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HIGHACRES

BY JANE D. ABBOTT

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARRIET ROOSEVELT RICHARDS

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**TO
THOSE DEAR CHUMS**

"WRITE A STORY ABOUT SCHOOL," YOU ASKED ME. "WRITE A STORY IN WHICH THE HEROINE HAS A MOTHER AND A FATHER—WE'RE SO TIRED OF POOR ORPHANS," YOU BEGGED. I HAVE TRIED TO DO IT, ASKING YOUR FORGIVENESS FOR ONE LITTLE STEP-FATHER. TO YOU I AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATE THE STORY



**AMID THE UNFORGETTABLE SHOUTS OF THE BOYS AND GIRLS SHE
SLID EASILY ON DOWN THE TRAIL**

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[Amid the unforgettable shouts of the boys and girls she slid easily on down the trail](#)

[She pointed down to the winding road](#)

[One by one, quite breathless with excitement, they climbed to the tower room](#)

[Gyp, Jerry, Tibby, even Graham, superintended Isobel's preparations for the dress rehearsal](#)

HIGHACRES

CHAPTER I

KETTLE MOUNTAIN

If John Westley had not deliberately run away from his guide that August morning and lost himself on Kettle Mountain, he would never have found the Wishing-rock, nor the Witches' Glade, nor Miss Jerauld Travis.

Even a man whose hair has begun to grow a little gray over his ears can have moments of wildest rebellion against authority. John Westley had had such; he had wakened very early that morning, had watched the sun slant warmly across his very pleasant room at the Wayside Hotel and had fiercely hated the doctor, back in the city, who had printed on a slip of office paper definite rules for him, John Westley, aged thirty-five, to follow; hated the milk and eggs that he knew awaited him in the dining-room and hated, more than anything else, the smiling guide who had been spending the evening before, just as he had spent every evening, thinking out nice easy climbs that wouldn't tire a fellow who was recuperating from a very long siege of typhoid fever!

It had been so easy that it was a little disappointing to slip out of the door opening from the big sun room at the back of the hotel while the guide waited for him at the imposing front entrance. There was a little path that ran across the hotel golf links on around the lake, shining like a bright gem in the morning sun, and off toward Kettle Mountain; feeling very much like a truant schoolboy, John Westley had followed this path. A sense of adventure stimulated him, a pleasant little breeze whipping his face urged him on. He stopped at a cottage nestled in a grove of fir trees and persuaded the housewife there to wrap him a lunch to take with him up the trail. The good woman had packed many a lunch for her husband, who was a guide (and a close friend of the man who was cooling his heels at the hotel entrance), and she knew just what a person wanted who was going to climb Kettle Mountain. Three hours after, John Westley, very tired from his climb but not in the least repentant of his disobedience, enjoyed immensely a long rest with Mother Tilly's good things spread out on a rock at his elbow.

At three o'clock John Westley realized that the trail he had chosen was not taking him back to the village; at four he admitted he was lost. All his boyish exhilaration had quite left him; he would have hugged his despised guide if he could have met him around one of the many turns of the trail; he ached in every bone and could not get the thought out of his head that a man could die on Kettle Mountain and no one would know it for months!

He chose the trails that went *down* simply because his weary legs could not *climb* one foot more! And he had gone down such steep inclines that he was positive he had descended twice the height of the mountain and must surely come into some valley or other—then suddenly his foot

slipped on the needles that cushioned the trail, he fell, just as one does on the ice—only much more softly—and slid on, down and down, deftly steering himself around a bend, and came to a stop against a dead log just in time to escape bumping over a flight of rocky steps, neatly built by Nature in the side of the mountain and which led to a grassy terrace, open on one side to the wide sweep of valley and surrounding mountains and closed in on the other by leaning, whispering birches.

It was not the amazing view off over the valley, nor the impact against the old log that made his breath catch in his throat with a little surprised sound—it was the sudden apparition of a slim creature standing very straight on a huge rock! His first joyful thought was that it was a boy—a boy who could lead him back to the Wayside Hotel, for the youth wore soft leather breeches and a blouse, loosely belted at the waist, woolen golf stockings and soft elkskin shoes, but when the head turned, like a startled deer's, toward the unexpected sound, he saw, with more interest than disappointment, that the boy was a girl!

"How do you do?" he said, because her eyes told him very plainly that he was intruding upon some pleasant occupation. "I'm very glad to see you because, I must admit, I'm lost."

The girl jumped down from her rock. She had an exceptionally pretty face that seemed to smile all over.

"Won't you come down?" she said graciously, as though she was the mistress of Kettle Mountain and all its glades.

Then John Westley did what in all his thirty-five years he had never done before—he fainted. He made one little effort to rise and walk down the rocky steps but instead he rolled in an unconscious heap right to the girl's feet.

He awakened, some moments later, to a consciousness of cool water in his face and a pair of anxious brown eyes close to his own. He felt very much ashamed—and really better for having given way!

"Are you all right now?"

"Yes—or I will be in a moment. Just give me a hand."

He marveled at the dexterity with which she lifted him against her slim shoulder.

"Little-Dad's gone over to Rocky Point, but I knew what to do," she said proudly. "I s'pose you're from Wayside?"

He looked around. "Where *is* Wayside?"

She laughed, showing two rows of strong, white teeth. "Well, the way Little-Dad travels it's hours away so that Silverheels has to rest between going and coming, and Mr. Toby Chubb gets there in an hour with his new automobile when it'll *go*, but if you follow the Sunrise trail and then turn by the Indian Head and turn again at the Kettle's Handle you'll come into the Sleepy Hollow and the Devil's Pass and——"

John Westley clapped his hands to his head.

"Good gracious, no wonder I got lost! And just where am I now?"

"You're right on the other side of the mountain. Little-Dad says that if a person could just bore right through Kettle you'd come out on the sixth hole of the Wayside Golf course—only it'd be an awfully *long* bore."

John Westley laughed hilariously. He had suddenly thought how carefully his guide always planned *easy* hikes for him.

The girl went on. "But it's just a little way down this trail to Sunnyside—that's where I live. Little-Dad's my father," she explained.

"I'd rather believe that you're a woodland nymph and live in yonder birch grove, but I suppose—your garments look so very man-made—that you have a regular given-to-you-in-baptism name?"

"I should say I had!" the girl cried in undisguised disgust. "*Jerauld Clay Travis*. I *hate* it. Nearly every girl I know is named something nice—Rose and Lily and Clementina. It was cruel to name any child J-e-r-a-u-l-d."

"I think it's—nice! It's so—different." John Westley wanted to add that it suited her because *she* was different, but he hesitated; little Miss Jerauld might misunderstand him. He thought, as he watched from the corner of his eye, every movement of the slim, strong, boyish form, that she was unlike any girl he had ever known, and, because he had three nieces and they had ever so many friends, he really knew quite a bit about girls.

"Yes, it's—different," she sighed, unconscious of the thoughts that were running through the man's head. Then she brightened, for even the discomfiture of having to bear the name Jerauld could not long shadow her spirit, "only no one ever calls me Jerauld—I'm always just Jerry."

"Well, Miss Jerry, you can't ever know how glad I am that I met you! If I hadn't, well, I guess I'd have perished on the face of Kettle Mountain. I am plain John Westley, stopping over at Wayside, and I can swear I never before did anything so silly as to faint, only I've just had a rather tough

siege of typhoid."

"Oh, you shouldn't have *tried* to climb so far," she cried. "As soon as you're rested you must go home with me. And you'll have to stay all night 'cause Mr. Chubb's not back yet from Deertown and he won't drive after dark."

If John Westley had not been so utterly fascinated by his surroundings and his companion, he might have tried immediately to pull himself together enough to go on to Sunnyside; he was quite content, however, to lean against a huge rock and "rest."

"I'm trying to guess how old you are. And I thought you were a boy, too. I'm glad you're not."

"I'm 'most fourteen." Miss Jerry squared her shoulders proudly. "I guess I do look like a boy. I wear this sort of clothes most of the time, 'cept when I dress up or go to school. You see I've always gone with Little-Dad on Silverheels when he went to see sick people until I grew too heavy and—and Silverheels got too old." She said it with deep regret. "But I live—like this!"

"And do you wander alone all over the mountain?"

"Oh, no—just on this side of Kettle. Once a guide and a man from the Wayside disappeared there beyond Sleepy Hollow and that's why they call it Devil's Hole. Little-Dad made me promise never to go beyond the turn from Sunrise trail. I'd like to, too. But there are lots of jolly tramps this side. This"—waving her hand—"is the Witches' Glade and that"—nodding at the rock against which the man leaned—"is the Wishing-rock."

