the matter in hand to be aware of anything else, which was certainly fortunate for the white-robed figures, which nearly fell over each other in their scramble to escape.

## CHAPTER XII

"HAVE YOU NOT BEEN DECEIVED THIS TIME?"

When Miss Preston arrived upon the scene Toinette was serenely making her way upstairs, her burdens still in her arms, but supplemented by several lemons and a bottle of pickles. She took no notice whatever of the new arrival, but walked straight to her own room, and, placing her treasures upon her bed, covered them carefully with her bedclothes. At this covert act poor Mrs. Stone gasped despairingly, and, grasping Miss Preston's arm, said, in a most tragic whisper: "Marion, Marion, what did I tell you?"

But "Marion" was very much alive to the situation, and, had not a slight quiver about Toinette's mouth while Mrs. Stone was speaking confirmed her suspicions, some very audible giggles from the rooms close at hand would have done so. 120

Having tucked her ham snugly to bed, Toinette proceeded to tuck herself there, and, with a sigh as innocent as a tired infant's, she closed those staring eyes and slipped off to the land of dreams.

"Well, I think the first act is ended," said Miss Preston, with the funniest of smiles, "and we shall not have the second to-night, at any rate. But this one was certainly performed by a star," and, stepping to Toinette's bedside, she quietly drew from beneath the covers the "dry stores" there sequestered, placed them upon the table, and then smoothed the clothes carefully about her.

Mrs. Stone began to gather up the articles Miss Preston laid upon the table, and, consequently, did not see her slyly pinch the rosy cheek resting upon the pillow nor the flash of intelligence which two big brown eyes sent back. 121

They then left Toinette to her slumbers (?), and, after carrying the pilfered articles back to the housekeeper's pantry, returned to Miss Preston's room, where Mrs. Stone dropped into the first chair that came handy. She was as near a nervous collapse as she well could be, and came very close to losing her temper when Miss Preston seated herself upon her couch, clasped her hands before her, and laughed as poor Mrs. Stone had never known her to laugh before.

"Why, Marion! Marion!" she cried. "Have you taken leave of your senses?"

It was some seconds before Miss Preston could control her voice enough to reply, and, when she did, it proved the very last straw to complete Mrs. Stone's discomfiture, for her words were:

"Mehitable Stone, had anyone told me that I was sheltering beneath my roof-tree such a consummate actress, I should have been the most surprised woman in Montcliff. Upon my word I never saw anything better done." 122

"Acting!" exclaimed Mrs. Stone, aghast. "You do not for one moment imagine that poor child was acting? Impossible! Why, she was as sound asleep as she ever was in all her life, and there was not the least sign that she was conscious of my touch when I took hold of her arm to lead her from the pantry. Do you suppose it would have been possible for her to dissemble to that extent? *Never!*"

Miss Preston did not answer, but laughed softly again.

It was too much for Mrs. Stone; rising suddenly to her feet, she said, with asperity: "It is useless for us to discuss the matter further to-night, nay, *this morning*," looking at the tiny clock ticking away upon Miss Preston's desk, "but I trust that in broad daylight you may see more clearly. For my part, nothing will ever convince me that that child was deceiving me; my knowledge of girls is too perfect. It was a most pronounced case of somnambulism, the outcome of last night's injudicious eating, and, in my opinion, a very alarming condition, as one can never tell to what it may lead. Her digestion may be seriously impaired. It is quite unsafe to leave her alone to-night, for she may be seized with another attack at any moment. I shall spend the remainder of the night upon the couch in her room," and away she went to take up her sentinel duty. 123

"It is quite unnecessary," called Miss Preston after the retreating figure, but no heed was given to the words, and when Toinette waked in the morning what was her surprise to find Mrs. Stone bending over her asking, in the most solicitous of voices, if she were feeling quite well.

For a moment Toinette was unable to take in the situation, but her wits got into working order pretty quickly, and only her quivering lips would have betrayed her to a more discerning person. Mrs. Stone, however, saw nothing but an inclination to weep, and, stooping over Toinette, said, soothingly: "There, there, dear, don't hurry to rise, you are a little nervous this morning and ought to rest." 124

But Toinette was at the breakfast table as promptly as anyone, and as she took her seat she gave a quick glance toward Miss Preston; but that astute woman was pouring cream into her coffee-cup. An hour later, when all were scurrying about getting ready for the walk to the schoolhouse, which was situated several blocks from the home house and its adjacent cottages, Toinette came face to face with Miss Preston in one of the upper halls. Both stopped short, looked each other squarely in the eyes, and said nothing. Then Miss Preston's eyes began to smile, and her mouth followed their example, and, placing one finger under Toinette's chin, she said:

"I am forced to admit that it was one of the funniest things I've ever seen, and extremely well done, but it scared Mrs. Stone nearly to death; so, please, don't favor us with the second act." 125

And that was the only allusion ever made by Miss Preston to the midnight ramble, nor was it ever repeated for Mrs. Stone's benefit, although nothing could ever have persuaded the good lady that she had been the victim of a hoax that night.

It would have been difficult to find a more consummate teacher than Miss Preston, or one who,

without their ever suspecting it, could so bring her girls up to the mark. It was a rare exception when she failed to accomplish her aim, and her tact was truly wonderful. There was rarely a harsh word spoken, although Miss Preston could speak sharply enough when occasion required. But she seldom felt that it did. She had most unique methods, and they proved wonderfully successful. Then, too, some very old-fashioned ideas were firmly imbedded in her mind, which in the present day and age are often forgotten. That bad spelling is a disgrace to any girl was one of these, and most nobly did she labor to make such a disgrace impossible for any of her girls.

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Knowing how cordially human nature detests doing the very thing best for it, she never had regular spelling lessons in the school, but twice a week every girl in it, big and little alike, gathered in the large assembly room to choose sides and spell each other down. So irresistibly funny were these spelling matches, and so admirably did they display Miss Preston's peculiar power over the girls, and their response to her wonderful magnetism, that I think they deserve a chapter to themselves.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### ENGLISH AS SHE IS SPELLED

The last half hour before recess on Wednesdays and Fridays was the time set aside for the spelling matches. On Wednesday the words were chosen at random, sometimes from history, sometimes from geography, again from something which the classes had been reading; but Friday's words were invariably a surprise.

One morning, immediately after the opening exercises were concluded, Miss Preston rang her bell, and, when the girls were all attention, said:

"It will be well for those girls who are to lead the opposing sides of the spelling match to-day to choose with exceptional acumen—Annabel, spell that word!" So suddenly had the command been sprung upon her that, whatever knowledge poor Annabel might have possessed five seconds before, promptly flew straight out of her head, and she answered:

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"Ackumen."

"Sorry I haven't time to pass it on just now, but I'll reserve that honor. As I was saying, the heads had best keep their wits wide-awake, for I'm going to choose the words from a highly scientific and instructive volume to-day. It is called "How to Feed Children," and in this you will observe that I have a double object in view: to teach you which words, as well as the sort of food, to be digested. Wholesome instruction, my dears; and now to work, every woman Jill of you."

At ten-thirty all were again assembled in the big room, and a lively choosing of sides ensued. It was not by any means invariably the older girls who could spell best, for often some of the younger ones led them a fine race.

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Taking up the brilliantly bound little book, Miss Preston said:

"Now, my friends, I hope you will look upon the cover of this book as a brilliant and rosy example of what I expect, and, I beg of you, do not disappoint me," holding up the bright red book for the inspection of all. "Do not become excited, but learn to take a 'philosophical' view of it." Miss Preston paused, and so well did the girls understand her original way of doing things that "philosophical" was at once essayed. The first attempt resulted in "*philosopical*."

"A little too suggestive of milk-toast, I'm afraid, Marion. We must have our philosophy upon a sound basis. Next."

Several words passed successfully down the line until "course" was given, and when that was spelled "*cource*" Miss Preston's face was a study.

"That which we are most inclined to accept as a matter *of course* we may be sure will prove a matter of mortification to us. Katherine, you are given to poetic flights. Who was it that said: 'The course of true love never did run smooth?' He would have had an opportunity to learn that there were also other courses which did not run smoothly had he followed—'pedagogy.'"

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This proved a stumbling-block for the first girl, but the next one spelled it correctly.

"You see, Alma, that even the road thereto has its pitfalls, so take warning."

"Catch me ever teaching," was the half-audible reply, but softly as it was spoken sharp ears caught it.

"Posterity will be grateful for the blessings in store for it, 'undoubtedly.'"

The word fell to a little girl, but was rattled off as quick as a wink, to Miss Preston's great amusement, for the child was an ambitious little body who hated to be outdone by the big girls.

"Desirability" was the next word, and was given to one of the largest, although by no means the

most brilliant, girls in the school.

She hesitated a moment, and then said: "If desire is spelled d-e-s-i-r-e, I suppose the other end of it will be a-b-i-l-i-t-y."

"A quality in which you are lacking," was the instantaneous retort. "If you desired it more, your ability would be greater."

When desirability had been successfully dealt with, ten or more words were happily disposed of, then came another poser in the form of 'physiognomical,' and the groans which greeted it foretold its fate.

"What does it *mean*, anyway, Miss Preston?" asked one girl.

"Well, there is more than one way of telling you its meaning, but I believe in simple explanations, so I will say, that when you all rush off to the cloak-room at one o'clock that it would be well for you to observe carefully the expression upon the other girl's face when you throw down her hat and coat in your eagerness to get your own first. You will then, doubtless, have an excellent opportunity to form a correct idea of the meaning of physiognomical. Then you may come and tell me whether you consider her character an angelic or impish one."

How well Miss Preston was aware of their besetting sins, and how shrewdly did she use them to their undoing.

I should never dare tell the wonderful combinations of letters which were brought together ere that dreadful word was spelled correctly; but such a rapid sitting down followed that a stranger coming suddenly upon them might have supposed that Miss Preston's girls were fainting one after another.

About fifty words, all told, were spelled with more or less success, and then came the grand summing up, and those girls who could not yield a clean record from beginning to end had to pay the penalty.

Not a very severe one, to be sure, but one they were not likely to forget, for each word that they had misspelled was written upon a good-sized piece of paper and pinned upon their breasts "as a reward of demerit," Miss Preston told them, and, although it was all done in fun and joked and laughed over at the time, each girl knew that those words must be thoroughly committed to memory before the Wednesday spelling match began its lively session, or her report at the end of the term would be lacking in completeness.

And so, between "jest and earnest," did Miss Preston handle her girls, drawing by gentleness from a sensitive nature, by firmness from a careless one, by sarcasm (and woe to the girl who provoked it, for it was, truly, "like a polished razor keen") from a flippant, and by one of her rare, sweet smiles from the ambitious all that was best to be drawn.

Toinette was naturally a remarkably bright girl, and possessed qualities of mind which only required gentle suggestions to develop their latent powers. Refined and delicate by nature, keen of comprehension, she slipped into her proper niche directly way was made for her, and filled it to her own credit and the satisfaction of others. Nor did it take Miss Preston long to discover that a delicately strung instrument had been placed in her hands, and that it must be touched with skillful fingers if its best notes were to be given forth.

The weeks slipped away, and winter, as though to pay up for its tardy arrival, came in earnest, bringing in February the heavy snowstorms one looks for much earlier in the season in this part of the globe. The girls hailed them with wild demonstrations, for snow meant sleigh-rides, and it is a frosty old codger who can frown and grumble at the sound of sleigh-bells.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### "JINGLE BELLS, JINGLE BELLS"

One morning early in February the girls looked out of their windows to behold a wonderful new world—a white one to replace the dull gray one, which would have made their spirits sympathetically gray, perhaps, had they been older. But, happily, it must be a very smoky gray indeed that can depress fifteen.

"Quick, Edith, come and look!" and then, flying across the room, Ruth thumped upon Toinette's door, and called out: "Sleigh-bells! Sleigh-bells! Don't you hear them?"

The snow had fallen steadily all night, piling up softly and silently the great white mounds, covering up unsightly objects, laying the downiest of coverlids upon the dull old world until it was hardly recognizable. Every ledge, every branch and tiny twig held its feathery burden, or shook it softly upon the white mass covering the ground. Hardly a breath of air stirred, and the fir trees looked as though St. Nick had visited them in the night to dress a tree for every little toddler in the land.



Down, down, down came the flakes, as though they never meant to stop, and as one threw back one's head to look upward at the millions of tiny feathers falling so gently, one seemed to float upward upon fairy wings and sail away, away into the realms of the Snow Maiden.

It was hard to keep one's wits upon one's work that day, and many a stolen glance was given to the fairy world beyond the windows of the recitation-rooms. About five o'clock the weather cleared, the sun setting in a glory of crimson and purple clouds. An hour later up came my lady moon, to smile approval upon the enchanting scene and hint all sorts of possibilities.

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Lou Cornwall came flying into Toinette's room just after dinner to find it well filled with seven or eight others.

"May I come, too?" she asked. "Oh, girls, if we don't have a sleigh-ride to-morrow, I'll have a conniption fit certain as the world."

"Do you always have one when there is snow?" asked Toinette.

"Which, a sleigh-ride or a conniption fit?" laughed Lou. "You'd better believe we have sleigh-rides."

"You'd better believe! I've been here five years, and we've never missed one yet. Do you remember the night last winter, when we all went sleighing and came home at eleven o'clock nearly frozen stiff, Bess? Whew! it was cold. When we got back we found Miss Preston making chocolate for us. There she was in her bedroom robe and slippers. She had gotten out of bed to do it because she found out at the last minute that that fat old Mrs. Schmidt had gone poking off to bed, and hadn't left a single thing for us."

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"I guess I *do* remember, and didn't it taste good?" was the feeling answer.

