

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Hester's Counterpart: A Story of Boarding School Life

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Hester's Counterpart: A Story of Boarding School Life

Author: Jean K. Baird

Release date: October 20, 2008 [eBook #26973]

Most recently updated: January 4, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Chris Curnow, Joseph Cooper, Josephine Paolucci
and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at
<https://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HESTER'S COUNTERPART: A STORY OF
BOARDING SCHOOL LIFE ***





The water crept up.—Page 284.

THE HESTER BOOKS

HESTER'S COUNTERPART

A STORY OF BOARDING SCHOOL LIFE

BY

JEAN K. BAIRD

Author of "The Coming of Hester"

ILLUSTRATED BY ADELE W. JONES



BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

Published, August, 1910

COPYRIGHT, 1910, BY LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.
All Rights Reserved

HESTER'S COUNTERPART

Trancriber's note: Table of contents created for the HTML version.

[CHAPTER I](#)
[CHAPTER II](#)
[CHAPTER III](#)
[CHAPTER IV](#)
[CHAPTER V](#)
[CHAPTER VI](#)
[CHAPTER VII](#)
[CHAPTER VIII](#)
[CHAPTER IX](#)
[CHAPTER X](#)
[CHAPTER XI](#)
[CHAPTER XII](#)
[CHAPTER XIII](#)
[CHAPTER XIV](#)
[CHAPTER XV](#)
[CHAPTER XVI](#)
[CHAPTER XVII](#)

ILLUSTRATIONS

The water crept up (Page 284)	Frontispiece
	Facing Page
"I am Helen Loraine"	68
Again Hester deftly returned it	92
"Oh, girls, do you happen to have any cold cream?"	122
"You remember me, I see, Miss Alden"	150
They held their breath	290

HESTER'S COUNTERPART

CHAPTER I

[Pg 1]

Debby Alden, to use her own adjective in regard to herself, was not "slack." To this her friends added another term. Debby was "set." There could be no doubt of that.

When Hester was but twelve years old, Debby had decided that the girl should have at least one year at the best boarding-school. Four years had passed, during which time, Debby's purpose had remained firm, although not yet ripe for perfecting.

After the experience with Mary Bowerman's taunts and Abner Stout's guile, Debby decided that the time had come for Hester to have a change of environment. Miss Richards's advice was again sought. But that old friend no longer held the full power in her hands. Debby had grown alive and alert. She knew the standing of the schools throughout the State, and in what particular line of study or discipline each one excelled.

[Pg 2]

For months, she studied catalogues and estimated expenses. She had never made a study of psychology; but she understood that Hester had reached the most impressionable age of her life. Each thought and word would leave its marks upon her. Debby, who believed firmly that tendencies are inherited, had always with her the fear that Hester would show the tendencies of an alien race. Her one consolation was that much may be overcome by training, and too, perhaps, there was in Hester's veins only a drop of darker blood.

No one understood the position in which Debby Alden was placed. She always held herself responsible for the death of Hester's mother. Duty had compelled her to take care of the child, until love had come to her as a reward for the fulfillment of duty.

There was no one to whom she could speak concerning Hester and her fears in regard to her.

One thing she had done and would do; she would keep the child far removed from any influence which would tend to the strengthening of those traits which are supposed rightfully to belong to the race of slaves.

[Pg 3]

Debby consulted principals and teachers and read and re-read catalogues. At length, she decided upon Dickinson Seminary as the school which came nearest to fulfilling her desires for Hester.

Hester had always been sweet and submissive to Debby Alden. The girl had more than love for the woman who was mother and father both to her. Mingled with Hester's love for Debby was an inexpressible gratitude. Hester realized how much Debby had done and was doing for her. But it was not the dainty dresses and good home that touched her most. Debby Alden had given the waif her mother's name, and Hester never wrote in her big angular hand, Hester Palmer Alden, without feeling a glow of pride. She had a name of which to be proud, a name which Debby Alden had always held dear.

"It was the very kindest thing Aunt Debby could do," was a thought which came often to Hester. "She must have loved me even from the first, or she would have never given me her own name. She's so proud of being an Alden. Their name has never had a bit of shame or disgrace touch it." Then she added an afterthought, "and it never will through me."

[Pg 4]

One day she brought up the subject of the Alden name while in conversation with her aunt. Hester expressed herself warmly on the subject and the elder woman listened with a lightening heart. The pride of the Alden name and family which Hester showed, pleased her. To Debby came the thought that only those who had such birthrights could comprehend and appreciate the honor of possessing them. For a moment, she believed that she might have been mistaken in regard to Hester's parentage; but just for a moment. She could not close her eyes to facts. She, herself, had seen the purple tinge about the finger nails of the woman and had observed the lips and eyes which were peculiar to another race.

"It was beautiful of you, Aunt Debby, to give me your name, and I'll never, never bring shame to it."

[Pg 5]

"Let us talk no more of the subject," was the curt rejoinder. "We have much to do before you are ready to go to Dickinson, and we must not spend our time in telling what is to be done or not to be done a dozen years from now."

Hester was drying the dishes. At the mention of going to school, she stopped. Regardless of consequences, she raised her tea-towel in one hand like a banner, and Aunt Debby's blue cream jug, a relic of the Alden family, high in the other.

"Dickinson Seminary!" she exclaimed in a voice pitched high with nervousness. "I'll tell you right this minute, Aunt Debby, I will not go."

Had the ceiling fallen down upon her, Debby Alden could not have been more surprised. Hester, the obedient, now in the guise of an insurgent.

"*Will* not, Hester Palmer Alden, is not the word to use to me. I am the one to decide what is best for you to do or not to do, and I've decided upon your going to Dickinson."

The voice of the speaker was strong with the Alden firmness and decision. Perhaps, she forced herself to unusual firmness lest her great love for the girl should make her weak in discipline. She expected that Hester, having once made so strong an affirmation, would cling to it and perhaps be inclined to disputation. On the contrary, Hester began to sob.

[Pg 6]

Debby turned to look at the girl, down whose cheeks the tears were streaming. Then she said with a show of gentleness: "It's only natural that you feel bad about leaving home. Everyone does that. I really should not feel pleased if you did not feel bad. You can not give up to that feeling. I do not mean to permit you to do so. School is the best place for you, and you must go. You'll enjoy it after a while."

"I was not thinking about myself, Aunt Debby. I was thinking of you. Do you think that I can ever enjoy being away and having a good time while you are here alone?"

"I was used to being alone before you—"

"But you are not used to it now. I'll think of you sitting here alone in the evening. Every time you leave the house you'll be alone and you'll come into a lonely house when you come back. I will not go and leave you here, Aunt Debby, and you cannot make me."

[Pg 7]

"Hester Alden—" Debby Alden meant to be firm. It was scandalous to have a child so express herself to her elder, and that elder as a mother to her. Debby Alden would not be weak. She would be firm, and not so much as allow Hester to express an opinion.

"Hester Alden," she began, but could say no more because of a queer little catch in her voice. She turned back to her dish-pan and fell with great vigor to her dishwashing. After a few moments, she felt that she could control herself, and turning to Hester, said, "Now, Hester Alden, we'll have done with this nonsense right here. I've been alone and stood it fairly well and I can stand it again. What does it matter if I am alone? I'm no longer a young girl who demands company. I'm just a plain old—"

"Why, Aunt Debby—you are not. Doesn't everyone say you're beautiful, and you're not old—and

you're never going to get old." Hester turned and brought her foot down with some vigor, as though she would frighten old age and gray hair and loneliness from the house.

[Pg 8]

"Why, Aunt Debby, everyone says you're beautiful. The girls at school—."

Debby's cheeks flushed. There was something very sweet in the assertion, although she did not believe it even for a moment. But in all her forty years, no one had ever used that word in speaking of Debby. Although she felt that even now love, and not facts, was making use of it, she was touched. She was a woman after all, and it was sweet to find herself beautiful in someone's eyes.

But discipline must be maintained. She turned toward Hester. The girl threw her arms about Debby Alden's neck and sobbed, and Debby held up her kitchen apron before her eyes and wept silently.

"There, Hester, there!" she said at last. "We're both very silly, very silly. You must go to school and that's an end to it."

"No, Aunt Debby. I'll never go and leave you here alone. If I go, you must go with me."

"Go with you! That is the veriest nonsense, Hester. Debby Alden in a seminary. I'm not in my second childhood yet."

"But you could live in town. Mame Thomas has a cousin who lives in a little flat. She's a widow and keeps her girls in school. Couldn't you go and live there. We could see each other—."

[Pg 9]

"The dish-water is getting cold. Really, Hester, you and I are getting slack. I believe that is the first time in my life that I ever stood talking and let my dish-water get cold. It isn't a good way of doing. Mother never allowed us to be slack about such things. I was not brought up to talk first and work afterward. Think of me, a woman my age, doing such a thing!"

Taking up the dish-pan, she left the kitchen to empty the water. Hester dried her tears. Her heart grew light. She understood Aunt Debby well and she knew that the talk about letting the work stand was only a chastisement Debby was giving herself, when she felt herself yielding.

The subject was again discussed during the evening. No decision was reached. Debby, however, conceded enough to say that she would think the matter over and would ask Miss Richards's opinion concerning it.

[Pg 10]

Hester was fully satisfied with this. She knew that her Aunt Debby never forgot a promise. Hester knew also that Miss Richards would advise Debby Alden to spend a winter in the city.

The following day, after the housework had been finished and the dinner dishes put away, Debby Alden dressed and went to call upon her friend.

Hester went with her, as far as Jane Orr's home. "I'll be back shortly, Hester. You may stay with Jane until I call for you."

She made her way down the main street of the little country town.

Hester paused as she was about to mount the steps, and turned to look at the retreating figure. She could not restrain a smile. "It's certainly odd, but Aunt Debby doesn't seem to know how pretty she is."

Hester's adjective was not strong enough to describe Aunt Debby. There was something infinitely greater and finer in the woman than mere prettiness.

Debby Alden at twenty-five had been scrawny, hard-featured and severe. She then had the appearance of one who knew only the hard things of life, and was giving expression to them in her features and carriage. But this new Debby Alden was wholly different. Hester had brought love and interest with her. Debby Alden was alive to the world about her, and her active interests had given brilliance to her eyes and lightness to her steps. The angles of twenty-five years had been softened into curves. Debby was no longer hard-featured and scrawny. She had grown plump and round.

[Pg 11]

Some old wise man declares that it is woman's fault if she be not handsome at forty years; for then the body is but the reflection of life itself. Debby had been so true and faithful and so big-hearted and generous, that at forty, beautiful was the only word worthy to describe her.

Debby's call upon Miss Richards was short. To-day was one day when all things were working toward favoring Hester's project.

Miss Richards was growing old. She did not wish to travel alone or to be far from her friends. She was dainty, gracious, and smiling as ever, but age had laid its finger lightly upon her.

[Pg 12]

She listened to Debby Alden's plans.

"You are young yet, Debby," she said. "No woman should be content to sit at home and not improve her time. With Hester gone, there will be nothing to keep you here. The school is but a short distance from town. Why not rent a small flat?"

"But what would I do with no responsibilities? Keeping two or three rooms in order will not employ my time."

"Lockport is famed for lectures and recitals. Study-clubs are plentiful. You could read and study and you might practise your music, Debby. A few lessons will do you worlds of good."

"Lessons when I am almost forty years old!"

"Forty years young, my dear girl. Lessons, why not? Life is one long school term. The pupil who expects a hundred-mark must be learning and moving onward all the time. I am more than twenty years your senior, and yet I feel as though I was but beginning to learn how to live."

[Pg 13]

She paused a moment. Her mind dwelt on the things which were past. Then with a radiant smile, she turned to her companion. "Be very much alive while you are alive, Debby. The interests you have outside yourself will add to your own happiness. If you wish to find perfect happiness, fill your life with vital interests. Go to Lockport, study, read and work; see Hester when your heart longs for her. I—" she paused, wondering if Debby would accept her suggestion.

"I should like to be with you, Debby. I need something new. Each winter I have been south for so many years that it is a story oft told. Do you think that you and I could be happy together in a little flat? Hester then could have two hearts to fill with interest."

She looked wistfully toward Debby. For the first time Debby realized that her old friend was alone—very much alone as far as hearth-ties and love were concerned. It was not with thoughts of her own enjoyment that Debby's heart bounded. As an inspiration, it came to her that she held within her hands that which would fill the void in her friend's life.

[Pg 14]

"I am sure we could," said Debby. "We might as well settle the matter here, and we'll go to town this very week, attend to selecting Hester's room and we'll look up a nice little place for ourselves. We'll not have it too far from the school."

Then observing Miss Richards smiling, she added, "I presume you think I'm a little hasty; but I don't see it in just that way. Anyone with judgment can readily see that it is just the thing for us to do. When our minds are made up, there's no use in being slack. We'll go Thursday. Hester may stay with Jane Orr. Mrs. Orr will be glad to have her. And now, I must go and tell Hester. I don't understand how that child came to be so foolishly sentimental. She has taken the notion that she cannot be happy anywhere without me. Utter nonsense, of course! I've tried to train her to believe that one's happiness never depends on another."

She went her way, leaving her friend smiling at the speech. When Debby had gone, Miss Richards spoke aloud: "Debby, Debby Alden, how fearfully blind you are about yourself and your girl! How could Hester ever think other than she does when every bit of happiness in the child's life has emanated from you. Hester has sound judgment for one of her years, and she knows how much she owes to you."

[Pg 15]

But Hester did not know the full amount of her debt to her foster aunt nor did Miss Richards; for Debby kept her own secret in regard to Hester's parentage and no one but herself knew the fearful weight it was upon her.

CHAPTER II

[Pg 16]

Thursday morning, Miss Richards and Debby Alden started for Lockport. This was a small city and the county seat. Its situation made it a pleasant place to spend the summer and the population increased and diminished with the change of seasons.

The town lay between two ridges of high mountains. On one side the river flowed; on the opposite side Beech Creek, the conjunction of the streams being at the eastern edge of town. On the brow of the lower hills were the summer homes of the city folk. There were acres of lawn and grove with natural ravines through which ran little streams and over whose banks the laurels grew in wild profusion. Back of these hills, the mountains towered like great green giants. On foggy days, their peaks were hidden in clouds. They were awe-inspiring, for fog-covered brows spoke of mysteries beyond the comprehension of those who dwelt below.

[Pg 17]

The valley grew narrow toward the western end. Here, nestled close between hills, was Dickinson Seminary, one of the most exclusive and rigidly-disciplined schools of the State. The campus and grove beyond were extensive. Beech Creek lay to the south and was used for bathing and boating and skating in their seasons. It was a deep, narrow stream. Being fed only by a few short mountain brooks, it was little affected by floods.

To the north lay the river. It was serene and powerful, except when its waters were swollen. Then it made its way over the banks and encroached upon the campus. The seminary folk were pleased than otherwise at this, for on the river-soaked campus edge the willows and water birches thrived, and made a beautiful protection for the campus. The river was at a distance from the building; yet at flood time on a quiet night as the girls lay in bed listening, they could hear the noise of its waters.

Debby Alden and Miss Richards reached Lockport just at noon Thursday. Debby's first thought was of Hester and her accommodations at school. She visited the seminary, attended to matters there, and returned to the city. The expenses connected with Hester's education would not be

[Pg 18]

light, and Debby knew that she would be compelled eventually to use the little money which her father had put by for a rainy day; the interest of which had met her living expenses. The woman looked forward and saw the time when her money would be gone. But, strange to say, contrary as her present mode of action was to all her inheritance and previous training, she anticipated no day when she would be reduced to poverty. She calculated closely, knowing almost to a dime what the three following years would cost her and Hester.

By that time, perhaps, Hester would be prepared for some life-work and as for Debby—. She smiled grimly when she thought of coming to a place where she could not take care of herself. "It's not the Alden way to get stuck," she repeated to herself.

She mentally reviewed all these conditions before she set out with Miss Richards in search of a flat suited to their needs. In her look into the future, Debby believed herself able to see her way clear for three full years. [Pg 19]

"And then, if the worst comes to the worst, I can sell the timber land. It's never brought in anything."

She put this last thought into words. "Does that mean that you are pressed for money, Debby?"

"Not yet; but I may be before three years are gone, and Hester is through with school. I can see my way clear for three years."

"You are fortunate indeed if that be so. A score of things may happen that you know nothing of now. I have learned to anticipate neither joy nor sorrow but to take each day as it comes."

"But surely one must look ahead. Money matters do not take care of themselves. Hester's schooling will cost me almost every cent of my ready money. I'll have only my little place and the timber tracts beyond."

"You are not scattering your money in sending Hester to school, Debby. You are placing it where it will draw the greatest interest. Sometime you'll draw a big dividend." She smiled reassuringly. [Pg 20]

"I hope so; but I wasn't thinking of that now. All I want is to have Hester prepared for some work—to take care of herself and be a happy useful woman when I'm gone."

"Meanwhile, we'll stop in here and look at this little place. I think, Debby, you and I will never be content to shut ourselves up in little boxes on a second or third floor."

"No, I want room to breathe and some place outside where I can set my foot on the soil. I'm not one who likes the click of my own heels on the pavement. There's something about putting your feet on the earth that makes you feel that you belong."

The place into which they now turned was a little cottage at the extreme east of town near the conjunction of creek and river, yet high on the brow of a hill. It was a simple little place, weather-beaten and faded; but a strip of sod ran about the front and side. The little low porch was shaded with a Virginia creeper, and an old gnarled tree at the corner leaned over the roof as though about to rest itself against it. [Pg 21]

Its being at the extreme end of town from the seminary was to Debby Alden the one thing against it.

"If we were at the west end, Hester could slip in each day. The pupils are allowed an hour 'off campus' you know."

"And she would come to you with every thought that troubled her. You would be bearing her childish burdens just as you have always done. If you live where Hester can talk with you each day, she will lose the greatest benefit a year in school can give her."

"I think you are right," said Debby Alden.

"I like the house. I'm used to low ceilings and big porches and vines. I'm satisfied with it if you are; and we'll have Hester home but once a month."

It was best for Hester to be away and to learn to depend upon herself. That fact settled matters for Debby Alden. If it were good for Hester, then it should be done and Debby Alden would give no thought to herself in this matter. [Pg 22]

Miss Richards was pleased with the house and the two friends made arrangements with the caretaker to have it ready for them a few days before the opening of school. There were papering and painting to be done. Had it been within her own home, Debby Alden would have done the work herself. Every bit of woodwork in her own home had been done over with her own brush, and her paper-hanging had won the admiration of the country-side.

The next in the course of events was selecting the articles of furniture which might be spared from home. Debby had no idea of dismantling her old home. The house had been built and furnished for a large family. There were furnished bedrooms which Debby and Hester never entered except at cleaning time; below there were the old-fashioned parlor, the living-room with its air of comfort, the dining-room, kitchen and what in that locality was termed the shanty-kitchen. This last was a great room between the woodshed and kitchen proper. It was provided with every article for laundry use, and during the canning season was the scene of most of the household activities. [Pg 23]

Since the early spring days when going away to school had first been mentioned, Hester had viewed the event with dread. She knew nothing of meeting strangers and imagined there could be nothing pleasant about it. During the summer while Debby had talked and planned, Hester had shown little interest and had never of herself, brought up the subject. But since she had influenced her Aunt Debby to go to the city with her, she was almost satisfied to go. Her joy would have been unbounded had it been possible for Debby to be with her within the school. That could not be. Hester was wise enough to know that. There was one other course that could be followed, however. She could live in town with Aunt Debby and Miss Richards and be but a parlor student at the seminary. To Hester's mind, this would be a very satisfactory arrangement, and she meant to bring it to pass. Having been successful in persuading her Aunt Debby to live in town, Hester was confident that it would be no difficult matter to persuade her to this second course. Hester was naturally a diplomat. There was nothing deceptive about her; but, young as she was, she intuitively knew that some times are ripe and some are not for discussion. The time propitious for bringing up the question of her being but a parlor student was not until Debby and Miss Richards were established in their little cottage at the east end of Lockport.

[Pg 24]

Satisfied that she could bring matters to pass in the fashion she desired, Hester grew enthusiastic over the preparation for quitting the old home. There was much to be done in spite of the fact that Debby was never "slack" in the ways of her household. Every cupboard and closet was gone over. Bed clothes were aired and laid away where neither mice, rust, nor mildew could touch them. China and silver were sorted and again sorted before Debby was able to decide what pieces were best to take and what best to leave. The flowers were to be potted and put away to keep for spring planting. When it came to this, Debby began to realize what leaving home meant.

[Pg 25]

"I can take the spotted-leaved geranium," she said to Hester while they were making the rounds of the garden. "I always do pot that for a house-plant. I suppose it will grow as well at Lockport as here, if I see that it is attended to. Fortunately for plants, they have no feelings."

The words showed sentiment enough, but the tones of Debby's voice made them seem harsh and unfeeling. Hester was not deceived. Debby Alden came from a race who had for generations looked upon the expression of love and sentiment as a weakness. Whenever Debby felt her emotions conquering her, she unconsciously resorted to the ways of her forbears; she lashed herself into a semblance of sternness in an endeavor to conceal her real feelings.

"I suppose I'll not get a look at the asters when they bloom. It would be a shame to let them die on the stalk without a soul pulling one. I think I'll ask Kate Bowerman to see to them. She might pack up a few and send to me. I'm curious to see how that new royal purple turns out. I've been suspicious all summer that it would turn out a scrub. It looks like a scrub."

[Pg 26]

She was bending over the plants growing along the fence which divided her yard-proper from the garden and wood-yards beyond. Debby was proud of her collection of asters which were of every variety known throughout the country.

"They certainly are scrubs," she repeated as she bent for a closer inspection.

"How do you know, Aunt Debby? To me, they look like the other plants."

"I just know," said Debby. "I don't know how I know, but I just do. Plants show their breed just like people and animals. I've no need when I look at old Jim Ramsey's horse to be told it's mighty common stock. Yes; it has the same number of legs and hoofs and its eyes are in the right place, but it isn't a thoroughbred. Anyone can see that at a glance. It is just the same with plants. There's a wide difference. Though I suppose it is only ones who work about them and love them that see the difference. And with people! Some people are born common stock and stay common stock all their lives, even if they've lived in mansions and hold a dozen diplomas."

[Pg 27]

She paused suddenly. "Run and get some more crocks, Hester," she added. Debby was annoyed at herself in talking of family in the child's presence. With Debby's knowledge of Hester's parentage, it was as though she had thrown a taunt in the child's face. When Hester returned, bearing in her arms the two, large flower-pots, Debby made a point of showing her unusual consideration, asking her opinion as to the best flowers to be potted and whether she did not wish a plant for her window in school.

From the beginning of these preparations, one duty had been firmly fixed in Debby's mind. It was not a pleasant one, yet she did not mean to shirk it; but she did put it off to the very last morning when she and Hester had brought down the trunks and were preparing to pack their own personal belongings.

"There are some things in the attic, Hester, which rightfully belong to you. I've never mentioned them to you before, because you were yet such a child. But now you are leaving and Providence alone knows what may be in store for us. I may not come back. Now, don't begin to cry. I expect to live a good many years yet; but there's no telling. I believe in doing what Grandmother Alden always said, 'Hope for the best, but be prepared for the worst.'

[Pg 28]

"If anything should happen to me, it is only fair that you should have what is yours by rights. Just let your packing go this morning. We'll have time to finish this afternoon and not be rushed. I want you to go with me and look over the clothes that were yours and your mother's.

"I laid your mother out in the best things I could buy; and I kept every stitch she wore when the accident befell her. Somewhere or sometime, some of her friends will appear and they may be

able to recognize these clothes."

Debby lead the way to the attic, climbing up the narrow dark stairway which lead from the kitchen bedroom and Hester followed at her heels.

The attic was low and narrow. Except in the middle, one could not walk without stooping to escape the rafters. Along one side was a long row of boxes and trunks in which the Aldens, for generations, had kept their heirlooms. So far as money value was considered, there was nothing here worth while. A surveyor's compass and staff, a spinning wheel; old blue dishes covered with hair-like lines. There was no real lace, and there were no handsome gowns. Nevertheless, they meant much to Debby Alden. They were family to her.

[Pg 29]

A little low trunk was at the extreme end of the attic. It was to this that Debby directed her steps.

"Everything in this trunk belongs to you, Hester. When I packed it away, I put a card inside so that you might know that they were your mother's. There's nothing at all of value. Sit down here and we'll go over them."

She knelt before the trunk and opened it. Hester, obedient to Miss Debby's wishes, sat down on the floor near the window while the woman took out each article and passed it to her companion.

[Pg 30]

"This is the dress your mother wore. I thought from the material that she must have been well-to-do. She had a gentle, nice way of speaking. She looked like a woman who had never worked hard and was used to having things comfortable. That's why I can't understand how she could disappear and no one search for her. We sent notices to all the papers for miles about."

Debby Alden paused. She could not justify herself even in her own thoughts. By withholding what she knew of Hester's parentage, the newspaper accounts of the death of the French woman, had been misleading. This was one act of her life that gave her no satisfaction in thinking over. She put it from her mind and in nervous haste, passed the other articles of clothing to Hester.

"I've saved even her shoes. You see what a little foot she had. Your mother was a very pretty woman, Hester. Of course, I saw her only that hour at dinner when she sat in the kitchen. She had dark eyes and hair and a plump, round figure. You look like her, only there is a difference. Your eyes are dark but they don't look as your mother's did, and your mouth and expression are not as I remember hers to be."

[Pg 31]

Hester made no comment as she looked over the clothes. She was not at all moved by the sight of these things. She was sixteen, and had come to the place where she was able to understand much that Debby did not tell her.

She knew that something lay back of all this. Why had none of these people come for her? What were they that they would leave a little child in the world without ever making an effort to find her? They could not have been fine people. Hester was confident of that. She had picked up Debby's word and mentally set down the people from which she had sprung as "poor stock."

"If I ever am anything at all, it will be because of Aunt Debby's training," she concluded as the last article of her mother's clothes lay in her hands.

"It seems strange that they never came for you."

"I'm glad they didn't," responded Hester. Her pride was in arms. If her own people cared so little for her, she would never grieve for them.

[Pg 32]

"I am glad—very glad that they didn't," she repeated. "I belong to you. I'd rather be your girl than anyone's else and I couldn't be that if they had taken me away when I was a baby."

According to tradition, Hester's sentiment was not at all proper. One should cherish one's family above all else.

"It isn't right to say such things, Hester. Of course, you and I are very near to each other; but you cannot feel toward me as though I was your mother."

"Of course not. I feel a great deal more." She arose to her feet, dropping on the floor, the articles of clothing which had been in her lap. "Why, Aunt Debby, I'd treasure an old shoe-lace of yours more than those things." She pointed to the heap of clothes on the floor.

Debby meant to be firm. She had intended from the first that Hester should be rigidly disciplined. She believed in "the speak-when-spoken-to" child. But there are some arguments that cannot be questioned. She wanted Hester to love her above anyone else. She could not chide her for doing that. Debby's discipline went to the winds.

[Pg 33]

"How very foolish you talk, Hester!" she said reprovingly; but she looked up at the girl with such a tender light in her eyes, that Hester laughed aloud.

"But you like my foolishness, Aunt Debby. I know you do." She was down beside Debby Alden with her hand laid caressingly on the woman's arm.

"Now, Hester, you are—"

"But you like me to be foolish. You know you do, Aunt Debby."

"I surely do not—"

Hester laughed again. Aunt Debby was blushing like a young school-girl.

"You cannot say that you do not like it," cried Hester. "You turn the question every time and do not answer directly."

"We'll finish this work and go back to our packing," was the firm rejoinder. "Your little baby-clothes are here. Your mother must have been a fine needle-woman, for the rolled hems and hemstitching are perfect."

[Pg 34]

The little dresses and petticoats were yellow with age. There was no distinguishing mark about them. They were of fine sheer linen, and exquisitely made. But thousands of babies over the land might have worn just such garments.

"You had a little handkerchief about your neck like a bib," continued Debby. "This is it. It was pinned down in front with an odd pin. It's rather peculiar and not worth much as far as money goes."

She handed the pin to Hester. It was of yellow metal—gold, perhaps—of oval shape and about the size of a dime. Inside the outer gold edge was woven a narrow strand of hair, and within this was imbedded a peculiar yellow stone.

"Isn't it pretty!" cried Hester. She held it in her hands and examined it eagerly. It was the first interest she had evinced in anything which belonged to that time before she entered the Alden home.

"I fancy it isn't gold," continued Debby Alden. "I never knew gold to have that peculiar tinge. It was that way when I unpinned it from your bib. I tried to brighten it a little, but I couldn't. It looks now just as it did when I laid it away. That stone, of course, is nothing more than a bit of yellow glass of small value."

[Pg 35]

"Yes," said Hester slowly. Her eyes were fixed upon the queer stone. "I never saw a bit of glass look so. When I hold it one way, it looks like a spark of fire. It looks as deep as a well, when you look directly into the center."

"Cut glass," said Debby. "All cut glass reflects light like that."

Cut glass or something more, it appealed to Hester. Turning it about in her hand, she examined it critically.

"There's a little hook here at the end," said Hester. "Did you notice that, Aunt Debby?" Debby took the pin in her hand to examine it. "I didn't notice that before. It has been an old fashioned earring made into a pin. Earrings used to be fashionable. No lady ever dressed without them, I've heard my mother say. The breast-pin that I wear with my gray silk was made from an earring of Grandmother Palmer's. Dear, dear, I wonder who wore these."

[Pg 36]

"I'm going to keep this and wear it, Aunt Debby."

"I don't believe I would, Hester. Someone might ask you where you got it."

"And I shall tell them it was my mother's, and that I wore it when I was a little baby. That is true. Isn't it, Aunt Debby?"

"You might lose it—" Debby began.

"If I do, no one will care except me. I'd dearly love to have it, Aunt Debby. Isn't it my own to do with as I please?"

There was no argument to bring against this, and Debby remained silent. Hester, pleased with the bauble, pinned it on her dress and then set about replacing the other articles in the trunk.

The pin might be cut glass or something better. Neither Debby nor Hester knew, nor could they know that it would bring to Hester loss of friends and—but neither the girl or woman could anticipate that. At present, all they could do was to admire the glitter of the stone and watch the changing lights play upon it.

CHAPTER III

[Pg 37]

I was the last week in August when Debby Alden and Miss Richards moved into the cottage at the east end of Lockport. The seminary was not to open until a week later and Hester was with her friends, assisting in every way she could in putting the place to rights.

Thursday evening, the house was immaculate. There was neither fad nor fancy about its equipment. Debby had brought down some great four-posters, old blue china, and solid silver. Miss Richards had several black walnut armchairs that were old enough to have been Mayflower Pilgrims, but which were not. There was a rug which Miss Richards had picked up in Europe twenty years before and a gay screen which Lieutenant Richards had bought a century before in an old junk shop in China.

"We look as though we had stepped from a previous century," said Miss Richards. "We haven't a

modern article about us—" She glanced toward Hester and then added—"except Hester."

[Pg 38]

"You really need me," responded the girl. "I'm the only piece of twentieth-century furniture you and auntie have. I think I shall remain with you. I could study just as well here as shut up in that old stone building. I really think I could get my lessons better."

"I think so, too," said Miss Richards, "that is if you refer but to book lessons."

"What other kind could there be?"

"The kind that people teach you. They are all sorts of lessons, as varied in kind as there are people. The girls at Dickinson will teach you many a good lesson."

"I should think you and Aunt Debby could do it better. I've quite made up my mind to be but a parlor student."

"There are some things Debby and I cannot teach you. We love you too much to give you the very lessons which we know would prove best for you. The girls at school will do that for us."

"I do not always quite understand," said Hester. "Mr. Sanderson used to declare that I was neither philosophical nor mathematical. I do not see deeply into matters. I do know, though, which I like. Just now there is nothing I should like better than being at home with you and Aunt Debby, and I have quite made up my mind to that."

[Pg 39]

"You had better unmake it, Hester," said Debby who, coming into the house at that moment, had overheard their words.

"You will remain at the seminary even over Saturday and Sunday, except once each month. Miss Weldon does not approve of pupils coming back and forth. I think she is quite right. This flitting about gives a most unsettled feeling. You will not know where you belong, and we'll have none of it for you."

Hester sighed and turned aside. She was disappointed, only for the time. Had she been Debby Alden's own daughter, she could not have partaken more strongly of some of Debby's characteristics. When Hester once made up her mind, she was quite "set." She had no thought of giving up her plans.

"About the time that I'm ready to leave them, they'll both realize how much they'll miss me. Then I'll be able to persuade Aunt Debby to allow me to board at home."

[Pg 40]

Confident in her power of persuasion, Hester went about her work as happy as though the matter had been adjusted to her satisfaction.

There was yet some shopping to be done before Hester's outfit would be complete. Miss Debby had purposely delayed buying until she came to Lockport where she believed a better selection might be made.

Miss Richards had friends in town and had gone off to spend the day with them. After the household duties had been disposed of, Debby and Hester set out on their shopping expedition.

The morning was delightful and Debby, who took pleasure in the exercise of her muscles, decided to walk. With the exception of the summer homes which lay on the outskirts, Lockport was compact. The shopping district lay within a few squares. The store windows were tastefully decorated and Hester to whom all this was new, lingered to gaze and comment.

"I never knew hats could be so pretty. Did you, Aunt Debby? Why the window is a dream—a poem!" She paused to study the millinery display.

[Pg 41]

She had grown tall. Her shirt-waist suit of white linen was dainty and simple. She had pushed back her hat. When she was interested in anything, she was wholly unconscious of herself and what was going on about her. Now with bright eyes, and flushed cheeks, she stood before the window. She was a very pleasing sight to passers-by. More than one person stopped for a backward glance and smiled, well pleased, and passed on. Someone in particular found her pleasing. A young man hurrying from the store adjoining, paused a moment to look at Hester. Her face was in profile. All he could see was the cheek and chin, the tall, slender figure and the long braid of hair.

He paused but a moment. Then he smiled with delight and advancing, came up beside her. "Hello, honey. I did not know you were in town. Are you picking your fall chapeau?"

Hester was startled. She looked about her. Debby Alden had moved on and unconscious of what was taking place, was studying the display in windows several yards distant.

[Pg 42]

At Hester's alarm, a flush came to the young man's face.

"I humbly crave your pardon," he said, lifting his hat. "I mistook you for my cousin Helen. Believe me, I regret exceedingly—"

Debby Alden had turned at this moment. She came hurrying up. Hester had been alarmed and turned to lay her hand on Debby's arm.

"He thought I was his cousin," said Hester.

Debby turned toward the young man who would have explained had she allowed him to do so; but she gave him such a glance that words failed him.

"Come, Hester, an apology is merely an insult." Hester walked meekly along. She was not able to grasp the situation.