John Westley, who back home manufactured cement-mixers, suddenly felt that he had wakened into a world of make-believe.

He turned and looked at the rock—it was very much like a great many other rocks all over the mountainside and yet—there *was* something different!

Jerry giggled and clasped her very brown hands around her leather-clad knees.

"I name everything on this side—no one from Wayside ever comes this way, you see. I've played here since I was ever so little. I've always pretended that fairies lived in the mountains." She leveled serious eyes upon him. "They *must!* You know it's *magic* the way things—*are*—here!"

John Westley nodded. "I understand—you climb and you think you're on top and then there's lots higher up and you slide down and you think you're in the valley and you come out on a spot—like this—with all the world below you still."

"Mustn't it have been *fun* to make it all?" Jerry's eyes gleamed. "And such beautiful things grow everywhere and the colors are *so* different! And the woodsy glens and ravines—they're so mysterious. I've heard the trees talk! And the brooks—why, they *can't* be just nothing but brooks, they're so—so—*alive!*"

"Oh, yes," John Westley was plainly convinced. "Fairies *must* live in the mountains!"

"Of course I know now—I'm fourteen—that there are no such things as fairies but it's fun to pretend. But I still call this my Wishing-rock and I come here and stand on it and wish—only there aren't so awfully many things to wish for that you don't just ask Little-Dad for—big things, you know."

"Miss Jerry, you were wishing when I—arrived!"

She colored. "I was. Little-Dad says I ought to be a very happy girl and I am, but I guess everybody always has something real *big* that they think they want more than anything else."

John Westley inclined his head gravely. "I guess everybody does, Jerry. I think that's what keeps us going on in the race. Does it spoil your wish—to tell about it?"

"Oh, my, yes!" Then she laughed. "Only I suppose it couldn't because there aren't really fairies."

"What *were* you wishing?" He asked it coaxingly, in his eyes a deep interest.

She hesitated, her dark eyes dreaming. "That I could just go on along that shining white road—down there—around and around to—the other side of the mountain!" She rose up on her knees and stretched a bare arm down toward the valley. "I've always wished it since the days when Little-Dad used to ride that way and leave me home because it was too far. I know that everything that's the other side of the mountain is—oh, lots *different* from Miller's Notch and—school—and—Sunnyside—and Kettle." Her voice was plaintively wistful, her eyes shining. "I *know* it's different. From up here I can watch the automobiles come along and they always turn off and go around the mountain and never come to Miller's Notch unless they get lost. And the trains all go that way and—and it *must* be different! It's like the books I read. It's the *world*—" She sank back on her knees. "Once I tried to walk and once I rode Silverheels, but I never seemed to get to the real turn, it was so far and I was afraid. At sunset I look at the colors and the little clouds in the sky and they look like castles and I think it's the reflection of what's on the other side. *That's* what I was wishing." She turned serious eyes toward Westley. "Is it dreadfully wicked? Little-Dad said I was discontented and Sweetheart—that's mother—cried and hugged me as though she was frightened. But some day I've just *got* to go along that road."



SHE POINTED DOWN TO THE WINDING ROAD

For some reason that was beyond even the analytical power of his trained mind, John Westley was deeply stirred. Little Jerry, child of the woods—he felt as her mother must have felt! There was a mystery about the girl that held his curiosity; she could be no child of simple mountain people. He rose from his position against the rock with surprising agility.

"If you'll give me a hand I'll stand on your rock and wish that your wish may come true, if you want it so very much! But, maybe, child, you'll find that what you have right here is far better than anything on the other side of the mountain. Now, suppose you lead the way to Sunnyside."

Jerry sprang ahead eagerly. "And then you'll meet Sweetheart and Little-Dad and Bigboy and Pepperpot!"

CHAPTER II

SUNNYSIDE

Jerry had led her new friend only a little way down the sharply-descending trail when suddenly the trees, which had crowded thickly on either side, opened on a clearing where roses and hollyhocks, phlox, sweet-william, petunias and great purple-hearted asters bloomed in riotous confusion along with gold-tasseled corn, squash, beets and beans. A vine-covered gateway led from this into the grassy stretch that surrounded the low-gabled house.

"*Hey-o!* Sweetheart!" called Jerry in a clear voice.

In answer came a chorus of joyful yelping. Around the corner dashed a Llewellyn setter and a wiry-haired terrier, tumbling over one another in their eagerness to reach their mistress; at the same moment a door leading from the house to the garden opened and a slender woman came out.

John Westley knew at a glance that she was Jerry's mother, for she had the same expression of sunniness on her lips; her hair, like Jerry's, looked as though it had been burnished by the sun though, unlike Jerry's clipped locks, it was softly coiled on the top of her finely-shaped head.

"This is my mother," announced Jerry in a tone that really said: "This is the wisest, kindest, most beautiful lady in the whole wide world!"

Though the dress that Mrs. Travis wore was faded and worn and of no particular style, John Westley felt instinctively that she was an unusual woman; in the graciousness of her greeting there was no embarrassment. Only once, when John Westley introduced himself, was there an almost imperceptible hesitation in her manner, then, just for an instant, a startled look darkened her eyes.

While Jerry, with affectionate admonishing, silenced her dogs, Mrs. Travis led their guest toward the little house. She was deeply concerned at his plight; he must not dream of attempting to return to Wayside until he had rested—he must spend the night at Sunnyside and then in the

morning Toby Chubb could drive him over. Dr. Travis would soon be back and he would be delighted to find that she and Jerry had kept him.

"We do not meet many new people on this side of the mountain," she said, smilingly. "You will be giving us a treat!"

So deeply interested was John Westley in the Travis family and their unusual home, tucked away on the side of the mountain, to all appearances miles away from anyone or anything (though Jerry had pointed out to him the trail down the hillside that led to Miller's Notch and the school and the little church and was a mile shorter than going by the road), that he forgot completely the alarm that must be upsetting the entire management of the Wayside Hotel over the disappearance of a distinguished guest. Indeed, at the very moment that he stepped across the threshold into the sunlit living room of the Travis cottage, a worried hotel manager was summoning by telegraph some of the most expert guides of the state for a thorough search of the neighborhood, and, at the same time, a New York newspaperman, at the Wayside for a vacation, was clicking off to his city editor, from the town telegraph station, the most lurid details of the tragedy.

Sunnyside, John Westley knew at once, was a "hand-made" house; each foot of it had been planned lovingly. Windows had been cut by no rule of architecture but where the loveliest view could be had; doors seemed to open just where one would want to go. The beams of the low ceiling and the woodwork of the walls had been stained a mellow brown. There was a piney smell everywhere, as though the fragrant odors of the mountainside had crept into and clung to the little house. A great fireplace crowned the room. Before it now stretched a huge Maltese cat. And most surprising of all—there were books everywhere, on shelves built in every conceivable nook and corner, on the big table, on the arm of the great chair drawn close to the west window.

All of this John Westley took in, with increasing wonder, while Mrs. Travis brought to him a glass of home-made wine. He drank it gratefully, then settled back in his chair with a little contented laugh.

"I'm beginning to feel—like Jerry—that Kettle Mountain is inhabited by fairies and that I am in their stronghold!"

But there was little suggestive of the fairy in Jerry as she tumbled through the door at that moment, Pepperpot held high in her arms and Bigboy leaping at her side. They rudely disturbed the Maltese—Dormouse, Jerry called her—and then occupied in sprawling fashion the strip of rug before the hearth.

"Be *still*, Pepper! Shake hands with the gentleman, Bigboy. They're as offended as can *be* because I ran away without them," she explained to John Westley. "Do you feel better now?" she asked, a little proprietary note in her voice.

"I do, indeed, and I'm glad, too, very glad, that I got lost."

"And here comes Little-Dad up the trail! I'll tell him you're here. Anyway, he'll want me to put up Silverheels." She was off in a flash, the dogs leaping behind her.

After having met Jerry and Jerry's mother, John Westley was not at all surprised to find Dr. Travis a most unordinary man, also. He was small, his clothes, country-cut, hung loosely on his spare frame, his hair fringed over his collar in an untidy way, yet there was a kindness, a gentleness in his face that was winning on the instant; one did not need to see his dusty, worn medicine case to know that his life was spent in caring for others.