"You weren't here the year before," said Lou. "Sit still, my heart! Shall I ever forget it?"

"What about it? Tell us!" cried the girls in a chorus.

"That was the first year Mrs. Schmidt was here, and, thank goodness, she isn't here any longer, and she hadn't learned as much as she learned afterwards. My goodness, wasn't she stingy? She thought one egg ought to be enough for six girls, I believe. It took Miss Preston about a year to get her to understand that we were not to be kept on half rations. Well, that night we were expecting something extra fine. We got it!" and Lou stopped to laugh at the recollection. "We rushed into the house, hungrier than wolves, and ready to empty the pantry, and what do you think we found? A lot of *after-dinner coffee cups* of very weak cocoa, with *nary* saucer to set them in, and two small crackers apiece. 'I was thinking you would come in hungry, young ladies, so I make you some chocolate. You don't mind that I have not some saucers, it make so many dishes for washing,' she said, smiling that pudgy smile of hers. Ugh! I can't bear to think of it even to this day, and she was ten million times better before she left last spring. That was the reason Miss Preston took matters into her own hands the next time, I guess."

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Just then a tap came at the door, and Miss Preston put her head in to ask:

"Can you girls do extra hard work between this and eight o'clock?"

Had she entertained any doubts of their ability to individually do the work of three, the shout which answered her in the affirmative would have banished them forever, for the girls were not slow to guess that some surprise was afoot.

"Very well, I'll trust you all to prepare tomorrow's lessons without exchanging an unnecessary word, and at eight o'clock I'll ring my bell, and then you must all put on extra warm wraps and go out on the piazza to—look at the moon. I shall not expect you to come in till ten-thirty."

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As the last word was uttered Miss Preston met her doom, for five girls pounced upon her, bore her to the couch and hugged her till she cried for mercy.

"Come with us, oh! come with us," they cried. "It will be twice as nice if you'll come!"

"Come *where*? Do you suppose I've lived all these years and never seen the *moon*?" and laughing merrily she slipped away from them, only pausing to add: "It is ten minutes of seven now."

The hint was enough, and not a girl "got left" that night.

At eight o'clock a silvery ting-a-ling was heard, and never was bell more promptly responded to. Had it been a fire alarm the rooms could not have been more quickly emptied.

The moonlight made all outside nearly as bright as day, and when the girls went out upon the porch they found three huge sleighs, with four horses each, waiting to whirl them over the shining roads for miles. Miss Preston did not make one of the party, but Miss Howard was a welcome substitute, for, next to Miss Preston, the girls loved her better than any of the other teachers, and Toinette was sorely divided in her mind as to which she was learning to love the better.

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Off they started, singing, laughing at nothing, calling merrily to all they overtook, or passed, and sending the school yell, which Miss Howard had made up upon the spur of the moment for them,

"Hoo-rah-ray! Hoo-rah-ray!  
Sunny Bank, Montcliff,  
U. S. A.,"

out upon the frosty air, until the very hills rang with the cry, and flung it back in merry echoes.

Miss Howard's sleigh led the van, and one or two of the girls had clambered up to ride upon the high front seat with the driver, a sturdy old Irishman, who would have driven twenty horses all night long to please any of Miss Preston's girls. Ruth sat beside him, with Toinette next to her, and Edith was squeezed against the outer edge. But who cares about being squeezed under such circumstances? It's more fun.

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The snow had fallen so lightly that sometimes the runners cut through slightly; but, all things considered, the sleighing was very good. Still, the driver kept the horses well in hand, for they were good ones and ready to respond to a word. Moreover, the hilarity behind them seemed to have proved infectious, for every now and again a leader or a wheeler would prance about as though joining in the fun, and presently another animal became infected and wanted to prance, too. Had she not, the next chapter need not have been written.

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## CHAPTER XV

### "PRIDE GOETH BEFORE A FALL"

More than five miles had slipped away under those swiftly-moving runners ere Ruth was suddenly seized with a desire to emulate a famous charioteer of olden time, one "Phæton, of whom the histories have sung, in every meter, and every tongue," if a certain poet may be relied upon. So, turning a beguiling face toward the unsuspecting Michael beside her, she said:

"You're a fine driver, aren't you, Michael?"

"'T is experience ivery man nades; I've had me own," observed Michael, complacently.

"It must be very hard to drive four horses at once."

"Anny one what kin droive two dacently should be able enough to handle four; 't is not the number of horses, but the sinse at the other ind av the reins."

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"Is that so? I thought it needed a strong man to drive so many."

"Indade, no; it does not that. I've seen a schmall, little man, hardly bigger than yerself, takin' six along with the turn av his hand."

"Could he hold them if they started to go fast?"

"Certain as the woird, he cud do that same. 'T was meself that taught him the thrick av it. 'T is easy larnt."

"Then teach me right now, will you?"

Poor Michael, he saw when it was too late that boasting is dangerous work, but to refuse anything to "wan av the young ladies" never for an instant occurred to him. Probably had he asked Miss Howard's consent he would have been spared complying with a request which his better judgment questioned, but that did not occur to him, either, so, giving one apprehensive glance behind him at the twenty or more passengers in the sleigh, he placed the reins in Ruth's hands, adjusting them in the most scientific manner.

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They were skimming along over a beautiful bit of road with a thick fir wood upon one side and open fields upon the other. The road was level as a floor, and no turn would be made for fully half a mile. Horses know so well the difference between their own driver's touch and a stranger's hand, and the four whose reins Ruth now held were not dullards. They had been going along at a steady round trot, with no thought of making the pace a livelier one, but directly the reins passed out of Michael's hands the spirit of mischief, ever uppermost in Ruth, flew like an electric fluid straight through those four reins, and, in less time than it takes to tell about it, those horses had made up their minds to add a little to the general hilarity behind them.

The change was scarcely perceptible at first, but little by little they increased their pace, till they were fairly flying over the ground. Not one whit did the girls in the sleigh object; the faster the better for them. The sleighs behind did their best to keep up, but no such horses were in the livery stable as the four harnessed to Michael's sleigh, for Michael was the trusted of the trusted.

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But he was growing very uneasy, and, leaning down close to Ruth, said: "Ye'd better be lettin' me take thim now, Miss. We've the turn to make jist beyant."

"O, I can make it all right; you know you said that anybody who drives two horses decently could drive four just as well, and I've driven papa's always."

"Yis, yis," said Michael quickly, seeing when too late that he had talked to his own undoing, "but ye'd better be lettin' me handle thim be moonlight; 't is deceptive, moonlight is," and he reached to take the reins from her. But alas! empires may be lost by a second's delay, and a second was responsible for much now.

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As Michael reached for the reins the turn was reached also, and where is the livery stable horse that does not know every turn toward home even better than his driver, be the driver the oldest in that section of the country! Around whirled the leaders, and hard upon them came the wheelers, and a-lack-a-day! hard, *very* hard, upon a huge stone at the corner came the runner of the front bob.

Had the whole sleighful been suddenly plunged into a hundred cubic feet of hydrogen gas, sound could not have ceased more abruptly for one second, and then there arose to the thousands of little laughing stars and their dignified mother, the moon, a howl which made the welkin ring.

Shall I attempt to describe what had happened in the drawing of a breath? A bob runner was hopelessly wrecked; two horses were sitting upon their haunches, while two others were striving to prove to those who were not too much occupied with their own concerns to notice that, after all is said and done, the Lord *did* intend that such animals should walk upon two legs if they saw fit to do so. Michael stood up to his middle in a snow-drift; Ruth sat as calmly upon a snow bank as though she preferred it to any other seat she had ever selected, albeit she was well-nigh smothered by the back and cushions of her novel resting-place; Toinette was dumped heels-over-head into the body of the sleigh, where she landed fairly and squarely in Miss Howard's lap; Edith hung on to the seat railing for dear life, and screamed as though the lives of all in the sleigh (or out of it) depended upon her summons for assistance. The sleigh had not upset, yet what kept it in a horizontal position must forever remain a mystery, and such a heap of scrambling, squirming, screaming girls as were piled up five or six deep in the bottom of it may never be seen again. Some had been dumped overboard outright, and were floundering about in the snow, which, happily, had saved them from serious harm. With the inborn chivalry of his race, Michael's first thoughts said: "Fly to the rescue of the demoiselles," but stern duty said: "Sthick to yer horses, Moik, or they'll smash things to smithereens, and, bedad, I sthuck wid all me moight, or the Lord only knows where we'd all have fetched up at that same night," he said, when relating his experiences some hours later.

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"STHICK TO YER HORSES, MOIK."

When excitement was at its height the other sleighs arrived upon the scene, and if there had been an uproar before, there was a mighty cry abroad in the land now. But, dear me, it is all in a lifetime; so why leave these floundering mortals piled up in heaps any longer? They were unsnarled eventually, gotten upon their feet (or their neighbors'), packed like sardines into the two other sleighs, and, with six instead of four horses now drawing each, started homeward, none the worse for their spill, excepting a good shaking up, a few handfuls of snow merrily forming rills and rivulets down their necks, some badly battered hats and torn coats, and one of them, at least, with some wholesome lessons regarding handling four frisky horses when the air is frosty and a number of lives may depend upon keeping "top side go, la!"

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When the sleighing party reached home they found hot chocolate and ginger cookies awaiting them. Before retiring, Miss Preston had seen to it that neither shivering nor hungry bodies should be tucked into bed that night.

Five weeks had now sped away, and Toinette was beginning to look upon her new abiding-place as home; at least, it was nearer to it than any she could remember. The old life at the Carter school seemed a sort of nightmare from which she had wakened to find broad daylight and all the miserable fancies dispelled.

She and Cicely were seated at their desks one afternoon. It was half-past four and study hour. Cicely was hard at work upon her algebra lesson, but Toinette was writing a letter. This, she knew quite well, was not what she was supposed to be doing, but the five weeks had not sufficed to undo the mischief done in seven years, and she was writing simply from a spirit of perversity. There was ample time to do it during her hours of freedom, but the very fact of doing it when she knew full well that she ought to be at work on her German added piquancy to the act. Moreover, the letter was to a boy with whom she had become acquainted while at Miss Carter's, and had kept the acquaintance a most profound secret. Not that she cared specially for the boy, although he was a jolly sort of chap, and had been a pleasant companion during their stolen interviews, and often smuggled boxes of candy and other "forbidden fruit" into the girl's possession.

Still, at Miss Carter's a boy sprouting angel's wings would have been regarded in very much the same light as though he were sprouting imp's horns, and any girl caught talking to one—much less corresponding—would have had a very bad quarter of an hour, indeed. So, though she did not care two straws whether she ever saw him again or not, all the wrong-headedness which had been so carefully fostered for the past years delighted in the thought that she was doing something which might not be approved; indeed, from her standpoint, would be decidedly criticised, and to get ahead of a teacher had been the "slogan" of the Carter school.

It was the custom at Sunny Bank for the teachers to go around to the girls' rooms during the study hour to help, suggest, or give a little "boost" over the hummocky places, so when a pleasant voice asked at the door: "Can I help you any, dearies?" Cicely answered from her room: "Oh, Miss Howard, will you please tell me something about this problem? I am afraid my head is muddled."

"To be sure, I will," was the cheery reply, and Miss Howard passed through Toinette's room to Cicely's.

As she did so her dress created a current of air which carried a paper from Toinette's desk almost to her feet. She stooped to pick it up and hand it back to Toinette, who had sprung up to catch it, and, as she handed it to her, Miss Howard noted the telltale color spring into the girl's face.

"Zephyrus is playing you tricks, dear," she said, smiling, and passed on to Cicely. After giving her the needed assistance, she left them, and a little further down the corridor met Miss Preston.

"How are my chicks progressing, Miss Howard?"

"Nicely, Miss Preston. Cicely needed a little help with a problem in algebra, but I think Toinette needs a little of yours in the problem of life," and Miss Howard went her way.

A word to the wise is sufficient.

Meanwhile, the letter was finished, addressed, and slipped into Toinette's pocket, to be mailed later.

Ordinarily, all letters were placed in a small basket to be carried to the office by the porter. As Toinette came down the hall shortly before dinner Miss Preston was just taking the letters from the basket to place them in the porter's mailbag.

"Any mail to go, dear?" she asked.

"No, thank you, Miss Preston," answered Toinette, and, jumping from the last step, ran off down the hall to join Cicely and the other girls. In jumping from the step something jolted from her pocket, but, falling upon the heavy rug at the foot of the stairs, made no sound. As the porter was about to take the pouch from her hands Miss Preston's eyes fell upon the letter, and, supposing it to be one which had been dropped from the basket, stooped to pick it up. She was a quick-witted woman, and the instant she saw the handwriting and the address she drew her own conclusions.

"So that is part of the life problem, is it? Poor little girl, she has got to learn something which the average girl has to unlearn; where they entirely trust their fellow-beings, she entirely distrusts them. I wonder if I shall ever be able to show her the middle path?" Telling the porter to wait a moment, Miss Preston slipped into the library, and, catching up a pencil and slip of paper, wrote down the name and address which was written upon the envelope, then, stepping back to the hall, handed the porter the letter to post.

Toinette joined the girls, and in the lively chatter which ensued forgot all about the letter until several hours later, and then searched for it in every possible and impossible place, but, of

course, without finding it, and was in a very *uncomfortable* frame of mind for several days, and then something happened which did not serve to reassure her, for a reply came to her from her correspondent.

How in the world her letter had ever reached him was the question which puzzled her not a little, and she fretted over the thing till she was in a fever. Then she determined to write again to ask how and when the letter had reached him, although she was beginning to wish that boy, letter and all, were at the bottom of the Red Sea, so much had they tormented her. So a second letter was written, and then came the puzzle of getting it into the mail bag unnoticed. At Miss Carter's school all letters had been examined before they were allowed to be mailed, and as Toinette's correspondence was supposed to be limited to the letters she wrote to her father, she had never inquired whether Miss Preston first examined them or not, but, taking it for granted that she did so, handed them to her unsealed. On the other hand, Miss Preston, thinking that it was simply carelessness that they were not, usually sealed them and sent them upon their way.