"He said he thought I was his cousin, Aunt Debby. He seemed so sorry—"

"Nonsense. He had no idea that you were his cousin or anyone else that he knew. He is just a smart, ill-bred young man, Hester, who, thinking you a stranger and not used to the ways of a city, did what he could to annoy you. Never pay any attention to such folk, Hester. Hurry away from them as fast as you can. They are never desirable people to know."

[Pg 43]

"But he looked very nice, Aunt Debby. Did you notice his eyes? I liked the way he spoke. I really do believe that he thought that I was his cousin."

"It matters little what you think on such matters. Hereafter never give anyone time to apologize for speaking to you."

Smith and Winter's was the largest store in Lockport. It was on Pine, between Third and Fourth Streets. It was here that Debby Alden intended making her purchases.

"Do you think you would like a tan jacket better than a blue one, Hester?" she asked as the floor-walker was conducting them toward the coat department.

"I think so, Auntie. But you select what you think is best."

Debby made known her wants to the sales-woman. Jackets of tan and blue, of many sizes and shades were brought forth and tried on Hester. They were interrupted in their selection, by one of the girls from the alteration department, claiming the attention of the clerk.

[Pg 44]

"Miss Herman, did Mrs. Vail say when she wished her dress?"

"It was to be sent out to-morrow, but she telephoned last evening saying that she was called away. We are to send the dress on. She may not come back here. Her cottage will close this week."

"That's odd. She promised to come back for another fitting."

"She often does that; but she's not erratic. She always has a reason for going off in that way. When you get to know her as I do, you will think she's the sweetest woman in the world."

"I wasn't thinking of that—nor did I mean to criticise her. I wanted to know whether or not I should finish her work without another fitting."

"No, I'd wait." The clerk who had been addressed as Miss Herman turned to Debby Alden and waited her orders.

[Pg 45]

"Hester thinks the tan will please her best," said Debby. "If you can send it out to this address," she gave the woman her card. Miss Herman read it and smiled. "I have mistaken you all along for someone else. I thought you were Mrs. Loraine. I never met her, but her daughter is a seminary student here and often comes into my department. I was sure that this young lady was a younger sister of Helen Loraine's."

"No, we are not related. I know nothing of the people," said Debby stiffly.

"They are a fine family," said the clerk. "We are always pleased to serve them."

Hester would have spoken had not Debby silenced her with a look.

"Auntie, did you not hear that name?" she said as they moved away. "Helen Loraine. Isn't that the name of the girl who is to room with me, and that young man said his Cousin Helen."

"That young man's cousin exists only in his mind, and as your roommate—she may be a wholly different person. The name Loraine is common throughout this section."

[Pg 46]

"But, Aunt Debby, the clerk thought I looked like—"

"Nonsense. Some people never see further than their own nose. If the clerk noticed that your hair and eyes were black, she decided that you looked like every one else she knew who had the same coloring. I fancy she said that but to make conversation."

The following day when Debby Alden suggested that they make ready to go to the seminary, Hester brought up again the question of remaining at home. Debby listened patiently until the girl had expressed herself and had presented every argument in favor of attending the seminary for recitations merely. When Hester had finished, Debby Alden said quietly: "Please put on your hat and gloves, Hester. We must take the next car if I wish to be back home in time to get supper."

Hester felt that the decision was final and nothing could be gained by argument. Leaving the room, she soon returned with hat and gloves. These last articles she swung in her hands as they went down the walk.

"Hester, when at home we were a little lax about certain customs. Here in Lockport and among

[Pg 47]

strangers, we must be more careful. Put on your gloves before we leave the house. My mother taught me that a lady must finish her toilet before she leaves her home."

She waited until Hester had put on and buttoned the gloves. "It seems a trifle," continued Debby, "but it is trifles which mark the difference between a cultivated and an uncultivated woman."

When the street car took siding at Williams Street to give right of way to the east-bound car, a carriage drew up close to the curb. The coachman was in livery. Hester noticed that at once, for at her home no distinction in dress was made between the man who drove and he who employed him.

Servants in livery were not new to Debby Alden. Her attention was attracted to the sweet-faced woman in the carriage. This woman who was richly gowned was scarcely older than Debby herself; but her hair was white. There was some quality in the face which attracted and held. Perhaps it was the power of self-control. The power to smile sweetly when the person had cause only for tears. This woman was bending from the carriage in conversation with a man and woman on the sidewalk. As the car moved, the nervous horses jerked suddenly. The woman in the carriage turned her head and met Debby Alden's direct glance. Just for a moment, these two women looked into each other's eyes. Then the car moved on; the carriage bowled along. With each woman an impression of the unusual lingered.

[Pg 48]

Debby really was troubled. The face of the strange woman was as the face of a half-forgotten friend.

"That woman in the carriage made me think of someone," she said to Hester. "But I cannot think who. There was something about the turn of her head and the way she looked up at me that made me think I have met her somewhere."

"I did not see her," said Hester. "I was looking at the coachman. I hope that some day I may have matched horses and a man in livery." Then she turned toward Debby Alden. "Hasn't this been a peculiar day, Auntie. Every one thinks I am someone else, and you think every one is some one you know."

[Pg 49]

"Every one? You are putting it a trifle too strong, Hester. I have come in contact with a great many people, but I remember but one who made me think of someone else. You exaggerate, Hester."

"I'd really rather call it hyperbole," said Hester. "You are a classical scholar when you use hyperbole and a 'fibber' when you exaggerate."

Debby smiled at the sally. She and Hester were good friends, with a perfect understanding between them.

"Put your effects toward the classical into working order. I catch a glimpse of the seminary walls, Hester."

This was the first glimpse Hester had of her new home. There was a long stretch of grass, old trees and then the low, long, gray wall of stone. The campus crossed the end of the street. It seemed to the occupants of the car that they would be carried across the campus and through the building. But the line turned suddenly and ran along the edge of the grounds.

[Pg 50]

"We get off here, Hester," said Debby leading the way out.

Hester's gay spirits ebbed. Silently, she followed Debby Alden to the entrance. The office-boy swung open the great hall door for them to enter and escorted them down the long hall to the office.

Hester's eyes grew big. She had not dreamed that any place could be as beautiful as this. Her feet sank in the soft, thick carpet. She followed Miss Debby's footsteps as silent as a mouse.

Doctor Weldon was in her private office. Into this, Marshall conducted the callers. Hester shook hands in silence, and then sank into the nearest chair. For the first time in her life, her tongue refused to work as it should. It felt now as though it were glued to the roof of her mouth. She listened to the conversation between Doctor Weldon and Debby, but was not able to grasp what it meant.

Then Debby arose to depart. Marshall was sent in search of a hall-girl to conduct Miss Hester Palmer Alden to Room Sixty-two. Then Hester realized that she and Debby must part.

[Pg 51]

"I'll go with you to the door, Aunt Debby," she said. No further word was said until they stood on the steps and Debby turned for a farewell embrace. The tears were very close to Hester's eyes; but she forced them back, determined that she would not vex her Aunt Debby by a show of feeling.

Debby put her arms about Hester, kissed her warmly and said, "Be a good girl, Hester and do as the teachers tell you."

Such had been her words ten years before when she had taken her into the primary grade and left her in Miss Carns's care. Hester answered meekly now as then, "Yes, Aunt Debby."

Debby went down the winding path. Once she glanced back. Hester was standing erect with her head thrown proudly back. It was as though she were declaring, "You may kill me, but I shall not

The haughty proud turn of the head! Where had Debby seen that before? The experiences of the day rushed over her like a flood. Hester's poise and turn of the head were like that of the sweet-faced woman in the carriage.

CHAPTER IV

Miss Loraine, so the hall-teacher informed Hester, would be her roommate. Miss Loraine, however, was not at the seminary at present. She had come the previous day and attended to business matters, put her room in order and had then gone out to the home of her aunt who lived at a country place called Valehurst.

This information was given to Hester while she was being conducted to her room. The seminary and living-rooms were under one roof. The main building was a great rectangular block, containing offices, class rooms, dining-hall and chapel. From this extended an east dormitory, and one on the west. Each suite of rooms consisted of a bedroom and a small study or sitting-room. This was occupied by two students. Number Sixty-two which Hester was to occupy with Helen Loraine was on the second floor just where the dormitory joined the main building. It overlooked the front campus and was considered one of the most desirable rooms in the school.

Hester, being new to the ways of boarding-school life did not realize how fortunate she was in securing so fine a location. Helen Loraine had been a seminary girl for two years and knew the "ropes." The previous spring, she had put in an application for Number Sixty-two. She had come down several days before the opening of school to take possession, feeling sure that if she was once placed there, no misunderstanding would arise. There had been several instances at Dickinson, where girls had moved in their trunks and took possession before the rightful occupant of the room appeared.

The hall-teacher escorted Hester to the door and then left her. She found that the sitting-room lacked the bareness of dormitory rooms. Helen had unpacked her trunk and converted it, by means of a gay cover and cushions into a cosy corner. The study table held a few books and a candle with a shade. Across one end of the room, gay ribbons had been stretched across the wall. These were filled with photographs. The second study table held a great number of posters. On top of these, Hester found a note addressed to herself.

"DEAR ROOMMATE-TO-BE: I have put up enough belongings to hold the fort until you arrive. I did not like to do more until you came. I was afraid you might not like my style of decoration. I shall be back within a day or so. Meanwhile make yourself comfortable and do not get homesick.

"HELEN VAIL LORAINÉ."

Hester read the note several times. It was a thoughtful, kind act for Miss Loraine to leave the note. Hester was already experiencing the first tinge of homesickness; but she had no intention of giving way to her feelings. She could do just as Helen had done. She would keep so busy that she could not even think of Aunt Debby and Miss Richards sitting down together at their evening meal.

She unpacked her trunk and put her clothes in order in the closet and drawers. Helen had rigidly observed the old time custom of the hall and had stretched a blue ribbon from hook to hook, this portioning off equal space for herself and roommate.

Hester heard the ten-minute bell ring, but being unused to the ways of school, did not know its meaning. She opened the door leading from the sitting-room into the hall. She paused a moment to ascertain the reason for the bell's ringing. A murmur of voices came from the several rooms below. They were beautifully modulated with the intonation of those who have been trained to speak carefully.

"Really, I think you are mistaken, Mame. The Fraulein told me that Helen had gone to her aunt and would not return until Monday."

"I am not mistaken. Do you think that I do not know Helen Loraine when I roomed with her two terms?" This voice had in it a touch of petulant decision, as though the speaker was vexed because the responsibility of settling all pertinent matters devolved upon her.

"I saw her come across the campus," the speaker continued. "A lady was with her; but they went into the private office and remained ever so long. I would have waited had not Miss Burkham come along and informed me that a public hallway was not the proper place for a young lady."

Hester heard the words and felt the sudden touch of ironical humor in them; but she did not know of the smile which passed over the group in the room below; neither did she know Miss Burkham.

"I saw her," a third voice took up the conversation. It was a ringing, clear, happy voice as though the speaker had always lived in the sunshine, and her voice had partaken of its rippling notes. "I saw her when she crossed the campus, and was sure it was Helen. I was just about to run out and

give her a hug—Helen is the dearest girl in the world—when I saw I was mistaken. She isn't nearly so tall as Helen and she doesn't wear her hair in a bun as Helen does. She was an awfully sweet-looking thing, though, and looked for all the world like Helen."

"There's a new girl in Sixty-two. She went in there." The voice was deliberately low and steady. It was as though the owner had grown weary of life, but meant to live it down if she could. "Perhaps she may be Helen's sister, who knows?" The tone of voice would have influenced a stranger to believe that being sister to Helen Loraine, was a dire calamity.

[Pg 58]

A murmur of amusement rippled over the group. "Sara Summerson, do arouse yourself. Life is worth living, and examinations are months away."

"It will be all the same to me. It will be this term as it was last. I shall not have time to get out my lessons. When I wasn't getting a drink for Erma, I was driving my roommate in from the corridor and getting her down to work. When I thought I could get out my 'Unter Linden,' Miss Laird would call me to button her waist. If I ever am principal of a seminary, I'll have a law passed making it criminal for a teacher to wear a dress buttoned in the back. It's bound to distract the attention of the pupils from their books." The slow, sad monotone never varied. The hearers laughed. A bell rang and there was a sound of a general uprising.

Hester, conscious for the first time that she had been listening, turned into her room and closed the door. She heard the sound of passing footsteps, the murmur of voices, and then all grew still.

[Pg 59]

Alone in the dormitory! It sounded to her as fearful as alone in the desert. But Hester had not been trained by Debby Alden without effect. She had not the least intention of sitting down and giving way to her homesick feeling. The fear that she might give way, aroused her. She grew antagonistic with herself. There was some unpacking yet to be done and Hester flew at it as though her life depended on having it done a certain time and in regular fashion.

The little old-fashioned brooch which her Aunt Debby had given her was in a tiny box by itself. Hester took it out and examined it carefully. The little bit of cut glass in the center attracted her strongly. In the sunlight it gleamed like fire. In the shadow it showed a pale yellow tinge like the petal of a faded yellow rose.

Hester had no desire to wear it. It was pleasant, however, to have something which belonged to one's own people. The Alden home was rich in bits of china, linen, and silverware which had been handed down from generation to generation; but this little circle of gold, the mat of hair and bit of glass, was all that Hester had of which she could say, "This belonged to my family."

[Pg 60]

Helen's note had bade her make herself comfortable. Hester felt privileged to inspect the posters, take up the books and to examine the photographs.

She was growing hungry. The dinner hour must have passed. Perhaps, the bells which she had heard ringing earlier in the evening were to call the students to the dining-room. Hester had not understood that, but it really made little difference. She would not have ventured alone into the dining-hall though she were starving.

The hall-girl from the west dormitory had evidently forgotten her. It was the duty of hall-girls to play the part of hostess to new students. Fortunately for Hester, there were other persons more thoughtful than the hall-girls.

[Pg 61]

Hester had reached the stage where a good healthy appetite would have looked with favor upon crackers and cheese, when a knock came at the door. She opened to admit a round-faced, dimple-cheeked girl of sixteen, bearing a tray in her hand.

"I hope I am not intruding," she said. It was the same slow droll voice which Hester had overheard an hour before in the room below. "I am Sara Summerson, one of last year's girls. I did not know until after dinner was over that you were here,—a stranger and starving. The servants are in the dining-hall, so I asked Mrs. Hopkins if I might bring your dinner here."

"I am so glad!" cried Hester. "Will you come in?"

The invitation was not necessary. The caller was evidently a lady of resources, despite the slowness of her speech and movement. She had entered, moved back the books from the nearest study table and had set down her tray. "I brought you some tea," she said. "Will you not please sit down and eat while I fill your cup. We did have cocoa. I did not know which you like best; but I did know that if one does not like cocoa, one cannot bear to taste it."

[Pg 62]

Hester took her place at the table. Her new acquaintance sat opposite. Hester studied her now and came to the conclusion that she could like Sara Summerson. She was of Hester's age and physique, but of wholly different coloring. Her eyes were gray and calm; while Hester's were black and at times snapping. She wore a simple white gown with a Dutch neck. She was not at all pretty; but she was good to look at. There was a repose and calmness about her that had a good effect on Hester. Her droll slow smile gave an expression of humor to her slightest word.

While Hester was eating, the caller made no attempt to converse. When Hester had finished her meal, Sara looked across at her, viewed her slowly and serenely and said, "I saw you to-day when you came from the car. I thought you were Helen Loraine."

"I have heard that several times to-day," said Hester. "Is Helen Loraine beautiful?" It was a guileless question and Hester saw no compliment to herself in the asking. Sara scanned her

[Pg 63]

slowly, deliberately. "If she were, I should not tell you. I never spoil people by complimenting them—even though it be over someone's else shoulder. No, she is not beautiful. She's more than that. She's distingué." She smiled blandly at Hester.

"I'm afraid I do not know what you mean. That word is new to me."

"It would not be if you could see it printed. It is no doubt, one of your most intimate words. I've given it the French pronunciation. Miss Webster declares my French is startling in its originality. You wish to know of Helen? She is one of those people that you need to glance at but once to know that she is something. She is tall and fine-looking; but that is not all. She has an 'air' you know."

Yes; Hester did know. An "air" in this sense meant the same as Debby Alden's "stock."

"And I look like her? I was mistaken to-day for her while in a store."

"You look much alike, yet there is a difference. Are you related to her?"

[Pg 64]

"No, indeed. I never heard the name until to-day."

The subject ended there. Sara sat for some time. She told Hester of the customs of the hall, the manner of calling and returning calls; the conventions which were observed when one had a spread, and the social distinction between that and a fudge party. Fudge-making was always informal, and often surreptitious. Anyone might be invited to it; but a spread and chafing-dish party observed a difference.

"It had been known," Sara said, "in that very dormitory that freshmen—girls who had not been in school a month—had had the audacity to invite a senior to their parties. But they never did it a second time."

Thus having put Hester on the right track socially, Sara took up her tray and departed.

"The first bell rings at nine forty-five," so Sara had informed her. This gave the girls a half-hour to prepare for bed and for Bible reading.

Hester looked at the time. It was fully an hour before the retiring bell would ring. She had a feeling that after the first night, she would not mind being alone. She felt like an alien now. Perhaps, she would soon become part. She hoped so at least; for there is nothing quite as lonesome as being alone among many people. Sara had offered to escort her to breakfast and to introduce her to the other girls. Had Helen Loraine been in school, the courtesy would have been hers to fulfill.

[Pg 65]

To sit idle was impossible to Hester. The little box in which she had placed her pin, lay on the table. Without thinking, she placed it in the corner of her wardrobe, where it fitted snugly. In the shadow, it was hardly distinguishable from the woodwork. She put it safely away and then, perhaps because it was a new possession, straightway forgot about it for months.

Helen's photographs were many. The seminary girls had the habit of exchanging pictures each commencement. So it followed that students who had gone through their spring semesters, were well provided for in the line of pictures. Hester looked them over. There were girls and girls and yet more girls. Some wore evening dresses and hair in party style; others were in cap and gown. There were gymnasium costumes and bathing suits—all utilized for the picturing of girls.

[Pg 66]

Among the hundred or more were but one or two which were not those of students. There was one, old and fingermarked. It was that of a mother and children. The mother was young and beautiful. A boy leaned against her knee and a baby nestled in her arms. The boy was a handsome, manly little fellow; the baby was dimpled and smiling; its head was covered with soft dark curls, and its eyes were large and dark.

"Isn't she sweet?" said Hester to herself. "She looks as though she could eat those children up. She seems so fond of them. Mothers are always that way. Mrs. Bowerman looks at Mary as though she was the prettiest thing in the world and Mary is homely—just ordinarily homely, and Jane Orr's mother—." The thought was too much for Hester. Her lips quivered, her eyes filled with tears so that she could scarcely distinguish the features of the picture which she held in her hand. "It's just a way that mothers have," she said again. "I do wish I had had a mother!"

[Pg 67]

Then, as though the thought were unjust to the woman who had taken a mother's place to her, she added quickly. "But I wouldn't give up Aunt Debby for any mother—not even Jane Orr's."

She did not realize how long she sat with the picture in her hand, studying the mother and children. She was awakened from her reverie by the half-hour bell. She was relieved at the sound of it. Now she could sleep and forget that she was alone and under a strange roof.

She was very tired and soon fell asleep. An hour passed and in a half-conscious way she was aware that the light was on in the sitting-room and someone was moving softly about as though not to disturb her. She was too far gone in slumber to realize where she was. She thought that she was back home and Aunt Debby had slipped in to see that she was properly covered. Satisfied that this was so, she fell sound asleep. It was broad day when she was awakened by someone bending over her. She felt the touch of lips on her forehead and the sound of a sweet musical voice.

[Pg 68]

"Wake up, little roommate. The rising-bell rang long ago. You will miss breakfast."

Then as Hester opened her eyes wide, she saw bending over her, a tall, slender girl enveloped in a soft kimona, and with her dark hair streaming like waves over her shoulders.

Beautiful! Hester decided at that instant that she had never seen a sweeter face.

"I slipped in last night so that I might not waken you. I am Helen Loraine. I hope we shall be good friends, little roommate."



"I am Helen Loraine."—Page 68.

CHAPTER V

[Pg 69]

After a few days' acquaintance with Helen Loraine, Hester understood what Sara meant by saying that Helen had an "air" about her. She was always friendly, but never intimate or familiar. The sweep-women in the hall were accorded the same courtesy as a teacher. She was sympathetic without being gushing. She was just in her treatment of others, generous and kind, yet she never allowed herself to be imposed upon. With Hester, she divided all things equally; neither giving nor keeping a larger part. She was as just to herself as to others. She would have battled royally before she would have given up one of her rights. Yet no one imposed upon her; for there was that about her which instinctively fixed the boundary line. It was not what she did or said, but what she *was*, which caused her to find favor among the students.

During the first week, Helen and Hester spent their spare time in arranging their rooms. It was really marvelous what could be done with cretonne and dotted swiss. Hester had come prepared to do her part in the furnishings. Debby Alden, acting upon Miss Richards's suggestion, had selected for Hester, fancy covers, cushions and a few pictures.

[Pg 70]

Hester had not realized the importance of the accessories until the "fixing up" fever was apparent. During the first week of school, the conversation of the entire dormitory was concerning the arrangement of their rooms. There were no calls made. The conventions of the hall frowned upon one student calling upon another until that other had time to put her rooms in livable condition.

Working together, Helen and Hester soon grew friendly. Before the week had ended, Helen knew that Debby Alden was the most remarkable article in the aunt line that the age had produced. She knew also that Hester had neither sister nor brother; but she did not know that the name Alden had been given her by courtesy rather than by right, or that Hester and the beloved Aunt Debby held no ties of blood in common.

[Pg 71]

On the other hand, Hester learned that Helen was an only child; that she had a cousin Robert Vail who was almost as a brother to her; that Robert had neither brother nor sister, and that his mother, who was Helen's Aunt Harriet, loved Helen and kept her at the Vail home as much as

possible.

"You would like Aunt Harriet," said Helen in one of the confidences. It was Friday evening. The study hour had been short. The girls in kimonas and with their hair in braids, sat in their sitting-room. As they talked, they gave satisfied admiring glances about the room.

"Aunt Harriet is only forty, yet her hair is white. She had nervous trouble and brain fever that caused her to become gray; but in other ways she is like a girl. She is most unselfish. The girls in school love her. She understands what girls like and is always doing something nice for them. I cannot explain to you in what way she is so attractive. When you meet her, you'll understand just how she is."

"I may never meet her," said practical Hester.

[Pg 72]

"You will if you remain at Dickinson. When she is at her home, she comes to see me very often. Her country home, Valehurst, is back on the hills, about three miles from here. It is a charming place. You have noticed how the road gradually rises from Susquehanna Avenue. It ends in a little plateau and there Aunt Harriet's home stands."

"Her country home? Doesn't she always live there?"

"No, uncle has business which keeps him in the city a great part of the time. He must be there during the winter. Generally, the family stay at Valehurst until the last of September. Then Aunt Harriet drives or motors in each week to see me. She likes her horses best, because they are alive. She is very fond of animals and was a fine horsewoman when she was younger. She always takes me for a ride, and best of all, takes my roommate with me."

"But she does not know me," Hester was tremblingly expectant. At home, automobiles were rare, and Hester knew no more of them than the smell of the gasoline. To ride in an automobile would be a joy unspeakable. If it should chance that Mrs. Vail would take her, she would write and tell Jane Orr about it and describe the sensations that went with the ride.

[Pg 73]

"But she will know you. She makes a point of knowing all my friends. I know just what she will say the instant she comes into this room. She has a proud way with her. She carries herself very straight and holds her head high." Helen arose and moving toward the door, showed to Hester the grand manner of her Aunt Harriet.

"She will say," continued Helen, "I am very glad to see you, Helen. I miss you very much. Have you everything you need for your room and your wardrobe? If you haven't, make out a list and I shall see that you are provided for, and your roommate, dear. I hope you like her. I should like to meet her."

Helen came back to her easy chair. She laughed softly as she leaned back. "And then you'll be brought in and her heart will warm to you. It always does to every girl she meets, and it will to you. Do you know what you will do, Hester Palmer Alden?"

"No, about that time, I'll be so embarrassed that I shall not be able to say a word. If your aunt is haughty and proud, I shall be afraid."

[Pg 74]

"But she is not that kind of proud. I know what you'll do. You'll do just what every girl has done. You'll fall heels over head in love with her and before she goes, you'll be ready to declare that she's the dearest woman in the world."

"Except Aunt Debby," said Hester with dignity.

"Hester, will you light the alcohol lamp. Let us have a cup of cocoa before we go to bed. You set the chafing-dish boiling while I look for Aunt Harriet's picture."

Helen began her search among the pictures which had been heaped in a basket; for after grave consideration, she and Hester had decided that photographs ranged about the wall were out-of-date and not at all in harmony with the other fittings of their rooms.

Hester lighted the alcohol burner; suspended the kettle and brought forth the cups. This was one of the side-issues of school life on which she had not counted. She had been anticipating successive days of hard study and recitations. Having never experienced it, she could not dream of the little social bits which crept in as easy and naturally as they did at home; the half hour of confidential chat, the lunches, the visits into the rooms of the other girls, the walks and rides; the gymnasium stunts and the dances where the tall girls lead.

[Pg 75]

The kettle was boiling before Helen found the picture.

"Here it is!" she cried triumphantly. "It is really soiled for I have kept it out for two or three years. This does not look as Aunt Harriet does now. It was taken a long time ago." As she talked she held out the card to Hester.

"Why, that is the picture I liked so well. When you were not here—that first evening I was alone, I looked over your pictures. What a sweet face she has and what dear little children! Is that little boy your cousin Robert?"

"Yes, but he does not look like that now. When I wish to tease him, I show him this picture. He thinks it is horrid—perfectly horrid—though the word he uses is 'beastly.' He declares if he could find the man who took such a picture he'd have him in jail—or have his life."

[Pg 76]

"What for?" asked Hester.

"Simply for putting out such a picture. Rob says it is libel—pure and simple, to say he ever looked like that."

"I think it is lovely," said Hester. "Is the baby you?"

"No; that is Aunt Harriet's little girl. I am a year older than she."

Hester studied the picture attentively. While she did so, her mind reviewed the remarks Helen had made in regard to the Vail family. There were statements at variance.

"You said Robert had no sisters or brothers," she said.

"He hasn't," was the reply. "They did—that is—" Helen was visibly embarrassed. She could not equivocate, neither could she go into details of a family history. She hesitated a moment and said, "Little Dorothy was not with them long—just a year."

"Poor little baby. It must be dreadful to die when you are little. You miss so much. If I had died when I was little, I should have been sorry all the time thinking about what I had missed."

[Pg 77]

Hester's new logic caused her not to notice that Helen had made no affirmation in regard to the death of the child.

"Little Dorothy," was what Hester called her. From that time on, at odd moments, Hester introduced the subject of "little Dorothy," yet never became aware that the subject was not a pleasing one to Helen who never encouraged or took part in it.

Taking the card, Helen slipped it into the basket.

"Is your cocoa ready, Hester? I am almost famished. I never eat veal, so Friday evenings I go hungry. Friday is always veal day at school."

"I was so interested in the picture that I forgot about the cocoa." She hurried to the alcohol lamp.

"It is burnt out. It really did not have much in it. I should have filled it, I suppose. But I am not accustomed to cooking in this way. The water is boiling."

She measured the cocoa and cream into the cups and poured the boiling water from the kettle upon it.

[Pg 78]

"I wish your Aunt Harriet would come to see you to-morrow," continued Hester. "I liked her picture when I first saw it. I know that I should like her almost as much as I do Aunt Debby. Do you think that she will come to-morrow?"

"No, not to-morrow. She went away last week. She did not expect to go, but she heard something which caused her to go to Canada. Poor Aunt Harriet!"

The last words surprised Hester. She could see no just cause for the use of that word "poor," in connection with Mrs. Vail. To Hester's mind, a woman with a city and country home, automobiles, horses, and servants in livery was far from being poor.

The week had been so filled with new experiences that Hester had been from her room only for recitations, meals and the required walk about the campus. She had met a number of the girls, but with the exception of Helen and Sara, could not remember the name of any.

"I'll never know one girl from another. They all look alike to me," she said to Sara one day.

[Pg 79]

"Not when you know them. You'll know Renee—" She stopped in time. She was not naturally critical. To express her opinion to Hester concerning the girls, was not fair.

"We are all different," she continued slowly. "All with different virtues and faults. To be perfectly candid, I'm the only really fine one in the set."

They had been walking arm in arm up and down the corridor. As they came to the rear door of the dormitory, Sara paused. "More notices, I see. Come, Hester, we must know the worst at once. Here is where our dear Miss Burkham makes known her by-laws."

For the first time, Hester observed the white cards stuck along the edge of the door. Pausing before them, she read aloud.

"The young ladies will not make use of this entrance except to gain admittance to the gymnasium. On all other occasions, the front dormitory door must be used."

Then Sara explained. "Miss Burkham does not approve of visits at rear doors. When the girls have on the gym suits, they are not permitted to go to the front of the building. If you go out this door, you can enter the gymnasium without attracting undue attention."

[Pg 80]

Sara smiled. Undue attention was Miss Burkham's bugbear. She was always endeavoring to instill into the minds of her charges, that a lady never attracts undue attention. The word had been in use so frequently that it had become a by-word among the students.

"The next card is what makes my mouth water," continued Sara who had been reading silently.

"Beginning with the first week of the fall term, the ice-cream man will keep to the front side of

the east wing. Plates will be put in their usual place for Belva to take care of."

"Basket-ball team Number one—known as the Invincibles will hold a business meeting at 10:30 Saturday morning in the gymnasium."

This last notice was signed, "Helen Loraine, Captain."

"She never told me," cried Hester. "I never suspected that she was interested."

"Helen never tells anything about herself," said Sara. "Sometimes I grow quite exasperated about her reticence. She has been on the team ever since she was a student here. She played well before she came. Her cousin, Rob Vail, was a captain when he was in school and he taught her all the tricks of the game." [Pg 81]

Hester had no words to express herself. Basket-ball! It was enough to send the color to her cheeks. She had seen the boys in the high-school play. At home, girls did not indulge in such games. It might be that she herself, Hester Alden, could learn to play and be put on one of those teams. The thought brightened her cheeks and sent the blood through her veins with excitement.

"Who teaches you? How many teams have you, and how can you get on one? Does it take long to learn to play?"

Sara looked at her. Sara was deliberate. Her expression now was one of sad surprise.

"Do you often talk as fast as that?" she asked. "And do you expect your friends to answer with the same velocity? If you do, Hester Alden, never come to me with your questions." [Pg 82]

Hester laughed. "I always talk fast when I get excited. The words pop from my mouth like popcorn over a hot fire."

"Give me time and I'll answer your questions. Our crack team is the Invincibles. They are the only one we allow to play the tournament games with outside teams. They play with the girls from the high school, the Normal Training School and, with some of the seminary teams. I really do not remember how many games were scheduled last year. They have never allowed me to play. I'm too—. Helen Loraine is good enough to say '*deliberate*.' The other girls call it '*slow*.'"

"Then of course there must be a scrub team for the Invincibles to battle against. You must play scrub before you can hope to become an Invincible. Then the freshies and juniors have substitute teams. They practice with each other and fill up on the other teams as they are needed."

"I think I could learn to play," said Hester. "I am not—not very deliberate."

"I should say not, if you fly at a ball in the same way you talk. You might get on a substitute team. Miss Watson, the physical-culture teacher, will hold a meeting soon. The first week of school is generally so busy that the gymnasium work is not begun." [Pg 83]

"But next week, she will meet the girls and make arrangements for the work on the teams and in the gym. If I were you and really wished to play, I'd speak to Helen Loraine. She'll get you on if anyone can. You need a friend at court, for there are always more applications than there are places or times for practice."

"We must turn back. Miss Burkham would campus us, if we were to go out at this door." Sara turned and arm in arm, the girls moved toward the front entrance. "Listen, do you hear that melodious bell? That is Sykes's cow-bell. Come, and I'll treat you."

Hester followed as Sara lead the way from the front dormitory door out on to the campus. As they passed the end room, the sound of voices in conversation came to them.

"Can you let me have some perfume, Erma, and a fine handkerchief? I neglected to put mine in the laundry." [Pg 84]

"Help yourself," was the reply.

Sara smiled. "Erma Thomas is easily worked. If she does not take a firm stand, she'll keep Renee in perfume and other extras for the entire year."

Just then the door opened and Renee Loveland came out. She was a tall, handsome girl, with the bearing of a princess. She bore in her hands a bottle of perfume and two dainty handkerchiefs.

The campus sloped naturally toward the public road; yet it was several feet higher. The boundary had been made definite by a low cement coping. On this, sat several girls, among which was Berenice Smith. Across the road was an ice-cream wagon, surrounded by a score of girls with their purses in their hands. The ice-cream man was measuring cream into small wooden butter-plates.

"Here's the way we do," said Sara as Hester looked dubiously about in search of means with which she might dispose of her cream.

"This is the way." Sara deftly broke off a bit of the dish where it curved upward. "These make the best spoons in the world, and one never need bother keeping them in order." [Pg 85]

Soon walking by two's and three's, across the campus, moved the girls, each bearing in her hand her wooden dish with ice-cream.

Berenice sat alone on the coping. Hester Alden was not a reader of faces and could give no reasons for her pet likes and dislikes. She instinctively did not like Berenice, although the acquaintance had gone no further than a passing word. Berenice was dark, with coloring which inclined to swarthinness; her brow was low, and her eyes small and deeply set. She made an effort to be pleasant and invariably made flattering remarks to those with whom she conversed. As the girls approached, she held out her purse toward Sara.

"Be good and bring me a chocolate and peach cream," she said. "I am as far as I am allowed to go."

Taking the purse, Sara performed the commission and returned.

"For how long?" she asked.

"Two weeks. One week is almost over."

This was all Greek to Hester. She looked from one to the other; but they, taking it for granted that all the school world understood, offered neither explanation nor information. [Pg 86]

As they crossed the tan-bark, Mame Cross met them. She looked like a fashion-plate in a tailored gown and handsome hat.

"I've had permission to go down town," she said. "Do you want me to get anything for you?" The question was put to Sara.

"We're out of alcohol. You'd better order some."

"Did you know that Berenice is campused for two weeks? She made fudge Monday evening after the study bell rang. Miss Burkham discovered it at once. Anyone passing through the hall could smell fudge cooking."

"It seems strange that Miss Burkham should campus her for that. We made fudge. It was the first night and no one is expected to observe study hours during the first evening."

"But Berenice lied. You know Miss Burkham will not tolerate deception. It was not making fudge but the deception that caused the punishment."

Mame moved away. She would have been a beautiful girl, had she not looked bored and unhappy. [Pg 87]

"You're new suit is beautiful, Mame," said Sara over her shoulder.