Widely traveled as John Westley was, never in his whole life had he met with such an interesting experience as his night at Sunnyside. Most amazing was the hospitality of these people who seemed not to care at all who he might be—it was enough for them that chance had brought him, in a moment's need, to their door. Everything seemed to prove that Mrs. Travis, at least, was a woman educated beyond the ordinary, yet nothing in their simple, pleasant conversation could let anyone think that they had not both been born and brought up right there on Kettle. Everything about the house had the mark of a cultured taste, yet the cushioned chairs, the rugs, the soft-toned hangings were worn to shabbiness. And most mystifying of all was Miss Jerry herself, who had appeared at the supper table in a much faded but spotless gingham dress, black shoes and cotton stockings replacing the elkskins and woolen socks, very much a spirited little girl, with a fearlessness of expression that amused John Westley while at the same time he wondered if it could possibly be the training of the school at Miller's Notch.

He felt that Mrs. Travis must read in his face the curiosity that consumed him. He did not know that deep in her heart was a poignant regret that Jerry should have, in such friendly fashion, adopted this stranger—Jerry, who was usually a little shy! Of course she could not know that it was because he had admitted to Jerry that he, too, found something in Kettle that approached the magic—that he had stood on the Wishing-rock and had wished, very seriously, and if Mrs. Travis had known what that wish was her regret would, indeed, have been real alarm! After Jerry, with Pepper, had gone off to bed and Dr. Travis with Bigboy had slipped out to the little barn, John Westley said involuntarily, as though the words tumbled out in spite of anything he could do: "Of course, you know that I'm completely amazed to find a spot like this—off here on the mountain."

Mrs. Travis smiled, as though there were lots of things in her head that she was not going to say.

"Does Sunnyside seem attractive? We haven't any wealth—as the world reckons it, but the doctor

and I love books and we've made our little corner in the world rich with them."

"And you have Jerry."

"Yes!" The mother's smile flashed, though there was a wistful look in her eyes. "But Jerry's growing into a big girl."

"You must have an unusually excellent school here." John Westley blushed under the embarrassment of—as he plainly put it—"pumping" Jerry's mother.

Her explanation was simple. "It's as good as mountain schools are. When the snow is so deep that she cannot go over the trail I have taught her at home. You see I have not always lived at Miller's Notch—I came here—just before Jerry was born."

"Has she many playmates?" He remembered Jerry chattering about some Rose and Clementina and a Jimmy Chubbs.

"A few—but there are only a few of her own age. And she is outgrowing her school." A little frown wrinkled Mrs. Travis' pretty brow. "That is the first real problem that has come to Sunnyside for—a very long time. Life has always been so simple here. We have all we can want to eat and the doctor's practice, though it isn't large, keeps us clothed, but—Jerry's beginning to want something more than the school down there—and these few chums and—even I—can give her!"

John Westley recalled Jerry's face when she told her wish: "I want to go along that shining road—down there—around and around—to the other side of the mountain." He nodded now as though he understood exactly what Mrs. Travis meant by "her problem." He understood, too, though he had no child of his own, just why her voice trembled ever so slightly.

"We can't keep little Jerry from growing into big Jerry nor from wanting to stretch her wings a bit and yet—oh, the world's such a big, hard place—there's so much cruelty and selfishness in it, so much unhappiness! If I could only keep her here always, contented——" she stopped abruptly, a little ashamed of her outburst.

John Westley knew, just as though she had told him in detail all about herself, that life, sometime and somewhere away from the quiet of Sunnyside, had hurt this little woman.

"Dr. Travis and I find company in our books," Mrs. Travis went on, "and our neighbors, though we're quite far apart, are pleasant, simple-hearted people. Jerry does all the things that young people like to do; she swims down in Miller's Lake, and skates and skis and she roams the year round all over the side of Kettle; she can call the birds and wild squirrels to her as though she was a little wild creature herself. She takes care of her own little garden. And I do everything with her. Yet she is always talking as though some day she'd run away! Of course I know she wouldn't do exactly *that*, but I sometimes wonder if I have the right to try to hold her back. I haven't forgotten my own dreams." She laughed. "I certainly never dreamed of *this*"—sweeping her hand toward the shadowy room—"and yet this is better, I've found, than the rosy picture my young fancy used to paint!"

John Westley wished that he had read more and worked less hard at making cement-mixers; so much had been printed in books about this reaching out of youth that he might repeat now, if he knew it all, to the little mother. Instead he found himself telling her of his own three nieces. Then quite casually Mrs. Travis remarked:

"Some very pleasant people have opened Cobble House over on Cobble Mountain—Mr. and Mrs. Will Allan. I met her at church. She's—well, I knew in an instant that I was going to like her and that she'd help me about Jerry. I——"

"Allan—Will Allan? Why, bless my soul, that's Penelope Everett, the finest woman I ever knew! They come from my town." He sprang to his feet in delight. "I never dreamed I was anywhere near them! I'll get Mr. Chubb to take me there to-morrow. Of *course* you'll like her. She's—well, she's just like *you!*"

CHAPTER III

ON THE ROAD TO COBBLE

The next day Mr. Toby Chubb's "Fly-by-day," as Dr. Travis called the one automobile that Miller's Notch boasted, chugged busily over the mountain roads. John Westley started out very early to find his friends at Cobble; then he had to drive back to Wayside to appease a distraught manager and half a dozen angry guides and also to pack his belongings; for the Allans would not let him stay anywhere else but with them at Cobble. Then, after he had been comfortably established in the freshly painted and papered guest-room of the old stone house which the Allans had been remodeling, he coaxed Mrs. Allan to drive back to Sunnyside that she might, before the day passed, get better acquainted with Jerry and Jerry's mother.

"I couldn't feel more excited if I'd found a gold mine there on the side of Kettle!" John Westley had told his friends. Mrs. Allan, an attractive young woman, who was accustomed to many

congenial friends about her, had been wondering, deep in her heart, if she was not going to find Cobble just the least little bit lonely at times, so she listened with deep interest to John Westley's account of Jerry and Sunnyside.

"I can't just describe why the girl seems so different—it's that she's so confoundedly natural! There's a freshness about her that's like one of these clean, cool mountain winds whipping through you."

Mrs. Allan laughed at his awkward attempt to explain Jerry. She was used to girls—she loved them, she understood just what he was trying to say. He went on: "And here she is growing up, tucked away on the side of that mountain with a mother who's more like a sister, I guess—says she skates and skis and does everything with the child. And the most curious father—don't believe he's been further away from Kettle than Waytown more'n three or four times in his life; sits there with his books when he isn't jogging off on his horse to see some sick mountaineer, and the kindest, gentlest soul that ever breathed. There's an atmosphere in that house that *is* different, upon my word—makes one think of the old stories of kings and queens who disguised themselves as peasants—simple meal, everything sort of shabby but you couldn't give all that a thought, there was such a feeling of peace and happiness everywhere." John Westley actually had to stop for breath. But he was too eager and too much in earnest to mind the glint of amusement in Mrs. Allan's eyes. "When I went to bed didn't that big, amber-eyed cat of Jerry's follow me upstairs and into the room and stretch herself across my bed just as though that was what I'd expect! I never in my life before slept with a cat in the room, but I felt as though it would be the height of rudeness to chuck her off the bed! And I haven't slept as soundly, since I've been sick, as I did in that little room. I think it was the piney smell about everything. Miss Jerry wakened me at an unearthly hour by throwing a rose through my window. It hit me square in the nose. The little rascal was standing down there in the sunshine, in her absurd trousers, with a basket of berries in her hand—she'd been off up the trail after them."

Although John Westley's glowing account had prepared her for what she would find at Sunnyside, ten minutes after Penelope Allan had crossed the threshold she could not resist nodding to him, as much as to say: "You were quite right." In such places as Sunnyside little conventional restraints were unknown and in a very few moments the two women were chatting like old friends while Dr. Travis was explaining in his drawling voice the advantages of certain theories of planting, to which Will Allan listened intently, because he was planning a garden at Cobble, while John Westley, only understanding a word now and then, wished he hadn't devoted so much of his time to cement and knew more about spinach.

Afterwards, as they drove down the rough trail back to Cobble, John Westley demanded: "Honestly, Pen Allan, doesn't it strike you that there *is* a mystery about these Travis people?"

She hesitated a moment before answering, then laughed lightly as she spoke. "You funny man—the magic of these mountains is getting in your blood! Of course not—they are just a very happy family who know a little more than most of us about what's really worth while in this world. Now tell me about your own nieces—Isobel, and that madcap Gyp, and little Tib." She knew well how fond John Westley was of these three girls and to talk of them brought to her a breath of what she had known at home before she had married Will Allan, the spring before.

"Oh, they're as bad as ever," he said in a tone that implied exactly the opposite. "Isobel's growing more vain each day and Gyp more heedless, and Tibby's going to spoil her digestion if her mother doesn't make her eat less candy and more oatmeal. I haven't seen much of the youngsters since I was sick."