Although she had not said anything about it, the little affair had by no means passed from Miss Preston's thoughts, but she was trying to think of the wisest way of going about it, and was waiting for something to guide her.

"If I can only win her confidence," she said to herself more than once.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### "HAF ANYBODY SEEN MY UMBREL?"

It was the last week in February, and in a few days the school dance was to be given. One afternoon a dozen or more girls were gathered in Ethel's room to see her dress which had been sent out from town. It was as dainty an affair as one could wish to see, and many were the admiring glances cast upon it, and many the praises it received. Possibly it was a trifle elaborate for a girl of fifteen, for it was made of delicate white chiffon over pale yellow satin, and exquisitely embroidered with fine silver threads. But Ethel looked very lovely in it as she preened herself before the mirror, and was fully aware of the fact.

"What are you going to wear, Toinette?" she asked.

"I've never worn anything but white yet," answered Toinette. "At Miss Carter's all my dresses were ordered by Miss Emeline, and she said I ought not to wear anything else till I was eighteen. I hope Miss Preston won't say the same."

"I should think you would have hated to have the teachers say just what you must wear, as well as what you must study. Didn't your father ever send you any clothes?"

"Papa was too far away to know what I wore or did," answered Toinette, rather sadly.

"Aren't you glad he is home again?" asked quiet little Helen Burgess, who somehow always managed to say soothing things when one felt sort of ruffled up without knowing just why.

"You had better believe I am!" was the emphatic reply. "What will you wear, Helen?"

"The same thing I always wear, I guess. I haven't much choice in the matter, you know."

Toinette colored slightly at her thoughtless remark, for she had not paused to think before speaking. All the girls knew that Helen's purse was a very slender one, and that it was only by self-sacrifice and close economy that her parents were able to keep her at such an expensive school. She made no secret of her lack of money, but worked away bravely and cheerfully, always sunny, always happy, with the enviable faculty of invariably saying the right thing at the right time. She had pronounced artistic tendencies, and Miss Preston was anxious to encourage them in every possible way. Her great desire was to go to Europe and there see the originals of the famous paintings of which she read. Each year Miss Preston went abroad and took with her several of the girls whose parents could afford such indulgences for them, and Helen longed to be one of them, although she never for a moment hoped to be.

She did really remarkable work for a girl of her age, and was improving all the time, but the trip over the sea seemed as far off as a trip to the moon. Toinette was somewhat of a dilettante, and pottered away with her water-colors with more or less success. But she admired good work, and was quick to see that Helen was a hard student, and to respect her for it. Although so unlike in disposition, as well as position, a warm regard had sprung up between them, and Toinette spent many hours watching Helen work away at her drawing. The girl's ambition was to illustrate, and there was hardly a girl in the school who had not posed for her, and the drawings in her sketch-book were excellent.

Toinette had never been taught to think much about others, and so it is not surprising that, while she admired Helen, and wished that she could have those things she so longed for, it never occurred to her that perhaps there were other and more fortunate girls who might have helped a trifle if they chose to do so. That she, herself, had it within her power to do it never

entered her head till the girls began to talk about their new dresses, and what put it there then would be hard to tell. Nevertheless, come it did, and when she heard Helen speak so composedly of wearing to the school dance, *the* event of the season, in their eyes, the same dress which had done service for many a little entertainment given through the winter, and which gave unmistakable signs of having done so, she realized for the first time what it must mean to be deprived of those things which she had always accepted as a matter of course.

Still, no definite plans took shape in her head regarding it, and it is quite possible that none might ever have done so had not something occurred within a short time which seemed to be the hinge upon which her whole after-life swung.

As the girls were in the midst of their chatter about the new gowns a tap came at the door, and Fraulein Palme looked in to ask:

"Haf anyone seen my umbrel? I haf hunt eferywhere for him, and can't see him anywhere."

"No, Fraulein, we haven't seen it," answered several voices.

"Where did you last have it?" asked Ruth.

"Right away in my room a little while before I am ready to go out. I go down to the post-office and must get wet without him."

Two or three of the girls went into the hall to look for the missing umbrella, and others went back to Fraulein's room with her to make a more exhaustive search. But without success.

"Have you more than one?" asked Edith.

"No, it is but one I haf got. It is very funnee," and poor Fraulein looked sorely perplexed.

"Take mine, Fraulein. Yours will turn up when you least expect it," said Toinette.

"What did it look like, Fraulein?" asked Cicely.

"Chust like thees," was the astonishing answer, as absent-minded Fraulein held forth the missing umbrella, which all that time she had held tightly clasped in her hand, and which had been the cause of Edith's question as to whether she had more than one, for she supposed, of course, that the one Fraulein was so tightly holding must either be one she did not care to carry, or else one she was about to return to someone from whom she had probably borrowed it.

The shout which was raised at her reply speedily brought poor Fraulein back to her senses, and murmuring:

"Ach, so! I think I come *veruckt*," she hurried off down the hall with the girls' laughter still ringing in her ears.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE LITTLE HINGE

The day before the dance was to be given Toinette wrote her second letter, arguing that when everybody else had so much to occupy their thoughts they would have little time to notice other people's doings, and the letter could be mailed without exciting comment. Waiting until the very last moment, she ran down to the mail-basket to slip the letter in it unobserved. As ill-luck would have it, Miss Preston also had a letter to be slipped in at the last moment, and she and Toinette came face to face. It was too late to retreat, for the letter was in her hand in plain view, so, forced into an awkward position, she made a bad matter worse. Dropping the letter quickly into the basket, she said:

"Just a note for papa about something I want for the dance to-morrow, Miss Preston; I didn't think you'd care, and I hadn't time to do it earlier," and, with flaming cheeks, she turned to go away.

"Wait just one moment, dear," said Miss Preston, "I've something to say to you. Walk down to my room with me, please," and she slipped her arm about the girl's waist.

No more was needed, and all the suspicion and rebellion in Toinette's nature rose up to do battle with—windmills. It was a hard young face that looked defiantly at Miss Preston.

"Toinette, dear, I want to have a little talk with you," she said, as she locked the door of her sitting-room, and, seating herself upon the divan, drew Toinette down beside her.

Toinette never changed her expression, but looked straight before her with a most uncompromising stare.

"You said just now that you did not think I would care if you sent a note to your father; why should I, sweetheart?"

It must have been a stubborn heart, indeed, which could resist Miss Preston's sweet tone.

"Oh, I don't know, but teachers always seem to mind every little thing one does," replied Toinette, sulkily.

"It seems to me that this would be entirely too 'little a thing' for a teacher or anyone else to mind. Don't you think so yourself?"

"Well, of course, I didn't think you would mind simply because I wrote to papa, but because I posted the letter without first letting you read it," answered Toinette.

Now, indeed, was Miss Preston learning something new, and not even a child could have questioned that her surprise was genuine when she exclaimed:

"Read your letters, my dear little girl! What are you saying?" and a slight flush overspread her refined face.

It was now Toinette's turn to be surprised as she asked:

"Isn't that the rule here, Miss Preston?"

"Is it anywhere? I can hardly believe it. One's correspondence is a very sacred thing, Toinette, and I would as soon be guilty of listening at another person's door as of reading a letter intended for another's eyes. Oh, my little girl, what mischief has been at work here?"

While Miss Preston was speaking Toinette had risen to her feet, her eyes shining like stars, and her color coming and going rapidly. Now, taking both Miss Preston's hands in her own, she said, in a voice which quivered with excitement:

"Is that *truly* true, Miss Preston? Aren't the girls' letters ever read? Haven't mine been? *Do* you trust me like that?"

Miss Preston looked the girl fairly in the eyes as she answered:

"I trust you as I trust the others, because I feel you to be a gentlewoman, and, as such, you would be as reluctant to do anything liable to cast discredit upon yourself as I would be to have you. I do not wish my girls to fear but to love me, with all their hearts, and to trust me as I trust them. I do not expect you to be perfect; we all make mistakes; I make many, but we can help each other, dear, and remember this: 'Love casteth out fear.' Try to love me, my little girl, and to feel that I am your friend; I want so much to be."

Miss Preston's voice was very sweet and appealing, and as she spoke Toinette's eyes grew limpid. Miss Preston still held her hands, and, as she finished speaking, the girl dropped upon her knees and clasped her arms about her waist, buried her face in her lap and burst into a storm of sobs. All the pent-up feeling, the longing, the struggle, the yearning for tenderness of the past lonely years was finding an outlet in the bitter, bitter sobs which shook her slight frame.

Although Miss Preston knew comparatively little of the girl's former life, she had learned enough from Mr. Reeve, and observed enough in the girl herself, to understand that this outburst was not wholly the result of what had just passed between them. So, gently stroking the pretty golden hair, she wisely waited for the grief to spend itself before she resumed her talk, and, when the poor little trembling figure was more composed, said:

"My poor little Toinette, let us begin a brand new leaf to-day—'thee and me,' as the Quakers so prettily put it. Let us try to believe that even though I have spent thirty more years on this big world than you have, that we can still be good friends, and sympathize with each other either in sunshine or shadow. To do this two things are indispensable: confidence and love. And we can never have the latter without first winning the former. Remember this, dear, I shall never doubt you. Whatever happens, you may rest firm in the conviction that I shall always accept your word when it is given. Our self-respect suffers when we are doubted, and one's self-respect is a very precious thing, and not to be lightly tampered with."



"LET US BEGIN A BRAND NEW LEAF TO-DAY."

She now drew Toinette back to the couch beside her, put her arm about her waist, and let the tired head rest upon her shoulder. The girl had ceased to sob, but looked worn and weary. Miss Preston snuggled her close and waited for her to speak, feeling sure that more was in her heart, and that, in a nature such as she felt Toinette's to be, it would be impossible for her to rest content until all doubts, all self-reproach could be put behind her.

She sat perfectly still for a long time, her hands clasped in her lap, and her big, brown eyes, into which had crept a wonderfully soft expression, looking far away beyond the walls of Miss Preston's sitting-room, far beyond the bedroom next it, and off to some lonely, unsatisfied years, when she had lived in a sort of truce with all about her, never knowing just when hostilities might be renewed. It had acted upon the girl's sensitive nature much as a chestnut-prickle acts upon the average mortal; a nasty, little, irritating thing, hard to discover, a scrap of a thing when found—if, indeed, it does not succeed in eluding one altogether—and so insignificant that one wonders how it could cause such discomfort. But it is those miserable little chestnut-prickles that are hardest to bear in this life, and so warp one's character that it is often unfitted to bear the heavier burdens which must come into all lives sooner or later.

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## CHAPTER XIX

### "FATAL OR FATED ARE MOMENTS"

"Nobody has ever spoken to me as you have, Miss Preston," Toinette began presently, "and I can't tell you how I feel. Maybe heaven will be better, but I don't believe I shall ever feel any happier than I feel this minute. It seems as though I'd been living in a sort of prison, all shut up in the dark, and that now I am out in the sunshine and as free as the birds. But I must tell you something more: I can't rest content unless I do. The letter I posted to-day wasn't to papa, I sent it to Howard Elting, in Branton, and it isn't the first I've written him, either. I didn't lie about the other one, Miss Preston; I was ready to mail it, but lost it; I don't know how. Somebody must have found it and posted it, for he got it and answered it, and I was so puzzled over it that I wrote again. That was the letter you saw me post. Now, that is the truth, and I know that you believe me."

Toinette had spoken very rapidly, scarcely pausing for breath, and when she finished gave a relieved little sigh and looked Miss Preston squarely in the eyes. Truly, her self-respect was regained.

Will some of my readers say: "What a tempest in a teapot?" To many this may seem a very trivial affair, but how small a thing can influence our lives! A breath, the passing of a summer shower, may help or hinder plans which alter our entire lives. And Miss Preston was wise enough to understand it. Here was a beautiful soul given for a time into her keeping. Now, at the period of its keenest receptive powers, a delicate and sensitive thing needing very gentle handling.



Stroking the head again resting upon her shoulder, as though it had found a safe and happy haven after having been tossed about upon a troubled sea, she said, quietly:

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"I posted the letter, dear; I found it in the hall where it had been dropped; it never occurred to me that there was any cause for concealment; the girls all correspond with their friends; it is an understood thing. I recognized your writing, and, as I had friends at Branton, I wrote to ask if they knew the person written to. They replied that they did, and told me who he was. Knowing how few friends you have, I wrote to this boy asking him to come to our dance to-morrow night, because I thought the little surprise might give you pleasure, and you would be glad to welcome an old friend. Does it please you, my little girl?"

"Oh, Miss Preston!" was all Toinette said, but those three words meant a great deal.

The dressing-bell now rang, and Toinette sprang up with rather a dismayed look. As though she interpreted it, Miss Preston said:

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"You are in no condition to meet the other girls to-night, dear. They cannot understand your feelings, and, without meaning to be unkind or curious, would ask questions which it would embarrass you to answer. You are nervous and unstrung, so lie down on my couch and I will see that your dinner is brought up. I shall say to the other girls that you are not feeling well, and that it would be better not to disturb you." Then, going into her bedroom, Miss Preston quickly made her own toilet. She had just finished it when the chimes called all to dinner, and, stooping over Toinette, she kissed her softly and slipped from the room.

Some very serious thoughts passed through Toinette's head during the ensuing fifteen minutes, and some resolutions were formed which were held to as long as she lived.