"Do you think so? I simply cannot bear it. I never have anything like other girls."

"That is Maine's old cry," said Sara when she was beyond hearing. "She is the best-dressed girl in school and she has a father who is devoted to her. She has everything in the world to make her happy, but she's always complaining. Now, Erma is different. She's perfectly satisfied. Every dress she owns is a perfect love of a dress."

Hester had said very little during this hour with Sara; but she had learned a great deal. There had been no guile or envy in Sara's frank expression of the virtues and faults of her friends; and not for an instant did she think she was making an error or stepping over the border line of kindness when she told Hester all she knew of those students.

CHAPTER VI

[Pg 88]

Hester was not a girl to condescend to subterfuge to gain a point. She was often frank to painfulness. To her mind when one wished a favor, the only way was to speak directly and ask for it. She was neither politic nor tactful. She had decided that basket-ball was the one game that was really worth playing. Tennis was old and did not appeal to her. She and Jane Orr had played tennis ever since they had been old enough to hold a racquet. But basket-ball! The thought of it sent the blood coursing through her veins.

At the first opportunity, she spoke to Helen. She went to the subject directly like a bullet to the bull's eye.

"Sara Summerson told me you were captain of the first team and that you had a good bit of influence in getting the girls on the other teams. I would like to play and I wish you would put me on. Will you?" [Pg 89]

"I cannot put you on the first or even the scrub. I must pick from the substitute teams to fill any vacancy. I have nothing at all to do with the sub. The physical instructor does that, and of course picks out the girls whom she thinks will be able to play the game. But I'll speak to her about you."

"I wish you would," said Hester. "I'm *fairly* aching to get into a game."

"You'll be *completely* aching after your first practice," said Helen.

"I'll soon get over it. My muscles were sore for days when I tried to skate, but I didn't mind."

The first gymnasium meeting for new students was held Monday afternoon and Hester was first

girl in the room. Helen had promised to go with her to see that she met Miss Watson but Helen was deliberate and Hester impatient. So Hester sat alone in the gymnasium for half an hour before any one appeared.

Miss Watson was a practical worker. Before many minutes had passed, she had the students enrolled, the classes organized and the time appointed for meetings. Having dispatched the regular routine work, she began the organization of squads for tennis and basket-ball. These were primarily to train the girls for work in the first teams which played the tournament games with other schools.

[Pg 90]

Before she began her arrangements, Helen Loraine spoke with her. The conversation could not be heard, but Miss Watson looked toward Hester, smiled and nodded in affirmation. A few minutes later, she read the names. Among the freshmen substitutes were Hester's and Berenice's names.

"But Berenice played last year," whispered someone near Hester. "She plays a good game, too. Why didn't Miss Watson put her first or scrub?"

The reply came but too low for Hester's ears. Helen was waiting in the corridor when Hester came out. "I know; Miss Watson said she would put you on. You'll have a good place for passing. You know the game from observation. But if I were you, I'd read the rules again and again. If you have them fairly fixed in your mind you are not so apt to make a foul play. Do your best, and you may work up to one of the other teams before long. Erma Thomas may not come back after the first of the year. That will leave one place for a substitute. She plays right guard. She's one of the finest passers we've had, but she gets rattled if she tries to make a goal. She's too nervous to play when she is conscious that any one is looking at her."

[Pg 91]

Hester was confident that she would not lose her head if the opportunity to make a goal came to her. Following Helen's instructions, she studied the book of rules. She was early at the first practice. Miss Watson gave the positions; Helen was referee. Hester was given the place of right guard.

"Keep your eyes open," said Helen. "I would give a good bit if you could make a play to put you on the first team."

Berenice was left guard. A moment before the game was called, she came up to Hester and spoke low that the others might not hear. "Helen Loraine knows the game, but there's a whole lot of things she never sees. Louise Reed is your opponent. She's not at all a suspicious girl. You see to it that we win. They always pick substitutes from the team which wins."

[Pg 92]

Hester knew little of the subtleties of human nature, and consequently could not grasp the full import of the remark Berenice had made.

Renee Loveland and Josephine Moore were captains. To Hester it seemed like an hour of intense excitement before the ball was in the air and Renee had sent it forward toward her.

"Don't hold it—don't hold it," was the one thought in Hester's mind, for that rule in particular, had made a peculiar impression upon her. She was naturally a quick actor. Now the ball was scarcely within her clutches until it was out again across the room to Berenice. Hester rushed toward the goal, just as Berenice, jerking under the arm of her opponent, passed the ball back to Hester. Again Hester deftly returned it; making a backward movement just as Louise was about to cover her. Again Berenice deftly caught it and dribbled for a yard or more. They were near enough to the basket for a goal; but Berenice's opponent covered her. The ball went flying direct across the cage. Louise made a dash; Hester sprang forward and covered her. In the excitement of the play, Hester had put forward two hands. Just as quickly she remembered and swung her right arm about Louise, while with her left hand, she tossed the ball straight into Renee's clutch. Renee, who knew the game and played it well, did not lose her presence of mind. Like a flash, she gave a forward leap and sent the ball to goal. But while it curved downward in the air, the whistle of the referee was heard.



Again Hester deftly returned it.—Page 92.

"Foul on the freshmen," she cried. "Right guard used two hands to cover."

[Pg 93]

"I think you are mistaken," cried Berenice. "I wasn't playing. Hester Alden's arm was raised, but it did not touch her opponent."

"Yes; I did!" cried Hester. "I touched her and then remembered."

"I didn't know. It must have been a very slight touch," said Louise.

"We've scored," cried Berenice.

"I am refereeing the game. Foul on the freshmen." Determination shone in Helen's eyes as she gave Berenice a look that would have subdued a sensitive person. Turning about, Hester tossed the ball to Louise who made a goal from the foul of the freshmen team. The ball went back to center and the game again was on.

[Pg 94]

At the end of the first half, the score stood six to eight in favor of the sophomores.

Berenice came up to Hester while she was struggling into her sweater. "You see how it is," she whispered. Her eyes were snapping with anger and her voice fairly hissed. "You see what a little prude like you can do. If you would have sustained me, Renee's goal would have counted us two, and Louise would have had no chance to make a goal or foul. It would have been 8 to 7 in our favor."

"But I really did touch," said Hester. "It was a foul, all right. I suppose I should have remembered in time; but this is my first game, and there's a lot to learn."

"There's something that you will never learn," was the retort and Berenice turned and walked away.

Hester did not grasp all that Berenice wished to convey. She believed the girl was vexed because of the score and attributed Berenice's anger to righteous indignation at bad playing. Helen came up before the beginning of the second half. "What about playing this, Hester?" she asked. "You did some hard playing for a new girl. Do you think you can stand it for a second half? You'll be stiff to-morrow. I'll ask Renee to have Edna Bucher substitute for you."

[Pg 95]

"I'd rather finish, myself," cried Hester. "Why, I wouldn't stop now for worlds!"

"Your own sore muscles be upon yourself then, little roommate," said Helen smiling. "I have warned you. All that is left for me is to offer the use of my witch-hazel and arnica."

"I will not have Edna Bucher substitute," cried Renee coming up. "I am glad Hester has grit enough to keep to it. This evening we must make a score."

"And to-morrow there will be wailing and groaning and rubbing of muscles," said Helen. The ten minutes was up. Helen moved toward the center of the cage.

During the second half, Hester had no active work. She guarded Louise and was careful not to make another foul move. Berenice was an active player, getting so interested in the game that she forgot her special work. She never played into another's hand. Although Renee was the champion at throwing goals, Berenice risked the score rather than give the play to the center. She appeared determined that Hester should not come within touch of the ball, and she moved like a flash of light, hither and thither, across the cage, seeming to be everywhere at once.

[Pg 96]

Helen watched the game closely. She was an impartial referee; her one desire being to play a fair game. She was aware of Berenice's playing at cross purposes and watched her closely. At last she called a foul.

"I don't see why," cried Berenice. Her little beady eyes snapped as she approached Helen and looked defiantly up at her.

"Two-hand dribble—the second time you have done the same thing. The first I let pass unnoticed just—to give you time."

"I positively did not two-hand the ball. If that is a foul, I—"

"I am a referee. Get out of the game. Edna Bucher is called to substitute."

[Pg 97]

"I will not—" began Berenice.

"Get out of the game within a minute or you shall be penalized for all the games to follow." There was no disputing Helen. Her manner was calm and her voice low, but authority was in her bearing. She stood ready to give the signal to play; but before she put the whistle to her lips, she said quietly, "While I am managing, we'll play an honest game or we will not play at all."

The girls, except Berenice, cheered and clapped. She was making her way from the gymnasium. Her heart was filled with anger and a scowl was on her face. How she hated Helen Loraine! It was not the first time Helen had criticised her.

"And Hester Alden will be another one just like Helen—too goody-good to live," was her thought. Even after Berenice was being disqualified, Hester did not understand fully all that had taken place. It was not until they were at the baths, that a full understanding came to her. Outside the bath, were the lockers. Sara and Renee had come up and paused for a moment.

[Pg 98]

"Will you allow Berenice to play next game?" asked Sara.

"Miss Watson must settle that. The captain and referee may disqualify for one game; but to make it permanent penalizing, the matter must be brought before Miss Watson. It is a very difficult matter to explain. The best way would be to have Miss Watson referee for one or two games. Then she would grasp the subtleties of the situation."

They passed on. When they were almost beyond hearing, Renee's voice sounded loud and clear.

"Sara, I do wish you'd let me wear your tan shoes down town to-morrow evening. I have permission to go, and I wish to wear my brown suit, but I have no tan shoes. I wear the same size as you."

Hester smiled. She had known Renee but ten days, during which time she could not remember one instance when the conversation did not conclude with "will you lend?"

Hester was deliberate in matters of getting from a gym suit into a dress. When she was ready to appear, the corridor leading from the gymnasium baths was deserted except for the sweep-women who were putting the finishing touches to their work.

[Pg 99]

Hester hurried out. As she crossed the campus, she found Josephine Moore sitting on the steps leading up to the dormitory. From this place, there was an excellent view of the river and the mountain beyond. Josephine appeared to be spellbound by it. She was a large girl with quantities of brown hair which she drew loosely back and coiled at the back of her head. Her eyes were large, lusterless and of a weak and faded blue, but Josephine had read novels and knew what speaking eyes meant. She tried to make her eyes soulful. She was of a romantic turn of mind, and although she would not have prevaricated for the world or done another harm by repeating anything to their detriment, she was a dreamer of day-dreams. So well did she dream that it was difficult sometimes for her to know where truth ended and dreams began.

"Can you not sit a while?" she asked. She moved to make room beside herself. Her voice was low and full and had in it a pathetic quality which was in harmony with her dreams. Hester sat down beside her. Being somewhat awed by this magnificent creature with the soulful eyes, Hester sat in silence.

[Pg 100]

"I love this time of day," began Josephine in low rapturous voice. "I love the gathering twilight. I think this is the hour when poets must sit and dream. The world and work and all horrid things are passing and only the tender twilight hangs like a mantle over all." She paused and looked at her companion. Hester felt that a reply of some sort was expected. She said the first and easiest thing that came to mind. "Yes, it is sort of nice."

"'Nice' is scarcely the word. I wish I knew what would exactly express the feeling. Sublime, soulful—" She paused and raised her eyes as though to scan the heavens. "I suppose I feel differently from other people. They tell me that my singing shows soul. I myself have often noticed the difference between myself and other girls. Would you believe it? They pass here with

laughter and jest. I cannot do that. I always pause and look at the trees and river. It seems as though a spell comes upon me. I cannot laugh and jest in the midst of such sublime things."

[Pg 101]

"Is Hester Alden there?" cried a gay voice. "Oh, is that you, Jo? Mooning? You had better come in. If you sit on those cold stones, you'll take cold and your nose will be red and your eyes watery. You'll not be sublime then." The cheer and good-nature in the voice robbed it of ill-feeling. Erma laughed as she appeared. No one could take exception to anything she said. She was too happy—too well satisfied with the world and the people about her to do anything or say anything in bitterness.

Josephine arose slowly as became one of a poetic and soulful temperament.

"You are the slowest mortal, Jo. You are wanted up in Philo Hall. You haven't fifteen minutes until the first study bell. The girls have been looking everywhere for you. You are on the program committee."

"I was carried away—," began Miss Moore. But Erma had turned her back upon the girl. As she was about to speak to Hester, she was diverted from her intention by the sound of wheels. Both she and Hester turned to look as a carriage with a coachman in livery, came from porte-cochere, turned down the driveway and passed within a few feet of where the girls stood. The carriage passed under an arc light and Erma and Hester saw distinctly the features of the woman in the carriage. She had a beautiful face, although marked with care. Her hair was white, yet her bearing as she sat erect, was that of a young woman.

[Pg 102]

"What a sweet face!" cried Hester. "That is the carriage that blocked our way, the day that Aunt Debby came up to school with me. I remember most distinctly."

The occupant of the carriage had not looked in their direction. Even had she done so, she could not have distinguished the girls; for they stood leaning against the pillars and the moving shadows fell dark upon them.

When the carriage had passed, Erma turned to her companion. "Helen was looking for you. I told her if I saw you, I'd tell you to go to your room. Helen has had company—at least I saw someone in her room."

"It may be Aunt Debby," cried Hester. She did not wait to explain. She paused not to excuse herself, but went racing down the corridor as fast as her feet would carry her. Her heels clattered on the hard wood floors and the sound of her labored breathing was audible at a considerable distance.

[Pg 103]

Just as she reached Number Fifteen, the door opened and Hester was taken by the arm. This was so unexpected that her first impulse was to jerk away, and hurry on. Fortunately a sober second thought overcame the impulse.

"Miss Alden, is the building burning? Why this haste?" Hester raised her eyes to those of the preceptress. Miss Burkham was the acme of all that was cultured and elegant. No imagination was strong enough to picture her, other than deliberate, low-voiced, serene of countenance. Hester who knew more of bluntness than irony, replied fearlessly, "No, there is no fire. I wished to get to my room as quickly as possible."

"So I surmised. But I see no necessity for this unladylike haste." Her restraining hand was yet upon Hester's shoulder. The girl felt herself quivering with the desire to be off down the corridor and up the stairs to Number Sixty-two. What if Aunt Debby should really be there waiting for her? Her heart beat fast with the thought.

[Pg 104]

Miss Burkham also felt the quivering of flesh under restraint. She delayed Hester yet longer while she made plain to her the unwritten by-laws of a lady's conduct.

"No lady races through the halls, in such fashion. It is the manner of a tom-boy. You may walk slowly down the corridor. I will stand here to see if you comprehend just what I mean by slowly. I trust that I may not be compelled to ask you to return in order that I may give you instructions in regard to the manner in which a lady walks."

"No, Miss Burkham," replied Hester humbly. She controlled her impatience at being thus detained. Miss Burkham released her and Hester moved forward as though by well-directed machinery.

On reaching Number Sixty-two, she found Helen standing before her dressing-table. She was alone. She turned as Hester entered.

"Little roommate," she said smiling a welcome at Hester. "Little roommate, I am vexed with you. I have been sending messengers everywhere in the hope of finding you. My dear Aunt Harriet was here and asked for you in particular. She waited until the last possible moment. And see there."

[Pg 105]

Helen pointed to a hamper which stood near the doorway. "She has brought us fruit, cake, and roasted chickens. No, I did not open the basket. Aunt Harriet told me what was there. It is for you as well as for me. I know Aunt Harriet, and I know how the basket is arranged. There will be a chicken for you and one for me; a box of fudge for you and one for me; and so on through the entire menu. Aunt Harriet is very much afraid that some girl will have her feelings hurt or feel slighted. Open up the basket, Hester. I must take off this waist. The collar hurts me. It always was too high. I'll feel more comfortable in a kimona."

She turned to her dressing table. "Aunt Harriet brought me something which pleased me. I have an old pin which belonged to mother when she was a girl. I thought I had lost it, but Aunt Harriet said I left it at her home and she brought it with her." [Pg 106]

Helen held the pin in her hand while she talked. Then she laid it carelessly in a little pin tray on the dresser. It was a pin of unusual style, about the size of a dime. The outer band was of a peculiar gold. Within this was a yellowish-white stone which reflected the light like a flame of fire.

Hester's eyes would have opened wide at the sight of the pin, but she did not see it, for her attention was on the hamper she was unpacking.

CHAPTER VII

[Pg 107]

There was at Dickinson a Doctor Wilbur who had charge of the mathematics. He was a man of brilliant mind, sharp tongue, and a poor opinion of the mental ability of girls in general. He had been at Dickinson two years, not because he loved the class of students, but the financial consideration had been the best ever offered to him.

The girls feared him and yet respected him for the power he exercised over a class.

He did not hesitate to use sarcastic speech. Scarcely a day passed, but some girl came from Class-room C with her feelings deeply wounded.

Hester, who had a way of "speaking up," had borne her share of Doctor Wilbur's humor. But she forgot and forgave the instant she left his recitation.

One day he had been particularly trying, and the sting of his words had lingered. She had it in mind to tell Helen of the bitter words Doctor Wilbur had hurled at her, simply because she could not explain the projection of a perpendicular upon a plane. So far in their school life—two months had passed—Hester and Helen had spoken to each other only of the agreeable things. But now Hester meant to express herself and be sympathized with. [Pg 108]

But when she reached Sixty-two, she found Edna Bucher awaiting her. Edna was tall and slender; long and lank, perhaps would be more nearly her description. She was colorless and lifeless. Her one desire seemed to be to be ladylike and to go with the best people. In her lexicon, *best* meant those with money or influence. Her hands were always cold, and her face expressionless. She posed as being the leader in classes. She was literary and musical, if one might believe her own judgment of herself. She never played, however, for the practice tired her. When she failed to respond to an invitation to recite—sometimes the invitation was quite urgent—it was not that she was not prepared to recite, but she was so nervous that she could not control her voice. [Pg 109]

"I've been waiting for you for half an hour," she began as Hester entered the room. Her tones implied, that although the responsibility be on Hester's head, she would be good enough to overlook it.

"Were you?" replied Hester. "You surely knew that the freshies were busy until this hour."

"I presume I did so; but it passed entirely from my mind. I was so absorbed in my work. I am editor-in-chief of the 'Dickinson Mirror.'"

"Oh," exclaimed Hester. She looked at Miss Bucher again. The glory of being editor of the "Mirror" cast a halo about the head of the otherwise unattractive girl.

"Yes, the girls selected me. I do not understand why they did. They appeared to think I had literary ability. Of course, I do not see that I have, but everyone speaks about it."

She had an unpleasant little mannerism of talking through closed teeth and but slightly parted lips. In conversation, she used her lips as little as possible. It may have been that she wished to keep them from wearing out, or perhaps, she considered it unladylike to open her mouth more than was absolutely necessary. [Pg 110]

"I came to have you help. We always appoint four girls to collect news, write special articles and poetry. Of course everything must treat of school life. Then, when it is printed—"

"Printed," cried Hester, her eyes snapping with fire. "Do you really have it printed and do the ones who write things have their names in it?"

"Certainly. It is issued four times a year; once during each semester, and a special souvenir one for commencement. What do you think you'd like to do?"

"I'll write some poetry," said Hester. She had never written any in her life, but she had the feeling that she could do it by half trying.

"Poetry, isn't hard," she replied airily to Miss Bucher's look of surprise. "Just make out a list of rhymes like this." She took up a paper and wrote: [Pg 111]

wide
right
might
knee
me.

"Then you fill them in," she continued. She held the pencil suspended in the air. Her brow was puckered with thought. "Of course, it isn't supposed to read as sensibly as prose. That is one of the greatest differences between them. In poetry one must use imagination and poetic license." Then she fell to work upon the paper and wrote steadily and laboriously for some minutes. Her eye flashed with triumph. "Listen. Of course this is mere rough work. I'll polish up what I write for the 'Mirror.'

"Imogen was by his side,
So they wandered far and wide,
The woods and vales stretched left and right,
He loved the girl with all his might,
So dropping on his bended knee
He cried, 'Oh, fair one, pity me.'"

A peal of laughter followed this closing line. It was a merry peal without malice or guile. Hester turned. Erma was standing in the doorway.

"Oh, but that is rich! He dropped on his bended knee. Could he get on his knee if it wasn't bended?" She laughed aloud.

"You are so literal!" cried Hester with dignity. "In poetry, one is allowed—"

"Poetry," another merry laugh. "Is that poetry? Take it to Doctor Weldon's classes and let her put her seal of approval on it."

Erma had made her way to the door. With a mock courtesy and a sweep of her skirts, she vanished. But as she went down the corridor, the girls in Sixty-two caught the echo of her laugh and her song, "And dropping on his bended knee."

Miss Bucher was a lady who arose to the occasion. She did not give way to merriment. Her face was colorless and serene.

"I understand fully, Miss Alden, the point you wish to make. Miss Thomas has no literary appreciation." She paused. There is but one thing worse in the world than adverse just criticism, and that is praise so faint that it is damaging. Miss Bucher paused as though to weigh her words. Then she spoke: "Miss Thomas means well enough, but—well, nature has not gifted us all in the same way."

It was fair enough, or seemed to be. Yet Hester felt that intangible something to which one cannot respond, because one feels rather than knows of its existence.

Miss Bucher arose. She was not given to furbelows. Each line of her attire accentuated her angles and height.

"I will go now. I am glad you will help me. Could you have your poem or whatever you decide upon ready by Monday?"

"I shall have it ready to give you when we go into chapel. I shall have something. Do not fear."

Scarcely had the door closed upon the caller, when Hester was at her study-table with pencil and writing-pad. Inspiration had seized her. She would write a poem that would be worthy the name. It would appear in the "Mirror" with her name below, "Hester Alden." On second thought, decided to write it Hester Palmer Alden. The Palmer gave an added dignity to her name. How pleased Aunt Debby would be! What a pleasure it would be to write! Perhaps in time she might be editor-in-chief. Then when she left school—at that instant a part of Hester Alden which had been dormant awoke. The desire for expression came to her. What beautiful glorious things she would write—some day! Just what they would be or when she would write them, she knew not. But they were so beautiful that the tears came to her eyes as she dreamed of them.

Helen did not come back to her rooms until barely time to dress for dinner. She found Hester with her head on the table, and a huge tablet before her.

"Sick, little roommate?" asked Helen, bending over her.

"No; I have been writing a poem—that is, I have begun to write one. I have sat here for an hour and all I have written is the first line. It was easy."

"First lines usually are," said Helen smiling. In many ways, she was more years older than Hester than the calendar gave her credit for.

"What is the first line? May I read it?"

"'Doc Dixon had a Freshman Class.' It begins fairly well; but you will startle your leaders with such a sudden burst into facts. Why not lead up to the subject and break the news gently?"

"You may all ridicule; but I intend writing a poem. All the ridicule you cast upon me will make me

[Pg 112]

[Pg 113]

[Pg 114]

[Pg 115]

but the more determined."

"I believe that. I have observed that trait on several occasions. You make me think of Rob Vail in that way."

"I shall finish after dinner," was Hester's sole comment. "I presume I had better prepare for it now. Are you wearing a silk dress?" she asked as she turned toward Helen and saw that she was getting into a little one-piece suit of checked silk instead of her customary white.

"Yes, mother thinks I dress too thinly. If I wear the white I cannot wear long sleeves. So I have promised to keep to this dark silk, though I do not like it nearly so well."

[Pg 116]

She had slipped into her dress and was looking about for her pins and rings. "I had a little old pin on my dresser. Did you see anything of it, Hester?"

"No, indeed. I never presume to touch anything there without your permission."

"I did not mean to suggest that, little roommate. I carelessly let it lie there several days ago, and now I cannot find it."

"I have not seen it," said Hester. She spoke quickly and perhaps, with unusual curtness. At least it seemed so to Helen, who attributed the curtness to Hester's being hurt at being asked such a question. She let the subject drop and no further word passed between them until they were called to dinner.

When study hour came again, Hester pushed aside her text books and fell to writing. The door of the study, during this time, was always open and no words were permitted between roommates. Helen, observing that her roommate was not working at her lessons, gave her several warning glances; but Hester was unaffected. The muse had laid its hands upon her and she was helpless in its clutches. She wrote and erased, only to rewrite and erase again.

[Pg 117]

It was not until the study period was over that she raised her head and with a smile of triumph read aloud:

Doctor Dixon had a freshman class,
Whose minds were soft like snow.
He tried to teach them geometry,
But he could not make it go.
He scolded them in class one day;
He shocked the entire school.
The tears ran down one sweet girl's face,
When he called her a mule."

A look of surprise flashed over Helen's face. "Surely Hester, he never would do that. He is critical and sarcastic, but surely he is a gentleman."

"Do what?" asked Hester. "Why surely he is a gentleman."

"Surely, he never would dare address one of the pupils in that way. A mule!"

Hester laughed. "You are taking matters seriously. You must remember that this is poetry, and allowance must be made. In poetry, one cannot describe matters as they are. One cannot be too realistic. One must use what fits in. I was compelled to use the word mule because it was the only one I could think of which rhymed with school. Now listen to the rest, please Helen." She continued reading wholly unconscious that her roommate was not in sympathy with her.

[Pg 118]

"And then they ran to him and asked,
As he came forth from school,
'Doctor, dear, which is it best to be,
A driver or the mule?'

"'The mule has the best of it,' he said,
'So I'm inclined to think,
It can be driven to the water's edge,
But it can't be made to drink.'"

"There, don't you think that is fine, Helen? That will appear in the next issue of the 'Mirror' with my name at the bottom. Aunt Debby will be delighted."

There was no enthusiastic response. Hester waited a moment, then looked at her roommate, and again asked, "Don't you think she will be delighted? She has never suspected that I was poetic. Indeed, I never knew it until Miss Bucher asked me to write this."

[Pg 119]

"If Aunt Debby is the kind of woman I think she is, I am sure she will not be at all pleased." Helen spoke slowly. Then at the look of surprise in Hester's eyes, she crossed the room, and sitting down on the arm of her roommate's chair drew Hester's head close against her and held her thus in a tender protective embrace, while she continued.

"No, little roommate, I do not believe she will be pleased. I am not. It is fun—mere fun, I know. Were you and I the only two to know of it, it would do no harm at all. But consider, little roommate, the 'Mirror' goes out to all the old students. Hundreds read it. Among them, are many

just as I who took the matter seriously, without considering that the poet was put to straits to find some word to rhyme with school.

"They will think that we have grown lax here. Many will wonder what sort of man this Doctor Wilbur is that he dare use such terms in addressing a student. Do you see now why I wish this would not appear in the 'Mirror'?"

"I see why you think it should not. But really people are very foolish to cavil over such matters. If I might have my way, I would pay no attention to them. I would go my way, do as I please and let such people think as they please." [Pg 120]

"It is a very independent way of doing, but it is not at all practical. We must consider public opinion a great many times. We must hedge ourselves about with convention when we would be independent, for always there are some minds which put evil construction upon the slightest careless act."

"Perhaps you are right," said Hester slowly. Before her faded the dreams of greatness. Taking up the paper, she deliberately and slowly tore it into pieces and threw them into the wastebasket. She expressed no word of regret. She expected no expression of admiration for her fortitude. She was no weakling. If she believed a thing were right, she would have performed it, regardless of the sacrifice to herself. She was the expression of Debby Alden's high ideals and rigid discipline.

"I'll get up earlier than usual to-morrow," said Hester lightly. "I promised on my word of honor to have a copy ready for Miss Bucher. If I may not write poetry, at least I can write personals. Let us go to bed now before the retiring bell rings." [Pg 121]

A hurried knock came to the door. Before either girl could respond, Renee entered. She wore a gay kimona of embroidered silk. Her dark wavy hair hung over her shoulders. She looked like a goddess as she paused an instant on the threshold. Then advancing, she cried, "Oh, girls, do you happen to have any cold cream? I'm out and I do need some particularly badly."

"Yes, I have some." Helen took a small box from the dresser and gave it to Renee.

"Thank you ever so much." Without further words, Renee went her way.

Hester waited until the sound of her footsteps had died away.

"I was thinking," she began slowly. Her brow was puckered as though she were greatly perplexed. "I've been thinking that I never heard Renee say anything but 'Will you lend me?' Does she not know anything else?"

"I presume she does, but she has allowed the habit to grow. Each year, she grows worse. I fancy by the time she graduates, she will borrow our diplomas and essays. It may be that by that time, Renee will have particular need of them." [Pg 122]

Hester had prepared for bed and was sitting on the edge of her own little iron cot waiting until Helen was ready to say good-night.

"I am going to remain up some time, little roommate. But you need not wait for me." She crossed the room and kissed Hester affectionately. Somehow Helen had fallen into the older sister attitude toward her roommate. Since the first week of school, Hester had never gone to sleep without Helen's kiss warm on her lips. This had never been done after the fashion of a sentimental school girl who caresses everything which comes in her way. Helen was not demonstrative, and what her lips touched, touched strongly her affections.



"Oh, girls, do you happen to have any cold cream?"—Page 121.

"I must make a thorough search for my pin," she said, going back to her dressing-table, to begin the search. "I must not lose it. It is a peculiar design. It was once an earring belonging to Grandma Hobart. It has her hair woven about it. When Aunt Harriet and mama were babies—they were babies at the same time, you know—grandma had the earrings made into pins. Mama wore this for years, and then gave it to me. I should feel bad if I should lose it." [Pg 123]

Hester scarcely heard what Helen said. Her mind was busy with thoughts of the literary work to be ready before chapel. She was running over in her mind all the material at hand which could be worked into personals to appear in the "Mirror."

CHAPTER VIII

[Pg 124]

Before the midwinter holidays, the report was the round of the dormitories that Hester Alden was playing a good game of basket-ball. She was alert and quick. Her passing was particularly good and Helen praised her highly. Hester was brimming with enthusiasm. The one fly in her cup of ointment was that Aunt Debby could not see her play, for the games of the substitute teams were never public. If perseverance and whole-hearted desire meant anything in winning out, Hester meant to be on the second team. Then she ran the chance of substituting.

Berenice could play the game well, but was inclined to use tricks and artifices which generally resulted in a foul being called on her own team. Consequently her good playing and dishonesty barely averaged as much as the fair dealing of the average player.

Three times each week, the gymnasium work was basket-ball. The day before Thanksgiving an extra practice was called because the session in school had been shortened. [Pg 125]

Berenice and Hester were playing right and left guard. Berenice who had never forgiven Hester for her attitude in the first game of the year, kept the ball as much as possible to herself even risking the game for the sake of annoying Hester.

"You're wasting your time on grand-stand plays," said Renee while the referee had called time. "Hester plays well at passing. Give her a show. You dribble and dribble and half the time make a foul when you might have played into Hester's hand."

Berenice shrugged her shoulders; her bead-like eyes snapped; but she made no reply.

While this conversation was going on between them, Erma Thomas had hurried up to Hester. "Berenice is determined not to play ball into your hands. It's pure jealousy. Do some playing, Hester, and make goals. Play ball to me when you wish to pass, and I'll pass it to you for a goal."

Helen put up her whistle and the game was resumed. The ball was at center with Renee and Maud. Berenice's eyes were alight, and every muscle quivering with excitement. Scarcely was the ball in air, before it was in her hand, and she was moving toward the goal. Her guard was upon her, but by a quick movement, Berenice and the ball slipped under the outstretched arm, and by deft movements, came close to goal. Making a sudden spurt with the ball in hands, she pitched for a goal. But at that instant, the whistle sounded.

[Pg 126]

"That is the third foul you've made in this game," cried Helen, "and we have played scarcely ten minutes." She tossed the ball to the opposing team. "Foul on the first subs."

Mame Cross caught the ball and took a position before the goal, but Berenice would not accept the decision of the referee.

"Helen has a spite against me. How was I foul there?"

Helen was given no opportunity to answer. Renee, who was just and severe at times, came forward.

"Foul, of course, it was. It was evident as could be. You are always stirring up a fuss and holding back the game. You are the only one on the squad who cannot play an honest game. Leave the cage, and remain out. Maude may take your place permanently."

[Pg 127]

With her own captain against her, there was nothing to be done except to obey. Already Maud was within the cage and at her place.

The game continued. Mame pitched a goal from Berenice's foul. With the ball again back to center, it was evident that Berenice in spite of her brilliant playing, had been a drag on the game. Before this, she had been the team and the others were mere fillers-in. Now each took a more active part.

Maude was not one who played for her own glory, but to score for the team. The ball came to her and she passed it to Hester, and hurried forward to receive it on its return. She reached the basket and might have made a goal, but she was short while Hester was tall and quick in movement. Those considerations came to the girl, and quick as a flash she passed the ball to Hester. There was a sudden upward movement of Hester's long arms, a slowly curving ball and a final goal. It was the first score their team had made since the beginning of the game.

[Pg 128]

This success was like wine in Hester's veins. The desire to make goals came upon her. It seized her like a mania. It was impossible to tell whether it were luck or skill. But in the second half of the game, Hester pitched a goal from every ball which was passed to her. That practice game went down in the history of Dickinson as the one in which one player made ten successive goals from the field.

The wealth of the Incas was as nothing to Hester in comparison to the congratulations of the girls who crowded upon her at the close of the game.

"You'll get on the scrub, sure," cried Erma in her high excited tones. "Remember your old friends when you rise to glory."

Their praises were very sweet; but sweetest of all was Helen's quiet commendation, when after all the excitement had passed, they were back in Sixty-two.

"I never saw a better play. I never knew a girl who learned the game so quickly, and I have coached a number during my three years. If you do as well the next game, I'll substitute you on the scrub team. I have one girl there who will never learn. She does no better than she did a year ago."

[Pg 129]

"Do you suppose I might be called then as substitute on the scheduled games," cried Hester.

"If you're the best player. I'll pick only the best. I will not risk a game even for friendship's sake—even for your sake, little roommate."

"I mean to be the best player," said Hester quietly. Helen's calmness had always the effect of quieting her in her intense excitement.

But Miss Hester had yet to learn that other powers than one's own desire, enter into results.

The first team had played eight games, four having been in their own gymnasium and the remainder at different schools. On these trips to the seminaries and normals, they were treated royally. Hester could imagine nothing finer than being met by carriages, whirled away to dormitories where the guest-chambers were at their disposal and later to be banqueted.

[Pg 130]

During the fall term, Dickinson had retained second place. Helen was determined that they should move to first and secure the pennant whose value was that of the laurel wreaths of the Olympiads. In order to put up the best game possible, Helen attended every skirmish and practice, determined that her substitutes should be the best. In addition to her regular work this self-imposed task of overlooking the substitutes' games, gave her little leisure.