"And Graham—poor boy, stuck in among those girls! He must be in long trousers now."

"Graham can take care of himself," laughed the uncle. "Wish I had the four of them here with me! I wanted to bring them along but Dr. Hewitt said it'd be the surest way to the undertaker. They are a good sort but—sometimes, I wonder——"

"You are an extraordinary uncle, to take the responsibility of your nieces and nephew the way you do."

"I can't help it; I've lived with them since they were babies and it's just as though they were my own. And their father's away so much that I think their mother sort of depends on me. Sometimes I get a little bothered—they're having the very best schooling and all the things money can give young people and yet—there's a sort of shallowness possessing them that makes them—well, not value the opportunities they're having——"

"You talk like a veritable schoolmaster," laughed Mrs. Allan, teasingly.

"Have you forgotten that when Uncle Peter Westley left Highacres to the Lincoln School it made me trustee of the school? That's almost as bad as being the principal. And this year I'm going to take an active interest in the school, too. The doctor says I must have a 'diversity' of interests to offset the strain of making cement-mixers and I think to rub up against two hundred boys and girls will fill the bill, don't you? They've remodeled the building at Highacres this summer and completed one addition. There are twenty acres of ground, too, for outdoor athletics."

"What a wonderful gift," mused Mrs. Allan, recalling the pile of stone and marble old Peter Westley had built in the outskirts of his city that could never have been of any possible use to himself because he had been a crusty old bachelor who hated to have anyone near him. Gossip

had said that he had built it just because he wanted his house to cost more than any other house in the city; unworthy as his motive in building it might have been, he had forever ennobled the place when he had bequeathed it to the boys and girls of his city.

"There'll be a chance, with the school out there, of offsetting just what's threatening Isobel and Gyp—a sort of grownupness they're putting on—like a masquerade costume!"

"I love your very manlike way of describing things," laughed Mrs. Allan, recalling certain experiences of her own when, for six months, she had undertaken the care of her own niece, Patricia Everett. "It's so—*vivid!* A masquerade make-up, too big and too long, and then when you peep under the 'grown-up' costume, there's the little girl still—really loving to frolic around in the delightful sports that belong to youth and youth only."

John Westley rode on for a few moments in deep silence, his mind on the young people he loved—then suddenly it veered to the little girl he had found on the Wishing-rock, her eyes staring longingly out into a dream-world that lay beyond valley and mountain top.

"I've an idea—a—*corker!*" he exclaimed, just as the Fly-by-day bounced into the grass-grown drive of Cobble House.

CHAPTER IV

THE WESTLEYS

"Gyp Westley, get right down off from that chair! You *know* mother doesn't want you to stand on it!"

Miss Gyp, startled by her sister's sudden appearance at her door, fell promptly from her perch on the dainty chintz-cushioned chair.

"I was only tacking up my new banner," she answered crossly. "Here, Tib, put the hammer away. What are you going to do, Isobel?" Gyp's tone asked, rather: "What in the world have you *found* to do?"

Because Mrs. Hicks' mother had been so inconsiderate as to have a stroke of apoplexy, much misery of spirit had fallen upon the young Westleys. Mrs. Hicks was the Westley housekeeper and Mrs. Robert Westley, who, with her four youngsters, was spending the month of August at Cape Cod, had declared that she must return home at once, for Mrs. Hicks' going would leave the house entirely alone with the two housemaids who were very new and very inexperienced. There had been of course a great deal of rebellion but Mrs. Westley, for once hardhearted, had turned deaf ears upon her aggrieved children.

"Not a bit of silver packed away or anything, with that yellow-haired Lizzie! And anyway, it'll only be two or three weeks before school opens." Which was, of course, scant comfort!

"Oh, I thought I'd walk over and see if Ginny's home yet."

"Of course she isn't. Camp Fairview doesn't close until September second. I wish *I'd* gone there! Where's Graham?"

Isobel stretched her daintily-clad self in the chintz-cushioned chair that Gyp had vacated.

"He went out to Highacres to see the changes. Won't it seem funny to go to school in old Uncle Peter's house?"

For the moment Gyp and Tibby forgot to feel bored.

"It'll be like going to a new school. I know I shall be possessed to slide down the banisters. I wish I'd known Graham was going out, I'd have gone, too."

"Barbara Lee's going to take Capt. Ricky's place in the gym," Isobel further informed her sisters. "You know she was on the crew and the basketball team and the hockey team at college."

"Let's try for the school team this year, Isobel." Gyp sat up very straight. "Don't you remember how Capt. Ricky talked to us last year about doing things to build up the school spirit?"

Isobel yawned. "It's too hot to think of doing anything right now! Miss Grimball's always talking about school spirit as though we ought to do everything for that. This is my last year—I'm going to just see that Isobel Westley has a very good time and the school spirit can go hang!"

Gyp looked enviously at her valiant sister. Isobel was everything that poor, overgrown, dark-skinned Gyp longed to be—her face had the pink and white of an apple blossom, her fair hair curled around her temples and in her neck, her deep-blue eyes were fringed by long black lashes; she had, after much practice, acquired a willowy slouch that would have made a movie artist's fortune; she was the acknowledged beauty of the whole Lincoln school and had attended one or two dances under the chaperoned escort of older boys.

"Here comes Graham," cried Tibby from the window. She leaned out to hail him.

Graham Westley, who had, through the necessity of defending, for fifteen years, an unenviable position between Isobel and Gyp, developed an unusual amount of assertiveness, was what his uncle fondly called "quite a boy." But the dignity of his first long trousers, at one glance, fell before the boyish mischievousness of his frank face.

His sisters deluged him now with questions.

"Why don't you go out there and look at it yourselves?" But he was too enthusiastic about the new school to withhold his information. The living room and the old library had been built into one big room for a reference library; the classrooms were no end jolly; the billiard room had been enlarged and was to be an assembly room. A wing had been added for an indoor gymnasium. He and Stuart King had climbed way to the tower, but the tower room was locked.

"I remember—mother and Uncle Johnny said that Uncle Peter's papers and books had been put up there. Mother wouldn't have them here."

"Isn't it funny," mused Gyp as she balanced on the footboard of her bed. "Everybody hated old Uncle Peter, he was such a cross old thing, and nobody ever wanted to go to Highacres, and then he turns it into a school and we'll all just love it and make songs about it—"

"And celebrate Uncle Peter's birthday with an entertainment or something," broke in Graham. "Maybe they'll even give us a holiday—to show respect to his memory. Hurrah for old Bones!"

"Graham—you're *dreadful*," giggled Gyp.

"I don't care. It's Uncle Peter's own fault. It's anyone's fault if nobody in the world likes 'em—it's because they don't like anybody else!"

Isobel ignored his philosophy. "You want to remember, Graham Westley, that being Uncle Peter's grandnieces and nephew and having his money gives us a certain—" she floundered, her mind frantically searching for the word.

"Prestige," cried Gyp grandly. "I heard mother say that. And I looked it up—it means authority and influence and power. But I don't see how just happening to be Uncle Peter's nieces—"

At times Gyp's tendency to get at the very root of things annoyed her older sister.

"I don't care about dictionaries. Now that the school's going to be at Highacres we four want to always be very careful how we speak of Uncle Peter and act sort of dignified out there—"

"*Rats!*" cut in Graham, with scorn. "I say, Gyp—that's *my* banner!" Thereupon ensued a lively squabble, in which Tibby, who adored Graham, sided with him, and Isobel, in spite of Gyp's tearful pleading, refused to take part, so that the banner came down from the wall and went into Graham's pocket just as Mrs. Westley walked into the room.

"Why, my dears, all of you in the house this glorious afternoon?"

Mrs. Westley was a plump, bright-eyed woman who adored her four children, and enjoyed them, with happy serenity, except at infrequent intervals, when she worried herself "distracted" over them. At such times she always turned to "Uncle Johnny."

Isobel and Gyp had almost managed to answer: "There's no place to go," when the mother's next words cut short their complaint.

"I have the most astonishing news from Uncle Johnny," and she held up a fat envelope.

"Oh, when's he coming back?" cried Tibby.