A tap at the door, and a maid entered with a dainty dinner. Placing a little stand close to the couch, she put the tray upon it, and then asked: "Can I do anything more for you, Miss Toinette?"

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"No, thank you, Helma. This is very tempting."

When Miss Preston came to her room an hour later she found the tray quite empty, and Toinette fast asleep. Arranging the couch pillows more comfortably, and throwing a warm puff over the sleeping girl, she whispered, softly: "Poor little maid, your battle with Apollyon was short and sharp, but, thank God, you've conquered, even at the expense of an exhausted mind and weary body."

It was nearly midnight when Toinette opened her eyes to see Miss Preston warmly wrapped in her dressing-gown, and seated before the fire reading. The lamp was carefully screened from Toinette, who could not at first realize what had happened, or why she was there, but Miss Preston's voice recalled her to herself.

"Do you feel rested, dear?" she asked. "Don't try to go to your room; just undress and cuddle down in my bed with me to-night; I've brought in your night-dress."

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Toinette did not answer, but, walking over to Miss Preston, just rested her cheek against hers for a moment. Twenty minutes later she was fast asleep in her good friend's bed.

The following day all was bustle and excitement at Sunny Bank, for great preparations were being made for the dance in the evening, and understanding how much pleasure it gave the girls to feel that they were of some assistance, she let them fly about like so many grigs, helping or hindering, as it happened.

They brought down all the pretty trifles from their rooms, piled up sofa pillows till the couches resembled a Turk's palace; arranged the flowers, and rearranged them, till poor Miss Preston began to fear that there would be nothing left of them. However, it was an exceedingly attractive house which was thrown open to her guests at eight o'clock that evening, and the girls had had no small share in making it so.

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A very complete understanding seemed to exist between Toinette and Miss Preston now, for, although no words were spoken, none were needed; just an exchange of glances told that two hearts were very happy that night, for love and confidence had come to dwell within them.

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## CHAPTER XX

### "NOW TREAD WE A MEASURE."

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Shall we ever grow too old to recall the pleasure of our school dances? Then lights seem brighter, toilets more ravishing, music sweeter, our partners more fascinating, and the supper more tempting than ever before or after.

The house was brilliantly lighted from top to bottom, excepting in such cosy corners as were specially conducive to confidential chats, and in these softly shaded lamps cast a fairy-like light.

Miss Preston, dressed in black velvet, with some rich old lace to enhance its charms, received

her guests in the great hall, some of the older girls receiving with her.

There were ten or more girls who were taking special courses, and these were styled "parlor boarders," and at the end of the school term would enter society. Consequently, this dance was looked upon as a preliminary step for the one to follow, and the girls regarded it as a sort of "golden mile-stone" in their lives, which marked off the point at which "the brook and river meet."

A prettier, happier lot of girls could hardly have been found, and none looked lovelier, or happier, than Toinette. Her dress, a soft, creamy white chiffon, admirably suited to her golden coloring, had been sent to her by her father, whose taste was unerring. No matter how many miles of this big globe divided them, he never forgot her needs, and, if unable to supply them himself, took good care that some one else should do so. So the dress had arrived the night before, and Miss Preston had been able to give her another pleasant surprise for the dance. And now she looked as the lilies of the field for fairness.

She was whirling away upon her partner's arm, when, chancing to glance toward the door, she beheld something which brought her to an abrupt stand-still, much to her partner's amazement. Miss Preston stood in the doorway, and, standing beside her, with one hand resting lightly upon his hip and the other raised a little above his head, and resting against the door-casing, stood a tall, remarkably handsome man. His attitude was unstudied, but brought out to perfection the fine lines of his figure.

Hastily exclaiming: "Oh, please, excuse me, or else come with me," Toinette glided between the whirling figures, and, forgetful of all else, cried out in a joyous voice: "Papa, papa Clayton, where *did* you come from?"

It was so like the childish voice he had loved to hear so long ago, that he started with pleasure.

During the brief holiday Toinette had spent with him he had missed the spontaneity he had known in the little child, and, without being able to analyze it, felt that something was wanting in the girl. She had been sweet and winning, yet under it all had been a manner quite incomprehensible to him, as though she did not feel quite sure of her position in his affections. Her laugh had lacked the true girlish ring, and her conversation with him seemed guarded, as though she had never quite spoken all her thoughts.

He had been immeasurably distressed by it, for he could not understand the cause, and bitterly reproached himself for not being better acquainted with his own child. In the merry girl who now stood before him, her eyes shining, her cheeks flushed with excitement, her voice so joyous, he saw no trace of the listless one he had placed in Miss Preston's charge two months before.

Slipping one arm about her, he snuggled her close to his side, as he answered:

"A blue-coated biped left a good, substantial hint at my office not long since, and this is what came of following it."

"*You* did it! I'm sure of it," laughed Toinette, shaking her finger at Miss Preston, as the latter said: "I leave you to a livelier entertainer, now, Mr. Reeve, while I go to look after some of my guests who may not be so fortunately situated," and she slipped away, Toinette calling after her: "You are responsible for most of the nice things which happen here. Oh, daddy," dropping unconsciously into the old childish pet name, "I've such stacks of things to tell you. But, excuse me just one second, while I find a partner for that boy I've left stranded high and dry over there; doesn't he look miserable? Then I'll come back," and, kissing her hand gaily, she ran off. Returning a moment or two later, she said:

"There! he's all fixed, and is sure to have a good time with Ethel and Lou; they're not a team, but a four-in-hand. Now, come and have a dance with me, and then we'll go off all by ourselves and have the cosiest time you ever dreamed of. I feel so proud to have you all to myself," she added, as they glided away to the soft strains of the music, "so sort of grown-up and grand with such a handsome partner."

"Hear! hear! Do you want to make me vain? I haven't been accustomed to hearing such barefaced compliments. They make me blush."

"I really believe they *do*," answered Toinette, throwing back her head to get a better look at him, and laughing softly when she saw a slight flush upon his face. "Never mind, it is all in the family, you know."

"Perhaps I have other reasons for feeling a trifle elated," he said, as the dance came to an end and he followed Toinette to one of the cozy corners. Springing up among the cushions, she patted them invitingly, and said:

"Come, sit down here beside me, and let me tell you all about the loveliest time of my life. Oh, daddy, I *do* so love to be here, and you don't know how good Miss Preston is to me. She is good to us all, but, somehow the other girls don't seem to need so much setting straight as *I* have. I think I must have been all kinked up in little hard knots before I came here, and Miss Preston has begun to untie them. She hasn't got all untied yet, but I feel so sort of loosened up and easy that everything seems lots more comfortable."



"I FEEL SO SORT OF GROWN UP AND GRAND."

Clayton Reeve did not smile at Toinette's odd way of explaining her feelings. He knew it to be a fourteen-year-old girl who spoke, and that her thoughts, to be natural, must be put into her own words. 195

On she rambled, telling one thing after another, and, while they were talking, Helen Burgess stopped near their snugger. It was too dimly lighted for her to discover them, and the next thing they knew they were unwitting eavesdroppers, for Helen was talking very earnestly to one of her boon companions, a day-pupil at the school, and one of the brightest in it, but, like Helen, not embarrassed with riches. For some time the girls had been saving their small allowances toward the purchase of cameras, but so slowly did the sums accumulate that it was rather discouraging for them. They were now talking about their respective ways of procuring the sums of money needed, and the trifle they had managed to save, and the small amounts they earned in one way or another, to augment the original sums, seemed so paltry to Toinette, who never stopped to ask whence came the five-dollar bills so regularly sent her each week, and who, had a fancy entered her head for one, would have walked out and bought a camera very much as she would have bought a paper of pins. 196

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## CHAPTER XXI

### CONSPIRATORS

Mr. Reeve would have risen from his snug corner and discovered himself to the girls, but Toinette laid her finger upon her lips to enjoin silence, and, although he could not quite understand her desire to play eavesdropper, he complied. From the subject of the cameras the girls went on to Helen's work in the art class, for Jean was much interested in that also, and they often built air-castles about the wonderful things they would do when that fabulous "stone ship" should sail safely into port. They talked earnestly for girls of thirteen and fifteen, and Mr. Reeve could not fail to be impressed by the strength of purpose they seemed to possess, and, having a good bit of stick-to-ativeness himself, admired it in others. Moreover, he had been forced to make his own way in life when young, and could sympathize with other aspiring souls. 197

Presently the two girls moved away, and then Toinette whispered: "I don't know what you think of me for making you play 'Paul Pry,' but I had a reason for it, and now I'll tell you what it was."

"I inferred as much, so kept mum."

"Well, you see, since I've been here I've waked up a little, and, somehow, have begun to think about other people, and wonder if they were happy. At Miss Carter's school everybody just seemed to think about themselves, or, if they thought of anybody else, it was generally to wonder how they could get ahead of them in some way. But here it is all so different, and everybody seems to try to find out what they can do to make someone else happy. I can't begin to tell you how it is done, because I don't know myself; only it *is*, and it makes you feel sort of 199

happy all over," said Toinette, trying to put into words that subtle something which makes us feel at peace with all mankind, and little realizing that its cause lay right within herself; for a sense of having done one's very best and a clear conscience are wonderful rosy spectacles through which to see life.

"Go on, I'm keenly interested, and these little confidences are very delightful," said her father, with an encouraging nod and smile.

"So I began to want to do little things, too, and, do you know, daddy, you'd be really surprised if you knew what a lot of ways there are of making the girls happy if you only take the trouble to look for them. For instance, there is Helen Burgess, the larger of the girls you saw just now: we have become real good friends, and she is very clever, and draws beautifully. But she has so little to do with that she can't afford to get the things the other girls have to work with, nor have the advantages they have. She and Jean have been trying ever so long to get cameras, for they think that they could take pretty views of Montcliff and sell them to the people who come here in the summer, and I'm sure they could, too. It does not make so much difference to Jean, for, although she isn't rich, she isn't exactly poor, either, you know, and has a good many nice things, but Helen never seems to have any. So I thought I'd have a little talk with you and get you to send out a cute little camera for each of them and never let them know where they came from. Wouldn't that be great fun? But I want to pay for them. You can use ten dollars of my money, and not send me my allowance for two weeks; I've got enough to last."

"And what will my poverty-stricken lassie do meantime?" asked Mr. Reeve.

"Oh, she is not so poverty-stricken as you think," laughed Toinette. "She won't suffer. And then I wanted to ask you if there wasn't some way of helping Helen in her art work. She wants so much to go abroad with Miss Preston, but has no more idea of ever being able to do so than she has of going to the moon. What would it cost, papa? Isn't there some way of bringing it about? Couldn't you have a talk with Miss Preston and find out all about it, and then we could plan something, maybe."

Toinette had become very earnest as she talked, and was now leaning toward her father, her hands clasped in her lap, and her expressive face alive with enthusiasm.

Mr. Reeve hated to spoil the pretty picture, but said, in the interested tone so comforting when used by older people in speaking to young folk: "I am sure we can evolve some plan. I shall be very glad to speak to Miss Preston before I return to the city, and haven't the slightest doubt that great things will come of it."

"How lovely! You're just a darling! I'm going to hug you right here behind the curtains!" cried Toinette, as she sprung up and clasped her arms about his neck.

"Haven't you one or two more favors you'd like to ask?" said Mr. Reeve, suggestively.

"No, not another one, just now," she answered, laughing softly. "Too many might turn your head, and mine, too. But it is so good to have you home once more. You don't know how lonely I've been without you, daddy. There wasn't anyone in the world who cared two straws for me till you came back and I came here. But I've got you now, and I'm not going to let you go very soon again, I can tell you. You are too precious, and we are going to have lovely times together by-and-by when I grow up, aren't we?"

"We are not going to wait till then, sweetheart; we are going to begin right off, this very minute. I can't afford to waste any more precious time; too much has been wasted already," he said, as he raised the pretty face and kissed it, and then, drawing her arm through his, added: "Now let me do the honors. Introduce me to your friends, and let me see if seven years' knocking about this old world has made me forget the 'Quips, and Cranks, and Wanton Wiles, Nods, and Becks, and Wreathed Smiles' I used to know."

They left the snuggery, and, blissfully conscious of her honors, Toinette presented her father to the girls. Just how proud they were of the marked attention he showed to each I'll leave it to some other girls to guess. He danced with them, took them to supper, sought out the greatest delicacies for them, and played the gallant as though he were but twenty instead of forty-two. "He treated us just as though we were the big girls," they said, when holding forth upon the subject the next day.

Twelve o'clock came all too soon.

Mr. Reeve remained over night, and the following day found an opportunity to have a long talk with Miss Preston—a talk which afforded him great satisfaction for many reasons.

Toinette, with several of the other girls, escorted him to the train, and gave him a most enthusiastic "send-off."

In the course of a few days a package was delivered at the school. Had bomb-shells been dropped there they could hardly have created more excitement. Jean's house was only a few blocks from the school, and one Saturday morning—for the cameras were obliging enough to choose that day to appear—Mrs. Rockwood's sitting-room was the scene of the wildest excitement.

## "WE'VE GOT 'EM! WE'VE GOT 'EM!"

Mrs. Rockwood was in her sitting-room one morning. It was Saturday, and a day of liberty for Jean. She had gone over to the school to spend a few hours with Helen, and Mrs. Lockwood did not expect her home until lunch-time, but, happening to glance from her window about ten o'clock, what was her surprise to see two figures approaching, one with a series of bounds, prances and jumps, which indicated a wildly hilarious and satisfied frame of mind in Jean, and the other with a subdued hop and skip, and then a sedate walk, which, although less demonstrative, was quite as indicative of a very deep and serene happiness to any one familiar with Helen.