Each day, before dinner and lunch, there was a quarter-hour relaxation period. To Helen, this was anything but what the name stood for. The loss of her pin troubled her. She was confident that it was somewhere in her bedroom. She very distinctly remembered removing it from her stock and placing it in the cushion which stood on her dresser. There was a possibility of its being

knocked off, or being caught in ribbon and ties, and so might have been dropped somewhere. She began a systematic search. One day, she emptied the drawers in the dresser and examined every article there, to be sure that the pin was not clinging to it. She peered under and about each article of furniture. But no pin appeared. While she was on her knees searching the corners of the room and edges of the rug, Erma appeared in the doorway. She gave a peal of delight.

[Pg 131]

"Have you turned Moslem; or is it Mohammed who takes long journeys on his knees to do penance? I have passed your door twice and each time I find you crawling about on all fours like a Teddy Bear."

"I've lost my pin. I am sick about it."

"I wouldn't be. No pin is worth being even half sick about. Buy yourself another, or better yet, Christmas is coming. Throw out a few gentle hints to your friends. Tell them you have lost your pin. They would be very stupid not to understand that it was their duty to replace it. Perhaps more than one will respond as becomes friends. You may have a half dozen pins in place of one."

"This cannot be replaced. It has belonged to our family for generations. The story is that one of the Loraines who were French, for political reasons, left his country and went to Brazil. While there, he discovered valuable mines. Selecting the finest gems, he returned to France and presented them to the king, and was immediately restored to favor. Two stones of the collection were pushed aside as not worthy so great a ruler. Tourie Loraine kept these for himself and had them made into rings. Later the rings were made into earrings. I think that was done by my great-grandfather as a gift to his bride. Grandmother had twin daughters. Earrings were no longer in style and so the stones were made into brooches and set about with her hair. Each little girl was given one. My mother gave hers to me. The other which belonged to Aunt Harriet disappeared years ago."

[Pg 132]

Erma laughed with delight. She loved romance either in real life or between the pages of a book.

"How perfectly lovely to have such glorious things happen in one's family! Nothing like that ever happened in our family. My people did nothing more exciting than write charters and fight Indians. I think we were very commonplace. It is the French people who have the romantic blood. Tell me some more, Helen. You have no idea how interesting this is."

[Pg 133]

"There is little more to tell. After the stones had been in our family for several generations, it was discovered by the merest accident, that they were yellow diamonds and very valuable, on account of their size and purity. They were not really yellow, you know, but sometimes reflected a peculiar yellow light. We were sorry that we knew the value of them."

"Sorry! I should think you would have been delighted. I can imagine nothing to be sorry for in finding that what you thought was a pretty little stone, was really worth a great deal of money."

"Because if it had been worthless, someone would never have been tempted as she was. My Aunt Harriet on one of her visits South years before, had found a little colored girl who was mistreated. She brought her North and gave her a home. She fed and clothed her and trained her to be an excellent servant. When she was able to work, Aunt Harriet paid her wages. She learned the value of Aunt Harriet's pins and rings. She disappeared and the jewels with her. There were a whole lot of complications which I cannot go into detail about. But it changed Aunt Harriet's whole life. I remember Rosa so well. She was a beautiful girl. She did not look like a colored woman. She was scarcely darker than I am, and she had the most beautiful eyes and hands."

[Pg 134]

"And nothing has been heard of her?" Erma was eager to know. She could have sat there all day to listen and would have forgone both meals and lessons.

"Nothing. It was surely strange how such a thing could have happened and not be found sometime. It is not an easy matter for a woman to disappear and all traces of her be lost."

Hester had not been present during this conversation. As Helen finished, her roommate came down the corridor and joined the two girls.

"Helen has been telling me the most thrilling tales from her family history. It is worth writing to make a story. Don't you know something, Hester? Didn't your family do some wonderful things?"

[Pg 135]

"No," replied Hester. "The Aldens settled down in one place and remained there. As Aunt Debby says, they fulfilled their duty to their church and to their neighbors, but nothing happened in their lives which was not prosaic."

"But your mother's family," persisted Erma. "Surely there must be something romantic on her side of the tree."

Hester smiled at the words. There was a little touch of sadness in her smile. She had never spoken to the girls of her people. They knew that she was an Alden. The name was well known in the central part of the State. They knew that an aunt had reared her. That was all the knowledge that came to them. When other girls talked together of what their parents and grandparents had done as children and repeated the old-time stories, which had been handed down to them as part of their family history, Hester Alden had only listened and had taken no part in the recital. Now, she would have evaded Erma's direct question, but Erma was not one who would permit her inquiries to go by the board. She repeated it. Hester answered slowly.

[Pg 136]

"When I was a year old I had neither father nor mother. My mother met a horrible death. Aunt

Debby took me. She never could talk of my parents, so I know little of them. Aunt Debby is mother, father, sister, and brother to me."

"Oh, forgive me, I did not know. I would not have wounded you for the world."

Erma was on her feet. Impulsive, loving and quick to act, she put her hands on Hester's shoulders and touched her lips warmly and affectionately. "But you have friends. I want to be one, Hester. You know I've always liked you and I'd love you if you'd give me half a chance."

Hester, who responded quickly to affection, returned the embrace. "I'd love to have you for a friend. Aunt Debby is always first, for she is my friend, too, but you and Helen must be the next best."

The little flow of sentiment might have continued, had not Renee at that moment, appeared in the doorway. [Pg 137]

"I'm awfully sorry to disturb you. But could you lend me your Solid Geometry, Helen? Did you get that original? Have you really? Isn't that lovely! Would you object to letting me look over it for a moment?"

Helen took the book from the study-table and drawing out an original, handed it to Renee who, sitting down, began a thorough study of the problem she could not solve for herself.

Barely was Renee disposed of than Josephine came in. She moved languidly. Her eyes were opened very wide, but instead of brilliance or alertness, they spoke of sentiment and dreaminess. Josephine had made a study of looking so. Soulful, she thought it to be; but the girls called it by another name not so complimentary and rallied her good-naturedly about it.

Renee was quick, in action and thought. Josephine's slowness annoyed her. Now, she took her eyes from the paper which she had been studying on, and cried brusquely, "If someone would only set a fire under you, you'd get somewhere sooner, Jo. Why don't you move, when you move." [Pg 138]

Jo was not annoyed. She moved not a whit faster. Gliding in, she seated herself on a shirt-waist box and assumed a pose of figure which she believed to be artistic. She showed no annoyance at Renee's speech. She smiled sweetly and serenely. No matter what was said to her, or done in her presence, that smile came to her. Her placidity was exceedingly annoying to this set of girls. "If Jo was not always so sugary sweet," was the general complaint. "If she would not always agree to everything. If only now and then she would express an opinion, one would know at least that she had formed one." These were the only complaints ever made against her.

"Has something been troubling you?" she asked Helen. "You appear quite disturbed."

"I am. I lost a pin." Helen told how she had placed it that evening she had last worn it, and how it had mysteriously disappeared. Both Jo and Renee had seen the heirloom, for Helen had worn it at intervals since she had entered the hall. [Pg 139]

"I'd advertise for it. You might have dropped it in the hall somewhere. Have Doctor Weldon announce it in chapel; and put a notice on the bulletin board in the main hall." It was Renee who made the practical suggestion.

"I'm sure I did not lose it outside this room. I am quite sure of that."

"About as sure as one can be of anything. I've noticed, however, that being sure is no proof."

"What a loss it must be to you!" cried Jo softly. "Of course, the money value is of little consideration. It is the memories which cling to it which make it precious. I know how you feel about such matters. You have so much sentiment. I know what trifles may mean to one. I always wear this little chain. I have worn it since I was three years old. I never could bear to part with it. It seems a tie to bind me to my childhood. I feel as though I could never grow old while I wear it. I shall never take it off."

Renee shrugged her shoulders. "I'm glad you don't have the same sentiment toward your collars. What a beautiful sentiment you might conjure up about a waist which some dear departed chum had embroidered for you; or perhaps she buttoned it up the back the first time you wore it and died immediately afterward. I really think the last would be most touching. Then you would feel that you could never unbutton the buttons which her dear hands had buttoned." [Pg 140]

The irony in Renee's voice was strong. While she had been speaking, she arose and moved toward the door.

Hester's face had flushed. She feared that Josephine would be angry. Erma, however, laughed merrily, and smiled and fluttered about like a gay butterfly. She thought Renee's sarcasm was the finest wit in the world. If it had been directed toward herself, she would not have cared at all, and could conceive of no reason why Jo should be hurt.

Josephine raised her brows languidly and smiled sweetly. "Renee laughs at sentiment," she said. "What is it that Shakespeare says about jesting at scars because you never felt a wound?" [Pg 141]

"If I ever do show wounds," cried Renee, "they will not be ones made by a tin soldier with a toy pistol. It will take a cannon ball to make me know that I've been touched."

She sailed out of the room, her head high and her heels coming down with some show of feeling.

Erma burst into a fresh peal of laughter.

"Isn't Renee dear and doesn't she say the most brilliant things? I often wished I could be witty. All I can do is to laugh at the jokes which other girls make."

"Why wish to be witty?" asked Josephine. "You're so sweet and womanly and tender."

"Am I all that?" cried Erma and she laughed again. "I must go and tell Mame. She has known me for years and has never suspected that I am all that."

She hurried away. Jo yet lingered.

"I had a letter from Cousin Rob Vail," said Helen to Hester. "He is coming down Saturday morning in the touring-car with Aunt Harriet and you and I are invited to take a ride and then have dinner down in the city. Aunt Harriet is disappointed that she has never been able to meet you. So be prepared to meet the sweetest woman in the world." [Pg 142]

"Mrs. Vail is so sweet!" cried Jo. "I never look at her but there comes to my mind the picture of the 'Mater Dolorosa,' she's so sad and pensive."

"She looks sad," said Helen, "but I never knew livelier company. One cannot be dull with her. She has a sorrow which passes comprehension, yet, she never worries another with it. She has trained herself to take an interest in others."

"Saturday!" Hester cried and began prancing about the room. "Two days until Saturday. I wonder how I shall ever be able to wait until then."

The bell for luncheon rang and the girls moved from the room. As they passed down the corridor, a number of the girls spoke to Helen about the loss of her pin and expressed the belief that it had only been mislaid and would be found.

A number had seen and discussed it. Sara spoke of this. "It was so peculiar and unusual that anyone who finds it will know it is yours." [Pg 143]

Hester walked ahead without taking part in the conversation. It came to Helen then that her little roommate had shown no interest whatever and had not assisted in the search or even expressed her sympathy for its loss.

CHAPTER IX

[Pg 144]

Hester was deep in literary work for the Philomathean paper. She was not attempting poetry. After Helen's criticism she had not the heart to bring her efforts before the public, although she did write in secret. It is a long and hard drop from being a poet to a hack-writer scribbling down personals. Poets are born, while any one can write personals.

Hester had been cultivating the unpleasant little mannerism of thinking aloud or rather in tones under her breath, as she wrote she read. Her efforts resulted in this form.

"'Miss Erma Thomas has been excused from classes on account of sustaining a sprained ankle.'

"'Sustain.' I wonder if that is the right word. Sustain a sprain. It sounds all right. I'll let it be that. If I don't know, the other girls will not know either." [Pg 145]

"Hester, do you realize that you are thinking aloud?" asked Helen after this performance had continued some minutes.

"Am I? I did not know; but it does not matter. What I am saying is not private and it makes no difference if all the world hears."

"That is not the idea," said Helen. She was sweet, calm, and decided. "Has it not come to you that I might wish to study and that monotone is anything but pleasant?"

Hester's face flushed crimson. "I beg pardon. I was selfish, Helen."

Helen crossed the room and bending over the abashed, confused Hester, said tenderly, "Do not mind my speaking so, little roommate. If it were Aunt Debby you would not take it so to heart. Then why should it hurt from me? Boarding-schools and roommates serve one great purpose—they rub off the jagged edges of one's manners." She bent and kissed the girl.

"Helen Loraine, you are the dearest girl I know. I am so glad I have you for a roommate. We have never quarreled and I hope never will." [Pg 146]

"No, we never will," said Helen. She went back to her work.

In addition to her literary efforts, Hester had other claims upon her. The Christmas season was approaching and her gifts were barely in preparation. She was embroidering a set of linen collars and cuffs for Helen, and the efforts to keep the work hidden was making life strenuous for her.

Whenever Helen left the room, Hester took up the work, took a few stitches and perhaps was compelled to put it away. There were many people passing up and down the dormitory halls. It

was not always possible to distinguish Helen's step. Then she had to resort to subterfuge to get the measure of Helen's collar. She had not accomplished that yet, but she had her plans laid and meant to carry them out at the first opportunity.

It came to her sooner than she expected. Saturday morning, after a few minutes' study, Helen looked at the time, and arose from her work.

"It is almost ten o'clock. Aunt Harriet and Cousin Robert should be here. I think I'll walk down to the guests' entrance and see if I can find any trace of them. Bob would not be permitted to come to the dormitory. Perhaps, Aunt Harriet is waiting with him in the reception hall. Marshall may have been sent for us, but you know his failing. He may be fulfilling a half-dozen commissions before he comes for us. If they are not there, I shall telephone to Auntie."

[Pg 147]

Hester urged her to be gone. It was with a feeling of relief that Hester heard the click of Helen's high heels as they went down the hall. Waiting until she believed that Helen would not be interrupted, Hester hurried to the wardrobe which they had in common and taking down a waist began to measure the collar. She had just completed this when she heard the click of Helen's heels. Quick as a flash the dress was hung up. Hester was about to close the door when the dress caught. She was fussing over it and was very red in the face and visibly embarrassed when Helen entered the room.

"What is the trouble?" Helen asked.

"Nothing at all," was the reply given with unusual curttness. "What should make you think there was any trouble? I was just opening the wardrobe door."

[Pg 148]

Her long speech which was wholly unnecessary and her evident embarrassment did not pass unobserved. Helen gave her a quick look. Hester was not herself, that was evident.

"I asked the question because your face was red, and you appeared excited. That was all. I did not find it necessary to go to the guests' entrance. Marshall was coming for us. We are to go to the reception hall. You will meet Aunt Harriet at last."

"How strange it seems that I have been here almost four months and yet we have not met! She always came when I was home with Aunt Debby, or in class. I fancy the Fates do not intend that we shall meet."

"You shall meet in two minutes, or I am not a reliable prophet," was Helen's reply.

Two minutes proved that she was not. Robert Vail alone awaited them in the reception hall. His mother had not been able to come.

Hester gave a start of surprise when Helen presented the cousin to her. He was particularly fine-looking and attractive but she was not startled at that. He was the young man who had accosted her that day on the street and apologized by saying he had mistaken her for his cousin, Helen.

[Pg 149]

"You remember me, I see, Miss Alden. You must have thought I was rude, but I was confident that you were Helen. I had not seen her for three months."

"I am glad that I met you so that I can explain to Aunt Debby," said Hester naively. Then observing his look of surprise, she added, "She would not believe that you had really made a mistake. She thought you did it just to annoy me."

"How could she?" cried Helen with a show of feeling. "Cousin Rob—."

"Go slowly, Cousin," laughed the young man. "You must remember that I was a stranger to Miss Alden and her aunt. They were fully justified in believing that I was rude."

"I did not," said Hester. "I saw you and I knew that you had really mistaken me."

[Pg 150]

"How could your Aunt Debby think of such a thing? Didn't she also see Rob?" asked Helen.

"I did not believe you could show such a spirit," laughed Hester. "You are always so calm."

"When things touch myself, but not when they touch my friends," said Helen.

"Please calm yourself, Helen. You know we made a compact this very morning and promised never to quarrel or be angry with each other."

"The same old school-girl fashion," said Robert Vail. "If I am a good prophet, you'll be tearing each other's hair before the day is over."

"Why did Aunt Harriet not come?" asked Helen, abruptly changing the subject of conversation.

"She went on a little trip into Virginia," he replied. Then observing the anxious look which came to Helen's face, he continued, "We tried to persuade her not to go, but she said this might be a real clue and she could not be satisfied to remain home. Father would have insisted, for mother is really worn out, but she was so anxious to go that she and father went off last night."



**"You remember me, I see, Miss Alden."—Page
149.**

"Was there anything new, or merely the same old story as before?" asked Helen.

[Pg 151]

"Who can tell? You know Rosa's mother had been a house-servant in Virginia and Rosa had a host of relatives there. Mrs. Mader—you remember the Doctor Mader who sometimes attends mother? Well, Mrs. Mader had been West. There she made the acquaintance of a southern woman who talked much of a Rosa Williams, who did some work for her. Mrs. Mader was interested and asked all sorts of questions. This Rosa Williams, so the southern woman said, was a handsome mulatto woman about forty years old. She also said that she had several children and that one in particular had neither the features nor coloring of a negro."

"Poor Aunt Harriet!" said Helen. "If only she would give up hope. She is wearing herself out in this way."

Hester was delighted with this new acquaintance. She had known few boys. Jane Orr's brother, Ralph, had been her ideal of what a boy should be. Jane had not let his good qualities pass unnoticed. But Hester was inclined to think that Robert Vail surpassed Ralph in every particular. Helen had told her much of this one cousin who took the place of brother to her. He was in his last year in medical college, and had led his class for three full years. Yet he was not a bookish man. He was of a social nature, fond of company, and outdoor life, taking as much interest in cross-country walks and athletics as he did in his studies. Hester was thinking of these matters while Helen and Robert were talking. She had been sitting with her eyes upon the floor, listening in a half abstracted fashion. She raised her eyes suddenly to find Robert Vail's eyes fixed on her in scrutiny. Her cheeks grew crimson and she looked away.

[Pg 152]

"I beg pardon," cried the young man, "I seem destined to annoy you with my rudeness. The first time I met you I mistook you for Helen. The resemblance is not so marked now that I see you together."

"Yet we are often mistaken for each other," said Helen, "if the hall is just a little dark, the girls mistake us. Often I am called Hester."

[Pg 153]

"It would have to be very dark if I were to mistake you now after once seeing you together.

"I wish to explain to Miss Alden why I was looking so intently at her now. I've seen my mother sitting that way many a time. There was something about you which made me think of her."

"You told me she was very beautiful," said Hester, saucily turning toward Helen.

"Hester Alden, are you really fishing for compliments?" asked Helen, pretending to be shocked at Hester's question.

"There is really no use of fishing when the compliments are floating on the surface within your reach," said the young man gallantly.

This was all very pleasing to Hester. She had not been accustomed to receiving such compliments or attention and she felt quite grown up and elegant.

Robert Vail's gallant manner was of short duration. He looked at Hester again, and grew quite serious. Very strange ideas came to him. He had a queer feeling that somehow his mother had made a mistake in not calling at the seminary that morning, and that he stood nearer the truth than he had ever stood before. These thoughts prompted him to turn to Hester with questions which were pertinent and personal.

[Pg 154]

"Where do you live, Miss Alden?" Hester told him. She wondered as she did so why he had asked the question as though it were of moment.

"Who are your people? Have you always lived there?"

He had touched Hester on the one delicate subject of her life. She had pride enough for several girls. Not even Aunt Debby knew how her lack of parentage and name had hurt her. She had never permitted herself to think of it, lest she should grow depressed and unhappy. And to think that now this Robert Vail whom she had liked so much, had presumed to question her. Like a flash, it came to her that perhaps he had met Kate Bowerman or Abner Stout and they had told him that she had been left a waif on Debby Alden's hands and that her people had cared so little for her that they never came to find her.

[Pg 155]

For an instant, pride was up in arms. Her one thought was to defend herself at whatever cost. All Aunt Debby's precious training was flung to the winds. She raised her head proudly and looked directly at him. In her eyes was a look of defiance; the crimson of annoyance and shame flamed on her cheeks.

"Who are my people?" she repeated his question. "As my name is Alden, I presume my people also were of that name. My father and mother died when I was a babe, and my father's sister, my Aunt Debby Alden reared me."

Her annoyance was evident. Robert Vail was vexed with himself for having caused it. "I am always falling into error, Miss Alden. If you forgive me this once more, I shall promise not to annoy you again. I fancy my question was personal. I asked it because of the resemblance to my mother and cousin. It came to me that you might be a relative. Though I doubt if you would wish to claim us. We are a bad lot. I am really the only fair specimen among them."

[Pg 156]

"Such insufferable conceit," said Helen. "Everyone knows that it keeps all the other members of the family taking care of you."

"Which proves what I have just said. I am the family jewel. It behooves them to take care of me, lest I be lost or stolen." Turning to Hester, he held out his hand. "Am I forgiven?" he asked.

Hester, ashamed and abashed, laid her hand within his. "I am sorry I spoke so hastily," she said. But the red did not leave her cheeks, nor the hurt look from her eyes. She blushed for the statement she had made. "'My father was Aunt Debby's brother.' It was a lie—nothing less than a lie," she kept saying to herself and the thought spoiled the entire day for her. It spoiled more than that, too. Perhaps, had she told the truth, she would never again have need to blush for her lack of name or to misunderstand her people for not coming in search for her. Her little sin bore its own fruits with it; yet Hester believed she was paying the debt by being sorry and ashamed.

[Pg 157]

"About your going with me," Robert turned to his cousin. "Mother said I was to play escort and take you anywhere you wished to go."

"Aunt Harriet's not coming may make a difference. The preceptress gave me permission to go with the understanding that we were in your mother's charge."

"I shall take as good care of you as mother. Better care, I fancy, for she would be helpless if she had to manage a machine."

"It is the idea of not living up to the conditions," replied Helen. "If you and Hester will excuse me, I will explain to Miss Burkham. Perhaps, she will not object to my going with you. She would if you were not a cousin."

She went directly to the preceptress and in a few moments returned with that lady herself, who listened to the story of the difficulties.

"We intended stopping to see Aunt Debby," said Hester. "I wrote her a note yesterday, telling her to expect us."

"You may go under these conditions," said Miss Burkham, "that you go directly to Miss Alden's aunt's. If she can accompany you further, very well. Otherwise you remain at her home until you are ready to return to school. Under any circumstances you must be here before five o'clock. Be kind enough to set your timepieces with the tower clock. Then there will be no excuse for not being here on or before the hour appointed. You may get your wraps. I shall entertain Mr. Vail until your return."

[Pg 158]

Miss Burkham was always exacting. Her speech was frank and sometimes even blunt; but she had such a sense of justice and fitness of things, that her decisive words were never galling, even to the most sensitive of the girls. Her manner was gracious and her smile kindly. She would put herself to no end of trouble to add to the happiness of the pupils; on the other hand, she would go

to no end of trouble to see that the rules of the school were rigidly enforced and that the girls under her care would do nothing unbecoming a lady or which might bring criticism upon their heads.

Soon the three were on their way. For three days, Hester Alden had enjoyed the ride in anticipation. But now something had gone from it. The buoyancy of spirit which was generally hers and the power of enjoying the most trifling affairs had deserted her. She sat silent until Helen rallied her. Then she made an effort to be her usual bright talkative self; but it was plainly an effort. She was forcing an interest in what was going on about her. Her mind dwelt only on the statement she had made to Robert Vail.

[Pg 159]

"It was a lie, a lie," she kept repeating to herself. She was almost afraid to meet Aunt Debby. How Aunt Debby despised anything of that kind! Hester felt that her clear gray eyes would look straight down into her heart and read the lie which had made a mark there.

Robert Vail observed that Hester was more than quiet. She was depressed and anxious.

Debby Alden was prepared to receive the guests. She, with Miss Richards, had a lunch ready to serve. She had smiled when she arranged her table service. She had given it the right touch of daintiness and refinement. There had come to her, the remembrance of certain conditions of her life and her manner of doing things before Hester had come into her life. She had spoken her thoughts to Miss Richards.

[Pg 160]

"I have been a different woman ever since I found Hester," she said. "Life holds so much more for me than it did before—a great deal more than I ever hoped to have it hold. I wonder what I would have been had Hester gone her way that day and not have come into my life."

"You would have been Debby Alden," said Miss Richards, "a woman of conscience and principle. You would have been the same Debby—only with the narrower view of life. You would have been an old woman instead of a bright, interesting, beautiful, young girl of forty."

Debby Alden had blushed at the speech.

"You and Hester have conspired to spoil me. I think you are leagued together to make me vain and worldly. What one does not think of, the other does. It was only last week that Hester wrote me some very silly nonsense about not one of the women at the reception, looking half so fine as I. Of course, I know the child does it merely to please me."

[Pg 161]

Miss Richards nodded her head in negation. "You know she means every word she says, Debby. Hester could not prevaricate, even to please you. As to its being nonsense, you know it is not. We think what we say and you like to hear us say it. Why not express ourselves? There is nothing in the world that is as great as love. The greatest thing in the world! Why then should we go through life with silent lips, or lips which open only for criticism while all the time love is really in our hearts? Is it not lovelier and kinder to express our love while the loved ones are here to listen?"

This had been Miss Richards's philosophy of life. It had been her love as well as Hester's which had brightened and developed Debby Alden. Their words concerning Debby's being beautiful were not flattering. She was beautiful with the beauty which comes from fine principle, high ideals, and a warm, love-filled heart. People had turned in the streets for a second look at Debby Alden, while she, wholly unconscious that she had grown so attractive, moved on her way without knowing of the eyes turned in her direction.

[Pg 162]

Debby went down to the gate to meet her guests. She took Hester in her arms. In an instant her intuition told her that something was wrong.

"What is troubling my little girl?" she asked.

"Nothing, Aunt Debby. Nothing at all. Oh, how sweet to be back home!" She threw her arms about Debby Alden's neck and hugged her with a vehemence which caused that lady to gasp for breath.

Helen and Miss Alden had never met. Debby at once noticed the resemblance between Helen and Hester. She greeted the former as she had done her own little girl. Then she turned to Robert Vail and holding out her hand, said merrily, "I shall forgive and believe now, since I know you have a cousin Helen and she does resemble Hester. Until this time, I thought it all a myth of your own making, manufactured for the sole purpose of annoying two plain country folk."

Rob Vail laughed as he took her hand in his own firm clasp. "I do not know whether I shall allow myself to be forgiven under such circumstances. You would not have faith in me until I presented the proof and that is really no faith at all. I wish to be trusted without evidence."

[Pg 163]

He laughed again and held Miss Debby's hand tight in his own while they moved up the walk toward the tiny cottage.

"From this time, I shall have faith in you, though evidence is lacking," she said.

She liked the boy. She had never before been so pleasantly impressed by a young man as she had been by him. He was wholesome, clear-eyed and unaffected.

Debby Alden recognized these virtues in him and received him at once into her home and friendship. She liked his college talk; his bright way of making his smile and voice put his words

at fault. Yet, while he entertained her she was not wholly unconscious of two things—that Hester was not herself, and that the resemblance between the two girls was not the result of mere chance. Suddenly she turned to Helen with the question:

"Have you any sisters? Did you ever have any?"

[Pg 164]

"No, unfortunately, I am an only child," was the reply.

"Which may account for any peculiar little traits of character or manner," said Robert Vail. "Only a brother or sister is able to 'comb one' thoroughly smooth. They trim the plant of self-esteem; they nip the bud of selfishness before it can bloom; they serve their purpose, nuisances though they are—these brothers and sisters."

"How unfortunate that you never had any. You might have been—" Helen left the sentence unfinished, implying by her tone that he might have been all that he was not.

"But you served the same purpose, cousin. You have never failed in your duty toward me. You are worth a dozen brothers and sisters when it comes to 'combing one down.'" They laughed at the sally and might have carried it further had not Miss Alden led the way to the lunch table.

CHAPTER X

[Pg 165]

Hester Alden barely escaped being campused for dancing her way through the main hall and shrieking in wild excess of spirits. To add to the enormity of the offense, the day on which this had occurred was the day when the ice-cream wagon came in from Flemington and disposed of its wares at the front entrance of the campus. At the time of her exhibition of high spirits, Hester had held high in her hand a paper butter-dish filled with cream, which had melted and was trickling over the edge of the dish and down her sleeve. The German teacher had heard the unusual commotion and appeared on the scene.

"Ach, Fraulein Alden, what matters it by you? To your room go you at once. To Miss Burkham, I such conduct shall report."

Hester in the exuberance of spirit, hugged the little German lady who was as fat as a dumpling. "Fraulein Franz, you are a dear old soul if you do get your English verbs confused. You would dance and laugh and spill your ice-cream too, if you were to play on the scrub team."

[Pg 166]

"Gra-shus," said Fraulein. "Pardon me, I did not know the cause. I wonder not that you much rejoice."

She retired to her room. Hester laughed again, but softly this time for Miss Burkham's office was not a great distance away.

"The dear old Fraulein! To think of her begging my pardon for reprimanding me. I am only too glad it was not Miss Burkham. If she had seen me, I'd had two weeks on the campus and someone else would have been compelled to carry my cream from the wagon to the coping."

The other east dormitory girls had heard the news and were quite as well pleased as Hester. Mame Cross had been forbidden by her father to play any but practice games. He thought she grew too excited for her own good. It was her place on the second squad which Hester was to fill.

[Pg 167]

Helen had used her influence in behalf of her roommate; for there were ten other players who would have been as well pleased as Hester was, had it fallen to their lot to substitute. Fortunately they were a liberal, broad-minded set of girls. They were not envious, but rejoiced with Hester in her good fortune.

As Hester hurried down the main hall to the dormitory stairs, she found her own particular set of friends waiting for her on the landing.

"Here she is!" cried Erma. "We have been looking everywhere for you. Isn't it simply grand to think that one of our set got on?"

"I'm glad you've got it, since I couldn't," said Mame. She had always the expression of one on whom Fortune had frowned. On the contrary, she had fairly basked in that lady's smiles, since the first day of her babyhood.

"I don't see why father will not let me play. There's no danger of my hurting myself, and what if I should? He has an idea that I am such a precious article that I should be done up in cotton. One thing, Hester, if you play a match game, you'll look better than I do. My basket-ball suit was a fright; but then, I never do have anything that looks like other girls."

[Pg 168]

Hester was about to express herself contrary to this sentiment, when an audacious remark from Erma caused her to fall back in silence.

"You see how it is, Hester," explained Erma later as the two walked arm in arm down the hall. "Mame is the best dresser in school. She has the best-made clothes and the best taste about choosing them, and you never see a pin or hook loose. Yet we never yet have heard her say she was satisfied. So we just concluded that we wouldn't encourage her. When she begins to

complain and find fault with her lot, we'd look as though we pitied her. It isn't a bit of use of trying to convince her how lucky she is.

"Now, I am always the other way." Here Erma paused long enough to laugh merrily. "I'm satisfied with everything. My father is simply grand; I just adore this old seminary, and I think the girls on our hall are the sweetest things, and I never had a dress in all my life that wasn't simply a dream."

[Pg 169]

The girls rejoiced with Hester, all except Berenice. She went through with the form of congratulations, but her voice had a sarcastic touch and her eyes had narrowed themselves into mere slits. Her words were a little uncertain as to meaning; but Hester to whom all things appeared beautiful, was in no mood to take exception.

"I'm sure I'm glad you're on the scrub," she said slowly. "I'm always glad to see people get what they work so hard for."

"Thank you, Berenice. You girls have all been lovely. You do not have a bit of jealousy about letting a 'freshie' step in ahead of some who have been here two and three years."

"We want to win games," cried Louise Reed. "Whoever makes goals for us, suits us whether she's a freshman or a senior. Get the pennant and we'll carry you home on our shoulders."

They had come to Sixty-two. Erma and Mame in company with Berenice walked on down the corridor.

"I'd love to have been put on; but since I wasn't I am glad that Hester was. It was fair, too. She's played better than any other one on the team. She gets excited but she doesn't lose her head."

[Pg 170]

Berenice sneered. "To get on the team, one must learn to toady," she said. "No doubt if you had played lackey to Helen Loraine, you would have been playing scrub."

Erma turned suddenly to look at the speaker. There was no laughter now in either her eyes or voice as she, gazing steadily at Berenice, asked, "Do you mean to say that Hester Alden plays lackey to Helen? Do you mean to say that Helen would permit it if Hester were foolish enough to do so, and furthermore do you mean to say that Hester was not chosen for the simple reason that she is the steadiest player among the substitutes?"

Berenice shrugged her shoulders. Her little beady eyes had their lashes drawn down upon them until they had narrowed into a mere slit.

"How you do fly up, Erma! I really did not think you had such a temper; but one thing you may rest assured of: it is always you sweet girls who fly into a passion at the slightest word."

"I have never posed as being a sweet girl, and I am not in a passion now. I have asked you a question which you have evaded. You have insinuated things about girls who call me their friend and I will never let such matters pass. I wish you to answer my question before we go one step further."

[Pg 171]

Erma stood still. The others did as she did. Berenice laughed lightly. "How very silly. A perfect tempest in a tea-cup simply because I choose to get off a joke."

"If that is a joke, it is in horribly bad taste," was Erma's retort.

"You are unjust, Erma. How many times have I heard you laugh at Helen for trying to stand in with the teachers, and for letting Mame copy her translations."

"Hundreds of times, but you always heard me laugh and jest when the girls themselves were present and when every one who heard, knew that it was mere fun. It was mere give and take between every one of our set who were present. You have yet to hear me criticise an absent girl, or jest about her."

Again Berenice shrugged her shoulders as though she would dismiss the subject.

[Pg 172]

"I am glad I am not ugly-tempered," she said and walked away without a backward glance at the others. For a moment, Erma was wounded. Then the humor of the situation came to her. She laughed until the silvery echoes rang from one end of the corridor to the other; and the girls begged to be quiet lest the hall-teacher follow in their footsteps and they be sentenced to solitary confinement on the campus.

After receiving the congratulations of her friends, Hester had gone to her room. Helen was busy preparing a lesson for the session the following morning.

"Of course, you know what has happened," cried Hester. "Of course you do. I can see by your eyes. Miss Watson sent for me to come to her and then told me. I knew who proposed my name. It was you, Helen Loraine. I cannot possibly thank you, and I never in the world can repay you."

Flinging her arms about her roommate's neck, Hester embraced her warmly all the while declaring that she would never be able to repay her.

[Pg 173]

"Yes, you surely can," said Helen. "Play a good game and justify my recommending you. That will please me best of all."

"I shall do that for your sake, for my own, and for the team's."

Helen stood silent a moment, considering whether she had better tell Hester all her plans. She decided that she would and drawing Hester down on the cosy corner, which had been improvised from trunks, she continued: "For several reasons you must play well the next two weeks. Three weeks from next Saturday, we play the girls from Exeter Hall. They are the hardest squad we'll meet. Their coach is a college woman and a specialist in physical culture and athletics. The Exeter team is the best-trained one we'll come up against. We'll take along four substitutes. Maud plays well for the first half, but she tires easily. I intend to substitute for her on the second half, and if you justify my doing it, I'll let you take her place."