"Very soon. But what do you think he wants to do—bring back with him a little girl he found up there in the mountains—or rather, *she* found *him*—when he got lost on a wrong trail. Listen:

"...She is a most unusual child. And she has outgrown the school here. I'd like, as a sort of scholarship, to send her for a year or two to Lincoln School. But there is the difficulty of finding a suitable place for her to live—she's too young to put in a boarding house. Could not you and the girls stretch your hearts and your rooms enough to let in the youngster? I haven't said anything to her mother yet—I won't until I hear from you. But I want to make this experiment and it will help me immensely if you'll write and say my little girl can go straight to you. I had a long talk with John Randolph, just before I came up here—we feel that Lincoln School has grown a little away from the real democratic spirit of fellowship that every American school should maintain; he suggested certain scholarships and that's what came to my mind when I found this girl. Isobel and Gyp and all their friends can give my wild mountain lassie a good deal—and she can give Miss Gyp and Isobel something, too—"

"Humph," came a suspicion of a snort from Isobel and Gyp.

"Wish he'd found a boy," added Graham.

From the moment she had read the letter, Mrs. Westley's mind had been working on ways and means of helping John Westley. She always liked to do anything anyone wanted her to do—and especially Uncle Johnny.

"If Gyp would go back with Tibby or—"

"*Mother!*" Gyp's distress was sincere—the spring before she had acquired this room of her own and she loved it dearly.

"And Gyp's things muss my room so," cried Tibby, plaintively.

"Then perhaps you'll all help me fix the nursery for her." Everyone in the household, although the baby Tibby was twelve years old, still called the pleasant room on the second floor at the back of the house, the "nursery." Mrs. Westley liked to take her sewing or her reading there—for her it had precious memories; the old bookcase was still filled with toys and baby books; Tibby's dolls had a corner of their own; Isobel's drawing tools were arranged on a table in the bay window and, on some open shelves, were displayed Graham's precious "specimens," all neatly labeled and mixed with a collection of war trophies. To "fix the nursery" would mean changes such as the Westley home had never known! Each face was very serious.

"It wouldn't be much to do for Uncle Johnny!"

Isobel, Gyp, Graham and Tibby, each in her and his own way, adored Uncle Johnny. Because their own father was away six months of every year, Uncle Johnny often stood in the double rôle of paternal counsellor and indulgent uncle.

"And he's been so sick," added Tibby.

"I can keep my stuff in my own room." Graham rather liked the idea.

"I suppose I can do my drawing in father's study—even if the light isn't nearly as good." Isobel, who underneath all her little affectations had an honest soul, knew in her heart that hers was not much of a sacrifice, because she had not touched her drawing pencils for weeks and weeks, but she purposely made her tone complaining.

"I s'pose we can play in there just the same?" asked Gyp.

"Of course we can," declared her mother. "We'll put up that little old bed that's in the storeroom."

"What's her name?" Gyp's forehead was wrinkled in a scowl.

Mrs. Westley referred to the letter.

"Jerauld Travis. What a pretty name! And she's just your age, Gyp!"

But Gyp refused to be delighted at this fact.

Then Mrs. Westley, relieved that the children had consented, even though ungraciously, to the change in their household, slipped the letter back into its envelope. "I'll write to Uncle Johnny right away," and she hurried from the room, a little fearful, perhaps, of the cloud that was noticeably darkening Isobel's face.

"I think it's *horrid*," Isobel cried when she knew her mother was out of hearing.

"What *you* got to kick about? How'd you like it if you was *me* with another girl around?"

"If you was *I*," corrected Gyp, loftily. "I think maybe it'll be nice."

"You won't when she's here! And probably Uncle Johnny'll like her better than any of us." Which added much to the flame of poor Isobel's jealousy.

"Well, I shall just pay no more attention to her than's if she was a—a *boarder!*" Isobel had a very vague idea as to how boarders were usually treated. "And it's silly to think that Uncle Johnny will like her better than us—she's just a poor child he feels sorry for."

"Do you suppose mountain people dress differently from us?" asked Tibby.

Graham promptly answered: "Yes, silly—she'll wear goatskin—and she'll yodel."

"Anyway," Isobel rose languidly, "we don't want to forget about Uncle Peter——"

"And our prestige," interrupted Gyp, tormentingly. "And we can't act horrid to her 'cause *that'd* hurt Uncle Johnny's feelings——"

Tibby suddenly saw a bright side of the cloud.

"Say, it'll be fun seeing how she can't do things!"

And, strangely enough, such is human nature in its early teens, little Tibby's suggestion brought satisfying comfort to the three others. Gyp's face cleared and she tossed her head as much as to say that *she* was not going to worry any more about it!

"Come on, Isobel, I'll treat down at Wood's."

"Let me go, too," implored Tibby.

Gyp hesitated. "I only have thirty cents——"

"You owe me ten, anyway," urged Tibby.

Graham, in a sudden burst of generosity, relieved the tension of their high finance. "Oh, let's all go—I'll stand for the three of you!"

CHAPTER V

JERRY'S WISH COMES TRUE

Jerry would, of course, never know how very hard Mr. John had had to work to make her "wish" come true. Ever afterwards she preferred to think that it was just standing on the Wishing-rock and wishing and wishing!

She had noticed, however, and had been a little curious, that every time Mr. John had come to Sunnyside he and her mother had talked and talked together in low tones so that, even when she was near them, she could not hear one word of what they were saying, and that, after these talks, her mother had been very pale and had, again and again, for no particular reason, hugged her very close and kissed her with what Jerry called a "sad" kiss.

Then one afternoon Mrs. Allan had come with John Westley, and her mother, to her disgust, had sent her down to the Notch with a message for old Mrs. Teed that had not seemed a *bit* important. After her return John Westley had invited her to take him and Bigboy and Pepperpot to the Witches' Glade because, he said, he "had something to tell her!"

It was a glorious afternoon. August was painting with her vivid coloring the mountain slopes and valleys; over everything was a soft glow. It was reflected on Jerry's eager face.

John Westley pointed down into the valley where Jerry's "shining" road ran off out of sight. They could see an automobile, like a speck, moving swiftly along it.

"Your road, down there, goes off the other side of the mountain and on and on and after a very long way—takes me back home. I'm going on Thursday."

Jerry turned a disappointed face. Each day of John Westley's two weeks near Miller's Notch had brought immeasurable pleasure and excitement into her life.

"Mrs. Allan is going to drive back with me—she lived in my town, you know. She hasn't been home for months and I shall enjoy her company."

Jerry was staring at the distant road. After awhile the specks that were automobiles and that she liked to watch would become fewer and fewer; the days would grow colder, school would begin, the snow would come and choke the trails and she and Sweetheart and Little-Dad would be shut in at Sunnyside for weeks and weeks. Her face clouded.

"And now listen very carefully, Jerry, and hold on to my arm so that you won't fall off from the mountain! *You* are going with us!"

Jerry *did* hold on to his arm with a grip that hurt. She stared, with round, wondering eyes.

He laughed at her unbelief. "Your wish is coming true! You're going to ride along that road yonder, in my automobile, which ought to get here to-morrow, straight around to the other side of the mountain, and on and on—then you're going to stay all winter with my own nieces and go to school with them—"

Jerry's breath came in an excited gasp.

"Oh, it *can't*—be—true! Mother'd *never* let me."

"It *is* true! Mothers are always willing to do the things that are going to be best for their girls. Mrs. Allan and I have persuaded her—"

But Jerry, with a "whoop," was racing down the trail, Bigboy and Pepperpot at her heels. She vaulted the little gate leading into the garden and swept like a small whirlwind upon her mother, sitting in the willow rocker on the porch. With a violent hug she tried to express the madness of her joy and so completely was her face hidden on her mother's shoulder that she did not see the quick tears that blinded her mother's eyes.

That was on Monday—there were only three days to get her small wardrobe ready and packed and to ask the thousand questions concerning the Westley girls (Graham was utterly forgotten) and the school. Then there were wonderful, long talks with mother, sitting close by her side, one hand tight in hers—solemn talks that were to linger in Jerry's heart all her life.

"I don't ever want to do anything, Mumsey Sweetheart, that'd make you the least little, *little* bit unhappy!" Jerry had said after one of these talks, suddenly pressing her mother's hand close to her cheek.

On Wednesday afternoon she declared to Mr. John, when he drove over from Cobble, that she was "ready." She said it a little breathlessly—no Crusader of old, starting forth upon his holy way, felt any more exaltation of spirit than did Jerry!

"I've packed and I've mended my coat and I've finished mother's comfy jacket that I began winter before last and I've said good-by to Rose and poor old Jimmy Chubb, who's awfully envious, 'cause he wanted to go to Troy to work in his uncle's store and he says it makes him mad to have a girl see the world 'fore he does, but I told him he ought to keep on at school, even if it was only

Miller's Notch. And I've cleaned Little-Dad's pipes. And I've promised Bigboy and Pepperpot and Dormouse that they may all sleep on my bed to-night. I'm afraid Pepperpot—he's so sensitive—is going to miss me dreadfully!" Jerry tried to frown away the thought; she did not want it to intrude upon her joy.