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A moment later the front door slammed, and two pairs of feet came tearing up the stairs as though pursued by Boer cavalry, and two eager voices cried:

"We've got 'em! We've got 'em! We've got 'em!" and both girls came tearing into the room to cast themselves and two very suggestive looking parcels upon Mrs. Rockwood.

"What in this world has happened?" she asked, in amazement, for both girls were breathless, and could only point at the parcels in her lap and say: "Open them! Open them, quick!"

Mrs. Rockwood was a woman who entered heart and soul into her daughter's pleasures, and nothing was ever quite right in Jean's eyes unless her mother shared it. Every little plan must be talked over with her, and it was pretty sure not to suffer any from one of her suggestions. Helen spent a great deal of time with Jean and was devoted to Mrs. Rockwood. Consequently, when the cameras arrived at the school that morning, and they found out that there was really no mistake, but that they were certainly intended for the persons whose names were so plainly written upon the boxes, and sent in Miss Preston's care, they could hardly wait to get over to Jean's house to show their treasures to her mother. Many had been the surmises as to whom had sent such beauties, but Toinette kept a perfectly sober face, and no one suspected the secret.

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Carefully removing the wrappings, Mrs. Rockwood brought the contents of the boxes to view. She was as much surprised as the girls, and exclaimed: "Why, who could have sent them to you, and how did anyone learn that you were so anxious to have them? Such beauties, too!"

"That is the funniest part of it all, for we never told a soul, and didn't mean to till we had them, and now here they are. I believe St. Nick must have heard us wishing for them," said Helen.

"And to *both* of us, and just *alike*! Think of it! Oh, moddie, isn't it lovely?" and Jean threw her arms about her mother's neck by way of giving vent to her feelings.

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"I'm as delighted as you and Helen are, dear, only I wish we might learn who our benefactor is."

"Yes, isn't it too bad. Well, it may crop out later. I thought first it must be Miss Preston, but she said that she did not know any more about it than we did," said Helen.

"Now, when may we take our pictures, and what shall we take?" cried Jean.

"You suggest something, Mrs. Rockwood; it will be nicer if you do it," said Helen, dropping down upon her knees beside Mrs. Rockwood, and placing her arm around her friend's waist.

Mrs. Rockwood drew her close to her side as she replied:

"Let me examine these treasures which have arrived so mysteriously, read the directions concerning them, and then we'll see what we'll see," and she began to read: "Take the camera into a perfectly dark closet, where no ray of light can penetrate (even covering the keyhole), and then place within it one of the sensitive plates, being careful not to expose the unused plates. Your camera is now ready to take the picture, etc." "That is all very simple, I'm sure, and if the taking proves as simple as are the directions you need have little apprehension of failure. But your directions add very explicitly that you must *not* attempt to take a picture unless the day is sunny. So I fear those conditions preclude the possibility of your taking any upon this cloudy day, and you will have to possess your souls in peace till 'Old Sol' favors you."

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"Oh, dear, isn't that too bad! I thought we could take some right off. Don't you think we might at least try, mamma?"

"I fear they would prove failures; better wait a more favorable light."

As though to tantalize frail humanity, "Old Sol" remained very exclusive all day, and, even though Helen remained till evening in the hope that he would overcome his fit of sulks, nothing of the kind happened, and she was forced to go back to the school without one.

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"Just wait till Monday, and we'll do wonders; see if we don't," said Jean, as she bade her farewell, little dreaming what wonders she was destined to do with her magical box ere the sun set Monday night.

"I'll ask Miss Preston to let me come over at four o'clock on Monday, and then we'll go out in the little dell and get a lovely picture. You know the place I mean: where that old clump of fir-trees stands by the ruined wall," said artistic Helen.

But when Monday arrived unforeseen difficulties arose for Jean. The day was the sunniest ever known, and, while waiting for Helen to come, she got out the precious camera to set the plates.

"Why, mamma, there isn't a dark closet in the whole house; not a single one," cried Jean, coming into her mother's room as she was dressing to go out on Monday afternoon. "Now, where in this world am I to open my plate-box, I'd like to know?"

Mrs. Rockwood laughed as she turned toward Jean, whose face was the picture of dismay. "True enough, there isn't. Now, who would have supposed that the architect who designed this house, and put a window in every closet, could have been so short-sighted as not to anticipate such a need as the present one?"

"But what am I to do?" desperately.

"Try putting a dark covering over the windows."

"I have, but it's just no use, for I can't get it pitch dark to save me."

"And to think that barely forty-eight hours ago I was congratulating myself that every closet in the house could be properly aired. Alas! how do our recent acquisitions alter our views?"

"Now, moddie, don't laugh, but stop teasing me, and just think as hard as ever you can *how* I am to find a dark place."

Mrs. Rockwood thought for a few moments, and then said:

"I have it! Mary's pot-closet, under the back stairs; that is as dark as a pocket, I'm sure."

"There! I knew you'd find a way; you always do. Just the very place, and now I'm going straight down to fix it. Good-bye," and, kissing her mother, away she flew.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A CAMERA'S CAPERS.

"Mary!" cried Jean, as she bounced into the kitchen, where the maid, a typical "child of Erin," who worshipped the very ground Jean trod upon, stood at the sink paring her "taties" for the evening meal, "see my new camera; I'm going to take a picture with it, and I've got to go into your pot-closet to fix the plates."

"A picter, is it? And will ye be afther takin' a picter wid that schmall bit av a black box? How do ye do it at all, I do' know."

"Oh, I go into a dark closet and put a gelatine plate in the box, and then I go outdoors and take my picture."

"A gilitin plate, is it? Thin, faith, ye'll take ne'er a picter this day, for Oi'm jist afther usin' the last schrap av gilitin in the house to make the wine jilly fer the dinner."

"I don't mean *that* kind of gelatine; the kind I use is already prepared on little plates in this box, and I have to go in the dark closet to fix them."

"Faith, I'd fix thim out here, thin, where ye can see what ye're about. It's dungeon dhark in the pot-closet."

"That is exactly what I want, and, *please*, don't come near it, or open the door while I'm in there, will you?"

"No, no; I'll not come near ye. The minute I've done me taties it's down in the laundry Oi'm goin', an' Oi'll not bother ye at all; but here, take this schmall, little candle wid ye whan ye go in, fer it's that dhark ye'll not see yer hand forninst ye," and she caught up a candle from the shelf.

"No, no! I don't *want* any light; the darker it is the better."

"It's crackin' yer head aff ye'll be."

"No, I sha'n't," said Jean, as she whisked into the closet and drew the door together just as Mary started down the back stairs to the laundry.

Had the closet been designed for an eel-pot it would have proved the most complete success, for getting into it was a very simple matter, whereas, getting *out* required considerable ingenuity. Absorbed in the one idea of getting the plates placed in the camera, Jean entirely forgot the peculiarities of the fastening upon the door. As she slammed it together every ray of light vanished, and she was instantly enveloped in an Egyptian darkness. Carefully opening her box, she drew from it one of the plates, touched it with her fingers to find which side was coated with the gelatine preparation, placed it in the camera and turned to leave the closet.

"Now, I'll have a picture in just about two jiffs," she said, and pushed against the door. To her surprise, it did not open. Another push, with the same result. It then dawned upon her that the spring-bolt had fastened upon the outer side. Feeling carefully about in the pitch darkness, she laid her things upon the shelf and tried to find a way of getting out. But, push, shake and rattle as she might, it was useless; the door remained tightly fastened.

"Mary," she called, "come and let me out, please."

No response.

"M-a-r-y! I'm locked in; come let me out!"

"What in the whorld is the matter wid ye?" came from the foot of the stairs.

"I'm locked *in* and can't get out; come and open the door!"

"Och, worra! Don't be callin' to me not to *open* the door; didn't Oi tell ye Oi wouldn't come near ye, and Oi *won't*. It's goin' down to the bharn Oi am, and ye needn't be for worritin', at all, at all," and receding footsteps proved Mary's words only too true.

"Now, I'm in a pretty fix, am I not? Like enough she won't come back for twenty minutes, and here I've got to stay. Plague take the old bolt!"

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What imp of mischief made Mary return to the laundry by the cellar-door, take up her basket of freshly laundered clothes, and, after carrying them up to Mrs. Rockwood's bedroom, go on to her own in the third story to dress for the afternoon, must forever remain a mystery. But this she did, and, as Jean heard her go up the back stairs, beneath which she was securely fastened in the pot-closet, she thumped and pounded with renewed energy. But the only response was:

"No, no; not for the whorld, darlint, would Oi disthurbe ye and spoil yer purty picter."

About an hour later Mrs. Rockwood, returning from her call, met Helen upon the front piazza.

"Has Jean got everything ready to take the pictures?" she asked, eagerly. "It is such a perfect day for it, and I am so anxious that I can hardly wait. It seems too good to be true that we have really got cameras at last, doesn't it?"

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"It seems as though the fairies must have been aware of your great desire to have them, and so took matters into their own hands," replied Mrs. Rockwood, as she unfastened the front door with her latch-key and held it open for Helen to enter.

As they entered the hall they were greeted with a series of muffled thumps and bangs.

"I *do* wish Mary would remember what I have so often told her about breaking her kindling upon the cellar floor," she exclaimed.

Rattle, rattle! Bang, bang! and then a crash as though the roof were falling.

"What under the sun can be the matter!" exclaimed Mrs. Rockwood.

Just then Mary appeared at the head of the stairs.

"Why, Mary, what is all this noise?"

"Shure, it was comin' down mesilf Oi was to see. Saints presarve us, can there be thieves in the house, Oi do' know!"

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"Rather noisy thieves, I should think. Where is Miss Jean?"

"Out in the fields beyant, wid her bit av a camela takin' her picter, Oi'm thinkin'. 'Twas there she said she'd be goin' afther she came out of the pot-closet—saints have mercy! Could she *git* out at all, at all?" and Mary tore down the stairs, with Mrs. Rockwood and Helen close at her heels. She reached the closet, flung open the door, and beheld a spectacle. Seated on the floor, in the midst of a scattered array of pots, kettles and frying-pans, her box of plates upset, her precious camera in her lap, and blissfully unconscious that the slide was open, sat Jean, a very picture of despair.

"Mighty man! And have ye been in here all this toim, an' not to be smothered dead!" cried Mary.

"How could I be anywhere *else*, I'd like to know?" said Jean, indignantly. "I called and *called*, but I couldn't get you to let me out," and, bouncing up, she scrabbled the plates back into their box, then caught up the camera to see if all was as it should be with that. As she jumped up the slide closed, and, quite unaware that it had ever been open, she announced to her nearly convulsed audience:

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"Well, I'm *out* at last, and now I hope I can take a picture; come on, Helen," little dreaming that the treacherous sunlight, which flashed through the hall window and straight into the pot-closet, had already printed a most perfect one on the plate.

A few moments later both she and Helen were out in the fields back of the house, and had snapped charming little scenes.

Bemoaning her unintentional trick, Mary went back to her work, while Mrs. Rockwood went up to her room to laugh heartily over the mishap, never suspecting that the funniest part would appear in the sequel.

A half hour later the girls came flying into her room to say, excitedly:



"AN' HAVE YE BEEN IN THERE ALL THIS TIME?"

"We've taken them! We've taken them!"

"And I know they will be just lovely, for the sun shone right on the trees and the ruins. How I wish we could develop them; don't you, Helen?"

"Yes, I'd like to know how, and, now that I have the camera, I shall get a developing outfit and learn; but let's take these right over to Charlton's and have him develop them for us."

They started for the village to leave the plates to be developed, and waited with what patience they could for the following day, when the photographer promised to send them the proofs.

They came, and one at least was truly a marvel.

In the foreground of Jean's was a pretty clump of fir-trees growing beside an old ruined stone wall, under which nestled a bunch of dry goldenrod. But the background! Did ever the maddest artist's brain conceive of such? Clear and distinct, where sky should have been, stood—a frying-pan!

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## CHAPTER XXIV

### WHISPERS

March, with its winds and storms, slipped away as though glad to whisk such trying days off the calendar, and, ere the girls realized it, Easter vacation was upon them, and capricious April was playing the schoolgirl herself, with one day a smile and the next a frown. But, like the schoolgirl, her smiles were all the sunnier for the frowns.

It must indeed be a dull, prosy old heart which cannot respond to the soft beauty of early spring, and want to frisk and frolic for very sympathy with all the new life springing into existence all about it. And there were no dull or prosy ones at Sunny Bank.

For some time the girls had known that this would be Miss Howard's last year with them; but now little whispers began to fly about, as little whispers have a trick of doing, that Miss Howard was about to enter another school, where she would be pupil instead of teacher, and there learn the sweetest lesson ever taught on this big earth—a lesson which says, "Not mine and thine, but ours, for ours is mine and thine;" and, while they rejoiced in her happiness, they were nearly inconsolable at the thought of losing her, for she had filled a very beautiful place in their lives—far more beautiful than they suspected. It was always Miss Howard who entered into all their little plans and pleasures, participated in their joys, and sympathized with their sorrows.

She was little more than a girl herself, yet possessed the strength of character sometimes wanting in a much older person, and by it set a beautiful example for her girls to follow. And they followed it unconsciously to themselves and to her, for never was there a more modest little body than Miss Howard, and had anyone hinted that she was a mighty balance-wheel to

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her fly-away girls, a source of encouragement to her timid ones, an inspiration to her ambitious ones, and an object of very sincere affection to all, she would probably have been the most surprised person in the school. Yet such was undoubtedly the fact, and it would have been a very wrong-headed girl, indeed, who was not ready to yield to her influence.

"If I felt criss-cross with all the world, I believe I'd have to smile back when Miss Howard smiled at me," said Toinette, shortly after she became a pupil in the school. "Her eyes are just as soft as the little Alderney bossie's, and her lips look sort of grieved if the girls look cross."