"Really?" That one word was all that Hester Alden could command at that moment; but it spoke volumes. To the girl it seemed as though the one ambition of her school life was about to be fulfilled—to play on the first team. [Pg 174]

She did not consider herself alone in this. Aunt Debby was always first in her thoughts. Ever since Mary Bowerman had taunted her with being a waif, Hester had realized how much the foster aunt had done for her, and what sacrifice of time and money, she had made. The one way which Hester saw to repay the obligation, was to do those things which would reflect credit on the Alden name. Playing on the first team would do that very thing for never before in the history of Dickinson, had a freshman been so honored.

Hester had reached such a degree of happiness that she lacked expression either by words or motion. She could but sit still in the cosy corner, her hands clasped in her lap and her eyes looking steadily before her. So she sat for some minutes but in those minutes, she anticipated every play in the coming game. She saw the goals she would make; she could hear the referee call out the score and read the figures which the score makers were writing down. She could see Aunt Debby sitting in the gallery; she could hear the applause which swept over the hall. [Pg 175]

"Really? Do you really think there is the least chance for me?" she asked at last.

"I really think so. I might say I am quite sure," replied Helen. "Miss Watson always permits me to choose my substitutes. I would almost promise but—"

"Don't promise. I would not have you do that. During the next two weeks I might lose my head and not play well at all," she said.

"I'm not afraid of that," replied Helen. "But it does not seem fair to the other girls to have me pledge myself to you, before you have had a single practice on the scrub. I try to be just, but sometimes I am afraid I am a little partial in choosing the ones I love best. Because you are you, I might be unjust to the others. Do you understand why I would rather not promise, little roommate?"

"Yes, I know."

The subject ended there. Helen went back to her work. Hester tried to keep her mind upon her books; but one might as well have tried to charm a butterfly. Her thoughts flew from the game to Aunt Debby, and back to Helen and the attitude she had taken in regard to the game. [Pg 176]

Hester had no doubt that Helen had a great affection for her. There had been some sweet and gentle evidence of it since the first week of school. Hester was beginning to understand what the girls had tried to convey to her that first day of school, when Sara had declared that Helen had such an air. It was the grace which was the expression of fine breeding, intellect and kindness of heart.

As Hester thought of these things, she could have gone down on her knees to Helen just as she would have done to Aunt Debby.

"We'll be friends all our life. Whatever happens, we will never quarrel. It is lovely to have a friend like Helen." These were the thoughts which came to Hester. Inspired by them to express herself, she opened a note-book and under the date of the month and year, she wrote what had been in her thoughts.

Helen was one who had much affection in her nature, but was never sentimental. She was intensely practical when it came to her work. After her talk with Hester about the work on the team, her mind turned to the petty details, the fulfillment of which meant success. [Pg 177]

"I wear my gray basket-ball suit when we play with an outside team," she said to Hester. "You have never seen it. It has D. S. in gold and blue letters. Dickinson Seminary. It looks well, and the suits are really pretty. Mine, however, is beginning to show wear. I have had it for three years. The last time we played over at Kermoor, a hook came loose on the shoulder where my waist fastens. It was a trifle but it almost caused me to lose that game. It pestered me until I could scarcely think of anything else. I made up my mind then that I'd never be placed in such a position again. While I have it in mind, I am going over those hooks and eyes and sew them so tight that they cannot possibly give."

"Why not come out on the campus now, Helen? The girls are going to walk along the river's edge as far as the campus reaches and then climb over the hill and come back the other way. Miss Watson will come with us."

"If I do I'll neglect those hooks. I had my gym work to-day and do not need exercise. You run along and I'll discipline myself about the hooks." She laughed softly at her own remarks. [Pg 178]

"Very well. If you will not, you will not," replied Hester, drawing on her red sweater and Tam-o-Shanter. "I'll be off or I'll keep them waiting, and you know Miss Watson does not approve of that."

She went her way down the hall. She was a picture good to look at, and which would have pleased more eyes than the partial ones of Debby Alden.

Upon Hester's departure, Helen went to her sewing. The gray gymnasium suit hung in a public press at the end of the hall, and it took her some time to find her own among the others which hung there. Her needles and thread were at hand, but hooks and eyes were lacking. She found that the waist required several additional hooks and what were in place hung by a mere thread.

"I have a card of hooks somewhere," she said to herself. "I remember distinctly putting in everything in the line of mending that I might possibly need. I remember now. What I thought I would not need often, I put in the bottom of the closet."

[Pg 179]

The closet floor held quite an assortment of boxes. Articles which the girls used seldom, had been stored here out of the way. Helen remembered that a box with hooks and eyes, buttons and glove-silk had been placed in there, early in the fall when she had unpacked the trunk.

She and Hester had been careful about not infringing upon each other's closet room. Each had her allotted space and number of hooks; but keeping the floor divided was not so easy. Boxes had been moved and shoved about until it was impossible to know whose they were.

Helen sat down on the floor and began a systematic search; in turn opening each box and examining its contents. It required system for the boxes were many and the confusion great. There were handkerchief boxes, spool, candy, and shoe boxes of all sizes and conditions.

She had opened each one without discovering the articles which she needed. She was about to put them back in their places when a little dark covered box, hidden deep in the corner, attracted her eyes. Without a thought that she might be infringing on someone's else right, she took up the box and opened it. She gave a sharp exclamation at the sight of its contents. She sat with it opened in her hand, looking at it steadily. Then she replaced the lid and put the box with the contents just as she had found them, back in the corner. She put the floor of the closet in order, and then went back to her work. She found her card of hooks and eyes in the bottom of her sewing-bag. She was busy sewing them on when Hester came in. They greeted each other as usual, yet Hester was conscious that something was different.

[Pg 180]

"Are you ill, Helen?" she asked.

"No, Hester."

"Are you worried?"

"What should I have to worry me? You have been gone less than an hour. What should happen in that time to make me either ill or anxious? I have been putting the floor of the closet in order. I am afraid I opened some of your boxes, but I did not disturb their contents."

[Pg 181]

"No matter if you did. I am glad the closet is in order. It surely needed some attention." Going to the door she flung it wide. "How nice it looks. The boxes piled up like a shoe-store. I wonder how long it will remain that way."

Helen watched her closely. Hester must indeed be a capital actor, for she had showed neither anxiety nor embarrassment at hearing that Helen had opened the boxes.

After dinner that evening, no conversations were carried on between the two girls. Helen, contrary to her habit, went directly to her room and did not mingle with her friends in the library or parlor. She was in her study garb and presumably deep in study when Hester came back to her room. She neither spoke nor raised her eyes at Hester's entrance. Her eyes were upon the text, but she was not studying. She was reviewing certain little incidents of Hester's being with her. A score of trifles to which she had then given no thought, now appeared in gigantic proportion with most pretentious signs. Hester had shown no interest whatever when the pin had been lost. She had not helped look for it. Just before the holidays, Helen remembered it clearly now, she had found Hester in the closet. Hester had blushed and stammered and appeared much confused and had replied curtly to Helen's questions. It was really very suspicious. Helen did not like to think of such matters. She had no desire to think evil of any one; but the evidence was there. She could not go past that. She had trusted Hester, and had really loved her. Hereafter she would trust and love no one.

[Pg 182]

Even after the close of the study hour, there was no opportunity for conversation; for at the ringing of the half-hour bell, Helen, contrary to her habit, went down the hall to the room of one of the seniors. She did not ask Hester to accompany her and the latter was hurt by the omission. They had been together almost six months and in that time such a thing had never before occurred.

Hester slowly made ready for bed. The fumes of chocolate and fudge in the making were wafted to her from the rooms at the lower end of the hall, and the chatter and laugh came with them. No one called her to come. She felt forsaken and lonely. Such occasions previous to this, she had not waited until a special invitation had been given her, but joined and helped with the merry-making. She felt that something stood between her and Helen. Just what that something was, she

[Pg 183]

did not know, nor could she surmise. There was nothing tangible for her thoughts to work upon to reach a conclusion. She instinctively felt that something was wrong. In this particular case, instinct was stronger than reason. She crept into bed, although the retiring bell had not rung. The two little iron cots stood side by side with only a narrow space between them. Helen had always been the deliberate one of the two. Hester was generally in bed before Helen had finished her reading. It had been the latter's habit to come to Hester's bed and softly kissing her on the forehead to whisper, "Good-night, little roommate."

It was for this good-night that Hester was waiting. She would insist then upon knowing what troubled Helen or what had gone wrong to cause this feeling of alienation. She would have cried had not her pride sustained her. The tears were very near the surface but she forced them back. She would cry for no one, no matter how that one treated her. [Pg 184]

A few moments before the retiring bell, Helen came into the bedroom. Knowing that she was late and that the lights would soon be turned off, she prepared hastily for bed. She did not once glance toward Hester, but that might have been because she was hurried. While Hester lay and watched her, the lights went out. She heard Helen laugh softly and say, "Just in time. I just gave the last turn to my hair."

Then she moved toward the cot, but she moved toward the outside and not near that of her roommate. Hester was overcome with homesickness. Her pride took to itself, wings. Raising herself in bed, she turned toward Helen.

"Have you forgotten something, Helen? Are you not going to bid me good-night?" [Pg 185]

"Surely. Good-night, Hester."

"But not that way, Helen. I mean the way you always have done."

There was silence for an instant. To Hester it seemed as though hours had passed before Helen replied gently and firmly, "Not to-night, Hester. I—I—cannot—to-night."

CHAPTER XI

[Pg 186]

After this, Hester Alden believed that school could never be as it had been. The first day proved that she was wrong. Outwardly, life at Dickinson moved on as before. No one appeared to know or care that Hester Alden had been touched to the quick, and that she was very miserable and unhappy.

Helen was courtesy itself. She was careful to include Hester in all her invitations, but it was a carefulness forced upon her from a sense of duty and not from love. Hester was not dull. She felt the difference. She could be quite as proud as Helen. So she raised her head a trifle higher as she walked and drew her shoulders a little more rigid and gave back to Helen the same rigid courtesy that she was receiving.

To Hester it was tragic. The alienation was a genuine sorrow to her. To one who merely looked on, the two girls were acting foolishly. A few words would have cleared away the misunderstanding and saved them from suffering. Helen acted from what she thought was a high sense of justice; Hester's action was from pride only. [Pg 187]

The other girls in the dormitory knew not the cause of the estrangement, for both Helen and Hester had that sense of honor which impelled them to keep closed lips on such matters. The intuition of the girls told them that affairs between Helen and Hester were not quite the same. That was as far as their intuition carried them.

In spite of Hester's unhappiness, matters at Dickinson moved on as before. Renee came to borrow; Erma laughed merrily; Mame wept over the condition of her clothes which looked as though they were fresh from the French tailor; Josephine grew eloquent on moonlight, love-stories, and kindred subjects; Mellie Wright came and went like a gentle ray of sunshine. The strangest part of all to Hester was that Mellie, who never appeared to notice what took place, was first to grasp the situation. Before the week had passed, she made an occasion to join Hester on the campus. No reference at all was made to the state of depression which hung over Hester like a cloud, but before the two had parted, the younger girl carried with her these impressions: [Pg 188]

Everything comes right some day, and that day comes when least expected; nothing matters if one continues to do what is right, regardless of other people's opinion of one; and if one is blue, the best thing to do is to do something and do it quickly.

Mellie did not put her philosophy into those words, nor did she make a personal application for her companion. The strongest impressions are those which we receive unconsciously. After this talk with Mellie, Hester's pride and ambition were aroused. She was indignant with herself that she had given way to any show of feeling and vowed to herself that from that instant she would not lose control over her emotions.

Fortunately for her, basket-ball practice followed close on her resolutions and putting her thoughts into action, strengthened her.

She played right guard on the scrub team with Edna Turnbach opposed to her. Edna was little, wiry, and active, an opponent that was really worth while. [Pg 189]

Hester cast her troubles to the wind and went into the game with all her energy. Edna was quick, but Hester matched her with cool calculation. Her long strides were equal to Edna's quick ones; and she had the advantage of length of arms which could be kept beyond Edna's reach.

The left guard on the scrub team was Emma who resembled a little Dutch doll wound up and set to moving. Emma had no guile in her disposition and was utterly lacking in self-assertion. She admired Hester's playing and never failed to play the ball into her hands. Just the moment Hester's hand touched the ball, Emma encouraged her with cries of "Show them how to play, Hessie. Show them how scrubs play when they once get started."

Emma was both an inspiration and an advantage. Hester played with all her energy. To watch her, one might believe that all the future depended upon the winning of the game.

For the first half, she had the ball the instant the captain's hand had left it. Passing it on to Emma with a quickness and deftness which was almost beyond belief, she rushed forward in position to receive Emma's return pass. It was no easy matter for Edna was close at her heels and the center stood in her way. But by quick side movements, a sudden jerk beneath outstretched arms, the thing was done. [Pg 190]

Only once during the first half was the ball worked back to the goal of the opposing team; but even then it did not make a score. For three minutes, it went from end to end of the cage and at last went from the hands of the scrubs on a foul that Emma had made.

During the game, Hester was not only playing right guard. She played the game alone with a little assistance from Emma—a game of solitaire. She was the team and made every score.

Miss Watson and Doctor Weldon stood in the gallery looking on.

"Hester Alden is a brilliant person," said Miss Watson. "She will amount to something if she continues." [Pg 191]

"She can do little in mathematics. She'll pass on about seventy-five per cent," said Miss Laird. She had long since erased Hester's name from her good books, for Miss Laird knew only angles and equations, fixed values and ratios, and had no conception of nor admiration for a mind which was not as her own.

Miss Watson laughed at this remark. She was more liberal-minded than Miss Laird and was not disappointed to find that her girls were not all of the same type.

"You can open an oyster with a pen-knife as well as a chisel," she said.

Miss Laird glanced at the speaker. She was logical but not witty. Seeing that she did not grasp the meaning, Miss Watson continued.

"Taking the oyster as each one's little world, you know, Miss Laird. I have known men and women who have achieved a wonderful amount of success and happiness who could not have made seventy per cent on one of your examinations."

Doctor Weldon had listened in silence. She had sat watching Hester during that intense first half. She read deeper than either of her teachers. [Pg 192]

"I am fearful for Hester," she said at last. She spoke so low that only Miss Watson heard her. "She is too easily hurt, and she'll fight off showing it until she drops from exhaustion. If I know the girl, her good playing this evening is not so much for love of the game, as it is to hide the fact that something has gone wrong."

"Rather an excellent trait. Do you not think so?" said Miss Watson. "Personally, I despise a whiner, and haven't a bit of sympathy for a girl who goes about asking for pity. Pride is a good thing when it helps us cover up our own bruises."

"It is very fine, if it is not overdone. You know you cannot keep all the steam in a boiler under high pressure. There must be a safety valve or—trouble. I hope Hester will not be too intense. Intense folk need such a lot of self-control, or they make every one miserable about them."

The conversation stopped at this point. The practice game was over and Miss Watson went below and into the cage to see that the girls were taking the necessary precautions in regard to wraps. [Pg 193]

"Hester Alden will play at Exeter," was the general opinion at the close of the game.

"I am sure of that," said Sara Summerson. "During the game I was where I could see Miss Watson. Nothing escaped her. She watched every move Hester made. Emma was all right at first, but that foul put her on Miss Watson's black list. I could tell that. You know how Miss Watson presses her lips together and nods her head when she's pleased. Well, she did that every time Hester made a good play."

"I will not get a chance to go," said Emma. "I am sure of that. I'd like to, for I know lots of Exeter girls. There's a whole *bunch* of them from up our way."

"You speak as though they were flowers," laughed Erma, as she hurried down the steps from the gallery to join the girls. "A bunch of girls and a bunch of flowers, I presume that is a figure of

speech, but nevertheless I would not let Doctor Weldon hear me, if I were you. She might fail to see how flowery it is, and think you are using slang." [Pg 194]

Josephine was leaning against the balustrade. Her cheeks were pressed upon her upturned palm and her eyes were raised toward some remote region in the direction of the ceiling. Her hair was bound with a Greek band. She had seen to it that her short-waisted dress was suggestive of Grecian lines of beauty.

"I rather like that term," she said slowly. "We say a bunch of flowers; then why not a bunch of girls. Somehow I always think of flowers when I see a group of girls together. Do people never make you think of flowers? Some seem to me like lilies, others like shy, modest violets."

"Oh, cut it out!" said Emma, disregarding the rules in the use of language. "Just at present they make me think of a lot of empty vessels which will be emptier if they are not out of these duds and into dresses before the ten-minute bell rings for dinner."

Emma strode on down the hall, in company with Mame Cross and Edna Bucher. Edna had her arm around Emma's waist, although she was fully six years Emma's senior. But the younger girl's father was a bank president, a railroad magnate, and a number of other important persons, and Edna believed in cultivating friendship where it would bear fruit worth while. Emma was lavish and Edna fell heir to many discarded trifles and was never ignored when Emma had a spread or banquet. [Pg 195]

"Josephine is too sentimental," said Emma placidly. "If she would only waken and talk sense, she would be fine."

"She's such a sweet girl," said Edna. Every woman, girl or child she had ever known, came under that general heading in Edna Bucher's good books. They were "sweet." That was always the sum and substance of her criticism. There might have been a reason for such a general judgment. As in the case of Josephine, obligation fixed the limit of Edna's expression. She was at that moment, wearing a shirt-waist which Josephine had purchased only to find it too small for comfort in wearing.

During the three weeks before the game with Exeter, nine practice games were played between the first team and the scrubs. In these Hester Alden played right guard. She had never missed a goal which she had attempted and had never made a foul. There had been one or two instances when she might have done quicker work in passing and kept the ball from the control of the opponent; but they were minor faults which faded into insignificance before her more brilliant plays. [Pg 196]

During this time, Helen had maintained the letter of courtesy toward her roommate. But there was no longer any show of affection or love between them. Nothing had been said about the trip to Exeter. However, Hester was counting upon it. She knew that her playing had justified Miss Watson and Helen in selecting her. Miss Watson was the head of the athletics, yet the choice of players in reality rested with Helen.

Miss Watson permitted this because she believed that girls who were in sympathy with each other could work together better than where there was an unfriendly feeling or antagonism. Hester, relying on being chosen as a substitute for the Exeter game, made ready her suit, purchased a new pair of gymnasium shoes, and was about to write to Aunt Debby concerning the trip. [Pg 197]

The games were played on Friday evening, unless the distance was too great for the visiting team to reach the school in a few hours. Then Saturday afternoon was given over to them. Several days before, Miss Watson read out the names of the substitutes and the teacher who would go in charge of the girls. This important reading took place immediately after the general gymnasium work in the afternoon.

Wednesday morning, Berenice went about with a very wise expression. She looked as though she could tell a great deal if she were insisted upon. Erma, meeting her in the hall, fell prey to her hints and insisted that she tell the secret that was weighing her down.

"I was in the office waiting to see Doctor Weldon," said Berenice. "Miss Watson was in the private office talking with the doctor. It was something about the players for the Exeter game. You know Miss Watson must always give the list to Doctor Weldon before it is announced. Something unusual happened, for they debated a long time. Of course, I could not catch the words. I did not try; but I could not help knowing that there was a discussion." [Pg 198]

"There generally is," said Erma. "Doctor Weldon will not allow a girl to play unless she is up in her work and her conduct. Campused twice, and your throat is cut for any work in athletics."

Berenice's face flushed. The reference to being campused touched her.

"This was more than that. It was an argument; Miss Watson held to one idea and Doctor Weldon to another." This was growing interesting. A group of girls clustered about Berenice to hear the startling news.

"Did you hear who the substitutes were?" asked someone.

"Why ask that?" said Sara Summerson slowly.

"I am not brilliant, nor yet am I observing; but I know who the substitutes will be if the choice is according to their playing."

"If it is," said Berenice.

"I think it always is," said Mellie gently. "It would be very foolish to have it otherwise; to risk our securing the pennant on account of a little personal feeling. I do not like to feel that people are unjust. They have always treated me fairly."

[Pg 199]

"They always will," said Erma.

"They have never treated me fairly," said Berenice. "Every one I meet always tries to make something from me or treats me unfairly."

Erma laughed and the girls followed her fashion.

"They always will, Berenice," she said. "People always find what they are looking for. You always find in every place just what you carry there. You are out looking for trouble, and you will find it waiting around the corner. If you will persist in going about with a chip on your shoulder, you may be sure that someone will take pleasure in knocking it off."

"But the players," cried Emma. "Who are they? When will Miss Watson read the names?"

"I did not hear the names, but I did hear her say that she intended making them public at gym this afternoon."

[Pg 200]

"I intend to ask Doctor Weldon if I may go over with the girls," said Emma. "Of course, I know that I will not be allowed to play and I don't care much about it. I'd have just as much fun looking on and rooting. I know a dandy lot of girls over there."

"You had better see her early then," said Louise Reed. "She will not grant more than ten extra permissions and I know a number of girls who intend going."

"I'll see her the first thing after luncheon," said Emma. "She will not let us come before one-thirty."

"Whatever you do, Emma, do not get excited and tell Doctor Weldon that you know some 'dandy' girls at Exeter. She will not allow any of us to go if she hears from you that the Exeter girls are of that type. Be careful, Emma."

Emma shrugged her shoulders and tried to look serious, but the effort was a failure, for the dimples came to her cheeks and rippled into smiles. She turned to Mame and asked if she were going.

"I—going?" exclaimed Mame. "How can I go? I haven't a thing fit to wear."

[Pg 201]

"You might wear your new blue broadcloth," suggested Louise Reed.

"New? Why, I had that before the holidays. I never did like it. I shall not go with you girls and look shabby. You always look so well and I will not put you to shame."

"I am sorry for you," said Erma. "I'd offer you my tan coat suit which I have worn but two years, only I need it myself; it being the only one of its kind that I have."

"You may laugh," said Mame. "But I am telling you the truth. I haven't a dress fit to wear."

"No congregating in the hall, if you please. If you must talk together you will find the parlor open to receive you." Miss Burkham had come among them and spoke with a voice of gentle authority.

"Yes, Miss Burkham," replied six voices together, as the six bowed and moved to their rooms.

The rumor that the names of the players would be read that afternoon filled the ranks in the gymnasium. A number of girls had received permission to be absent, but on hearing the rumor, they reconsidered and decided that they were able to be present. The period of exercise dragged along. The girls went through with the drills with as much animation as one might expect from an automatic machine. Their eyes were upon the clock whose hands moved provokingly slow. But it came to an end, as all things must after a time.

[Pg 202]

Miss Watson gave a signal to the pianist to stop playing. Then stepping to the front, she bade the girls to be seated. They found places on the floor, on the horse and the mattresses which lay along the outer edge of the floor. A few drew themselves up on the horizontal bars and balanced there carefully while Miss Watson drew forth her paper, looked it over and then began her preliminary remarks. One could have heard a pin drop, so quiet was the room.

"As you know, we play the Exeter team in their gymnasium, Friday evening," began Miss Watson in her brisk, business-like way. "The game will be called at eight o'clock. We shall have a two-hours' ride to reach Exeter. The last train from our station leaves at four o'clock. Consequently, the faculty will excuse from lessons Friday afternoon, all the girls who play."

[Pg 203]

"Or root?" finished Emma. She was balanced on the bars. The sound of her own voice so startled her that she nearly lost her balance and was saved from falling only by Louise's clutching her firmly by the shoulder.

Miss Watson turned toward Emma and looked her reprimand. "What have you to say concerning

the matter, Miss Chase?" she asked. The tones of her voice would have disconcerted any one but Emma. Hers was an effervescent spirit which could not be suppressed. She smiled upon Miss Watson as she replied, "The girls who go along to root—will they be excused, too? You said the players will not have any lessons Friday afternoon. What about the girls that root?"

Miss Watson looked her scorn of the question and questioner. One thing which had been discountenanced by the faculty and by Miss Watson in particular, was the word "rooting" and all it stood for.

Miss Watson ignored the questions and continued, "Miss Burkham had planned to accompany you—." [Pg 204]

The girls gasped. With Miss Burkham in charge they would not be allowed to speak above a whisper. She would compel them to be all that was elegant and conventional.

"—but she has found that to be impossible. Neither Doctor Weldon nor I can leave the school, so Fraulein Franz will have you in charge."

There was a relaxation of muscles. An expression of amusement and relief spread over the faces of the girls. Dear Fraulein Franz! She would be with them like a mother hen with a brood of ducks. With the Fraulein they would do much as they pleased, and she would attribute it to the peculiar customs of the country.

"The first team will be made up of the regular players. Three substitutes will accompany the team. Doctor Weldon thought three would be sufficient. I shall read the names of players and substitutes." Taking up the paper, she read.

"Captain, Miss Loraine—Players: Misses Turnbach, Cross, Bucher, and Loveland. Substitutes: Misses Reed, Chase, and Thomas." [Pg 205]

That was all. Hester's heart had been in her throat at the beginning. Now she felt cold and chill. She had been so confident. The girls knew that she had expected to be chosen. They knew that she had her suit in order, with gay new letters across the blouse. She sat quite silent and motionless on the mattress propped against the wall. She could not raise her eyes to meet the eyes of the girls. She could not speak to them. The girls did the kindest thing they could do. They went off without attempting to speak to her, or to offer her condolence or sympathy.

When she raised her eyes, she found that the gymnasium was deserted and that she was the only occupant.

She arose and went out into the corridor. She could not go to her room and meet Helen. Helen had played her false. Perhaps, the recent assumption of dignity on Helen's part had been to prevent any criticism of this action.

Hester could not remain alone in the gymnasium, neither in her present garb would she be permitted to visit the parlor, nor to linger in the halls. The only alternative was to go to her room, and meet Helen there. The injustice of the choice of substitutes at last appealed to her. Had she been an Alden in very truth, she could not have shown the old revolutionary spirit more. [Pg 206]

Wounded feeling gave way; personal pride took to itself wings. The thing was unjust and she would not bear it even from Helen Loraine. Another thing she would not bear—she had borne it too long already—and that was the distant, haughty treatment accorded her by Helen. Hester Alden's spirit arose. She would have justice though she had to fight for it.

The feeling of humiliation left her. Now she had no dread of meeting the girls. She raised her head proudly. Her eyes flashed, and a flush came to her cheeks.

Helen was in the study when she entered. She was evidently doing nothing and had been doing nothing for some minutes. Perhaps she dreaded the meeting as much as Hester. She looked up when the latter entered and spoke, "Well, Hester, are you back from the gym?" [Pg 207]

To use Debby's expression, Hester was not one to beat about the bush. Now, she brought up the subject at once.

"Did you or Miss Watson choose the substitutes?" she asked.

"Why, I did. That is, I recommended the ones I wished to play, and Miss Watson agreed that they were satisfactory."

"Helen Loraine, did you choose ones who played the best, as you have boasted that you always do?"

"I took the ones that played well and whom I thought had a right to be substituted."

"Answer me this." Hester walked directly before her roommate. Standing so, they looked into each other's eyes. "Answer me this. Do I not play a better game than either Louise or Emma? Have I not made the score when their fouls would have brought it down?"

"Yes, you have. You are a better player than either. To do you justice, Hester, you play as well as any girl on the first team." [Pg 208]

"I do, and yet you passed me over for an inferior player. Is that justice to either the team or me?"

"It does not appear so. Yet one cannot judge from appearances alone. I believed that I did what was fair and honorable."

"I fail to see it that way," said Hester proudly.

"We do not see it from the same point of view."

"Evidently not. But this much I insist upon. I must know the reason why you ignored me when you have acknowledged that I was the best player. I demand the reason."

"Don't you know, Hester Alden? Don't you really know?"

"I do not. There is something else I do not know or understand; that is your treatment of me for the last three weeks. Do not for a moment think that I am begging for either your love or friendship. I wish nothing that does not come to me of its free will. But it was you who first wished to be friends. It was you who always made the first advances. Time and time again, you told me that I was nearer to you than any friend you had ever had and that I seemed more like a sister to you."

[Pg 209]

"I know," said Helen slowly. "And I meant every word. From that first night you were here, you were never like a stranger. I meant every word I told you."

Her voice was low and sorrowful; but Hester was unmoved. The bitter feeling which had filled her heart for three weeks was now bursting forth in a torrent.

"Much I care for such affection! If that is the way you treat your sister, I am very glad I am not she. Suddenly, without a reason, you grow haughty and rude—."

"Rude! I was never rude, Hester. I was always courteous."

"Yes, with the kind of courtesy which made me angry all over. I wish to tell you right here, Helen Loraine, that I shall not stand being treated so without a reason."

"I thought I had a reason. I think yet I have a reason."

"Then why did you not come to me and tell me point blank? It is far better to accuse me of something definite than to go about acting and looking unutterable things."

[Pg 210]

"I could not tell you. Even now, if I should tell you and ask for an explanation—."

"I would refuse to give it. It was either your place to come directly to me or to trust me implicitly. I would give no explanation now, if I had a million of them to give."

"But, Hester, listen. I have been as hurt and miserable about this as you. Let me tell you—."

"Here you are. I knocked once and you didn't hear me. Hester, would you just as soon lend me your basket-ball suit? I never gave a thought of going to Exeter and I haven't any letters for my blouse." It was Renee who had interrupted them.

"Yes, you may have it," said Hester. She moved away. The talk which might have resulted in a reconciliation between her and Helen was not resumed and nothing at all came from it.

CHAPTER XII

[Pg 211]

There were but twelve girls who went down from Dickinson to the Exeter game; but to the hundred yet remaining, it seemed as though the dormitories were vacant. Hester found the afternoon long. Her anger had passed. She was not sorry that she had spoken as she did, but that no results had come from her show of spirits. She was not in a mood to visit with the other girls. Her intimate friends had gone with the basket-ball team. No study hour was observed Friday evening. The parlors and library were open. Hester, from her room, could hear the sound of the piano and the school songs. Instead of enlivening her, it had the opposite effect.

The girls who went down to Exeter could not possibly return until Saturday evening. That meant another entire day alone. Hester did not like to think of that.

[Pg 212]

"I shall pack my suit-case and to-morrow morning, I shall ask Doctor Weldon to allow me to go to Aunt Debby."

The decision brought up her spirits. She immediately began to arrange her work. The books were put in order and a suit-case taken from the shelf in the closet.

"Aunt Debby said she would make new collars for my waists and change the sleeves." With this promise in mind, she selected the thin white waists which were showing signs of wear. Miss Richards and Miss Debby, with a few deft touches, would make these look almost as well as new.

In her rummaging, Hester had the same experience that Helen had had three weeks before. She went over the boxes for some article she needed. She discovered the little box hidden away in the corner. She opened it and exclaimed just as Helen had done.

"My pin! I had forgotten all about that. I think I shall wear it. It looks rather pretty against a

white dress." Holding it up against her waist, she looked down upon it with satisfaction. It surely did look pretty, against the white! The little bit of cut glass scintillated like a bit of fire. Fastening it to her waist, she continued her work.

[Pg 213]

The next morning, she went down to breakfast wearing the pin. Mellie was at the table, and gave a look of surprise when Hester came in. After a time she turned to her and said: "Where did Helen find her pin? I am glad she has recovered it, for it was valuable in addition to being an heirloom."

"I did not know she had found it," said Hester. "She did not mention the matter to me."

"I thought—" Mellie hesitated and did not finish the sentence. Several times, Hester found her looking closely at her.

Hester was wearing a soft shirt-waist with a tie. The ends of the tie knotted in butterfly fashion had been caught together by the pin which was partly hidden by them.

Hester secured permission to visit her Aunt Debby. She was to go down on the ten o'clock car and return Monday morning in time for chapel. On her way to the car, she met Mellie, Berenice and several girls from the west dormitory.

[Pg 214]

"We'll walk with you to the triangle," said Berenice. "I do not know how we will put in our time today. It is certainly dull with the girls gone. I wonder how the game went last evening?"

"Didn't you hear?" asked one of the others. "They telephoned Miss Watson last evening. She's our hall-teacher and she told us at once. It was twenty to thirty in favor of Exeter."

"Exeter won!" cried Berenice. "It is poor management on someone's part. They never won a game from us before—not on such a score. Last year neither scored, and the year before Exeter was one goal ahead, and they would not have made that if the referee had not been partial."

"I am sorry. I was sure they would win," said Hester. They had come to the triangle, the place where the sloping walks meet at an angle.

"They would have won, too, if you had been there. You should have been. I, for one, was ready to revolt Wednesday morning, and the other girls would have stood by me. We would have done so if you would have shown any spirit; but you sat there as though the game were nothing to you."

[Pg 215]

Hester smiled but made no attempt to reply. She was learning to know Berenice and the danger of expressing one's opinion in her presence. Life at Dickinson was teaching her more than what lay between the covers of books. She was learning to meet people, to know them as they were, and to hold her tongue under provocation as she was doing now.

Berenice was not easily put aside. "Why, did you not show some spirit about it, Hester?"

"Spirit? Why should I? If Miss Watson and Helen thought Emma put up a better game than I, why should I complain?"

Berenice shrugged her shoulders. She was about to say more when Erma came down the dormitory steps and crossed the campus toward them. Her fair hair was piled high on her head in puffs and rolls. She was wrapped in a long garnet sweater. She looked like a crimson rose as she moved across the snow.

"Drop the subject," cried Berenice. "Here comes Erma. She takes exception to everything I say. One cannot express an opinion or offer a criticism in her presence unless one is taken to task."

[Pg 216]

"Perhaps it is just as well to let it drop," said Mellie gently. "It is only a game of basket-ball and not worth a heated discussion."

"Well, peaches," cried Erma cheerily accosting Hester. "Are you really going home? Won't your Aunt Debby be glad to see you. Tell her I send her a thousand hugs and a million kisses. How I wish I were going home to see that dear old daddy of mine. Girls, when you want to see the grandest man in the world, come home with me and I'll show you my daddy."

Berenice looked down over her nose.

"It is well to be satisfied," she said.

"It certainly is," replied Erma. "I am glad I am. There's not a father or mother better than mine and my friends are the best in the world. I wouldn't exchange them for millions."

She had come close to Hester, and encircling her with her arm, asked, "When are you coming back, peaches?"

"Monday morning. There comes my car now." She stooped to lift her suit-case which Marshall had brought down from her room and deposited at her feet. As she did so, the butterfly end of her tie fluttered, displaying her quaint pin whose setting gleamed like a spark of fire.

[Pg 217]

Its scintillation caught Erma's eye. She was about to remark concerning it, but stopped herself in time. But Berenice, who never let anything escape her, also caught the sparkle of the stone. More than that, she saw the expression which passed quickly over Erma's face, and she read it aright. She made no remark until Hester had boarded the car, had waved her good-byes and the car had disappeared down the bend of the road. Then turning, she slipped her arm into Erma's and

Mellie's, and so walking between them, moved toward the building.

"Did you notice the pin Hester had on?" she asked suddenly.

Mellie was wise and did not answer. Erma, who was as transparent as a ray of light, grew confused and tried to cover it up by asking, "A pin? Did she have a pin on? I suppose she did. Girls generally wear pins of some sort."