That last evening she sat quietly on the porch with one hand in her mother's and the other in Little-Dad's. Not one of them seemed to want to talk; Jerry was too excited and her mother knew that she could not keep a tremble from her voice. At nine o'clock Jerry declared that she'd just *have* to go to bed so that the morning would come quicker. She kissed them both, kissed her mother again and again, then marched off with her pets at her heels.

Far into the night her mother sat alone on the edge of the porch, staring at the stars through a mist of tears and praying—first that the Heavenly Father would protect her little Jerry always and always, and then that He would give her strength to let the child go on the morrow.

When the parting came everyone tried to be very busy and very merry, to cover the heartache that was under it all; John Westley fussed with the covers and the cushions in the big car and had his chauffeur pack and repack the bags. Mrs. Allan and Mrs. Travis discussed the lunch that had been stowed away in the tonneau, as though the whole thing was only a day's picnic. Jerry, a funny little figure in her coat that was too small and a fall hat that Mrs. Chubb had made over from one of her mother's, was, with careful impartiality, bestowing final caresses upon Bigboy, Pepperpot, Silverheels, and her father and mother alike. Then, at the last moment, she almost strangled her mother with a sweep of her strong young arms.

"Mumsey Sweetheart, if you want me *dreadfully*—you'll send for me," she whispered, stricken for a moment by the realization that the parting was for a very long time.

Then, though her heart was almost breaking within her, Mrs. Travis managed to laugh lightly.

"Need you—of course we won't need you! Climb in, darling," and she almost lifted the girl into the tonneau, where Mrs. Allan was already comfortably fixed.

But at this moment Bigboy tried to leap into the car. When Dr. Travis gripped his collar he let out a long, protesting howl.

"Oh, Bigboy—he *knows*! Let me say good-by again," cried Jerry, jumping out and, to everyone's amusement, embracing the dog.

"You must be a good dog and take very good care of my Sweetheart and Little-Dad," she whispered. Then, standing, she looked around.

"Where's Pepperpot?" she asked anxiously. The little dog had disappeared.

"He'll think that I love Bigboy more than I do him," she explained, as she climbed back in.

The car started down the rough road. Jerry turned to wave; as long as she could see her mother and father she kept her little white handkerchief fluttering. Then she faced resolutely forward.

"You know," she explained to John Westley, with shining eyes, "when you've been wishing and wishing for something, you must enjoy it as hard as you can."

Even the familiar buildings of the Notch seemed different now to Jerry, as she flew past them, and she kept finding new things all along the way. Then, as they turned from the rough country road into her "shining" road, which was, of course, the macadam highway, she looked back and up toward Kettle to see if she could catch a glimpse of Sunnyside or the Witches' Glade and the Wishing-rock. They were lost in a blaze of green and purple and brown.

"Isn't it *funny*? If I was up there watching I'd see you moving like a speck! And in a moment you'd disappear around the corner. And now *I'm* the speck and—I don't know when we reach the corner. But I'm—*going*, anyway!"

Then upon her happy meditations came a sudden, startling interruption in the shape of a small dog that leaped out from the dense undergrowth at the side of the road and hailed the automobile with a sharp bark.

"*Pepperpot!*" cried Jerry, springing to her feet.

The chauffeur had brought the car to a sudden stop to avoid hitting the dog. At the sound of Jerry's voice the little animal made a joyous leap into the car.

"He came on *ahead*—through the Divide! *Oh*—the darling," and Jerry hugged her pet proudly.

John Westley looked at Penelope Allan and she looked at him and the chauffeur looked at them both—all with the same question. In Jerry's mind, however, there was no doubt.

"He'll *have* to go with us, Mr. John, because I know he'd just die of a broken heart if I—took him back!"

Then, startled by John Westley's hesitation, she added convincingly, "He's awfully good and never bothers anyone and keeps as still as can be when I tell him to and I'll—I'll——"

No one could have resisted the appeal in her voice.

"Very well, Jerry—Pepperpot shall go, too."

CHAPTER VI

NEW FACES

"Ten miles more... three miles more ... five blocks more," Mr. John had been saying at intervals as the big car rolled along, carrying Jerry nearer and nearer to her new home.

For the two days of the trip Jerry had scarcely spoken; indeed, more than once her breath had caught in her throat. Each moment brought something new, more wonderful than anything her fancy had ever pictured. She liked best the cities through which they passed, their life, the bustle and confusion, the hurrying throngs, the rushing automobiles, the gleaming railroad tracks like taut bands of silver, the smoke-screened factories with their belching stacks, the rows upon rows of houses, snuggling in friendly fashion close to one another.

John Westley had found himself fascinated in watching the eager alertness of her observation. He longed to know just what was passing back of those bright eyes; he tried to draw out some expression, but Jerry had turned to him an appealing look that said more plainly than words that she simply couldn't tell how wonderful everything seemed to her, so he had to content himself with watching the rapture reflected in her face and manner.

But when, after leaving Mrs. Allan at her brother's, Mr. John had said "five blocks more," Jerry had clutched the side of the car in an ecstasy of anticipation. From the deep store of her vivid imagination she had drawn a mental picture of what the Westley home and Isobel, Gyp, Graham and Tibby would be like. The house, in her fancy, resembled pictures of turreted castles; however, when she saw that it was really square and brick, with a little iron grille enclosing the tiniest scrap of a lawn, she was too excited to be disappointed.

Two small carved stone lions guarded each side of the flight of steps that led to the big front door; their stony, stoic stare drew a sharp bark of challenge from Pepperpot, snuggled in Jerry's arms.

"Hush, Pepper," admonished Jerry. "You mustn't forget your manners."

As John Westley opened the door of the tonneau his eyes swept the front of the house in a disappointed way. He had expected that great door to open and his precious nieces and nephew to come tumbling out to welcome him.

He could not know—because his glance could not penetrate the crisp curtains at a certain window of the second floor—that from behind it Gyp, Graham and Tibby had been watching the street for a half hour. Isobel had resolutely affected utter indifference and had sat reading a book, though more than once she had peeped covertly over Gyp's shoulder down the broad avenue.

"*There they are!*" Tibby had been the first to spy the big car.

"Isobel"—Gyp screamed—"look at her hat!"

"I wish she was a boy," groaned Graham again. "Doesn't Uncle Johnny look great? I say—come on, let's go down!"

It had been a prearranged pact among the young Westleys not to greet the little stranger with any show of eagerness.

Tibby welcomed the suggestion. "Oh—*let's!*" she cried.

It was at that moment that Pepperpot had barked his disapproval of the weather-worn lions. Graham and Gyp gave a shout of delight.

"Look! *Look*—a dog! Hurray!"

"Maybe now mother will have to let us keep him," Graham added. "Come on, girls," he raced toward the stairs.

Their voices roused Mrs. Westley. She had not expected Uncle Johnny for another hour. She flew with the children; there was nothing wanting in *her* welcome.

"John Westley—you look like a new man! And this is our little girl? Welcome to our home, my dear. Did you have a nice trip? Did you leave Pen Allan at the Everetts? How is she?" As she chattered away, with one hand through John Westley's arm and the other holding Jerry's, she drew them into the big hall and to the living-room beyond. Jerry's round, shining eyes took in, with a lightning glance, the rich mahogany woodwork, the soft rugs like dark pools on the shiny floor, the long living-room with its amber-toned hangings, and the three curious faces staring at her over Mr. John's shoulder.

"Gyp, my dear," John Westley untangled long arms from around his neck, "here's a twin for you. Jerry, this boy is my nephew Graham—he's not nearly as grown-up as he looks. And this is Tibby!"

Jerry flashed a smile. They seemed to her—this awkward, thin, dark-skinned girl whom Uncle Johnny had called Gyp, the tall, roguish-faced boy, and little Tibby, whose straight braids were black like Gyp's and whose eyes were violet-blue—more wonderful than anything she had seen along the way; they were, indeed, the "best of all."

"Oh," she stammered, in a laughing, excited way, "it's just wonderful to—really—be—be here." Before her glowing enthusiasm the children's prejudice melted in a twinkling. Gyp held out her hand with a friendly gesture and Pepperpot, as though he understood everything that was happening, stuck his head out from the shelter of Jerry's arm and thrust his paw into Gyp's welcoming clasp.

Everyone laughed—Graham and Tibby uproariously.