And so the whispers grew louder and louder till just after the Easter holidays were over, and then all who loved her best learned that early in June wedding bells would ring and a very bonny bride would step forth from Sunny Bank, with several bonny bridesmaids leading the way, and one maid of honor to scatter the posies which were to be symbolical, as all hoped, of her future pathway through life.

And then arose the all-important question as to whom Miss Howard would choose for that great honor, and excitement ran high.

All the girls had a strong suspicion that it would be Toinette, although, to do her justice, Toinette herself did not suspect it. Still, Miss Howard had taken a keen interest in the girl ever since she entered the school, and felt strongly drawn toward her, being quick to see her good qualities, and to understand that the undesirable ones were very largely the result of unfortunate circumstances. So she had striven in her sweet and gracious way to help Toinette without words, and had been a strong support to Miss Preston.

As the warm spring days made wood and field to blossom, the girls spent a great deal of their time out of doors. Sunny Bank's grounds were very beautiful, and the adjacent field and woodland very enticing at that season. Basket-ball was a favorite source of amusement, and the lawn devoted to it as soft and smooth as velvet. So nearly every afternoon the team could be seen bounding about like so many marionettes, and if touseled hair and demoralized attire resulted, what did it matter? Rosy cheeks and ravenous appetites were excellent compensations.

It was the fifteenth of April, and Toinette's birthday. Many a climb had the expressman's horse taken up the long hill leading to Sunny Bank that morning, for, if Toinette had but few friends, she certainly had a very generous father, who meant that she should have her full share of birthday remembrances, and they kept coming thick and fast all day. With each came a funny note to say that he was sending still another package because he did not want her to have all her surprises in a lump; they would seem so much more if coming in installments. So they kept coming all day long, and by four o'clock her room looked like a fancy bazaar. Last of all to arrive was a large box upon which was printed in flaring scarlet letters: "Not to be opened till it is ten A. M. in *Bombay*."

The box stood in the hall when Miss Preston passed through the hall to dinner, and, unless suddenly stricken with ophthalmia, she could not fail to see the flaring notice. "Ah," she said, softly, to herself, "you have a triple mission, you inanimate bit of the carpenter's skill: first, to teach my girls a lesson in longitude and time, second, to mutely ask my permission for a frolic to-night, and, third, to suggest that when birthdays arrive it would be a most auspicious time for the "C. C. C.'s" to hold their revels, and that Diogenes' tub, if not himself, would be welcome, so I had better act upon the hint and contribute my share. Thank you, sir," and, with a funny little nod to the box, she went on to the dining-room.

"What is the joke, Miss Preston?" asked Cicely, as Miss Preston took her seat.

"Do you think I'm going to spoil it by revealing it so soon? No, indeed," and she laughed softly.

When dinner was ended the girls flocked around the box and curiosity ran riot. "What does that mean, Miss Preston? Do tell us."

"I have other matters of such importance on hand that I must deputize Miss Howard to unravel the mystery for you," she said, as she slipped away to the upper hall where the telephone was placed, and a moment later the girls heard the bell jingle and a funny, one-sided conversation followed. "Hello, Central! 1305. Is this 1305? Send me the usual order. Yes, four kinds. Eight. Well packed. Be prompt."

The porter carried the big box to Toinette's room and removed the lid for her. Such an array! I'm not going to attempt to tell about it, but shall let every girl who has ever attended a chum's birthday feast mention the articles of which that feast consisted, and then, after combining the entire list, they can form some idea of the contents of Toinette's box.

"Fly, Cicely, and hunt up every C. C. C., and a dozen besides! We can never dispose of such a cartload of stuff in a week if we don't have the entire school to help us," cried Toinette, as she lifted one thing after another from the box.

There is a saying that "Ill news flies fast," but, in my humble opinion, it is as a stage-coach beside the Empire State Express when compared to the fleetness of good news. So it did not take long to start this bit like an electric fluid through the school, and what sort of "Free Masonry" filled in details so successfully I know not.

## CHAPTER XXV

## "WHAT ARE YOU DOING UP THIS TIME OF NIGHT?"

It so happened that of the ten resident teachers but three were at home that evening; the others having joined a theatre party going to town, and it would be midnight before they returned.

Those at home were Miss Preston, Miss Howard, and, unfortunately, Mrs. Stone. Of the first two mentioned the girls felt small apprehension, for they understood them pretty thoroughly, but Mrs. Stone was an obstacle not so easily surmounted, and it seemed to them that she was never more ubiquitous.

At nine-thirty Miss Preston had bade all good-night in an unusually solicitous manner, wishing each happy dreams. Miss Howard had also retired to her room promptly at the stroke of the clock, and everything worked most auspiciously excepting the tucking away of Mother Stone, and she positively refused to be tucked, but kept prowling about like a lost spirit, till Ruth said, in desperation: "If she doesn't get settled down pretty soon I'll do something desperate; see if I don't."

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From room to room she went, popping her head in at one to ask if there was anything she could do for this girl, listening at the next door for sounds of insomnia, creeping stealthily on through the corridors to learn if any girl who ought to be en route for Sleepy Town had by chance missed her way.

She had made her way as far as the lower end of the hall, where on one side the stairs leading to the third story joined it, and on the other a door opened into the bath-room, when a rustle at the head of the stairs caused her to glance quickly in that direction; but it was too dark for her to see anything at the top of them. She paused to listen, and her sharp ears detected the sound again. That was sufficient. Up she flew and came plump upon Lou Cornwall, who had not had time to fly. Lou was stout and did not move quickly, and was fair prey for Mrs. Stone, who was as thin as a match, and managed to glide about like a wraith.

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Lou was arrayed in her bath-robe, and had her cap and mask in her hand. Quickly concealing them behind her lest Mrs. Stone's sharp eyes should discover them even in the dark, she stood stock still waiting developments. Mrs. Stone stooped from her towering height of five feet nine to peer into the face of the plump little figure huddled in the corner. "How you startled me," she said. "Why are you standing here when everyone else is in bed, and what are you doing up this time of night?"

"I had to get up, Mrs. Stone."

"Why, may I enquire?"

"I am going to the bath-room."

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"Then, why in the world don't you *go* and not stand huddled up here as though you were bent on some mischief? It is no wonder that we suspect you when you take such extraordinary ways of doing perfectly simple things. Go on at once, and, if you have been hesitating because you are timid, I'll wait here till you return," and down she planted herself upon the top step to mount guard.

Groaning inwardly, away went Lou, muttering: "If I don't keep you perched there till you nearly freeze, my name isn't Lou Cornwall!"

And keep her she did, till Mrs. Stone had another trouble added to her many, for she began to fear that Lou had been taken ill, and went to the bath-room door to speak to her. Finding that she could not hold out any longer, out she came, and, after receiving some very emphatic admonitions from Mrs. Stone, crept away to her room disgusted with herself, the world at large, and Mrs. Stone in particular.

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Meantime, the other girls began to suspect that Lou had fallen into ambush, and sent out a scout to reconnoiter, and it was not many seconds before the scout came scuttling back with the alarming information that the enemy was close at hand; in fact, that she was even now coming upon them in force, for, when Mother Stone found that Lou did not come from the bath-room as promptly as she thought she should, all her suspicions were instantly aroused, and she was keen to make discoveries.

The girls had planned to meet in Toinette's room, and creep from there to the old laundry as soon as all were assembled. About a dozen were already there, but, when the scout returned with such dire tidings, they decided that discretion was the better part of valor, and all made haste to get back to their rooms ere the enemy appeared. But, alack-a-day! that enemy could flit about in a surprisingly lively manner, and, ere some of them had reached safety behind their own doors, she came in view. To get to their rooms now was out of the question, so, making a virtue of necessity, they all slipped into a large closet used by the housemaids for their brooms, etc.

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Whether it was from a wholesome fear that Miss Preston would be very apt to criticize a too pronounced vigilance that Mrs. Stone refrained from opening the girls' doors, but contented

herself with simply listening, I cannot say, but if she heard no sound within she always passed on and left them to their innocent (?) slumbers. So on she went from one room to another, but, luckily, the alarm had gone before, and at each room darkness and profound silence prevailed. Satisfied that "all was well," she murmured something about, "It is always well to be upon the alert, for once the girls understand that someone is sure to detect the first signs of mischief, they are far less liable to carry it to excess," she set off for her own room. In passing by the housemaid's door she saw that it was not tightly closed and locked, as was the custom at night, and, with a joyous chuckle at her own astuteness, she pounced upon it, locked the door, and withdrawing the key sailed triumphantly to her room, where, serene in her sense of well-doing, she fell as sound asleep as her nature permitted.

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Meantime, how fared it with the mice in the trap? When the key was turned in the door, and they were made prisoners, nothing but the pitch darkness which enveloped them as a garment prevented each girl's face from plainly announcing to her neighbor: "Here is a pretty kettle of fish!" There were five in the closet: Ruth, Edith, Pauline, May and Marie. Luckily, a resourceful party. When all sound from the hall had ceased, Ruth gave just one howl, and then jumped up and down three times as hard as she could jump, by way of giving vent to her state of mind. Fortunately, the door was a heavy one and the sound did not reach Mother Stone's ears.

"You crazy thing!" exclaimed Edith, "next thing you know you will have her after us again."

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"Suppose we do; we've got to get out somehow, haven't we?"

"Yes, but she is the last one in the world we want to let us out. What a fix! If the girls only knew of it, they would come and let us out."

"How could they when she has the key, I'd like to know?"

Edith groaned: "I never thought of that plagued old key. Bother take her and it, too! Why couldn't she have gone to bed just as everybody else did, and have minded her own business, too."

"That was exactly what she thought she was doing," laughed May.

"It's all very well to laugh, but *how* are we to get down to the laundry, I'd like to know; or the girls ever find out where we are?"

While all this talking had been going on, little Marie, the liveliest, slightest, most quick-witted girl in the school, had been doing a lot of thinking, and now turned to the others and said:

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"Do you see that scrap of a window up there?"

"Yes, we see it, but it might as well be a rat-hole, for all the good it will do us; nothing but a rat could crawl through it!"

"Don't be too sure," answered Marie, with a knowing laugh. "I can get through a pretty small space when occasion demands, and, if I'm not much mistaken, the demand is very urgent just at this moment."

"How under the sun can you reach it, even if you can get through it after you've reached it?"

"What good have you derived from your gymnastic training this winter, I'd like to know, if you have to ask me that?" demanded Marie.

The window was one of those odd little affairs one sometimes sees built in houses, perhaps simply to excite curiosity and make one wonder why they were ever built at all, for they do not seem to be of the slightest use. The one in question was situated high up in the closet, and had probably been put there for ventilating purposes, if anyone ever felt inclined to get a step-ladder and clamber up to open it. It was shaped like a segment of a circle, was only about eighteen inches high at the widest part, and fastened at the top with a bolt. Getting at it in broad daylight would not have been an easy matter, and now, with only the light of the moon shining through it, it seemed an impossibility.

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## CHAPTER XXVI

### "LOVE (AND SCHOOLGIRLS) LAUGH AT LOCKSMITHS"

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"Here, I'm going to take command of affairs, since no one else seems inclined to," cried Marie. "May, you are the strongest girl here; just give me a shoulder, will you?"

"What shall I do?"

"Stand close to the wall underneath the window, and let me get on your shoulder; it may hurt a bit, but we can't stay stived up in here all night. Lend a hand, Ruth, and boost me up."

A step-ladder of knees and arms was formed, and up scrambled Marie as nimbly as a squirrel. Then another obstacle confronted her. The window had probably never been opened since it was built, and, having never been called upon to do its share in the economy of that household,

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was disinclined to begin now. Marie's slender fingers were dented and pinched in vain; that window remained obdurate.

"For mercy sake come down and give the old thing up! My shoulder is crushed flat," said May.

"Wait just one second longer, and I'll have it; see if I don't. Ruth, hand me that stair-brush, please."

Ruth gave her the brush, and, saying to May: "Now, brace yourself for a mighty push," she used the handle as a lever, gave a vigorous jerk, when away went bolt, window, Marie and all. Down she came with a thud, but, luckily, on a pile of sweeping cloths, which saved her from harm.

Scrabbling up, she cried: "Never mind, I'm not hurt a bit; now boost me up again, and let me see what is outside."

She was promptly lifted up, and, poking her saucy head out into the moonlight, drew in long whiffs of the sweet night air, which was wonderfully refreshing after the stuffy closet.

"The shed is about ten feet below, girls. If I had anything to lower myself down with I could easily reach it; I'm almost afraid to let myself drop, the shed slopes so."

"Hang fast a second while Ruth and I tie the sweeping-cloths together," cried May, and quickly catching up the calico covers they began to tie them together.

"See that you tie them tightly," warned Marie. "I've had one bump already, and I don't want another."

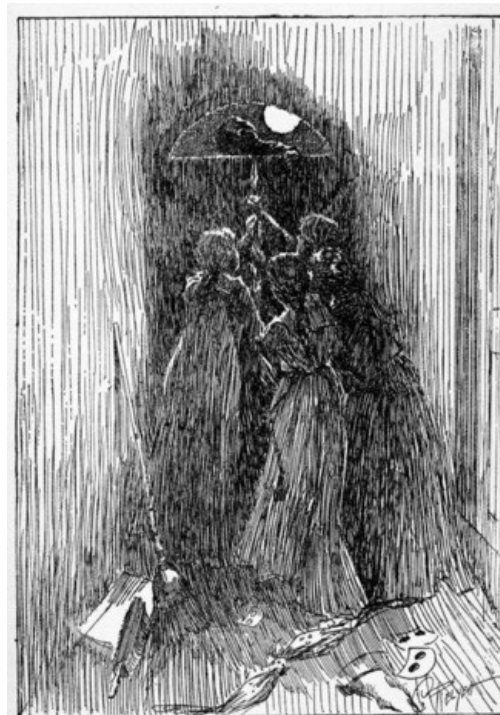
The cloths were soon ready, and one end handed to her. She fastened it securely about her waist, and, warning the others to hang on for dear life, she began to crawl through the narrow opening.