[Pg 218]

Berenice shrugged her shoulders. "Yes; she had a pin on, Erma Thomas, and you observed it as well as I did. You know as well as I do whose pin it is."

"You are very much mistaken. I know nothing at all about it. I have nothing to do with other people's jewelry."

"You have with this. At least you spent hours in helping to look for it. It is that odd one which Helen Loraine wore and which so mysteriously disappeared."

"Any disappearance is a mystery. If I lose a collar button, it is a mystery to me. If it was not, I would know where it was. The things we don't know are always mysterious. If we know, then they are as plain as day."

"It seems strange it should disappear for three months and then Hester Alden have it on, especially when Helen Loraine is away."

"That is the very time you should wear other people's jewelry and clothes. When I am home I always wear my mother's best silk stockings and rustling petticoats when I know she's down in the city shopping. Of course I always ask her—when she comes back—and she never refuses me permission. She always says the same thing: 'Well, since you have them on—'"

[Pg 219]

Erma's attempts to lead the conversation away from Hester and the pin was without results. Berenice clung to the subject with a tenacity which would have been admirable had the thing been worth while.

"I understand you, Erma. You think just as I do, but you are afraid to say so. I suspected from the first where the pin went; but of course I did not say so."

"Do you not think it a wise course to follow now—to say nothing?"

"It is very different now. Before, I was merely suspicious. One may not make statements in mere suspicion. Now I have proofs."

"Proofs? Because Hester Alden has the pin on and Helen is away?"

"Let us walk along the edge of the river," said Mellie. She, too, meant to change the conversation. "I love the river when it is icebound. I should like to cross if I thought it were safe. But I fancy we had better not. We have had several days of thaw and that always rots the ice, and rotten ice is far more dangerous than thin ice."

[Pg 220]

"I intend to speak my mind," said Berenice. "Mellie and you are very much afraid you will express yourselves. You think as I do about the matter, but you will not say so. I cannot see the difference between thinking a thing and saying it outright."

"The best thing to do is not to think it," said Erma. She laughed long and loud and merrily. "That is quite an idea. After this, I shall not think things. Perhaps my brain will never wear out. Doesn't the physiology say that every thought wears away some of the gray cellular tissue? Thank goodness, no one can blame me for destroying mine. I am sure I never thought any of mine away." As she spoke a new thought came to her. "No doubt, Helen found her pin weeks ago and you are having your tempest in a tea-pot all for nothing."

Berenice had not thought of that possibility. This was an argument, she was not equal to and was the means of causing her to say no more on the subject.

[Pg 221]

She knew from experience that she could not talk with some of the girls. They had a sense of loyalty and honor which restrained them from discussing anyone who came under the name of friend.

Berenice was unfortunate in her disposition. She was not by nature honest or sincere, and she could not conceive of another's being so. When Erma and Mellie had refused to listen to her suspicions, she attributed not to their high sense of honor, but rather that they were deceiving her and would discuss the question between themselves.

Every girl in the hall understood Berenice. They were careful of their words while in her presence and they never repeated a tale that she carried to them. Many a time had they taken her to task, but she never profited by the lessons. When the girls spoke to her plainly, she put the fault on them instead of upon herself. Gradually the girls let her go her own way, gave no credence to her words and kept a bridle on their tongues, when Berenice was within hearing.

[Pg 222]

Yet, a word dropped here and there, will spring up and bear seed even though every one about knows it to be but a poisonous weed. Berenice dropped these seeds in plenty. A word fell here and there, although the hearers repudiated it, it yet made an impression, before any one was conscious that it was so. No one could trace the source from which it sprung, but the impression was strong throughout the hall that Hester Alden had taken Helen's valuable pin and had hidden

it away for months, then at the first opportunity when Helen was at Exeter, Hester had worn it home.

Hester, wholly unconscious that her action might be misjudged or that it should be judged at all, had left the pin at the cottage with Aunt Debby. She had put it away in her own tiny bedroom. A feeling of pride had restrained her from wearing it at school. The other girls wore pins which were not make-believes and Hester did not like the idea of the odd metal and cut glass.

[Pg 223]

"Aunt Debby told me it was just a cheap little pin," she said to herself as she placed it away. "I shall always keep it because it was my mother's, but I shall not wear it. I do not feel just right wearing something which pretends to be something else."

When Hester returned to school Monday morning, more than one pair of eyes looked eagerly for her coming. Erma and Mellie were hoping that she would come in with the pin boldly in evidence, and thus put to rout the rumors which had crept into the hall. Berenice, too, watched for Hester's coming with a wholly different motive.

"If Hester Alden comes in to class and wears the pin when Helen is present, then of course nothing can be said. I shall believe it then that Helen found the pin and allowed Hester to wear it. But if Hester comes back without it, I shall draw my own conclusions, and I shall feel justified in doing so."

She did not dare to say this to Mellie, Erma, or the older girls. It was to Emma she spoke, and Emma being youngest of all, and new to school life, listened and believed.

[Pg 224]

Hester was expected on the eight o'clock car. It was not by chance that some of the girls lingered in the main hall at the time of her coming.

Marshall from the office window, saw the car coming in the distance and went down to the triangle to carry up Hester's baggage. The group of girls saw him and moved nearer to the door.

"The car is coming. Hester will be on it," said Berenice. Erma was in the little group. At the tone in Berenice's voice, Erma flushed. Like a flash there came to her a conception of the part she was playing in this. If she were Hester Alden's friend, she had no right to question her action and no right to wait at the door to find proof of her perfidy or her honesty. Erma raised her head proudly, "I think I shall not wait here. I shall see Hester later. The dear old honeysuckle that she is! I shall be glad to have her back. I missed her dreadfully these two days." She turned her back on the group and was about to walk away when Mellie moved forward and slipped her hand in Erma's arm. "I shall go with you," she said. Others, grasping the situation more clearly than they had before, followed the example of Erma. So it was, that only Berenice and two of the younger girls waited at the doorway.

[Pg 225]

But a few moments they stood there, when the door opened and Marshall ushered Hester into the hall.

"I shall take this case directly to your room, Miss Alden," said Marshall.

"Thank you, Marshall," cried Hester. She was her gay, bright self after her visit with Aunt Debby. Her eyes were sparkling and her cheeks bright. She turned to the girls who stood waiting for her. Ignorant of the motive which had brought them here to meet her, she greeted them affectionately.

"It was lovely of you girls to come down here to meet me. I had a lovely time with Aunt Debby. Yet I am glad to get back to school."

While she had been speaking, she had drawn off her gloves and had thrown back her coat. The girls had given no response to her greeting, but stood with their eyes fixed upon her. The exclamation which Berenice gave sounded much like one of exultation; for Hester Alden was not wearing a pin.

[Pg 226]

Hester felt conditions about her. She gave the three girls a quick hurried glance as though to grasp the intangible something which she felt. Then she continued her way down the corridor. Berenice was not easily offended. Catching step with Hester, she walked with her.

"Did you lose your pin, Hester?" she asked. "You had such a pretty pin on when you left school Saturday morning. I noticed at once that you didn't have it on now. Do you suppose you lost it?"

"No, I did not. I left it home purposely."

"Indeed. If I had such a pin I am sure I would wear it. There are only one or two girls in school who have diamonds. If I had a pin with a diamond in it, I am sure I'd be only too anxious to wear it."

"But that did not happen to be a diamond. It is a very cheap little pin which belonged to Aunt Debby—that is, it belonged to me, and I'd rather keep it than wear it."

Berenice gave her shoulders a shrug, lowered her eyelids until her eyes looked like little beads. She would prove to the girls that what she had said was true. Every one of Hester's friends had heard the report but had refused to discuss it. Erma laughed in derision at the mention of it. "Oh, you silly thing," she cried, "to come to me with such a story. Don't I know Hester better than that."

[Pg 227]

And Mellie, Mame, Renee, and Sara stopped the tale-bearers in their story. Yet while they tried to be true, in the heart of each one was a doubt. Had they not seen the pin many times? Had it not disappeared weeks and weeks ago; and had they not seen Hester wear it home, and that when Helen was absent? Proof was brought before them and they tried to ignore it. They tried to strengthen themselves in their position by believing that Helen had found the pin and had neglected to tell them.

Hester's friends would have let the matter pass, giving her the benefit of a doubt, but there was in school a different set who were easily influenced and stood ready to believe anything that was told them. This set with Berenice as instigator, took it upon themselves to ostracize Hester.

[Pg 228]

It was the custom of the students to loiter in the parlor after dinner, gathering about in groups. Someone talked; others drew about the piano; while others arm in arm walked up and down in confidential talk. One evening as Hester joined one of these groups, the talk ceased. There was an attempt to resume it, but it was fruitless. The group scattered, leaving Hester alone. This occurred several times. Hester was not supersensitive; neither was she dull. She knew that something had gone amiss, and that she had purposely been snubbed. But not by so much as a glance did she show that she was conscious of the treatment. She lingered a few moments longer, made a pretense of playing a piece and then went to her room and took up her books.

"They will not treat me so a second time," she said to herself. "They'll never have the satisfaction of knowing that I observed them."

It was all very well to speak bravely, but the sting was deep. She had determination and pluck enough not to bewail. She took up her lessons and vented her energy in getting them out.

[Pg 229]

She was not alone in observing the conduct of the younger set. The girls of her own hall had also seen what had taken place.

Not in this alone, did the younger girls express themselves. At recreation hour, which followed the evening study period, they were accustomed to gather in little groups in one of the rooms. At these times, the chafing-dish was brought into use, and the air was heavy with the odor of chocolate. By contriving, the younger set managed that Hester no longer made one of the party.

One evening, Erma and Mame took the girls to task on this matter. Emma and Louise expressed themselves strongly. Hester had been guilty of the greatest dishonesty and they meant to cut her dead.

"Are you taking it upon yourself to mete out judgment?" asked Mellie gently. "I should scarcely feel myself equal to such a great work. You are not sure that Hester is guilty. You are surmising. Who knows but Helen found the pin."

[Pg 230]

"I know," exclaimed Berenice. "I took it upon myself to ask her."

"You must have had—" Erma began with some show of feeling, but stopped herself suddenly and laughed instead. What was the use in turning the matter into a tragedy. "Well, if you begin to cut people, you little freshmen, bear in mind that other girls can do the same. Hester is my friend and will continue to be. If she is not treated as I am treated, then I am treated badly."

"It's a case of love me, love my dog, is it?" asked Berenice.

"It's a case of treat my friends as you treat me. If Hester is not at the next fudge party, then you may expect me to leave and furthermore, you need expect no invitation to any spreads that I have anything to do with."

She went her way. The younger girls shrugged their shoulders. It was considered very fine to be entertained by the seniors and to be accepted by them as friends. The freshmen who had been so favored did not wish to forgo these joys. On the other hand, they did not like the idea of giving up their independence and running at the beck and call of any senior.

[Pg 231]

Berenice's words about asking Helen in regard to finding the pin, had put Erma's convictions to rout. She tried to comfort herself in the thought that Berenice was not always reliable in her statements. It was sorry comfort at the best. A heroic course then presented itself to Erma. The thought no sooner presented itself to her than she determined to put it into play.

"This evening after study hour, I intend making some hot chocolate. Marshall shall buy me some nice fresh wafers when he goes down the street."

"Thank you, I shall be there," said Mame.

"No, you shall not. That is what I wish to speak to you about. The moment the half-hour bell rings, I wish you to go down to Hester Alden's room and I wish you to keep her there until I call to you and her to come. But not for worlds must you let her know that there has been anything premeditated about the affairs."

[Pg 232]

"Oh, not for the worlds," said Mame. "I do not quite grasp your idea, but I'll do as I am told though I die for it."

"You'll not die, Mamie. The good die young, so I see a long, long life for you. You will be rewarded for your goodness. I shall save the biggest cup for you and I'll fill it twice without so much as your hinting."

"I am your servant from henceforth. Two cups of cocoa to be had not for the asking, and big cups at that."

Promptly at the recreation hour, Mame hurried off to see Hester. There was something she wished done for the paper and Hester wrote so beautifully. Helen went away and left them. The sound of voices came up to them from Fifty-four.

"Erma asked me to come down for some hot chocolate," suggested Hester. But Mame refused to take the hint.

"Yes, she asked me too. She'll call us when it's ready. She knows that I am up here. Now, about this editorial. I'd rather write a novel than an editorial any time. In novels, something may be done; but in editorials, one must just think. Would you say this, Hester?"

[Pg 233]

She began her reading on an abstract subject which was a theme worthy of a logician and Hester was compelled to listen.

Meanwhile, down in Fifty-four, a number of girls had gathered. Erma was making good use of the chafing-dish while Renee was passing salt wafers and blanched almonds. Erma was laughing merrily, as she poured the cocoa. In the midst of her activities her brooch fell from her collar on to the table.

"Good thing, I heard it," she exclaimed, drawing the attention of the entire room to it. "If I had dropped it in the hall or on the campus, I might never have found it, just as you did, Helen. You never found your pin did you?"

"No," said Helen. Her reply was given curtly as though her mind were on other matters.

"I told you so," cried Berenice with a show of exultation, looking from one girl to another. They had become suddenly quiet at Helen's reply.

"I told you so," she repeated. Then turning to Helen, she continued. "I can tell you where it is. I saw it and so did several of the others. But they are afraid to tell."

[Pg 234]

"Not afraid," said Mellie gently. "Fear was not what kept us silent."

"Hester Alden knows where it is," continued Berenice. "While you were at Exeter, Hester went home. I met her in the hall and walked with her to the triangle. I saw the pin on her tie. It was partly hidden by the ends of her tie. When she came back, she did not have it with her. I was not the only girl who saw it. They all feel as I do about it. Hester Alden took your pin."

She looked about the room with an air of malicious triumph. What could the girls do or say now? The gauntlet had been thrown down and they could not fling it back. It must lie there, for Hester could not be defended. Gentle, soft-spoken Mellie arose to the occasion. "I hope you are happy now, Berenice," she said. "But I do not see how you can be after such an act. You have deliberately done what you could to ruin Hester's reputation and what have you gained by it? Nothing at all, except those who have heard, care just a little less for you."

[Pg 235]

During these remarks, Helen had sat silent on a heap of cushions piled high on the floor. At Berenice's first words, she had grown pale but she listened without a word. What could she say or do? While Mellie spoke, she decided the course she would take. If the girls misunderstood her meaning, well and good. She loved Hester. It was a queer worthless sort of love which would make no show of sacrifice for its object. She reasoned thus while Mellie was speaking. Then she looked from one girl to the other.

"What startling things you say, Berenice. What pin have you reference to?"

"Your heirloom with the diamond in it?"

"Oh, that," with an air of assumed indifference. "Is that the one that you have in mind? Yes, I found that three weeks ago. Where do you think I found it?" She looked about at the girls, but gave them no opportunity to answer. "I found it in a little box along with some other trinkets. The box had been put on the closet floor and got pushed back in the corner. I was hunting about for some hooks and eyes and came across it quite by accident."

[Pg 236]

A sigh of relief was felt. The girls had been sitting with every muscle rigid. Now, they relaxed and a buzz of laughter and talk began. Berenice was far more discerning than the other girls there. Something in Helen's manner was beyond her comprehension.

"Did you really know then that Hester Alden had your pin and was wearing it?"

Helen nodded brightly as she replied. No one noticed that she ignored the second question that Berenice had put to her.

"Why, certainly, I knew that Hester had it. You take up very strange ideas, Berenice. I'd put Hester and the pin from your mind from this minute. I give you my word of honor that I knew that Hester had the pin."

Erma laughed delightfully. Her voice ran the scale and came back with an echo of triumph in it. Her plan had succeeded beyond her most sanguine expectations.

"I have forgotten the girls," she said, "and the cocoa almost gone." Going to the hall, she called to Sixty-two. "Hester Alden, are you and Mame going to stay there all night? The bell will ring in a

[Pg 237]

CHAPTER XIII

[Pg 238]

From this time on, the younger set of girls made a point of being kind to Hester. Feeling that they had misjudged her they tried to repay by an excess of kindness. Hester was a responsive creature. She had no ugliness in her heart. Spite was a quality that had not entered into the composition of her character. So when the girls showered her with kindness, she responded heartily and put from her heart, the bitter thoughts which had been there.

Helen, after the brave stand she had taken in regard to Hester, was troubled. She felt that she had been placed by Hester's shortcomings in an unpleasant position. She had deceived her girl friends. To be sure, she had not told them a word which was not strictly true, but they had misunderstood her and she knew it. To make matters worse, she had deliberately constructed her sentences that they might be deceived and yet she was telling the truth. Taking it all in all, it was a paradox. She hated deception, and Hester had placed her in such a position that she had been compelled to put a double meaning to her words.

[Pg 239]

So the little plan which Erma had worked out had the effect of widening the breach between the occupants of Sixty-two.

Hester had been grieved by the treatment she had received from Helen; but after the choice of substitutes, sorrow gave place to anger at the injustice accorded her. When the anger had gone, a steadiness of purpose came to Hester. She resolved to treat Helen with courtesy, nothing more; to be untouched by her in any way. Hester set her lips firmly and raised her head proudly. She had caught little mannerisms from Debby Alden, just as she had caught the principle which had actuated her conduct: not to cry out and let every one know when one is hurt.

When she came back from the two-days' visit with Aunt Debby and Miss Richards, she had mastered her feelings to a great extent. She never failed to greet Helen upon rising; she bade her a courteous good-night when bed-time came. They spoke together of little school affairs, but the long confidential talks had gone. They were well-bred strangers together for a time. They were spoiling the best part of the school year by what they pleased to think was their heroism. It would have been far easier and more fruitful of good results had they taken each other sharply to task, and blurted out what they had against each other. It would have been an easy matter, for each would have discovered that there existed no cause for an estrangement between them.

[Pg 240]

Down in the city, Debby Alden was spending the best year of her life. She had continued her music until her playing had passed the apprentice stage. She read the classics with Miss Richards. The townspeople had found her charming in her gracious thought for others. She was practical and thoroughgoing, and they filled her hands with church and charity work. Debby had not an idle, lonely moment. To do her justice, she gave no thought to what people might be thinking of her. She had too many thoughts outside herself to give Debby Alden much thought.

[Pg 241]

She had proved the statement that it is a woman's own fault if she is not beautiful by the time she has forty years to her credit. Debby's beauty was of form and feature, and beyond this, the beauty which radiates from holding high ideals and living up to them. People did not merely like or admire this elder Miss Alden. Those words were weak to express the sentiment they held for her. They loved her, perhaps because Debby had in her heart an interest and love for every human creature that she met. Hester wisely had not mentioned to her aunt the little disturbance at school. This was partly due to unselfishness, and partly that there had been nothing tangible to tell. It would be very foolish to run and cry, "I have had my feelings wounded, but I do not know why." Pride, too, was one of the important factors of her silence. She could tell no one—not even her dear aunt—that the girls had, for some reason, held her in disfavor.

But Debby Alden had not lived with Hester sixteen years without understanding her. The girl had barely entered the cottage and removed her wraps before Debby knew that something had gone wrong. Debby asked no questions, according to Hester the same privileges she demanded for herself—to have hurts and wounds without being questioned concerning them.

[Pg 242]

At the sight of Hester's troubled face, Debby Alden's old fears came back to her. Had someone at the school brought up the subject of the girl's parentage? Had someone told her that she had been thrown upon the world a waif, and none of her people had cared to look for her?

Saturday evening, the three of the household gathered about the grate fire. Miss Richards had her embroidery and Debby had taken up a book; but neither was in the mood for work. Hester was filled to the brim with school. She was fairly bubbling over with stories of what the girls had done; who had been campused, and who had been called into the office.

Debby Alden listened to the chatter as though it were the profoundest wisdom.

"And, Aunt Debby, what do you think? I missed Mrs. Vail again last week. She came to take Helen for a ride and intended asking me to go with them, but Sara and I had gone around the campus and so I missed my ride and did not meet Mrs. Vail. Does it not seem strange, Aunt Debby, that I should always miss her? I fell in love with her picture, you know, and I was very anxious to know her. Don't you think it's very funny?"

[Pg 243]

"I do not know that it is funny," replied Debby. "It has just happened so. Does the young man come with his mother?"

"Rob? Sometimes he does. He comes very often alone. Several times, Miss Burkham permitted me to go down to the reception hall with Helen and talk with him. Last week, when we had a reception, he was there, and he talked to me a long, long time. I think he is the nicest boy I ever knew. I think he is nicer than Ralph Orr. Don't you think so, Aunt Debby?"

"You must remember that I met him but once, Hester. I liked him very much. He had such a nice boyish manner."

"Boyish. Do you know how old he is?"

"I am sure he is under seventy," said Debby with a smile.

[Pg 244]

"Surely," said Miss Richards in her droll, quiet way, "he must be younger than I am. I am only sixty-three."

Hester laughed. "You are making fun of me. He really isn't a boy. He is twenty-one and a senior in a Medical School. My, but he has strong nerves! I asked him if it didn't make him tremble to see the surgeons cut the flesh from one. He said it never phased him. That was his expression—never 'phased' him. I rather like the expression. It sounds just like what you might expect from a college boy. Don't you think so?"

"I never knew college boys," began Debby Alden, but stopped suddenly. She remembered in time that James Baker had been a college boy. "—I never knew many, not enough to know what language to expect of them."

Hester had not caught the hesitancy in Miss Alden's speech. Miss Richards had and looked up in time to see another Debby Alden than the Debby she had always known. This Debby had the flush of sixteen years in her cheeks and the tender light of day-dreams in her eyes.

Just a moment, Debby Alden sat thus. Then the woman came back where the girl had been. "What more?" she asked Hester. "Of what else does this wonderful lad talk?"

[Pg 245]

"Everything, Aunt Debby. I really do not believe there is a subject that he cannot talk upon."

The women could not restrain a smile at this girlish exhibition of the confidence of youth.

"He's traveled and he's been in school, and he is an athlete. He told me a great deal about school life. That was while we talked together at the reception. Helen was surprised that he talked so long to me. She says that he generally speaks to everyone for a few minutes and then goes. He must have talked to me a half an hour."

"And then he went home?" suggested Debby. Hester blushed. "No, Miss Burkham came up and said that I must remember there were other guests who demanded some of my time, and I had to excuse myself."

Debby Alden in her thoughts gave thanks to Miss Burkham.

Hester continued her chatter. She needed no encouragement for when she was once on a subject she generally threshed it so thoroughly that nothing but chaff remained.

[Pg 246]

"But Robert told me that he generally said but a few words to each lady present and then went home. But somehow from the very first, he said I did not seem a stranger to him. He felt that he had always known me. That was why he sat so long and talked with me and I wish that Miss Burkham would have attended to something else then, and let me alone."

This was said in the most childlike, guileless manner. Debby Alden almost gasped for breath. She was about to remonstrate at the expression of such opinions when a glance from Miss Richards restrained her. That lady was not at all alarmed, only amused at Hester's talk.

"But Eva does not know all I know," said Debby to herself. "If she did, she would find it no laughing matter."

When Hester had gone to bed, leaving Debby and Miss Richards yet at the fireside, the latter took up the conversation.

"You are needlessly alarmed, Debby. There is not a bit of danger about Hester's having her head turned. She looks upon Robert just as she did upon Ralph. He is a good companion. That is all. Perhaps, she is a little flattered by having a college boy notice her at all. I remember when I went to school, I did the same thing. If a cadet spoke with us, we held our heads high and if he asked us to dance, our heads were turned. We really cared not at all for the cadets, but the uniforms were very handsome. That was fifty years ago, Debby Alden, and girls have not changed one whit."

[Pg 247]

She smiled as she thought of the old school days. She was far enough away from them now to know what was mere childish pleasure which had left its pleasant fragrance clinging to all the years between.

"Nevertheless, no one knows what may result from these conversations. I shall speak to Hester."

"My dear Debby, I beg that you consider and do nothing of the sort. Hester is a child with no

thought of being anything else. Why should you put other thoughts into her head? You will do just such a thing if you discuss the subject further with her. Let her talk with the young man at the reception if she wishes to and Miss Burkham does not object."

[Pg 248]

"She appeared so much interested. I am afraid—"

"Nonsense. You would hedge Hester about with your fears. It is just a wholesome girlish interest which is right and proper for one normal young person to show in another. Had it been otherwise, Hester would not have talked so freely."

Yet, Debby was not satisfied. "You know that very serious love affairs are started in just such a boy-and-girl fashion."

"Surely. I know it. I know also that I do not think it altogether a bad fashion. Robert Vail, if I read him right, is an excellent young man. The Vails are people who are above reproach. So what cause would you have to complain, Debby Alden, if these half-hour talks should be taken seriously?"

"In the abstract, your ideas are worth while," said Debby. She could not laugh at the matter as Miss Richards was doing. "But in the concrete, they are wrong from beginning to end, and cannot be applied to Hester's case. Hester must never marry. Knowing that, I intend to keep her from falling in love, for I would not have her be unhappy."

[Pg 249]

There was tragedy in her voice which Miss Richards saw fit to ignore.

"At the same time, keep the rain from falling and the days from growing shorter. One is as easily done as the other. You will pardon my frankness, Debby, but I think you are about to make a mistake with Hester. You may restrain and educate her to a certain extent, but you cannot control her thoughts or her emotions. No one can do that for another. Guide Hester as far as your power lies; advise and admonish her, but she must live her own life; make her own mistakes and shed her own tears over them. You and your love must not shield her from that. She is herself to make of herself what she will.

"I cannot understand why you should wish her not to marry. In my mind, it is a fitting state for men and women, else the Lord would not have sanctioned it."

[Pg 250]

Debby could make no answer to this. Miss Richards bent over her needlework. She and Debby in all their years of intimacy, had but once before discussed the question. It had been Hester and Hester's future which had brought it up. The two women sat in silence for some minutes, when Debby said, "You cannot understand in what way life must be different for my girl. You do not understand and I cannot explain."

"Very well. But bear this in mind, Debby. You must not take the responsibility too heavily upon yourself. You are able to do a limited amount. There is a greater power in Hester Alden's life, than you. It is omnipotent and has a greater conception of life than your feeble mind can grasp."

"I know," said Debby humbly. "I am able to do so little. I cannot save my little girl all the bruises and hard places. She must bear them herself."

"And you should not if you could. Do not worry about Hester's being able to bear them. She has a courageous spirit and indomitable will."

[Pg 251]

Silence came again. Miss Richards worked on the center-piece she was embroidering. Debby leaned back in her chair. Her eyes rested upon the dying coals of the grate. Hester's childlike chatter had started her thinking on matters she tried to keep back in her memory. She blushed at her foolishness. Her practical business-like mind looked with scorn upon day-dreams—such day-dreams as came to her then, as she sat with her eyes on the grate. She could not smile at Hester's talk of Rob Vail's wonderful attainments. It touched too deeply. She had thought the same of Jim Baker that winter he took her to the spelling-bees. He had been a rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed boy who had ambitions. She had listened to his stories of the work he meant to do and she looked upon him as the most wonderful person in the world. But that had happened over twenty years ago, and she was very foolish to think of it at all.

Miss Richards worked in silence. At last when Debby Alden brought herself back from her day-dreams, her companion addressed her.

"When Miss Loraine was here, Debby, did you observe the resemblance between her and Hester?"

[Pg 252]

"Did I? I most assuredly did. The likeness was so strong that I almost exclaimed aloud when Helen stepped from the car. She was my Hester, with just a little difference."

"You passed the subject over so lightly that I thought you had not observed what I had."

"I passed over it lightly because I did not wish to disturb Hester. She knows she does not belong to my people; I would not have her know more, nor would I have her disturbed by commenting on the likeness.

"The likeness between her and Helen did not startle me as much as a little mannerism which I noticed in her cousin. Did you observe Robert's way of looking at one while that one was talking? He had the appearance of being absorbed with interest, and so impatient to hear all that was to be said that he might be tempted to pull the words from one's mouth."

Debby laughed softly at her words. "That is rather a peculiar way of expressing myself, but that is the impression he gave me. I have seen Hester sit so, listening. Time and time again, I have smiled at her intenseness, and I have chided her for it. I have no doubt that Robert Vail is an excellent young man. He looks it. If I read him right, he's inclined to be 'set' in his way. I do not doubt that if he thought a course of action was right and decided to follow it, he would be flayed before he could be compelled to give up. I have noticed that same tendency in Hester. She is what I call 'set' and always has been."

[Pg 253]

"Debby, do you think for a moment that Hester had to go far from home to find her example? Your dearest enemies could never accuse you of vacillating. You are what your people were before you. You're 'set' Debby—quite set.

"It is not a lack of virtue in one. On the contrary, I admire it. I have little sympathy for the one who moves with every passing influence. In my friendships, I find myself leaning toward folk who are 'set.'"

The gentle kindness in the speaker's voice and smile made every word she said seem like a caress.

"I should be very glad, Debby," continued Miss Richards, "that Hester has that virtue. Wax melts under any influence; but if iron is molded right you have something stable. You have given Hester high ideals, and I have no fear that she will be influenced from them."

[Pg 254]

"I had no thoughts of criticising," cried Debby quickly. "I am glad that my Hester is as she is. I would not have her different. I was remarking about the resemblance in manner and disposition between her and Robert Vail. She looks like Helen, but she is like Robert."

"Do you think there might be relationship, Debby? If there be one, Hester would not blush to claim such kin. The Vails and Loraines are fine folk—fine in the highest sense that I can use the word.

"You told me several years ago, that you knew more of Hester's family than you had given out. You told me no more than that, and I do not ask to know more now. But it came to me that they might be bound to Hester by ties of blood. Surely such a resemblance cannot come by mere chance."

"There are no blood ties there," cried Debby Alden. "I am sure of that. No, do not misunderstand me. I would not be jealous of them were they her kin. I should rejoice to know she was of such a family and the anxiety which I have borne in secret would leave me. No, Hester is not of the Loraine or Vail blood."

[Pg 255]

Arising from her place at the grate, she moved away to the end of the room and stood looking out on the white earth. After a few minutes' struggle with herself, she came back to where Miss Richards sat, "Eva, cannot your imagination fill out what I cannot tell? You know there are conditions of blood and family which bear a stain which generations cannot eradicate. Poor Hester, innocent and brilliant as she is, bears that mark. You know why I wish to make her independent and self-sustaining. Those from which she sprung are beneath her; and she dare not bring the affliction of her people upon those higher. You see why I must guard her. She must do as you and I have done—though not for the same reason. She must be alone all her life. I want you to help me in this."

[Pg 256]

"As I have always done, and always will," said her friend. "My heartstrings cling about Hester, too. I love her almost as much as you do, Debby Alden."

While the conversation was being carried on, Hester Alden lay in the room above not wholly unconscious that her aunt and friend were discussing her. Now and then a word came to her; but she closed her ears tight to shut out the slightest sound.

"Aunt Debby is talking about my people and I must not hear. She said once that what she told me was all she cared to have me know, so I must not hear this."

She shut the sound of voices from her ears. If Aunt Debby did not wish her to know, that ended it as far as Hester's desire to know was concerned.

Debby Alden was troubled in her thoughts about Hester all that winter term; for she knew that something lay heavy on Hester's heart. The girl continued her studies, took her part in the social life of the seminary, and played basket-ball with all her energy; yet her heart was sore because the breach between Helen and her had not been bridged. The seminary life was fine—but Helen had been the biggest part of it to Hester.

[Pg 257]

The river had been frozen over since the first of the year. The students who could skate, used the ice for an outside gymnasium under the chaperonage of the little German teacher. Helen did not skate and preferred the routine of the regular physical culture course. Hester, on the contrary, could have lived on skates, as far as her desire and lack of muscular weariness was concerned.

The difference in choice of exercise separated the girls yet further. The skating was like a tonic to Hester. She could not be dull, depressed, or anxious after an hour on the ice. She missed Helen's companionship less than before. While Helen was brought to realize that it was not a passing fancy she had held toward Hester, but genuine affection and she missed her companionship more and more.

The winter held on until late. The week preceding Easter Sunday, the spring thaw set in and the river came up and over the ice.

"We'll have an ice-jam and a good one," laughed Erma. "Last spring the cakes piled as high as the old apple tree. The ice broke just at tea-time and the river was floating with it until morning. Doctor Weldon allowed us to watch until bed-time. It was simply gorgeous. Great white blocks would rise high in the air and then crumble into powder. I think we'll have a bad jam this spring." Erma danced away, overjoyed at the prospect of something to break the routine. [Pg 258]

The following Saturday, the rain fell all day. The building was gray and cheerless. It was the time of year when homesickness is prevalent at school. The girls were dull and sat about silent in the parlor or idly turning over magazines in the library.

In the chapel a chorus of girls were being drilled. "What are they preparing for?" asked Hester of Sara.

"You are new, so I cannot tell you. Wait and find out," was the reply.

At tea-time the same heaviness of spirits hung over the dining-hall. Suddenly, a creaking sound was heard and a crush as though of breaking timber. [Pg 259]

"The ice!" cried Erma. Her voice was distinctly heard throughout the large dining-hall.

Fortunately, they were at the dessert and Doctor Weldon excused them immediately. They were warned to fortify themselves with wraps against the weather. In a few moments, they had hurried to their rooms and were back again in raincoats, overshoes, and Tam-o-Shanters.

The Fraulein loved the storm. She and Miss Laird were the only two of the faculty who could be induced to leave the building. The rain was falling softly. The Fraulein led the way across the campus to the edge of the river. The water had risen six feet since morning, and had encroached upon the campus, and gurgled about the trunk of the old orchard trees. The ice jammed back on the shore, forcing the girls to retreat. Great cakes arose as a perpendicular, balanced for an instant and fell to pieces, or crushed against the trees until they groaned and bent under the strain. All the while the growling and seething and gurgling of the water was heard above all. It was glorious. Little wonder that Erma had anticipated this with delight. [Pg 260]

The lights about the building were the only ones on the campus. The shadows were heavy where the girls stood along shore. Hester, to whom this scene was never old, although she had seen it every year of her life, stood entranced. Her umbrella had been tilted back and the rain beat down on her face, but she knew it not. She was unconscious of the chatter about her. She could not have talked. The river and noise and jamming ice held her spellbound.

Helen observed her as she stood so and believed that she was sad. Going up to where Hester was, Helen stood beside her, but no attention whatever was paid to her. Then she laid her hand lightly on Hester's arm. The result was the same. Hester stood with her eyes fixed upon the river, and made no response to the overture of friendship. Then Helen turned away, feeling that she had been repulsed.

When the heaviest flow had passed, the Fraulein took the girls back to the building. Helen went directly to her room to look over the evening mail; but Hester lingered with the Fraulein who was vainly trying to describe the flood which she had witnessed in her own little German village. [Pg 261]

When Hester at length entered Sixty-two, Helen had read her letters and was standing by the study-table in deep thought. She looked at Hester a little wistfully.

"I had a letter from our pastor at home," she said, turning to Hester. "You have heard me speak of Dr. James Baker?"