"Goodness *me*—a *dog!*" Mrs. Westley cried, with a startled glance toward John Westley.

"Let him down," commanded Graham, as though he and Jerry were old friends. Jerry put Pepperpot down and the four children leaned over him. Promptly Pepperpot stood on his hind legs and executed a merry dance.

"He cut through the woods and headed us off, miles away from the Notch—we couldn't do anything else but bring him along," Uncle Johnny whispered to Mrs. Westley under cover of the children's laughter. "For Heaven's sake, Mary, let him stay."

There had been for years a very fixed rule in the Westley household that dogs were "not allowed." "They bring their dirty feet and their greasy bones and things on the rugs and the chairs," was the standing complaint, though Mrs. Westley had never minded telltale marks from muddy little shoes nor the imprint of sticky fingers on satin upholstery; nor had she ever allowed painters to gloss over the initials that Graham had carved with his first jackknife on one of the broad window-sills of the library. "When he's a grown man and away from the nest—I'll have *that*," she had explained.

"I don't know what Mrs. Hicks will say," she answered rather helplessly, knowing, as she watched the young people, that she would not have the heart to bar Pepper from their midst.

"I say, Jerry,"—Graham had Pepper's nose in his hand—"can I have him for my dog? Nearly all the fellows have dogs, but mother——" he glanced quickly in her direction.

Graham might just as well have asked Jerry to cut out a part of her heart and hand it over; however, his face was so wistful that she answered, impulsively: "He can belong to all of us!"

"Where's Isobel?" cried Uncle Johnny, looking around.

Isobel had been listening from the turn of the stairway. She had really wanted, more than anything else, to race down the stairs and throw herself in Uncle Johnny's arms. (He was certain to have some pretty gift for her concealed in one of his pockets.) But she must show the others that *she* would stick to her word. So, in answer to his call, she walked slowly down the stairway, with a smile that carefully included only Uncle Johnny.

Jerry thought that she had never in her whole life seen anyone quite as pretty as Isobel! She stared, fascinated. To Uncle Johnny's introduction she answered awkwardly, uncomfortably conscious that Isobel's eyes were unfriendly. She wished, with all her heart, that Isobel would say something nice, but Isobel, after a little nod, turned back to her uncle.

"Gyp, take Jerry to her room. Graham, carry her bags up," directed Mrs. Westley.

"Pepper, too?" cried Tibby.

But Pepper had dashed up the stairs, and had turned at the landing and, standing again on his hind legs, had barked. Even Mrs. Westley laughed. "Pepper's answering that question himself," she replied. She turned to Uncle Johnny. "If it comes to a choice between Mrs. Hicks and that dog I plainly see Mrs. Hicks will have to go."

John Westley declared he had not known how "good" it would feel to get "home" again. Though he really lived in an apartment a few blocks away, he had always looked upon his brother's house as home and spent the greater part of his leisure time there. Mrs. Westley ordered tea. Uncle Johnny slipped Isobel's hand through his arm and followed Mrs. Westley into the cheery library.

Above, Jerry was declaring that her room was just "wonderful." She ran from one window to another to gaze rapturously out over the neighboring housetops. The brick, wall-enclosed court below, with its iron gate letting into an alleyway, was to her an enchanted battlement!

Graham's trophies, Tibby's dolls, Isobel's drawing tools had disappeared; a little old-fashioned white wooden bed had been put up in one corner; its snowy linen cover, with woven pink roses in orderly clusters, gave it an inviting look; there was a pink pillow in the deep chair in the bay-window; a round table stood near the chair; on it were some of Gyp's books and a little work-basket. And the toys had been left in the old bookcase, so that, Mrs. Westley had decided, the room would look as if a little girl could really live in it! Little wonder that Jerry thought it all "wonderful."

When Gyp heard the rattle of tea-cups below, they all tore downstairs again, Pepper at their heels. They gathered around Uncle Johnny and drank iced tea and ate little frosted cakes and demanded to be told how he had felt when he knew he was lost on that "big mountain." They

were all so nice and jolly, Jerry thought, and, though Isobel ignored her, she must be as nice as the others, because Uncle Johnny kept her next to him and held her hand. The late afternoon sun slanted through the long windows with a pleasant glow; the rows and rows of books on the open shelves made Jerry feel at home; the great, deep-seated chairs gave her a delicious sense of refuge.

It was Uncle Johnny who, after dinner, sent Jerry off to bed early; though she declared she was not one little bit tired, he had noticed that the brightness had gone from her face. Gyp and Tibby went upstairs with her; Graham disappeared with Peppercot.

"What do you think of my girl?" John Westley asked his sister-in-law. They had gone back to the library. Isobel sat on a stool close to Uncle Johnny's chair.

"She seems like an unusually nice, jolly child. But——" Mrs. Westley looked a little distressed. "May she not be homesick here, John—so far from her folks?" She hated to think of such a possibility.

"I thought of that," John Westley chuckled. "I said something about it to her. What do you think she said? She waited a moment before she answered me—as though she was carefully considering it. 'Well,' she said, 'anyway, one wouldn't be homesick for very long, would one?' As though it'd be like measles—or mumps. This is an Adventure to her; she's been dreaming about it all her life!" He told, then, about the Wishing-rock.

"I tell you, Mary, there's some sort of spirit about the girl that's unusual! It must come from some fire of genius further back than her hermit-parents. I'm as certain as anything that there's a mystery about the child. I've knocked about among all sorts of people, but I never found such a curious family before—in such a place. Dr. Travis is one of those mortals whose feet touch the earth and whose head is in the clouds; Mrs. Travis is a cultured, beautiful woman with a look in her eyes as though she was always afraid of something—just behind. And then Jerry—like them both and not a bit like 'em—her head in the clouds, all right—a girl who sees beauty and a promise and a vision in everything—a girl of dreams! You can imagine almost any sort of a story about her."

As Mrs. Allan had done, Mrs. Westley laughed at her brother-in-law's enthusiasm.

"She's probably just a healthy girl who has been brought up in a simple way by very sensible parents." Her matter-of-fact tone made John Westley feel a little foolish. "She's a dear, sunny child and I hope she will be happy here."

"What got me was her utter lack of self-consciousness and her faith in herself. Not an affectation about her—that's why I wanted her at Lincoln school."

"No one'll *look* at her there—she's so dowdy!" burst out Isobel.

Her uncle turned quickly, surprised and a little hurt at the pettishness of her tone.

"Isobel, dear—" protested her mother.

Then Uncle Johnny laughed. "I rather guess, from my observation of the vagaries of you young people, that sometimes one little thing can make even a 'dowdy' girl popular—then, if she has the right stuff in her, she can be a leader. What is it starts you all wearing these little black belts round your waists, or this mousetrap," poking the puffs of pretty silk hair that hid her ears; "it's a psychology that's beyond most of us! Maybe my Jerry will set a new style in Lincoln."

Isobel blazed in her scorn.

"Well, I'd *die* before I'd look like her!" she cried. "I'm going to bed." She felt very cross. She had wanted Uncle Johnny to tell her that she looked well; she had on a new dress and her hair was combed in a very new way; she had grown, too, in the summer. Instead he had talked of nothing but Jerry, Jerry—and such silly talk about her eyes shining as though they reflected golden visions within! She stalked away with a bare good-night.

Uncle Johnny might have said something if Isobel's mother had not given a long sigh.

"I can't—always—understand Isobel now," she said. "She has grown so self-centered. I'll be glad when school begins." Mrs. Westley, like many another perplexed parent, looked upon school as a cure for all evils.

Jerry and Gyp had been busily unpacking Jerry's belongings and putting them away in the little white bureau.

"Where's Pepper?" asked Jerry, in sudden alarm. The children had been warned to keep the little dog from "under Mrs. Hicks' feet." In a flash Jerry had a horrible vision of some cruel fate befalling her pet.

"I'll just bet Graham has him," declared Gyp, indignantly.

They tiptoed down the hall and up the stairs to Graham's door. Graham lay in bed, sound asleep; beside him lay Pepper, carefully tucked under the bedclothes. One of Graham's arms was flung out over the dog.

Some instinct told Jerry that a long-felt yearning in this boy's heart had at last been satisfied. And

Pepper must have felt it, too, for, though at the sight of his little mistress a distressed quiver shot through him, he bravely pretended to be soundly sleeping.

"Let him have him," whispered Jerry.

But, for a long time, Jerry, under the pink and white cover, blinked at the little circle of brightness reflected from the electric light outside, trying hard not to wish she had Peppermint with her "to keep away the lonesomes." The night sounds of the city hummed in eerie cadences in her ears. She resolutely counted one-two-three to one hundred and back again to one to keep the thoughts of mother and Sunnyside out of her head; then, just as she felt a great choking sob rise in her throat, she heard a little scratch-scratch at her door.