"My goodness, she is just like a monkey," said Pauline. "I never could have done it in the world," a most superfluous assertion, as no one in the world would ever have suspected her of being able to.

Away went Marie, vanishing bit by bit from their sight till only her laughing black eyes, with the soft dark hair above them, were visible in the moonlight. The girls lowered away slowly, and presently felt the strain upon the cloths relax.

"She's on the shed! Good!" said Edith, "and now she'll have us out in less than jig time."

But "many's the slip twixt the—lip and the birthday box," and the girls began to suspect Marie of treachery to the cause ere they again heard her voice.



"AWAY WENT MARIE, VANISHING BIT BY BIT."

Meantime, how fared it with her? Once upon the shed all seemed plain sailing, but the shed was somewhat like the mountains Moses climbed so wearily; it gave her a glimpse of the promised land without permitting her to enter it. The ground was fully sixteen feet below her, and to reach it without some means other than her own nimble legs was obviously impossible. The shed was only a small one built out over the kitchen, but just beyond, with perhaps five feet dividing them, was the end of the piazza roof, and if she could only reach that she could let herself down to the ground by the thick vines growing upon it. But those five feet intervening looked a perfect gulf, and how to get over them was a poser. Jump it she dared not; step it she could not. It began to look as though she must signal to the girls in the closet to haul in their big fish, when she chanced to spy something sticking up through the honeysuckle vines. Crawling

carefully down to the edge of the shed, she peered over, and saw the ends of the gardener's ladder. Pauline had not made a mistake when she called her a monkey, for in just one second she was at the bottom of that ladder.

"Now I'm all right, and will soon have the girls free," and off she scurried to the side of the house upon which Toinette's room was situated. Gathering up a handful of soft earth she threw it against the window, but with no result. Then a second one followed. Had she but known it, Toinette and her revellers had long ago given them up, and were now down in the old laundry spreading forth their array of goodies. After wasting considerable time, Marie suddenly bethought her of the above fact, and instantly skipped off to that Mecca.

There was not a ray of light visible, but, happily, sight is not the only sense with which we are endowed, and Marie's ears were as keen as her eyes. Giving the three signal taps upon one of the tightly closed window-blinds, she waited a reply. But the girls were not expecting taps from that quarter, and at once became suspicious. But precious moments were fleeing, and Marie was becoming desperate, so, flinging prudence to the winds, she gave three sounding bangs upon that window, and called out:

"If you don't open this window and let me in I'll set Mother Stone on your track, sure as you live!"

Open flew the window, and a moment later Marie was relating her experiences to them. Then came the question of rescuing the others. Not an easy one to answer. But Marie had gone so far, and, being a very resourceful little body, had no notion of giving up yet, and saying to the revellers: "I'm going to let those girls out if I have to take the door down to do it," off she flitted, as quickly and silently as a butterfly. In less time than it takes to tell it she stood outside their prison, and saying, encouragingly: "Don't give up, girls; I'll soon have you out," she slipped into the sewing-room opposite, and emerged a second later with the little oil-can and screw-driver from the machine drawer.

"For gracious sake, what *are* you going to do?" whispered Cicely, who had come with her to help if possible.

"Something I once saw a carpenter at our house do, if I can. Sh! Don't make any noise," and, reaching up to the top hinge, Marie dropped a few drops of oil from her can upon it, and then treated the lower one in the same manner. The hinges were what are known as "fish hinges," the door being held in place by a small iron peg slipped into the sockets of the hinge. After she had oiled them, she placed her screw-driver under the knob of the peg, when, lo! up it slid as easily as could be, and when both had been carefully slid out of place, nothing prevented the door from being softly drawn away from the hinges, swung outward, and if it did not open from left to right, as it had been intended to open, it was quite as easy to walk through it when it opened from right to left. To slip it back into place, when five giggling girls had escaped, was equally easy, and no one would ever have suspected the skillful bit of mechanical engineering that had taken place under their very noses at ten-thirty that night.

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## CHAPTER XXVII

### ARIADNE'S CLUE

The manner in which those liberated girls skipped down to the laundry was certainly not snail-like. They had nearly reached it when Ruth's feet became entangled in a piece of string, and, stooping down to loosen it, she discovered a slip of paper fastened to the end, and a large pin which had evidently stuck it fast to the door-casing. No doubt some of the girls had brushed against it in their hurry-scurry to reach the laundry, and, but for the ill wind which blew five of them into the housemaid's closet, this significant scrap of paper would never have been discovered. The candle they carried was brought to bear upon it, and they read the following words:

In ancient days, so the stories say,  
One Theseus found a remarkable way  
Of reaching a point he wished to gain,  
And down to posterity came his fame.

So, perhaps, posterity may also do well  
To follow a "clue," but never to tell  
Just what they found at the further end,  
Lest a rule should break instead of bend.

"What can it mean? Where does it lead to?" were the questions eagerly whispered.

"Come on, and let's find out," was Ruth's practical remark, and she began to wind up the string. There seemed no end to it, and it led them through the corridor, out of that into the kitchen,

then out to a small store-room built beneath the kitchen porch. Here the end was tied to a very suggestive-looking tub.

Had Diogenes succeeded in discovering an honest man he could not have felt greater satisfaction than these girls felt at the sight of that modest little oval tub, with its sawdust covering; and the way in which it was pounced upon, and borne in triumph to the laundry, brings my story of that night's revels to a climax, and no more need be told.

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When the twelve o'clock train whistled it was the signal for the revels to end, and, ere the carriages which were to meet the theatre-goers could bring them up the hill, Sunny Bank was as quiet and peaceful as though all its inmates had been dreaming for hours.

The weather had become beautifully soft and balmy for the middle of April, and the girls were able to sit out of doors, and do many of the things they had not hoped to do till May should burgeon and bloom.

A few days after the frolic Toinette was sitting in one of the pretty little summer-houses, of which there were several dotted about the grounds, when Miss Howard came in and took her seat beside her.

"You have been playing at hide-and-seek with me without knowing it," she said, "for I have been searching for you everywhere, and only discovered you here by the glint of the sunshine upon your hair."

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"Did you want me, Miss Howard? I'm sorry you had to hunt for me," answered Toinette. "What can I do for you?"

"Give me some wise advice," said Miss Howard, smiling.

"I give you advice!" exclaimed Toinette.

"Yes; don't you think you can?"

"I shall have to know what it is about before I dare say yes or no, Miss Howard."

"You know that I am going to leave you in a few weeks, dear, and I want my leave-taking to be closely identified with my girls, whom I have learned to love so dearly, and whom, I think, love me as well as I love them. I have spent many happy years in this school, first as pupil and then as teacher, and it has been a very dear home to me. Now I am going away from it forever, and though the future looks very enticing, and I have every reason to believe that it will be happy, still I cannot help feeling sad at the thought of leaving the old life behind. These are serious confidences for me to burden you with, Toinette, but you have crept into a very warm corner of my heart since you became a pupil here, and I know that there is a wise little head upon these shoulders," said Miss Howard, as she placed her hand on Toinette's shoulder.

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The girl reached up, and drawing the hand close to her cheek held it there, but did not speak.

"So now," continued Miss Howard, "I am going to ask you to help my outgoing from this happy home to be a pleasant one, by being my maid of honor when the time comes; will you, dear?"

"You want *me* to be the maid of honor, Miss Howard? You don't truly mean it? There are so many other girls whom you have known so much longer, and whom you must love better than you do me; although I don't believe they *can* love *you* any better than I do," said Toinette, naively.

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"That is just it, dear. I do love them all, and am sure that they are very fond of me. But in your case it is just a little different. All these girls have pleasant homes, and many loved ones in them who plan for their happiness, and to whom they will go directly vacation begins. For many years you, like myself, have had no home but the one a school offered, and which, unlike mine, was sometimes not as happy a home as it might have been, I fear. So, you see, we have, in one way, had a bond of sympathy between us even before we knew it to be so. And now we have still another, for when we leave here in June we shall each go to our own dear home; you to one your father shall make for you, I to the one my husband will provide for me."

A soft, pretty color had crept over Miss Howard's face as she spoke, and a very tender look came into her beautiful eyes. Truly, she was carrying something very sweet and holy to the one who was to bear that name.

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"So we shall step out into the new life together, shall we not, Toinette, and each will be the sweeter for our having done so?" asked Miss Howard.

"It is too lovely even to think about, Miss Howard. I don't know how to make you understand how proud and happy it makes me to think that you chose me from among all the others, and I hope they will not feel that you should not have done so. Do you think they will mind?"

"On the contrary, they are delighted with my choice, for I told them my reasons, as I have told them to you, and they see it in the same light that I see it."

"Then I shall be the happiest girl in Montcliff," cried Toinette.

"No, *next* to the happiest," said Miss Howard, laughing softly.

"Well, I shall be the happiest in *my* way, and you in *yours*," and Toinette wagged her head as though it would be of no use for Miss Howard to try to make her concede *that* point.

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"And now let us plan our maid of honor's toilet, and also what our six bridesmaids must wear. It was upon that important question I wished your advice, and, now that you know, do you feel qualified to give it?"

"Oh, how lovely!" cried Toinette. "Why, Miss Howard, it is almost like planning for my own wedding, and you are too sweet for anything to let me."

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## CHAPTER XXVIII

### "WHEN BUDS AND BLOSSOMS BURST"

The planning of the toilets took considerable time, and Miss Howard felt that she had made no mistake when she asked the girl's advice. Like her father's, Toinette's taste was unerring, and when she said:

"Wouldn't it be pretty to have the girls represent flowers?" Miss Howard was delighted with the idea.

"What flowers would you suggest, dear?" she asked.

"Let me think just a moment, please," said Toinette, and she rested her chin upon her hands, a favorite attitude of hers when thinking seriously of anything. "How would a lily, a violet, a pansy, a daffodil, a narcissus, and a snowdrop do?"

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"How pretty!" exclaimed Miss Howard. "What put such a picturesque idea in your head? It is beautiful, and can be carried out admirably. You must be my fair and lovely lily; then shall come my violet and daffodil; then my narcissus and lilac; then my pansy and modest little snowdrop. That will exactly suit Helen."

"Who are to be the bridesmaids?"

"Edith, May, Ruth, Marie, Natala and Helen."

"How nice of you to choose all the younger girls; it makes us feel so important. Now, let's plan just what the dresses are to be," said Toinette, becoming quite excited, and looking at Miss Howard as though all must be completed ere they left the summer-house.

"I am waiting for your suggestions," said she.

"Wouldn't it be pretty to have all the dresses made of white chiffon, or something soft like that, and have white, violet and yellow slips under them? Then have the hats trimmed with the flowers they represent. Would you like that, Miss Howard?"

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"Yes, immensely; but now I want to think about Helen. You know she has very limited means, and what might seem a small outlay for the others would probably be a large one for her, and I do not want to tax her resources, much as I wish to have her for one of my bonny maids."

"Yes," said Toinette, meditatively, "I suppose the dresses will be rather expensive, but it would be too bad not to have Helen; she is so sweet and is so fond of you, Miss Howard."

"Yes, she is a dear child, and I have felt a great interest in her from the moment she entered the school. I wish I knew of some way of bettering her circumstances. Mr. Burgess is a most estimable man, but not one liable to advance rapidly through his own efforts, I fear. He is most reliable and capable, but seems to lack the push so essential in this bustling day and age. He would prove invaluable in any position of trust, but would never secure such if it depended upon his own efforts to do so."

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Toinette had listened very attentively while Miss Howard was talking, and when she finished said:

"When papa was out here for the dance I spoke to him about Helen, and we had such a nice little talk. The next day he spoke with Miss Preston about those very things, but I do not know what came of it. I wish I did. His business affairs bring him into contact with so many large firms of different kinds that I am almost sure he could secure something for Mr. Burgess. Do you know what I am going to do?" said Toinette, eagerly, "I am going to write to him right off, tell him all about our plans; may I? About the wedding, the bridesmaids, and everything; then I am going to ask him if he has heard of anything that he thinks would help Mr. Burgess, and, who knows, maybe, by the first of June all will be fixed up so nicely that Helen can have things as nice as the other girls—and, oh, Miss Howard!—wouldn't it be *lovely* if she could go abroad with Miss Preston?" and Toinette clasped her hands in rapture at the very thought.

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Miss Howard laughed a happy little laugh, and, taking Toinette's face in both her hands, kissed her cheeks very tenderly, saying as she did so:

"I see that I made no mistake in my estimate of your character, dear, although I did not bargain for quite such a wise, resourceful little head and efficient helper as you have proved. How did you manage to think out so much in so short a time?"

"I suppose it is because my brains have never been overburdened with thoughts for other people," said Toinette, with an odd expression overspreading her face, "and so the part of them devoted to that sort of thing has had time to develop to an astonishing degree. But I guess I'd

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better begin to use the power before it becomes abnormal; Miss Preston says that abnormal development of any sort is dangerous," and she gave a funny little laugh as she glanced slyly into Miss Howard's eyes.

Miss Howard understood the quaint remark, and, rising from her seat, said: "I shall not soon forget our little talk, but must leave you now for the 'school ma'am's' duties. One of them will be to endeavor to persuade Pauline that it was *not* Henry VIII. who sought to reduce the American Colonies to submission, nor Lafayette who won the battle of Waterloo. Good-bye," and away tripped Miss Howard over the soft green lawn.