"Yes, I have," replied Hester and took up her work. One could not begin a conversation on so little encouragement. Helen took up the letter from her pastor and read it a second time. He wrote to her as he did to all the absent young people whose church home was his church. He brought to their attention, the coming Sabbath, and reminded them that it should mean much to them. He suggested that they too, lay aside the old life with its troubles and its shortcomings and arise with new ideals and a new spirit. He had expressed himself finely. Helen, who was sympathetic, was touched by his words. She would put aside the old life. She would begin that instant to forget all that had passed and begin anew even her friendship with Hester. [Pg 262]

Hester, fortified by her pride and the resolution she had made some weeks before, sat at her table writing. For weeks she had given Helen no opportunity for more than a passing word.

"This letter from Doctor Baker is beautiful," began Helen. "He is as good as he writes. He has been our pastor for fifteen years—more perhaps. Will you read it, Hester? It may do you good. It has me."

"Perhaps I do not need it," was the curt reply. "And perhaps Doctor Baker might object to a third party reading his letters."

"Nonsense. He would be delighted. Will you read it?"

"No, I thank you," said Hester, proudly. Then she added. "I may be beyond being reached, you know."

Her tone was sharp. It caused Helen to cease from further importunity.

"Very well, Hester. If you do not wish to, I shall not insist." She laid the letter aside.

[Pg 263]

"It will be the very last time, I shall try to make up with Hester," she said to herself. "She never really cared for me, or she would see that I wish to be friends. But she does not care."

When the half-hour bell rang, the girls began their preparation for bed without a word to each other. Since the first days of their misunderstanding, their politeness toward each other was so marked as to be burdensome.

They excused and begged pardon each time their paths crossed. The same formality was continued now. There was no conversation, although both were talkers and their heads were buzzing with the things they would like to have said.

When the retiring bell sounded, there was a short "Good-night, Hester," and as short a response, "Good-night, Helen."

There were to be sunrise services in the chapel at which every student was required to be present. But before that time, Hester was awakened by voices far in the distance. She sat up in bed to listen. The gray of the Easter morning was stealing through the window. The voices came nearer and nearer. At last she could distinguish the words.

[Pg 264]

"Christ is Risen. Christ is Risen. He hath burst His bounds in twain.
Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen! Alleluia, swell the strain."

It was the chorus of girls. This had long been the custom of the school, to wake the pupils by song on Easter morning.

The voices drew nearer. The singers paused at the landing of the stair. Hester could distinguish Erma's loud, clear notes which soared upward like a bird and floated over all.

"Alleluia, Alleluia, swell the strain."

The spirit of the Easter morn came to Hester.

There was peace and joy. She wished for that. She really had not had it for weeks. While the song rose and fell, her heart softened toward Helen. She would make up with her. She would ask to be forgiven and be friends again. She crept out of bed and went to Helen's bed, but Helen had gone to make one of the Easter Wakening Chorus.

CHAPTER XIV

[Pg 265]

Proserpina had returned to earth again. The evidence of her visit was everywhere. The campus had turned into green velvet; the pussy willows were soft as chinchillas; the apple trees were in leaf, and just about to blossom. These were the signs of spring everywhere. In addition to these, the seminary had a sign which appealed to it alone. The man with the ice-cream cart had appeared. For several days, his cart had been backed against the curb of the campus and the sound of his bell was like the music of the hand-organ to the girls. It was a bluebird and a robin—the harbingers of spring to them.

May came and was quickly passing. The girls were talking caps and gowns and diplomas. The seniors went about with a superior air; the juniors were little better for they had a class day at least. The freshmen and sophomores, in the plans for commencement week, were but the fifth wheel to a wagon. They were ignored. If they offered suggestions they were snubbed, and informed, not too gently, that they could not be expected to know anything about such matters—being new to the ways of commencement.

[Pg 266]

Though they had neither commencement, class day, nor play, the freshmen and sophomores did not lose spirit. What was not theirs by rights, they meant to make theirs by foul means and strategy.

It had long been the custom of the seniors to follow the commencement proper with a banquet. This included only members of the senior class. The Alumnæ banquet took place later and was in the hands of old students who had long since left the seminary. Among these were the wives of judges, physicians, bankers—people with whom the freshmen and sophomores dare not interfere, though it would have been an easy matter to have taken this Alumnæ Banquet, for there was no one on hand to guard it. The menu and serving were wholly in the hands of a caterer from the city.

Knowing that the affairs of the Alumnæ must not be tampered with, the freshmen turned all their energies toward the seniors and juniors.

[Pg 267]

The juniors were to give a play. The costumes were to be rented for the occasion. The play itself was zealously guarded lest it be stolen. Erma, whose talent lay in a histrionic direction, had charge of the copies of the drama. Erma had talent but no forethought. She put the pamphlets in the place most suited to them. Hester, who had been sent out by her class as a scout to find what

she could of the plans of the juniors, discovered the books the first day; and not only the books but the names of the juniors and the parts which each was to take. Hester reported immediately the results of her investigation. The following day, while Erma was engaged elsewhere the play disappeared, was hurriedly copied by the freshmen and replaced. Not a member of the junior class, so the freshmen believed, was aware of what took place and was not the wiser that the freshmen had begun the preparation of the same play.

"We can outdo them," said Louise at the class-meeting. "The play is booked for Tuesday evening. Monday evening is the band concert and promenade from seven o'clock until eight-thirty. After that, the freshmen class will have the floor and we'll give the play before the juniors. Their efforts will fall flat on Tuesday evening."

[Pg 268]

"But the costumes!" exclaimed Hester. "What will we do for them?"

"Borrow them from the juniors when they are from their rooms. We will need them but one evening. We'll return them as fresh as ever the following morning."

"Will they lend them?" It was a little first term girl who asked the question.

"No, you dear little freshie, they will not lend them if they can help themselves. We will ask them Tuesday morning and use them Monday. It is the safest way," said Emma, who was exceedingly enthusiastic over this part of school life. While at home, she had read volumes on the subject of life at a boarding school. From the impression left by those books, life at school was one succession of receptions, public meetings, and practical jokes. Discipline and lessons were in the undercurrent of life. Life at Dickinson had been wholly different from what Emma had anticipated. This stealing of the junior play and presenting it before the juniors had the opportunity, appealed to Emma. This was more in the order of the books she had read.

[Pg 269]

Louise sat up on the rostrum, appointing the students to their parts. She looked at Emma quizzingly, "About your part, Emma," she began.

"I know what I want to be. Let me be queen. I'd dearly love to put my hair up and wear a train."

"You! The queen!" the girls laughed in scorn. "You never would have dignity enough for that. What you should be is a Dutch doll that moves with a spring."

"I could do the queen part—," she began.

"Hush, hush. You are talking too loud. Some one is coming."

Footsteps were heard along the stair. The door opened and Renee put her head in.

"Are you there, Louise?" she asked. "Do you object to my taking your umbrella? My roommate has gone off leaving mine locked in the closet, and I've permission to go down town."

[Pg 270]

"Yes, yes, take it," cried Louise. Renee closed the door and disappeared.

"I'm suspicious of that umbrella," said Edna. "I think Renee was sent up here to see what we were about."

"No, I'd be suspicious of any one but Renee. She wished the umbrella. I am sure of that."

"But why should she need it this afternoon. There is not the slightest suggestion of rain and the sun is not bright."

"Because, she couldn't go without borrowing something," said Louise. "It wouldn't be Renee if she could. I suppose she looked about and an umbrella was the only thing she did not have at hand, so that was the only thing she could borrow."

Eventually the parts were given out and partly learned. The girls had planned for a rehearsal the first week in June. The fact that everything had to be done under cover from the juniors, made the practice drag. They could assemble only at such hours when the juniors were in class, and the chapel vacant.

[Pg 271]

The sophomores, confident that the freshmen alone would be able to manage the juniors, turned their attention to the seniors. Their plan was to divert the banquet from the dining-hall to one of the society halls, and feast upon it while the seniors went wailing in search of it.

Their plans were developing nicely when the weather saw fit to interfere. The last day of May, which fell on Tuesday, set in with a soft, fine rain. This was nothing alarming in itself, had it performed its work and gone its way. But it lingered all day, all night and when Wednesday morning broke dull and gray, the volume of water had increased, and was coming steadily down. Thursday was but a repetition of Wednesday. The rain did not cease for an instant. The sun never showed his face.

The river had crept up gradually until the water was licking the trunks of the apple trees; but this was not alarming. The ice flood had been higher; and further back on the campus were the marks of the flood of '48, the highest flood ever known along the river. Even then the water had not touched the building. There was nothing at all to be alarmed by the river's rising.

[Pg 272]

After the afternoon's recitations, the girls went down to the river's edge, although the rain poured down upon them. They were learning the tricks of the old river men. They stuck sticks in the edge of the water to mark the rise or fall.

"It's risen over a foot since lunch time," cried Erma. "See, there is my marker. You can just see it. Think of it—a foot. What will become of us?"

"It will rise twenty feet before we need give it a thought," said Hester. She had been reared along the river and had no fear of it. She loved it in any form it could assume—tranquil and quiet—frozen and white—rolling and bleak and sullen. In every form, she recognized only the beautiful and knew no reason to fear.

"But if it should rise twenty-five?" cried Erma. She was running about excitedly like a water-sprite. Her red sweater gleamed in the sullen gray light. The rain was trickling from her Tam-o-Shanter; but she was oblivious of all, save the far remote danger.

[Pg 273]

"Oh, what if it should come up twenty-five feet!" she continued asking as she ran along the shore.

"Oh, what if the world should come to an end!" retorted the girls in derision.

The gong in the main hall sounded.

"I knew it," cried Emma. "I knew Doctor Weldon would not allow us to be out long. She's dreadfully careful of us. Now, what harm can a little bit of water do to anyone?" Emma shook her bushy, curly locks.

"Nothing, when one's hair curls naturally. But it can do a lot when one's hair is straight. Look at mine." Mame sighed dismally. "Did you ever see such locks? Every one as straight as a poker. I wish, just for once, I could look like other girls."

Josephine was standing in the hall, waiting when the little group of girls entered.

"Have you been in all the time?" asked Hester. "How could you? The river is fine and getting higher and higher each moment. You shouldn't miss such a sight as this."

[Pg 274]

"I have not missed it," was the reply, given while the speaker's eyes took a soulful upward glance. "I cannot enjoy nature with people laughing and talking about me. I must be alone and commune with it. I have stood here watching from the window. What a beautiful and yet a terrible scene it is. I feel uplifted."

"I wish I felt the same way—uplifted to the extent of two flights of stairs," said Hester. She had not meant to be funny, but the girls laughed. Josephine turned upon her a hurt, aggrieved look. But just for a moment, then she smiled and said gently, "Hester, you little water-sprite! How can you jest when nature is at war?"

Edna Bucher was another student who would not brave the elements. She stood at the hall window where the stairway makes a turn. She was dressed in very somber clothes, guiltless of curves or graces. She did not look with favor upon girls' trudging out in the storm. It had in it the element of tom-boyism upon which Miss Bucher looked with alarm.

"No, I did not go," she said meekly and apologetically. "I was brought up to think it wasn't ladylike to go out in all kinds of weather; ladies don't do it. It is just what you would expect of a man."

[Pg 275]

The hearers replied not a word. They did not so much as shrug their shoulders or glance at each other. But each girl resolved at that minute, if being hearty and hale and fearless were unladylike, from that moment they would be that very thing.

The weather soon had its effect upon the spirits of the girls. Gayety in the dormitories and parlors was reduced to the minimum. Pupils stood silent at windows, gazing out at the steady downpour. Where they did gather in groups of three or four, there was no laughing or bright talk. Just a word now and then, and a low reply. At intervals, someone grew intolerant and expressed herself. "Will this rain never stop?" "I was hoping it would clear so that we might go into town."

Their hopes were doomed to disappointment. The rain never ceased for one instant during the night and all day Friday.

At lunch time Friday, the girls ran out on the campus to see what had become of their markers of the evening before. They were gone. The water had come over them and moved up in the campus until it touched the cannae-beds.

[Pg 276]

"The flowers will be ruined!" cried the girls. As though to prove the truth of the statement, a tongue of water curled itself softly about the plants, sucked deep into the roots, and when it went its way, the cannaes went with it, and only a hollow was left in the great bed, and this was quickly filled with water.

"It has risen three feet since last evening," said Hester, who had been standing silent, estimating the distance. There were exclamations of wonder, surprise, and fear. To many, three feet of a rise in water meant no more than a Greek syllable. They had not been reared near a river, and knew nothing of what might be expected in the way of floods.

"Three feet is nothing," said Hester with the air of one who knew all there was to know of such matters. "Why, a June flood is generally seven feet at home. We do not think much about it. And September floods—we do not always have them, but we wouldn't think of calling it a flood unless the river rose at least five feet. Three feet since yesterday! That is really nothing at all. I hope it will go five feet higher before night."

[Pg 277]

It was all braggadocio on her part; but it had the desired effect. Erma screamed in terror; Emma's eyes grew big; Mame scolded her soundly for expressing such a wish. For a while she had a hornet's nest about her ears.

Early Friday afternoon, a change came. Before, the rain had come down steady and constant. Now it came in a stream, as though the floors from a great reservoir had given way and the water had fallen in one great body.

There was no going out in this. An umbrella was no protection whatever, for the rain came through as water through a sieve. After dinner, the girls stood in the windows which overlooked the river and watched the water as it crept up, so slowly the eye could not recognize its advance.

The trunks of the apple trees were hidden from view. The water was muddy and foaming. The current had increased until the velocity was ten times that of normal. There was a sullen roar, and tearing as though the banks were giving way. Some logs were running, but not many. The breast of the water was covered with drift. At intervals, large branches of trees went down. Once a great oak, roots, trunk and all, sailed close to the apple tree and almost tore it from the earth. A walk, a piece of fence, a chicken coop, or a dog-kennel went bobbing along their watery way. Some distance below, yet in sight of the school, was the county bridge. It had been built in the early history of the country. It was a big, clumsy-looking affair of wood with a shingled roof and board sides. Now, entrances were cut off by a wide stream. It stood alone, like an isolated being; its weather-beaten sides, looking gray against the brown of the muddy water.

[Pg 278]

The sight of the river was growing awful, yet it attracted and held the girls. The study bell rang unheeded. Miss Burkham came from her room to call their attention to the study hours.

As the girls from the east wing crossed the main hall in order to reach their rooms, they saw Doctor Weldon in earnest conversation with Marshall, the office boy; Belva, the man-of-all work, and Herman who acted as night-watchman.

[Pg 279]

"I do not anticipate a bit of trouble," she was saying. "But telegrams came into the city from Reno, thirty miles above, that there was a twenty-foot flood there and still rising. They've sent warning all down the river.

"I have heard that alarm sounded ever since I have been at the seminary. It is always a twenty-foot flood and the word always comes from Reno. Either those people have no idea of a foot measure or their imaginations have been over stimulated." She spoke slowly yet with conviction, as one who has been accustomed to having their slightest word obeyed. The three men had been at the seminary and in her service for ten years. They adored her and accepted her word as final.

"However, Herman, you keep a close watch. Do not let the water reach the drive without warning us. We will not run any risks. If you wish to have Belva and Marshall with you, well and good. I shall ask the matron to have a lunch prepared for you."

[Pg 280]

There was little possibility of danger. Should the water creep up from the river, even to the west side of the dormitory, a great wing extended to the east and avenues of escape would remain open.

The girls overheard Doctor Weldon's words. They were not alarmed. They understood the conditions perfectly. Should the water come near the west wing, a thing which had never yet occurred even in the famous flood of '48, there could be no immediate danger. They were excited with the prospect of the unusual happening. Since it had rained for five days against their express wishes, they would feel themselves aggrieved if no compensation, in the form of an unusual experience, was offered them.

The fact that it was Friday night, and that the week had been one which had been void of relaxation or amusement in any way, moved the preceptress to shorten the study hour and lengthen the time for recreation.

But the students would not get away from the weather and the flood. Little groups of four and six came together and discussed floods, from the Noachean down to the one of '48. The girls had no personal knowledge of any high water, but they handed down the folk-lore as it had come to them.

[Pg 281]

Some were particularly fine in giving detail, and making weird, strange scenes so real that their hearers were deeply affected. Erma had this power in a great measure, and Hester, to some extent. By the time they had related several stories, the girls in Sixty-two were shivering with nervous fear.

"Oh, you silly little geese!" cried Erma. "Why, you are actually shivering over something which happened in my great-grandfather's time!"

"But you make it so real! You and Hester talk as if it happened but yesterday," said Mellie.

"Certainly, that is what we try to do," Erma laughed, and seizing Mellie by the hand, drew her up from the floor where she had been sitting. "That is what will make us famous. I shall be a great actress and Hester a great writer."

Hester heard and blushed. She wondered how Erma knew of her day-dreams for she had mentioned them to no one.

[Pg 282]

"Come, peaches," cried Erma. "I'll take you back to your rooms. If I do not, you all will have nervous prostration, sitting here listening to such stories."

"I do not know when Erma is complimenting me," said Mellie as she followed. "Sometimes I am 'silly goose' and sometimes I am 'peaches.' Now when am I which, and why?"

Erma laughed again. "Oh, you silly goose, don't you know you're peaches all the time with me?"

The girls departed. It was yet early, yet Helen and Hester prepared for bed. Each was deliberately slow. Their paths crossed and recrossed as they moved from one part of the room to the other, yet not a word was said until Hester reached to turn off the light. Then came the customary good-night.

CHAPTER XV

[Pg 283]

There was no danger of the river rising to such an extent that the building would be surrounded and communication cut off. Such a thing would be impossible! But Doctor Weldon had forgotten to reckon with the creek which flowed on the opposite side of town and joined the river at the east end. It had risen as rapidly as the river and had come over the banks and was creeping in upon them.

Hester awakened suddenly. It was early morning for the gray lights were shining in at the windows. The rain had ceased. The first thought which came to her was that of thankfulness. Now they could have a clear Saturday and be out of doors without being drenched to the skin.

It was not raining but there was a peculiar gurgling sound of water. Helen also heard it and sat up in bed.

"Do you hear that, Hester? What is it?"

"It is something outside, I'll see." As she spoke she had left her bed and hurried to the window. Her exclamation brought Helen to her. There was no need to ask for explanation. Beech Creek had backed in from a mile beyond, and was lapping against the stone foundation. The water was moving over the campus. Nowhere was it more than an inch deep; but on each side lay the greater depths of the river and the creek.

[Pg 284]

"Let us get dressed at once!" cried Hester.

"Yes, let us go downstairs," replied Helen. She was not so excited as Hester, yet she was more afraid. Hester knew the river and loved it. Now her excitement did not spring from fear, but from a kind of enjoyment.

They slipped into their clothes and made themselves as presentable as possible and hurried downstairs. At the front entrance was a group of girls. Some were standing on the lower step, which was a single piece of granite. The water was lapping but a few inches below. While they talked and laughed, some hysterically, the water crept up and lapped upon the lower step. The girls moved higher. Five steps led to the entrance, which was on the level of the first floor. Then the breakfast bell sounded and the girls reluctantly went into the dining-room.

[Pg 285]

While they were standing with their hands on the back of their respective chairs, awaiting the signal from the principal, she addressed them.

"Young ladies, you will be served with plain fare this morning. Perhaps, you do not know that the butcher, the baker, the milkman, and butter-man drive in each morning from Flemington. The road was flooded this morning and they could not reach us. The supplies which the steward keeps on hand, are in the basement, which was flooded last night. You may be seated."

There was no complaint at the bit of bacon and stale bread with which each plate had been served. There were excitement and hilarious good-humor, as though the flood had come for their especial benefit to give them an experience new and unusual. A bit of bacon and stale bread! One could get along very well for a few hours on that. But it seemed destined that the students were not to have even so little.

[Pg 286]

Marshall came in and hurried to Doctor Weldon. She appeared cool and collected; but one could never tell from her manner whether she were anxious or not. The few seniors who remembered when the building had been afire, remembered Doctor Weldon had acted just so. Waiting until Marshall left the dining-hall, she rang the bell. The buzz of voices ceased.

"Take your plates and go up to the parlor on the second floor. You may be dismissed in order. Miss Burkham's table first."

Miss Burkham arose and led the way. She was quite as collected as Doctor Weldon, although, she, too, had seen the water marks which were appearing on the floor from the water in the basement below.

"It is like a picnic. Think of eating bacon and stale bread in a parlor, done up in pale-green and silver. I know it will taste better." It was Erma who was talking. Her voice rang over all like a silver bell, as with merry laugh and light spirits she led the way to the floor above.

The door leading from the main hall on to the porch was closed, but a little stream had forced itself in and was trickling over the floor. The men-servants were rolling up the rug, preparatory to carrying it to the floor above and the women-servants were pinning up window draperies and hangings to save them from possible contact with the water.

[Pg 287]

Doctor Weldon, calm and serene, as though a flood were an everyday occurrence and not at all alarming, went about the building instructing the servants and teachers in regard to saving what they could of the property on the ground floor.

Hester, Helen, Erma, and their friends stood on the landing of the stairway and watched the men work. The girls had forgotten that they were hungry. Their plates were poised in the air and the bits of bacon and stale bread were untouched.

Renee came to the head of the stairway and leaning over the balustrade, looked down on the outstretched plates. "Haven't you girls touched a bite?" she asked. "I am glad I found you. I wish you'd lend me your piece of bacon."

The girls, thus addressed, saw nothing humorous in the request. Erma was about to hand over her portion when a laugh from the hall above caused her to pause. Emma, Edna, and Louise were laughing and ridiculing Renee, who turned about and went off in bad humor, explaining as she did so that she wanted a piece for Mame Cross who had been complaining that she had not been treated as other girls when it came to the distribution of bacon.

[Pg 288]

The men tossed the rugs upon the first landing of the stairway and went to the assistance of Marshall, who came in with tables and chairs from the kitchen. By much straining and lifting, the pianos were raised upon these.

"That is all we can do," said the night-watchman. "We cannot possibly take them to the second floor. They are three feet higher now. The water can't possibly rise that much more."

Doctor Weldon had taken refuge on the steps for the hall was flooded. The girls moved up to the second floor.

"Let us go to the Philo Hall on the third floor," cried Erma. "We can see over town from there."

[Pg 289]

"I do not wish to see," said several.

"I do," said Hester and Helen together. The three made their way to the hall whose windows opened to the north and east. The current from the river was sweeping about the corner of the building with a tremendous force. Logs and square timbers, uprooted trees and driftwood were being borne down in great quantities.

On the side of the driveway, where the current was strongest, stood an iron lamp-post deeply imbedded in a foundation of stone. It had been placed there in the early history of the school, when electricity and gas were unknown. It had never been removed for the trustees were graduates of the school and refused to remove the landmarks of their school-days. So there it stood above the muddy, dirty water.

The girls at the open window above could look down upon it.

"See that great timber coming!" cried Helen.

"It is right in the current and making straight for the building. If it should strike the corner!"

[Pg 290]

The building was old and not able to stand the force of a heavy timber, propelled by such a tremendous force. The girls at the window knew what that meant. They held their breath. The timber rushed on, but it turned broadside in the current and came up against the iron post. There it remained as nicely as though weighed and measured and fixed in place. Back of it came logs and drift which piled upon the timber and lamp-post until a bulwark was formed which turned the current away from the corner and the danger with it.

"It's luck. Did you ever see such luck?" cried Erma. "If that lamp-post had not been there, the whole corner of the building would have been broken in. It was luck—pure luck."

"It was Providence," said Helen simply. "I think it was meant that the lamp-post should be just where it is."

There were few words said. The scene was so awful that the desire to talk was taken away. From the parlors below, the excitement and laughter died. A quiet fell over the building. There was nothing to do but to watch and wait—for what or how long, no one could tell.



They held their breath.—Page 290.

The sun shone out on the water. Below, lay the city. The portion which stood low was flooded to the second floor. Hester thought of Aunt Debby as her eyes rested on the distant town. [Pg 291]

"There is no fear there," said Helen following the glance of her roommate's eyes. "Fairview Street is the highest in town. You remember there is a terrace with steps where it joins Market. The tops of the buildings on Fourth Street will be covered before it comes to the doors of Fairview."

Hester knew that this was true. No immediate danger threatened the little cottage. The seminary with its old walls and the current from both river and creek beating upon it was where fear lay.

"Look!" cried Helen, pointing her finger to midstream. There bobbing along like a cork on the current was a stable one side of which had been torn away. The mow was filled with hay, and in the stalls beneath was a horse feeding from the manger. It bobbed along serenely, as though midriver in a high flood were the legitimate place for a stable. Then it struck the sides of the bridge. There was the sound of crushing and the barn was sucked down under the bridge and disappeared from sight. [Pg 292]

The morning passed and the girls sat in the window seats, fascinated by the sea before them.

The water continued rising until twelve o'clock. It filled the lower halls and crept almost to the second floor. The water-pipes burst and a famine of drink as well as food came. Fortunately, the experiences of the day had taken away the appetite.

"I have been watching that old tree," said Hester. "When the clock struck twelve, the water had just reached the notch at the branches. It is one o'clock now and it has not gone higher."

The waters were at a standstill. The worst was over. At three o'clock, Hester cried out with delight. "It is falling—falling! See the trunk of the tree shows above the water."

It was slowly receding. The danger-mark had passed, although the signs of havoc it had caused, were yet passing on the breast of the river. A part of a kitchen went sailing by. The watchers saw the upper window of a half-submerged house. There was a bed, a cradle, and a sewing-machine open and ready for use. There were pathos and tragedy sufficient for a lifetime. There was a touch of humor too, for on a long plank, at either end, sat a rat and a great black cat. They watched each other instinctively, and were unconscious of the danger which threatened them both. [Pg 293]

Five o'clock came, and the girls had not moved from their positions. During the day, but a few sentences had passed between them.

At last hunger came to them. But there was no use going in search of food; for the larder was bare. There was not even a cup of water for them.

For more than an hour Helen had not moved. Fear of the water had passed. A finer feeling than dread inspired her now. Someone from below called Erma, and she left the Philo Hall. She

neither laughed nor danced. Even her effervescent spirits had been under the spell of the waters.

Her departure aroused Helen from her reverie. Arising, she came to where Hester sat. Her voice was low. To the old tenderness was added a new sweetness and strength, "Little roommate," she said, "listen to me for a few minutes. Weeks ago, I believed you guilty of an act I could not countenance. I treasured resentment against you, though even while I was doing it, I loved you. I did wrong in not going directly to you and making known my complaint. May I tell it to you now, or shall we let it be as though it never happened, and let all our ugly feeling and bitterness go down with the flood?"

[Pg 294]

"Let it go with the flood, Helen. I do not know how I erred, but I do know that I missed your friendship. Let us forget it from this minute."

"And let me give what I denied long ago," said Helen, as she stooped to press her lips to Hester's forehead.

CHAPTER XVI

[Pg 295]

Little by little, the water receded. So slowly did it fall that the eye could not mark it. Over the mud-colored waters, the sun shone brightly and made of the spray a million sparkling diamonds.

By evening, the students began to experience the pangs of hunger and thirst. There was nothing to satisfy them, for although there was water, water, everywhere, there was not a drop to drink. At twilight, the lower floors were above the flood, although at intervals, a sudden splash from without sent little streams back through the door.

The pupils were yet under the spell of the flood. Unusual quiet reigned in the dormitories, when suddenly a cry of delight came from Erma. Her voice echoed from one end of the hall to the other, and reached even to Miss Burkham's ears; but that lady did not appear to reprimand her. The preceptress realized that the girls had been under a nervous strain all day and she did not have it in mind to restrain them, even though they exceeded the bounds laid down by Seminary law.

[Pg 296]

"What has happened to Erma?" exclaimed Hester, starting up when the cry reached her ears.

"Don't be alarmed. It is nothing serious. I can tell from her voice. That shriek is Erma's cry of delight."

In an instant, Erma herself tripped down the hall to explain and to share. Knocking hastily, she did not wait to be admitted, but flung open the door.

"What do you think I found?" she cried. "A half-dozen lemons. I forgot that I had them. I bought them last week. Here, we're dividing."

She thrust one out at them. It had already been opened and part of its contents extracted.

"There wasn't enough for one a piece. Just take a good long suck from it."

The girls did. There was nothing humorous in this passing a lemon about among many. Not a drop of liquid had passed their lips since the night before. The few drops of juice which they were able to extract, were refreshing.

[Pg 297]

"Doesn't it taste good?" cried Erma. "I never knew before how perfectly delicious a cup of cold water is. Wait until I have the opportunity. I mean to drink a gallon without stopping. I must go on. The girls in Sixty haven't had any yet."

She was gone before Hester and Helen had expressed their thanks. Before she reached Sixty, the door opened and Renee came out. "I was looking for you, Erma. Someone said you had found some lemons. Can't you lend me one?"

"What's left of one. Take it and drain it dry." It was almost that now, but Renee received it thankfully.

"I thought I could not stand it another minute. How long will it be before we get anything to eat or drink?"

"In a week or so," cried Erma as she passed on.

Sunday morning broke clear and bright. There were no rising or breakfast bells, for there was nothing to serve the hungry people.

[Pg 298]

Doctor Weldon and Miss Burkham had conferred together and decided that as long as the girls were sleeping, they would be neither hungry nor thirsty, so they allowed them to sleep until they awakened of themselves.

The perversity of human nature showed itself in every girl's being awake unusually early. At the usual breakfast hour, the upper halls were filled. It was the Sabbath, but on the lower floor the servants were at hard work. The women were wearing top-boots and short skirts, which reached just below the knees. They were dragging out the mud with hoes. In the middle of the floors, the

sand and mud were fully a foot deep while in corners, which had been free from the force of the current, the deposit was three times that depth.

In the middle of the main floor, a saw-log lay. A great hole in the plaster showed where it had spent its force, and the shattered glass of the front door was evidence of its place of entrance. The curtains of real lace which had added to the beauty of the reception hall, were nothing but dirty rags, discolored, torn, and hung with bits of drift.

[Pg 299]

The sun beat down upon the water-soaked places, and the steam which arose, was foul-smelling. The men who were endeavoring to do the heavier portion of clearing, were knee-deep in the drift. The flood had receded, but the basement was yet full of water. The conditions were bad and would remain so for some time, regardless of the fact that everyone was doing his utmost to better them.

There was nothing to be hoped from the city, for it had its own burden. The store-houses had been flooded and the food supply cut off.

Miss Burkham went to Doctor Weldon. "What do you think of my taking the girls from the building?" she asked. "The hygienic conditions here are dreadful. Outside we can find the sunshine, at least. I can take them through the city streets—wherever the streets are open. I think we can keep them better satisfied if we keep their attention on something else than themselves."

"Perhaps, it would be better. I have been concerned about them. They have been most thoughtful and considerate so far. You may take the Fraulein with you—and the school purse, too, Miss Burkham. You may be able to buy something for them."

[Pg 300]

"While you are gone, I'll try to get into communication with our people at Flemington. The telephone and telegraphs are useless. Marshall and Herman might be able to walk out and carry something back. It will be hours before a delivery wagon can get through to bring us anything."

Following Miss Burkham's instructions, the girls dressed in their shortest and shabbiest skirts and put on heavy shoes. It was a dismal, hungry-looking party which set forth.

For a square down Main Street, the way was clear. They were often forced to leave the sidewalk and make a detour to escape the piles of drift which lay in heaps. The mud was over the tops of the rubber shoes, and the greater number had discarded overshoes before they had gone far. At the corner of Main and Clinton Avenue, they stopped. Their way was cut off by a great pile of logs, timbers, and uprooted trees which reached above the second story of the houses. Here and there, caught between the branches of the trees or the conjunction of timbers, were bits of household articles, parts of chairs, window frames or broken beds and soggy mattresses.

[Pg 301]

"We can climb over," suggested Hester. "That will not be much of a climb."

Miss Burkham had been hesitating. She feared to go on and yet to go back meant dissatisfied, hungry girls shut up in a wet, foul-smelling building.

"We'll climb," she said. "But be careful to move slowly, and not bring this down upon you."

The feat was not a difficult one. They succeeded in crossing and entered the business street. There was not a whole plate-glass window in this section. They had been shattered into bits so small that no trace of them could be found.

The girls entered what had been the largest and finest grocery store of the city. The mud was several feet deep; the show-cases had been battered to pieces; canned goods were piled in heaps in the corners and covered with refuse. But the combination most surprising, was where a large cheese had tumbled down upon a dead cow which had been washed in from some dairy farm far up the river.

[Pg 302]

Men were already clearing the streets, and shoveling the refuse from the stores.

From the business thoroughfare, Miss Burkham led her charges to the residence street. Here conditions were the same. The elegant houses bore the marks of the flood. Trees were uprooted. Lawns which but a few days before were things of beauty, were now but heaps of refuse, or hollows filled with water.

Doors and windows stood open wide. Delicate, cultivated women had arrayed themselves in overalls and were scraping the mud from their homes.

As they made their way eastward, Robert Vail hurried down a side-street to meet them.

"I started for school the instant I could," he explained to Miss Burkham. "I did not know how bad conditions were, but I expected they could not be good."

"I have a tally-ho and horses, but we could not get beyond Fairview Street. South Street is a mere chasm. The horses could not have crossed there. I did reach Miss Alden and Miss Richards. My man took them back home while I came in."

[Pg 303]

Hester grasped his arm. "Auntie—is Auntie all right?"

"Fine as silk. She was concerned about you until we satisfied her that seminary girls could not be gotten rid of so easily. It takes more than a flood—" He spoke lightly to the girls and then turned

to Miss Burkham. "Our housekeeper said I should fill up the tally-ho and bring the girls there. The buildings at school will not be fit to live in for some days. We'll take care of eighteen or twenty until you arrange matters."

A feeling of relief came to the preceptress. "You have taken a great responsibility from Doctor Weldon and me," she said. "We shall never be able to thank you. As to the girls, Hester and Helen, of course must go; also the Fraulein, for I must not allow the girls to go alone."

She turned to the group about her, and selected the number which would fill the tally-ho.

"You girls will go with the Fraulein and Mr. Vail, and remain until we send you word to return. Berenice, Violet, Edith and I will return to school." [Pg 304]

"I declare, this is too bad," cried Robert. "I cannot allow you to walk back, and without anything to eat."

"You cannot help it. The circumstances are unusual. The elements have our fortunes in hand," she replied.

"The instant I get the young ladies home, my man and I will come back with all the good things we can carry. Tell Doctor Weldon that we shall have a dinner—perhaps a late one—for her."