Toinette sat for a few moments, and then, springing up, said to herself: "I might as well go and write that letter this very minute, and I do hope papa will know of something right off. How lovely it would be!"

The letter was soon written, and within two hours was speeding upon its way to New York. Toinette had reasoned well, and, as good luck would have it, the letter arrived at a most auspicious moment. As Mr. Reeve sat reading it, his face reflecting the happiness he felt at receiving it so close upon the one which came to him every Monday morning, a client was shown into his office.

It happened to be one who was about to embark upon a new line of business in which he was venturing large sums of money, and which required capable, trustworthy men to carry out his plans. He had consulted with Mr. Reeve many times before, and nearly all details were completed; the few that remained dealt with minor matters, so Mr. Reeve felt considerable satisfaction at the thought of having brought all arrangements through so successfully. But it was certainly anything but a contented face he saw before him when he glanced up from Toinette's letter upon Mr. Fowler's entrance, and his first words were: "Well, for a prosperous capitalist, you bear a woeful countenance, Ned."

"If mine is woeful, yours certainly is not," was the prompt answer. "You look as though you had been the recipient of some very pleasing news."

"A pretty good sort," said Mr. Reeve, smiling. "The sort that makes a man feel old and young at the same time. Ever get any of that?"

"Don't know as I do; it must be a rare specimen," said Mr. Fowler, dryly. "Better let me know the kind it is; perhaps it will counterbalance the kind I have for you this morning; confound it!"

Seeing that Mr. Fowler was really disturbed about something, Mr. Reeve dropped his bantering tone, and went to serious matters. He then learned that the bookkeeper whom Mr. Fowler had engaged for the new line of business, and who would also act as his confidential clerk and office manager, would be unable to accept the position, as he was called to England by the death of his father, and would in future make his home there. This was a serious loss to Mr. Fowler, for he had known this man for years, and felt deep satisfaction at the thought of having such an efficient assistant.

"And now," he said, when he had told Mr. Reeve all the facts, "who under heavens am I to find to fill his place at such short notice, I'd like to know? Such men are not to be picked up at every corner."

"Read that letter," was all Mr. Reeve said, and handed him Toinette's letter.

Mr. Fowler took the letter, and began reading with a very mystified expression, as though he could not for the life of him understand what a letter from Mr. Reeve's daughter had to do with his private affairs. But, as he read, his expression changed, and when he came to the end he said: "Well, it may be Kismet; can't say. Funnier things have happened. Look into it, will you, Clayton? I'm sick and tired of the thing, particularly when I thought all important details settled."

And Clayton Reeve did "look into it" very thoroughly, leaving no stone unturned which would help him to learn all that it was necessary to know about Mr. Burgess, and nothing could possibly have been more gratifying than what he learned. As a result of it, Mr. Burgess was offered the position from June first, and the salary offered with it seemed a princely one to him as compared to the one he had received as clerk in the bank in Montcliff. It would be hard to understand the happiness which that schoolgirl letter brought to one family, or how the writing of it changed two lives very materially, and a third completely.

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## CHAPTER XXIX

### COMMENCEMENT

Many a girl has asked: "Why do they call it commencement when it is really the end?" If they have not found out why, I am not going to tell the secret. But one thing I have found out is this: Never in after life do we ever feel *quite* so important as we do when that day has been reached upon our life's calendar.



It was no exception at Sunny Bank, and when the fifth of June dawned that year it found a busy, bustling household. No, I am not telling the exact truth: it was not when it *dawned*, but fully three hours later, and then began the hurry-scurry which continued till all were assembled in chapel to listen to the opening prayer of the good man who had for many a year opened the Sunny Bank commencement exercises.

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He had grown old in faithful service in Montcliff, and was beloved and revered by all.

It is of no use for me to tell you all about those exercises; to an outsider they were exactly like many others that had taken place before; to the girls themselves they were unique, and stood out pre-eminent above all others. Everybody was there who had the smallest excuse for being, and just how happy six bodies were I will leave you to learn from what follows.

The exercises were to take place in the evening, and all day long relatives and friends of the girls arrived thick and fast. Among the first was Toinette's father. "Couldn't wait till evening, you see," he cried, as he met Toinette at the railway station. "Yes, it is all settled; I got them by a lucky chance at the very last moment."

"Did you say anything to Mr. Burgess about it?" asked Toinette.

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"No, I have not seen him; daresay he has had his hands full since the first. We'll speak to Miss Preston first, and then call at the Burgess' and tell them."

"How perfectly splendid! Oh, daddy, you are a perfect wonder! How do you ever manage to fetch things about so successfully?"

"Because I have found a wonderful incentive to spur me on," he answered as he handed her into the carriage which was waiting for them, and they whirled off up the hill.

"And you will stay here till after the wedding, won't you?" asked Toinette, snuggling close to his side and slipping her arm through his.

"What! Five whole days? What will you do with me all that time?"

"No danger of your suffering from ennui, I guess," laughed Toinette. "I will guarantee to keep you occupied. And then, daddy, after all is over we'll go off together, and won't we have glorious times!" and she gave a rapturous little bounce at the thought of the delightful days to come.

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Miss Preston was to sail for Europe on the fifteenth of June, five days after Miss Howard's wedding, and six girls were to go with her. When it became an understood thing that Mr. Burgess' financial affairs were to be so improved, the possibility of Helen making one of the party was talked over, although Mrs. Burgess was filled with dismay at the thought of having her daughter take such a step upon such short notice; it seemed a tremendous thing to that quiet, home-staying body. Still, Miss Preston had long been anxious to have Helen go with her, and, now that there seemed no further obstacle to her doing so, could not make up her mind to go without her.

She had talked it over with both Mr. and Mrs. Burgess, but, it must be confessed, had met with only lukewarm enthusiasm. Furthermore, it was very late in the day to secure stateroom accommodation upon the steamer by which Miss Preston would sail, her own and the girls having been engaged for weeks.

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Helen herself said very little, but Miss Preston knew that the girl's heart had long been set upon going, and this year the route planned took in the very points she had most wished to visit, and which would prove the most profitable for her to visit. In desperation, Miss Preston turned to Mr. Reeve once more, for she had found him a most resourceful man, and one not likely to be easily baffled.

The result was that he had succeeded in making a mutually agreeable exchange of staterooms with some other people, and was now primed and ready to carry the war into the enemy's country.

Soon after luncheon they all drove to Stonybrook, a town about ten miles from Montcliff, and Helen's home. Evidently their persuasive powers were strong, for ere the visit ended it was decided that Helen should make one of Miss Preston's party to sail with her "over the ocean blue," and some very happy people drove back to Montcliff that afternoon.

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The house seemed very quiet after the girls' departure for their homes on the day following commencement, for, excepting those who lived too far away to return for the wedding, and would remain as Miss Preston's guests until after the tenth, all had left that morning, and when a house has been filled with twenty-five or thirty girls, and all but eight or ten suddenly depart from it, the quiet which ensues cannot be overlooked.

Mr. Reeve gave himself up to the enjoyment of his five days' vacation as only a busy man can, and when I add that he was a very happy man, too, I need say no more.

The year had been one of many experiences both for him and for Toinette, and for both was ending far more happily than he had hoped it would. The future seemed to promise a great deal to them both, for they were growing to understand each other better every day, and Toinette was developing into a very lovely, as well as a very lovable, companion. They had planned a delightful summer vacation, to be spent in travelling leisurely from place to place, as the fancy took them, and Toinette had suggested nearly all.

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The five days at Montcliff were spent in driving about the beautiful country, playing tennis, rambling about the pretty woods, and doing an endless number of delightful nothings, as people can sometimes do when they fully make up their minds to put aside the cares of the world for a

time.

They soon came to an end, and then came Miss Howard's wedding day.

There has always seemed something inexpressibly sweet in Longfellow's words in reference to the forming of new ties and establishing the new home. In Miss Howard's case it was to be a home filled with all the sweetest hopes that can come into a woman's life: hopes sanctified by love and founded upon respect. Could they have a firmer foundation? The future held great promise for her, although worldly-minded folk might say that the step she was about to take was not marked off by a *golden* mile-stone, nor the path she would follow be paved with a golden pavement. She knew that quite well, and had wisely decided that a noble character and a brilliant mind were excellent substitutes, however agreeable it may be to have the former, and, also, that the former minus the latter are fairy gold.

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## CHAPTER XXX

### "O FORTUNATE, O HAPPY DAY"

"O fortunate, O happy day,  
When a new household finds its place  
Among the myriad homes of earth,  
Like a new star just sprung to birth,  
And rolled on its harmonious way  
Into the boundless realms of space!"

As though all that was loveliest had united to do her honor, and make the boundary-line between the old and the new life one to be long remembered by all who stood beside her at it, the day set for Miss Howard's wedding was all that Lowell has written about it. It was as "rare" and "perfect" as dear Mother Nature could make it for one of her loveliest children.

The girls had dressed the church, until it seemed a very bower of bloom, and at every turn Miss Howard would find the posies of which she was so fond. The three colors, if white may be called a color, chosen for the bridesmaids' dresses were used in the decorations, and altar, chancel, transept and aisles were brilliant with daffodils, narcissuses and lilacs, which filled the church with their perfume.

The wedding was to take place at four o'clock, and when that hour arrived little space was left in the church for the tardy ones.

Nearly all the girls had returned for the ceremony, and a bonnier lot it would have been difficult to find than that which filled the front pews of the church, for Miss Howard would have them all near her, insisting that none of the other guests could possibly have the same loving thoughts for her that her girls would have.

Promptly at the stroke of four the great organ rolled out its message to all, and, after her few distant relatives had been conducted to their seats, Miss Howard's bonny bridesmaids appeared, following another fancy of hers by walking together, with the ushers leading. First came Edith and Marie; Edith's yellow golden hair a perfect background for the big white chip hat, with its masses of violets, and her fair, soft skin made softer and fairer by the fairy-like chiffon draped so artistically over the pale violet satin beneath it. A daintily gilded basket filled with violets told all the story.

Saucy and pert beside her walked the little brownie Marie, looking for all the world like the bobbing daffies in her white basket. One wanted to sing the old nursery rhyme: "Daffy-down-dilly has come to town," for they were nodding a friendly greeting from her hat, and seemed to lend their golden sheen to the satin beneath the white chiffon gown.

Behind them followed May Foster and Natala King. May's bronze-brown hair and brilliant coloring were a perfect foil for the creamy-white narcissus blossoms on her hat and the creamy-white of her gown. While Natala's light-brown hair and hazel eyes needed just the lilac tints to show how pretty they were.

Then came Ruth and Helen. Could Miss Howard have chosen two who, placed beside each other, would have formed a more pronounced contrast? Not even the solemnity of the occasion could overcome Ruth's ruling passion, curiosity: she was determined to see all to be seen if it rested with her to do so. Nor were the pert pansy blossoms upon her hat, nodding a welcome to all, more on the alert. Or could those which peeped from the folds of her pansy-yellow gown, with its white chiffon draperies, smile in a more friendly manner than did Ruth, as she walked slowly up that aisle, with shy, modest Helen at her side. Helen looked the snowdrop to perfection, for if the pansies needed Ruth's gypsy coloring for a foil, the snowdrops needed Helen's pale blonde daintiness for theirs. The only color which relieved its pure white was the deep green of the wax-like leaves, and the contrast was perfect. The dress was of that soft silvery white only to be contrived by the combination of satin and chiffon, and Helen looked very

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lovely.

Behind them, a dream of fairness, walked Toinette. Through the chiffon of her gown ran fine golden threads, which caused it to glint and glisten as the sunbeams. The white satin underneath was of that peculiar ivory tint which combines so exquisitely with gold tints. Her hat was made of the chiffon, and trimmed with Easter lilies, which nestled in its soft folds and against the beautiful golden hair beneath them. Her basket was also white, and she was a fitting emblem of the pure soul she was leading to the altar.

Then came the bride, her hand resting lightly upon the arm of the friend who had led her along the greater part of her life's pathway, for Miss Preston had been Miss Howard's "guide, philosopher and friend" almost as long as she could remember. Very stately did she look, as she walked up that aisle to give away at the altar something which the years had rendered very precious to her, for sometimes "old maids' children" are more dear to them than are the children who claim the love of parents.

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Miss Preston was very proud of her honors.

But no words can describe the girl who walked at her side, her beautiful face made transcendently so by the tenderest, holiest thought that can fill a woman's heart: that she is about to become the wife of the man she loves. She seemed to forget the church and all who were gathered there to witness her happiness, and the soft, dark eyes looked straight before her to the altar, where her husband to be awaited her, as though that altar was to her as the entrance to the holy of holies; as, indeed, it was.

How brief is a marriage ceremony! A few words are spoken and two lives are changed forever, never again to be the same as they were less than ten minutes before, but filled with new duties, new obligations, and the responsibilities we must all assume when we utter the words: "I will." God meant that it should be so, and it is one of this world's many blessings.



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"THE BRIDE, HER HAND RESTING LIGHTLY  
ON THE ARM OF HER FRIEND."

The reception Miss Preston gave for her "adopted daughter," as she called Miss Howard, now Mrs. Chichester, was long talked over by the school, and quoted by the girls as "our reception" for months.

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Mr. and Mrs. Chichester sailed for Europe on the same steamer which carried Miss Preston and her girls, and a happier, merrier party it would have been hard to find. Toinette and Mr. Reeve went to bid them farewell and a pleasant voyage, and the last faces those upon the great ship saw as they swung out into the stream were Toinette's and her father's.

And now we, too, must leave them—leave them to the happy summer vacation, when they learned how dear they were to each other, and what a dear old world this is, after all, when two people manage to look at it through little Dan Cupid's spectacles.

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