"She has sent messengers to Flemington. They will bring us something for one meal at least. Come, girls." She led her little flock toward home. There was no hope of finding a bite to eat anywhere in the city. Men and women had worked all night and were yet working without a particle of food or drop to drink. The preceptress was worn and weak. Her responsibility for the last two days had been great; but she did not dare give up. She trudged bravely toward school, encouraging the girls and drawing their attention to any phase of the situation which was not burdened with pathos. [Pg 305]

Robert Vail led his party down the residence street and then turned down an alley. "These narrow passages have less drift," he explained. "My man and I discovered this this morning."

By devious ways, he brought them out on High Street which stood above the ravages of the flood. Here a tally-ho with four horses stood waiting.

Robert assisted the Fraulein and girls to their places and bade the coachman drive on. Hester and Helen sat side by side.

"Now, I am really to meet your Aunt Harriet," said Hester. "It is very strange. Think of my rooming with you for ten months and never meeting her."

"Never met mother?" exclaimed Robert Vail. "Be prepared to meet the finest mother in the world."

"There may be some exception," said Helen, "at least Hester may think so. She may be vain enough to think that she had the finest mother in the world." [Pg 306]

"Oh, no," began Hester hastily and then she paused. She was not dull. She had been keen enough to know that there was something not just right about a mother and child traveling alone through a strange country and no one ever searching for them. But she could not allow any one else to know her thoughts. Her face flushed as she continued, "I have never known a mother. Aunt Debby is all I ever had. I am sure that no one can be finer than she."

"We will make an exception in favor of Miss Alden," continued Robert. "With the exception of Miss Debby Alden, you will find my mother the finest woman in the world. You'll fall in love with her the instant that you meet her."

"I know. I have caught several glimpses of her but I never met her. But, perhaps she will not care for me. I should not be pleased if I should like your mother very much and she would not like me at all."

Vain little Hester Alden. She knew what speech Robert Vail would make. She had heard him express himself on the subject twice before. Because his words had pleased her, she called them forth again. [Pg 307]

"There'll be no danger of her not liking you. I'll vouch for that. Mother and I always like the same people and things. She has the best taste in the world."

Helen laughed teasingly. "You like to impress people with the fact that you are fond of your mother; but have you ever noticed, Cousin Robert, that there is always one compliment for her, and two for you?"

"Robert Vail and his mother like the same things. That is the first premise. The second is, his mother has excellent taste; conclusion—Robert Vail has excellent taste. I have not studied logic for nothing, Cousin Robert."

Robert shrugged his shoulders. "That is a girl's idea of reason," he said. "They always go about in a circle, like a lost duck and they never lose the personal element in anything."

"Your remarks are not original," said Helen. "I have heard Doctor Baker say that same thing."

"I have heard you mention Doctor Baker before. Is he your physician at home?" asked Hester. [Pg 308]

She had forgotten Helen's Easter letter.

"He's our pastor and perfectly lovely, Hester. He has been with us a long, long time. I told you once about him, but you were vexed with me then and my words fell on deaf ears. Sometime you must come and spend a month with me in my home and you shall meet Doctor Baker."

"I never would go and leave Aunt Debby for an entire month. It was bad enough to go to school and not be with her," was Hester's reply.

"But Aunt Debby can come along. My father would like her, and she and Aunt Harriet would be friends from the moment they met. Maybe we can arrange it for this summer. Sometimes Doctor Baker comes to visit us, too. He gets very lonely. I should think any one living alone would be lonely."

"Isn't he married?" asked Hester. "I thought ministers were always married. Why doesn't he get married?"

"You think a marriage certificate goes with the manse," said Robert. "His case is a paradox. He is always marrying, and yet never is married. Quite a riddle isn't it?" [Pg 309]

Helen's face lighted up. She was like Hester in that both delighted to hear romantic stories.

"He had a love affair, a long time ago," she said softly as though the subject were one too sacred for full tones to play upon. "But he went to college, and when he came back his sweetheart did not care for him. But he has never forgotten her."

Hester gave a sigh of contentment. She would remember and tell her Aunt Debby about this. While her Aunt Debby had chided her about repeating these little romantic tales which came to her ears, Hester had a feeling that the elder Miss Alden was not wholly unsympathetic.

Josephine, who was sitting in the front of the tally-ho, caught the last of Helen's speech. She sighed, and leaning forward that all might catch her words, said: "How lovely! Such persons appeal to me. There is nothing in the world which is so beautiful to me as faithfulness. How perfectly lovely! I always—" [Pg 310]

"Hester, lend me a pin, please. I see you have one in the front of your coat and I need one to fasten the ends of my tie," it was Renee who broke in upon Josephine's flow of sentiment.

"We shall soon be there now," said Robert. "The house stands back of those trees." He pointed to a small elevation which was about a mile distant. The girls exclaimed with delight except Mame Cross who looked down upon her short skirt and mud-stained shoes with a mortified expression.

"Really, Mr. Vail, I simply cannot enter your home, looking like this. Your mother would refuse to receive me."

"I do not understand why," he replied.

"Mame, do please forget about it," laughed Erma. "My shoes are muddy; my skirt is shabby; I am hungry—so hungry that I'll fairly snatch at anything to eat. I look like a fright, I know I do. But what's the use of thinking about it. It can't be helped. So why not pretend that we do not notice it?"

"We must make up for our looks by being so nice that Mrs. Vail will not notice that we are not immaculate." It was Mellie who offered this suggestion. [Pg 311]

"That is all very well for you girls to speak so," said Mame. "But you do not look as I do. You girls look nice, considering what you have gone through; but me—I always look the worst. I never look like other girls."

"Then give up trying, Mame. You never will look like other girls, you know. So make the best of matters which cannot be helped, and be cheerful and gay." Erma's words were supposed to be ironical; but her happy little laugh and dainty little touch upon Mame's hand, robbed them of their sting.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Robert Vail, as the horses turned from the main road into a private drive. Hester opened her eyes in astonishment. She had seen the beautiful homes near Lockport, but this surpassed any. The house was in the midst of a great park; there were lawn, forest, and flowers. The house was large, but not imposing. It had rather the look of a home than of a mansion. Never before had Hester seen such beauty of surroundings. Nature and cultivation had worked together to make the best of this. [Pg 312]

As the girls stepped from the tally-ho, Hester grasped Helen by the arm, "I am afraid—afraid," she whispered.

"To meet Aunt Harriet? Why, little roommate, she is not a bit formidable. You will love her."

"I think it is not just that—" she began again. She could not finish. Aunt Debby and Miss Richards had come to meet them. Back of these two, stood a large, wiry woman in a dark dress and an extensive white apron.

"My little girl," cried Debby, clasping Hester in her arms. "I have been very anxious about you."

"I was safe, Aunt Debby. Perfectly safe, but so hungry."

Robert Vail escorted his guests to the door.

"This is Mrs. Perkins, young ladies," he said, indicating to the big woman. "She will see that you have something to eat at once."

"I have been waiting dinner. If the ladies wish to come at once—" She led the way. The guests were weak from hunger. The odor of the food aroused their appetites afresh.

[Pg 313]

"Did you ever think bread and butter was so gloriously fine?" said Emma after her first mouthful. "Do you realize that we have had nothing since Friday evening."

"I do; but I do not intend talking about it—now," said Hester. "I have greater things to do."

Indeed, they all had that. They had kept up bravely under strenuous conditions. There had been no word of complaint. Erma especially, had been cheerful and gay as long as those two qualities were needed to sustain herself and her friends. Now, she was the first to give way. After a few morsels had been eaten, she realized that she was tired—so tired that she believed that ever being rested again would be an impossibility. She made an effort to keep up. She tried to laugh, but ended with a nervous giggle. Then to the amazement of all, she began to cry and sob.

"I am so tired. I am too tired to live. I never could go through with this again."

"And you will not need to—never again," said Miss Debby, going to the girl's aid.

[Pg 314]

"Let her cry. It will do her good," she continued as the others were about to leave their dinner. "Let her cry, it will do her good."

At this Renee began to giggle. Mame looked at her and straightway did as Renee. Mellie and Josephine made a brave effort to control themselves, but after a few minutes they were following Erma's example and were sobbing as though their hearts would break.

Miss Richards and Miss Debby took matters into their hands. There was no help to be expected from the Fraulein, for she was as wearied as the girls.

The housekeeper made ready the rooms and the girls were forced to go to bed.

"Each young lady ate a little something, I observed," said Mrs. Perkins. "Let them rest a while, then I shall take some refreshments to them."

"It was so beautiful what they behaved yet to this time," cried the Fraulein. "Never no word, no fuss, all smiles, all funs, no cross or nothing until now." She was much disturbed lest the women would discredit her for the girls' behavior.

[Pg 315]

"We understand," said Debby Alden. "It is not your fault, Fraulein. You are going to rest now, too. We intend treating you like a little girl; send you to bed and send your bread and jelly to you."

"Ach," the little German teacher tried to look self-reliant and sufficient to take care of herself. But there was something in Debby Alden's manner which touched her. The Fraulein was a stranger in a strange land. Many and many were the times when she longed for the tenderness of those who were bound to her by the ties of love and blood. She was but a little homesick girl, herself and wished to be mothered like other girls. But she was brave enough with all her longing. She shrugged her shoulders; but Debby laid her hand affectionately on the girl's shoulder. That settled it. In an instant, the German teacher rested her head against Debby; her eyes filled; she touched Debby's cheeks tenderly; "I vill go. The Fraulein is so kind. The Fraulein has a heart in her breast." Without a word of demur, the little German teacher followed the girls and rested while the housekeeper and Debby Alden waited upon them with the most kindly attention.

[Pg 316]

Robert Vail and his man had returned at once to the city taking with them a supply of necessities. The housekeeper came to Miss Debby with the explanation and apology. Thought of others had caused Robert to neglect his duty as host. Here Mrs. Perkins looked mournful and as though she might say much if she chose, and added that Mrs. Vail had left early that morning, having driven over the hills to an adjoining town where railroad communications had not been cut off. She had received news which had caused her some anxiety and she had set forth at once.

The housekeeper was in the mood to speak freely; but Debby Alden was not one who discussed with the maid the affairs of the mistress. She accepted the explanation and went her way. So many incidents of life turn as a straw in the wind. This was a time and place propitious for much clearing-up of uncertain matters; but Debby Alden had not been in the mood to listen; and the mistress of the house was traveling over the country after a will-of-the-wisp which had led her many a long, unfruitful journey.

[Pg 317]

Robert Vail, greatly fatigued with his day's work, came back to Valehurst just at dusk. By this time, the nervous tension had been greatly relieved. The girls had had a nap and a substantial evening meal, and were prepared to look at the experiences of the last few days in a more cheerful light.

Robert brought with him the good news that the hucksters from Flemington had driven in over the hill and had brought food with them to the seminary. The teachers and pupils were preparing to return with them to the farmhouses which stood high enough to be out of the way of the river and creek.

Marshall and Belva with a set of workmen were remaining at school to put the place in order; to

build fires that the building might be dried rapidly and to protect the grounds and buildings from vandalism. Doctor Weldon had sent word that the young ladies who were with the Fraulein at Valehurst were to remain there until she recalled them.

[Pg 318]

Miss Debby and Miss Richards, with the little group of girls, had gathered about Robert on the lawn, anxious and eager to hear about their friends. When the message had been received and the good news told, the crowd separated into little groups. Helen and Hester, in company with Robert, moved toward the house.

"I had no opportunity of asking you about Aunt Harriet," said Helen, "and I do not like to put such questions to Mrs. Perkins. You said that Auntie would be here, Robert." She looked up at him and waited as though expecting an explanation.

"So I thought. We made ready before daylight this morning to go for you girls. Mother came down to see us off. In fact it was she who prepared the lunches to give to any one in distress. But Perkins tells me that quite early someone called her up on the 'phone. She talked a long time. Then she called Ryder and told him to get out the grays and the light carriage. Then she went off. She didn't even leave word where she went. I called up father's office. He knew nothing about it."

[Pg 319]

"And don't you know?" There was anxiety in Helen's voice. Her eyes had a pained, distressed look.

"She telephoned to Perkins that she had gone to Minnequa, a little factory town where an old colored woman had the care of a young white girl. The message came from those people who had found such a 'sure thing,' before and then failed to make good when the time came."

"You don't mean that horrid man and his son? What was their name—Stroat—Strout?"

"Stout, if I remember right. Before it was a mere scheme to extort money, and I do not doubt that it will be the same now. Poor mother, she will be worn out with the journey and have nothing but disappointment for it all. I mean to talk with her on the wires to-night. If she does not intend coming home at once, I shall go to Minnequa and be with her. I may start early and shall not see you in the morning. Will you explain to Miss Debby and the girls? I am not running away, but I must not let my mother stay there alone."

[Pg 320]

"Yes, you must go. Do not give a thought about us. We shall be very well taken care of here. Poor Aunt Harriet! How I wish I might fill that empty place in her heart!"

Hester had been walking a few steps in advance; but had heard the conversation. Why should Helen always speak of her aunt as though she were to be pitied? Mrs. Vail had everything that a woman could desire—a beautiful home with trained service, a husband and son who considered no one but her. It was strange. Hester could not understand why Helen should always speak of Mrs. Vail as "poor Aunt Harriet."

CHAPTER XVII

[Pg 321]

How fine it would be if one could foresee the result of every action! Hester Alden's slight prevarication to Robert Vail, when she told him that her father had been Miss Debby's brother, carried with it a long series of misunderstandings. Had Robert Vail known the facts—but he did not.

Hester, bearing within her heart the consciousness of her own fault, spent not a few unhappy moments with herself. To it, she attributed the former entanglement, between herself and Helen. She reached this conclusion because she knew of nothing else on account of which Helen might have misjudged her. Several times, she decided to speak of the matter to Helen and confess that she had misrepresented matters when she had declared that she belonged to the Alden family; but each time, her courage failed her, and her pride prevented. It is not an easy matter for one to confess that she has, in her statements, deviated from the truth.

[Pg 322]

The morning following the coming of the girls to Valehurst, Robert Vail left home early and by a hard drive over the mountains at length reached the junction where railroad communication had not been cut off.

Mrs. Perkins expected him to return with his mother the following day; but they were detained by business. So Valehurst was left without a host or hostess. Mrs. Perkins exerted herself to make the guests comfortable and the servants, with which the home was well provided, vied with each other in their attendance upon the young ladies. The girls were thoroughly enjoying their experience, Hester, perhaps most of all, for such a household was new to her. She liked to play lady of the manor.

"Don't you wish you and I could live this way?" she said to Debby Alden, during the second day of the enforced visit. Debby Alden looked at the questioner and then asked, "Are you not satisfied, Hester, with your own little home?"

[Pg 323]

"Yes, I am!" cried the girl impulsively. "A little house with Aunt Debby is better than a mansion without her. I am really satisfied. Yet it does seem nice to be here. I feel quite at home."

"I presume a lady feels at home in any cultivated environment," was the rejoinder. Debby paused a moment. She was not one to repeat the tales which came to her ears; but when, as in this instance, her sympathies were touched and she felt that her story might bear with it a moral, it might be really worth her while to repeat it to Hester.

"Valehurst is very beautiful, Hester. We recognize that; but it cannot bring happiness to those who dwell in it. Mrs. Vail has a great sorrow. What it is, I do not know. I did not care to inquire. Robert told me that his mother, years ago, had a bereavement from which she has never recovered, and to which she has never become reconciled. The servants speak as though she were a woman saddened by some dreadful experience."

"But Helen says she is very cheerful and can never do enough to make others happy."

[Pg 324]

"Outwardly, perhaps. From what I have learned, she is one who has strength of character enough to keep her sorrows to herself and not burden others. Of course, she would try to make Helen and every one else happy, even though she were most miserable herself. I would not have spoken of the matter, had I not thought you were estimating one's happiness by the amount of material wealth one possessed.

"Poor Mrs. Vail! I am a happier woman than she. I have just my little home and my girl, but I am very content."

"So am I, Aunt Debby." She pressed Debby Alden's arm closer within her hand. Then she added, "Wasn't it a good thing that I was left to you. Wouldn't it have been dreadful if I had been taken somewhere else and you would have been left alone. Just think how lonely we would have been."

"Yes, it would have been hard; but it didn't happen that way. It was intended that you should be my girl."

"You mustn't think that I was discontented because I wished that you and I lived in a mansion. I am not one bit discontented. I was just wishing."

[Pg 325]

"Learn to be contented. Folks are miserable otherwise. The Aldens, taking them as a family, were not complainers or grumblers—except Ezra, and how he ever came by it, I do not know. He was never contented. He wouldn't go to school, and he wouldn't farm, and he wouldn't be satisfied anywhere or with anything."

"Ezra? Who was he, Aunt Debby? I never heard you mention his name before."

"He was my oldest brother. He would be a man of sixty if he were living now. I never mentioned him, because he is more of a memory than anything else. He was only sixteen when he ran off west. He wrote a few times. The letters were two or three years apart, and always from different sections. At one time he was on a ranch, another time in the gold fields. He could not be contented long anywhere."

"Where is he now, Aunt Debby?"

"Dead, Hester. Dead long ago. At least we think so. For years, no letters have come from him. When father died, we sent word everywhere, but he never replied. We said then that he was dead."

[Pg 326]

"If he had lived, I'd have had an uncle. I should like an uncle. From what I've read, they are very jolly."

"You can not always believe what you read," was the sententious rejoinder.

The guests remained at Valehurst three days, during which time neither Mrs. Vail nor Robert appeared, although the latter sent many messages to the girls, through the medium of his cousin or the housekeeper.

Thursday morning, word came from Doctor Weldon that the students must return to school and make ready their belongings to go home. Commencement was not to be considered. The graduates would receive their diplomas, but there could be no festivities.

The students had been taken care of in the country houses which stood on the hills back of Flemington. These were the only places for miles about which had not been flooded. As soon as communication with other places had been made, Doctor Weldon was kept busy sending and receiving telegrams. Each father and mother was distracted when news of the flooding of Lockport came.

[Pg 327]

By Thursday evening, the students had returned. The drift and dirt had been removed from the Seminary building, and the campus had been freed from logs and driftwood. But some things could never be replaced. The old apple trees had been uprooted; the grassy slope which had lain close to the river front had been washed out to gravel bottom. The gray bricks of the building showed the water mark and at the corner a few misplaced ones told the story of how the old lamp post had saved the building.

The once beautiful halls were water-stained; hard-wood floors were warped until they stood in little hollows and hills; and the polished wood of the doors and balustrades had lost all semblance of beauty.

The girls rushed into one another's arms. They could talk now of the flood for the danger had

passed from them. The dormitories were a babel of voices. A score of girls talked at once and not one listened to another.

Miss Burkham from the hall below heard the confusion and retired to her own apartments. She had no thought of interfering with the chatter. She explained her lack of discipline to Doctor Weldon later. "This will never happen again in all their lives. As long as they were talking, they were forgetful that the opportunity for the banquet, the play, and commencement had been taken from them. I thought it wise to put up with the noise, rather than have them feel depressed."

[Pg 328]

The girls were discussing the play and banquet even then. There were confessions on all sides.

"We intended feasting on the senior banquet," cried Erma. "We had bribed Belva. He was to lead the caterers up to our third floor. You seniors would have sat waiting in the Philo Hall below."

"No, indeed. You reckoned without considering that the senior class were not all dullards. We had heard of your plans. Doctor Weldon gave us permission to hold the banquet at a hotel in the city. Miss Burkham and the Fraulein were to go with us. So while you girls would have been sitting in the attic waiting for the banquet, we would have been whirling away in cabs to the city." Helen had a smile of triumph as she told the story. If the seniors had been robbed of their opportunity to outwit the juniors, they at least would not miss the chance of boasting of it.

[Pg 329]

Erma looked at her quizzingly. "Was that really true?" she asked. "Well, I have this much to say. If the seniors had outwitted us, we in turn outwitted the freshmen. They were gloating over the fact that they had a copy of our play."

"We did," cried Hester. "And we had the parts almost learned."

"Yes, I was to be the queen," said Emma. "I knew my part. I was to—."

"You the queen!" said Edna Bucher, with a touch of sarcasm in her voice. "I could not possibly conceive of you taking such a part."

"Well, you never did have much imagination. You should cultivate it," was Emma's quick rejoinder.

"Please do not quarrel," said Josephine as she raised her soulful eyes and let them rest upon each girl in turn. "This may be our last time together. It would be so sweet to carry with us pleasant memories. Let us have sweet—."

[Pg 330]

"Not too much, though," said Emma. "You always were a great girl for caramels and fudge, Jo; but you must remember some of the rest of us liked olives and pickles."

"Emma's speech in plain English, means that she prefers some wit to too much sentiment," said Hester.

"I most assuredly do," was the rejoinder, as Emma sat down on top of the trunk which had been brought in ready for packing.

The group of girls had gathered in Sixty-two. During the winter and spring terms, this room had been the general gathering place; for Hester and Helen were popular with the other students.

"I wish I might finish about the play," cried Erma. "Those miserable little freshmen thought they had our play. Yes, I know you took a copy from my study-table drawer. It was one I put in there for you to take. While you were busy learning that, we had another. So while you girls were gloating over the 'East Indian Queen,' we went on in peace and practised 'A Roumanian Princess.'"

[Pg 331]

"Really? Erma Thomas, do you mean it?"

"Do I mean it? I surely do. Oh, wasn't it fun to hear you practise and see you slip about with your mysterious airs!"

The door opened and Renee came in. She was robed in a full-length kimona.

"You girls sitting here doing nothing! I am packing. I do not intend letting it go until morning and then hurrying. My trunk is locked and I cannot find the keys. Will you lend me yours, Helen?"

Helen arose to get them from a drawer. Emma sighed as she looked at Renee.

"When I go to heaven," she said, "and meet Renee there, I know what she will say to me the very first thing."

The girls looked their queries and Emma concluded, "'Emma, please lend me your crown. I've mislaid mine.'"

"And Emma will be finding fault with everything. She'll feel dreadful because she is forced to be in heaven all the time," said Sara slowly. This was a hit direct at the little Dutch doll, for all through the year she had been complaining at the restrictions of school, and could not understand why Doctor Weldon did not allow the girls to go down to the city when they pleased.

[Pg 332]

During this conversation, Mame Cross had been sitting apart. Now Josephine turned to her, and assuming an attitude and expression of great solicitation and interest said, "Mame is the only one who feels what this evening means to us. Perhaps never again shall we talk together. No one

knows what the summer will bring. Mame is overcome by the thought—."

"I am not. I was not thinking of that at all," Mame replied. "It came to me while the girls were talking of the banquet and play and commencement that I was almost glad that we were not having any of them."

"Mame Cross, what heresy! The flood has made her mad," cried the girls.

"I have reasons for thinking so. I simply could not have gone to one thing. What could I have worn if I had gone? I made up my mind when we had our last reception that I would never go to another unless I had something decent to wear."

[Pg 333]

"When I meet Mame in heaven," said Emma, trying to look serious, "the very first thing she will say is, 'My robe doesn't hang as well as yours, and my harp isn't so bright.'"

"Are you not getting a little irreverent?" said Helen gently. "There are so many common things to jest about. Is it not better to use them as the butt of our wit, instead of matters beyond our comprehension?"

"Yes, I suppose so, Helen," said Emma. "But, you know I never consider. I blurt out just what I wish to say."

The half-hour bell sounded and the girls went to their rooms to make ready to appear at the dining-table. The lower halls were yet damp although they had been open to the air and sun since the previous Sabbath. Doctor Weldon, not wishing to risk the health of the pupils, had converted a class-room on the second floor into a dining-hall. Here dinner was served informally; the students attending to their own wants, for the servants were kept busy carrying the trays from the floor below.

[Pg 334]

At the bringing-in of the last course, Doctor Weldon arose to make the announcements. She asked the young ladies to attend to their packing at once. Belva and Marshall had already brought down trunks and boxes from the store-room. Immediately after breakfast, the following morning, each young lady should call at the office when arrangements would be made for her going home.

There was too much to be done after dinner to permit of any visiting. The girls went to their rooms and began to dismantle them. Hester and Helen had much to do, but they contrived to carry on a steady flow of talk while they worked.

"Perhaps, we'll never be together again," said Hester, from the depths of the closet whither she had gone in search of shoes. "You will not be here next year. We may never meet again."

"I think we shall," said Helen. "The world is not a very large place. You are to visit me, you know. I shall ask your Aunt Debby when I see her."

"And you'll come to visit me. Couldn't you come this summer? You'd like Jane Orr and Ralph. He is the nicest boy I ever knew, except Robert Vail."

[Pg 335]

"Rob *is* nice. Yes, I think I can come. We could have a fine time."

Hester grew eloquent about the walks, picnics and drives they could have. Helen was accustomed to life in a mansion with a retinue of servants. Hester knew this. She knew also that at her home, Aunt Debby and she would perform all the household work and that Aunt Debby would set out her own flowers and plant a garden of radishes and lettuce with their kindred small garden truck. Helen would have no servants to wait upon her. Hester gave no thought to the difference in the household. To her, friendship was above all material conditions. As she felt concerning such matters, she took it for granted that all right-minded people must feel. She could not conceive the thought that Helen, as her friend, could be critical of the plain old-fashioned home where she and Aunt Debby were the home-makers. It was not training alone which gave Hester such impressions. She had within her the instinct of true nobility. She gave the best of what was hers without apology or explanation. She took it for granted that her offerings would be received in the same spirit. They were, for Helen Loraine valued a friend higher than the friend's possessions.

[Pg 336]

"I am very glad I asked you to forgive me, last Saturday," continued Helen. She was bending over the drawer of the chiffonier while she robbed it of its contents. "I could not have been happy had I gone home and not have made friends with you. It was my fault, Hester, that you did not play as a substitute on the first team. I thought something, and I told Miss Watson that I did not care to have you play. You do not know how sorry I have been since."

"Yes, I do. There, I think I have all my shoes ready to pack. Those old gym shoes I might as well throw out as rubbish. Yes, I do know, Helen. I felt dreadfully about it myself; but I thought you had a good reason. I myself despise a girl who prevaricates even a little."

Helen raised her head from her work to look at Hester. She could not fully grasp this last remark.

[Pg 337]

Hester, catching the peculiar expression of her friend's face continued, "You did not tell me why you were hurt with me. Of course I knew. It was what I said about my father being Aunt Debby's brother. That was it, was it not?"

"What an idea, you silly little Hester! Why should I be angry with you for saying that? What was it to me whether he was Miss Alden's brother or not?"

"I thought you knew and despised me for telling what was not true. I am not one bit an Alden. I do not belong to Aunt Debby except through love. My mother died at the Alden home. Somehow, I never could quite grasp all the story, for no one will tell me all. Somehow, Aunt Debby felt herself responsible and she took me and gave me her mother's name. Don't you think that very sweet of her? To Aunt Debby, Hester Palmer Alden was the name she loved the most and she gave it to me."

"Yes, she must have loved you, too, or she would never have given you that name. It was not what you said that caused me to be displeased with you. Shall I tell you?" [Pg 338]

Hester shook her head slowly. She was yet sitting on the floor near the door of the closet. All about her, were odds and ends of her possessions.

"No, do not tell me. I know I did not do anything else to make you despise me. So please don't tell me what it was. Whatever it was, I did not do it and I might feel hurt if I knew that you suspected me of anything very bad."

"Very well, little roommate. We'll never talk about the matter. We'll clean off our slates and make them clean for the next lesson," said Helen. "That is what Miss Mary used to tell us when we went to primary grade."

"I always liked to hear you say 'little roommate.' Next year, Helen, you will not be here to say it. I wonder who will call me that." The tears were near Hester's eyes, but she forced them back and smiled.

"Perhaps, someone nicer than I and someone you will love better." [Pg 339]

"That will never be. It couldn't be. But you'll come back to visit?"

"I do not think it will be possible. Father says I may go to an eastern college. That will take me far from here. I do not wish to go four years. I intend taking special work; for I mean to be a settlement worker."

Hester nodded. Just then she could not have said a word if her life had depended upon it. She thought that Helen's giving up a life of ease and luxury to work among the people of the slums, was a glorious thing; although she herself could not have done such a thing and had no desires in that direction.

"It will be lovely, Helen," she said at last. "Perhaps when you are working somewhere I shall come to visit you."

"Perhaps you may be working with me. Who knows?"

"I know I shall never be that kind of a worker. I intend to be a novelist. Perhaps, I shall find a great deal of material when I come down to visit you. I think being a great novelist would be glorious."

"Yes, if one could be great and could write life as it is and make people better by the writing." [Pg 340]

"That is the kind I intend being," said Hester with conviction, and yet not conceit. "I shall be a great one or none at all. I never should like mere commonplace writing. I should like to imagine; to look at people and describe them as they were, and to see even their thoughts."

Helen laughed. Hester had already won a reputation in character-description. She had the faculty of describing her friends in a few pertinent words which meant as much as an entire paragraph from some people.

"I think your character-drawing will be excellent," said Helen. "You have a way with you, you know."

"Do you really think so? Aunt Debby says I am critical, but I do not mean to be that. People just naturally make me think of different things. I see a likeness. I cannot help it that it is there. Aunt Debby was once quite indignant when I was telling her about the different girls at school. I said Josephine made me think of soft-A sugar. Aunt Debby did not like it. But that is what she made me think of. I couldn't help it." [Pg 341]

Hester was quite serious. Although the remark concerning Josephine was her own, she did not fully appreciate her own wit in the application.

Hester arose slowly. "That closet is cleared, thank goodness. I'll see to the trifles on the dressing-table. I'd rather pack big things than such trifles as hairpins, handkerchiefs, and stockings."

"I am ready to put mine in the trunk," said Helen. As she spoke, she drew the trunk from against the wall and lifted out the tray. She gave an exclamation as her eyes fell on a quantity of lawn and lace.

"I've hunted everywhere for those waists," she said. "I went to the laundry several times to ask Mrs. Pellesee if they had been mislaid. I was confident that they had not come back from the laundry."

She made a dive into the depths of the trunk and brought forth the shirtwaists.

"I remember now when I put them there. When I got my new one-piece suit to wear to dinner, I [Pg 342]

put these away. It was the night I lost my pin."

"Yes," said Hester without turning her head. Her mind was upon putting the contents of her dressing-table in order. She scarcely heard what Helen was saying.

Helen gave a second exclamation as her hands seized the fluff of lace about one waist; for the pin which she had missed months before was fastened to the lace.

"I found my pin!" she exclaimed. "I am glad—so glad! Look, Hester!"

Hester gave a quick indifferent glance toward Helen's upraised hand in which this stone glittered like a star.

"I'm glad," she said. "I thought it was very strange what became of it. I couldn't understand how it would disappear from the room. I have a pin something like that—but mine is just a cheap imitation. Aunt Debby says it is the kind one buys at a five-and-ten-cent store."

For a moment, Helen stood silent. She was abashed and ashamed of the suspicion which she had long held in her mind. She had done wrong; but on the other hand, she had done what she could to make matters right. It pleased her even now to know that she had asked Hester's forgiveness and had believed in her, before the proofs of her innocence came to hand. It is a worthless sort of faith and a poor friendship which needs evidence at hand. Faith is faith only when it believes without proof, or against proof. These thoughts came to Helen while she stood with the pin in her hand. Then she crossed to where Hester stood and laying her hand on Hester's shoulder, said, "Little roommate, to-night will be our last night together in school. Will you try to think with kindness of the roommate who was unjust to you? You have taught me one great big lesson, Hester, and that is that one cannot even believe her eyes. Will you forget all the unpleasant part of the year, and remember only that I really loved you with it all?"

[Pg 343]

"That will be easy. It will be but thinking kindly of myself. For every one says that you are my counterpart."

"A poor imitation, I am afraid. If I predict rightly the years will prove me but the reflection of a great and a brighter body. You'll be the sun, Hester. The best I'll ever be is a pale little moon." She bent to kiss Hester's lips. With that caress all the suspicion and doubt vanished and Hester Alden's year at school had closed.

[Pg 344]

THE END

DOROTHY BROWN

By NINA RHOADES

Illustrated by Elizabeth Withington Large 12mo Cloth \$1.50



This is considerably longer than the other books by this favorite writer, and with a more elaborate plot, but it has the same winsome quality throughout. It introduces the heroine in New York as a little girl of eight, but soon passes over six years and finds her at a select family boarding school in Connecticut. An important part of the story also takes place at the Profile House in the White Mountains. The charm of school-girl friendship is finely brought out, and the kindness of heart, good sense and good taste which find constant expression in the books by Miss Rhoades do not lack for characters to show these best of qualities by their lives. Other less admirable persons of course appear to furnish the alluring mystery, which is not all cleared up until the very last.

"There will be no better book than this to put into the hands of a girl in her teens and none that will be better appreciated by her."—*Kennebec Journal*.

MARION'S VACATION

By NINA RHOADES

Illustrated by Bertha G. Davidson 12mo Cloth \$1.25

This book is for the older girls, Marion being thirteen. She has for ten years enjoyed a luxurious home in New York with the kind lady who feels that the time has now come for this aristocratic though lovable little miss to know her own nearest kindred, who are humble but most excellent farming people in a pretty Vermont village. Thither Marion is sent for a summer, which proves to be a most important one to her in all its lessons.



"More wholesome reading for half grown girls it would be hard to find; some of the same lessons that proved so helpful in that classic of the last

generation 'An Old Fashioned Girl' are brought home to the youthful readers of this sweet and sensible story."—*Milwaukee Free Press*.

For sale by all booksellers, or sent postpaid on receipt of price by the publishers

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO., Boston

BRAVE HEART SERIES

By Adele E. Thompson

Betty Seldon, Patriot

Illustrated 12mo Cloth \$1.25

A book that is at the same time fascinating and noble. Historical events are accurately traced leading up to the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, with reunion and happiness for all who deserve it.

Brave Heart Elizabeth

Illustrated 12 mo Cloth \$1.25

It is a story of the making of the Ohio frontier, much of it taken from life, and the heroine one of the famous Zane family after which Zanesville, O., takes its name. An accurate, pleasing, and yet at times intensely thrilling picture of the stirring period of border settlement.

A Lassie of the Isles

Illustrated by J. W. Kennedy 12mo Cloth \$1.25



This is the romantic story of Flora Macdonald, the lassie of Skye, who aided in the escape of Charles Stuart, otherwise known as the "Young Pretender," for which she suffered arrest, but which led to signal honor through her sincerity and attractive personality.

Polly of the Pines

Illustrated by Henry Roth Cloth 12 mo \$1.25

"Polly of the Pines" was Mary Dunning, a brave girl of the Carolinas, and the events of the story occur in the years 1775-82. Polly was an orphan living with her mother's family, who were Scotch Highlanders, and for the most part intensely loyal to the Crown. Polly finds the glamor of royal adherence hard to resist, but her heart turns towards the patriots and she does much to aid and encourage them.



For sale by all booksellers, or sent postpaid on receipt of price by the publishers

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO., BOSTON

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HESTER'S COUNTERPART: A STORY OF BOARDING SCHOOL LIFE ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this

eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission

for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party

distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are

particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.