"Oh, *Pepper*—I'm so *glad* you came!" She caught the shaggy little form to her. She could not let him lie on the pink-and-whiteness, so she carefully spread it over the footboard and folded her own coat for him to sleep on.

How magically everything changed—when a shaggy terrier snuggled against her feet. The haunting shadows fled, the sob gave way to a contented little sigh and Jerry fell asleep with the memory of Gyp's dark, roguish face in her thoughts and a consuming eagerness to have the morning come quickly.

CHAPTER VII

HIGHACRES

Old Peter Westley had made up his mind, so gossip said, to build Highacres when he heard that Thomas Knowles, a business rival, had bought a palatial home on the most beautiful avenue of the city. "Pouf"—that was Uncle Peter's favorite expression and he had a way of blowing it through his scraggly mustache that made it most impressive. "Pouf! *I'll* show him!" The next morning he drove around to a real estate office, bundled the startled real estate broker into his car and carried him off to the outskirts of the city, where lay a beautiful tract of land advertised as "Highacre Terrace," and held (with an eye to the growth of the city) at a startling figure. In the real estate office it had been divided into building lots with "restrictions," which meant that only separate houses could be built on the lots. Peter Westley struck the ground with his heavy cane and said he'd take the whole piece. The real estate man gasped. Uncle Peter said "pouf" again and the deal was settled.

Then he summoned architects from all over the country who, to his delight, spent hours in the office of the Westley Cement-Mixer Manufacturing Company trying to outdo one another in finesse and suavity. Fortunately he decided upon a man who had genius as well as tact, who, without his knowing it, could quietly bend old Peter Westley to his way of thinking. Under this man's planning the new home grew until it stood in its finished perfection, a mass of stone and marble surrounded by great trees and sloping lawns. Gossip said further that Highacres so far surpassed the remodeled home of Thomas Knowles that that poor gentleman had resigned from the Meadow Brook Country Club so that he would not have to drive past it!

What sentiment had led Peter Westley to leave Highacres to the Lincoln School no one would ever know; perhaps deep in his queer old heart was an affection for his nephew Robert's children, who came dutifully to see him once or twice a year, but made no effort to conceal the fact that they thought it a dreadful bore.

"I think," Isobel said seriously to her family, as they were gathered around the breakfast table, a few days after Jerry's arrival, "that it'd be nice if Gyp and I put on black——"

"*Black*——" cried Gyp, spilling her cocoa in her astonishment.

"Yes, black. We should have worn it when Uncle Peter died and now, going to school out there, it would show the others that we respected——"

Mrs. Westley laughed, then when she saw the color deepen on Isobel's cheeks she added soothingly: "Your thought's all right, Isobel dear, but it will be hardly necessary for you and Gyp to put on black now to show your respect. I think every pupil of Lincoln can best do it by building up a reputation for scholarship that will make Lincoln known all over the country."

"Isobel just wants everybody to remember she's Uncle Peter's——"

"Hush, Graham." Mrs. Westley had a way of saying "hush" that cleared a threatening atmosphere at once.

"Oh, isn't it going to be *fun*?" cried Gyp. "Mother, can't we take Jerry out there this morning?"

"But I have to use the car——"

"If you girls were fellows, we could walk," broke in Graham.

"We can—we can! It's only two miles and a half. Simpson watched on the speedometer the last time we drove out."

Graham looked questioningly at Jerry and Jerry, suddenly recalling the miles of mountain trail over which she had climbed, laughed back her answer.

Because a new world, that surpassed any fairy tale, had opened to Jerry in these last few days, it seemed only fitting to go to school in a building that was like a palace. She thrilled at the thought of the new school life, the girls and boys who would be her classmates, the new teachers, the new studies. For years and years, back at the Notch she had always sat in front of Rose Smith and back of Jimmy Chubb; she had progressed from fractions to measurements and then on to algebra and from spelling to Latin with the outline of Jimmy's winglike ears so fixed a part of her vision that she wondered if now she might not find that she could not study without them. And there had always been, as far back as she could remember, only little Miss Masten to teach multiplication and geography and algebra alike; she and the other children who made up the "advanced grade" of the school at Miller's Notch always called her "Miss Sarah." Would there be anyone like Miss Sarah at Lincoln?

As they walked along, Gyp bravely measuring her step to Jerry's freer stride, Gyp explained to Jerry "all about" Uncle Peter.

"He's father's uncle. Father's father—that's my grandfather—was his youngest brother. He died when he was just a young man and Uncle Peter never got over it. Mother says my grandfather was the only person Uncle Peter ever really liked. He always lived in the same funny little old house even after he made lots of money, until he built Highacres. He was terribly queer. I used to be dreadfully afraid of him because he always carried a big cane and had the awfulest way of looking at you! His eyes sort of bored holes right through you, so that you turned cold all over and couldn't even cry. I'm glad he's dead. He was awfully old, anyway—or at least he looked old. We used to just hate to have to go to see him. The old stingy wouldn't ever even give us a stick of candy."

"The poor old man," Jerry said so feelingly that Gyp stared at her. "My mother always said that such people are so unhappy that they punish themselves. Maybe he really wanted to be nice and just didn't know how! Anyway, he's given his home to the school."

If Peter Westley, looking down from another world, was reading that thought in a hundred young hearts he must surely be finding his reward.

"There it is!" cried Graham, who was walking ahead.

School could not really seem a bit like school, Jerry thought, as she followed the others through the spacious grounds into the building, when one studied in such beautiful rooms where the sun, streaming through long windows framed in richly-toned walnut, danced in slanting golden bars across parqueted floors. Gyp's enthusiasm, though, made it all very real.

"Here, Jerry, here's where the third form study room will be. Look, here's the geom. classroom! Oh, I *hope* we'll be put in the same class. Let's go down to the Gym. Oh—look at the French room—isn't it darling?" The trees outside were casting a shimmer of green through the sunshine in the room. "Mademoiselle will say: 'Young ladies, it ees beau-ti-ful!' Aren't these halls jolly, Jerry? Oh, I can't *wait* for school to begin."

On their way to the gymnasium, which was in the new wing of the building, the girls met another group. One of these disentangled herself from the arms that encircled her waist and threw herself into Gyp's embrace. The extravagance of her demonstration startled Jerry, but when Gyp introduced her, in an off-hand way: "This is Ginny Cox, Jerry," Jerry found herself fascinated by the dash and "*camaraderie*" in the girl's manner.

There were other introductions and excited greetings; each tried to tell how "scrumptious" and "gorgeous" and "spliffy" she thought the new school. Like Gyp, none of them could wait until school opened. Then the group passed on and Jerry, breathless at her first encounter with her schoolmates-to-be, remembered only Ginny Cox.

"She's the funniest girl—she's a perfect circus," Gyp explained in answer to Jerry's query. "Everybody likes her and she's the best forward we ever had in Lincoln." All of which was strange tribute to Jerry's ears, for, back at the Notch, poor Si Robie had always been dubbed the "funniest" child in the school and *he* had been "simple." Jerry did not know exactly how valuable a good "forward" was to any school but, she told herself, she knew she was going to like Ginny Cox.

In the gymnasium the girls found Graham with a group of boys. Gyp greeted them boisterously. Jerry, watching shyly, thought them all very jolly-looking boys.

"Do you see that tall boy down there?" Gyp nodded toward another group. "That's Dana King. Isobel's got an awful crush on him. She won't admit it but I *know* it, and the other girls say so, too. He's a senior."

The boy turned at that moment. His pleasant face was aglow with enthusiasm.

"Come on, fellows," he cried to the other boys, "let's give a yell for old Peter Westley." And the yell was given with a will!

"L-I-N-C-O-L-N! L-I-N-C-O-L-N!
Lincoln! Lincoln!
Rah! Rah! Rah!

Jerry tingled to her finger-tips. Gyp had yelled with the others, so had Ginny Cox, who had come back into the room. What fun it was all going to be. Dana King was leading the boys in a serpentine march through the building; out in the hall the line broke to force in a laughing, remonstrating carpenter. Jerry heard their boyish voices gradually die away.

"Before we go back let's climb up to the tower room." That was the name the children had always given to the largest of the turrets that crowned Highacres' many-gabled roof. A stairway led directly to it from the third floor. But the door of the room was locked.

"How tiresome," exclaimed Gyp, shaking the knob. Not that she did not know just what the tower room was like, but she hated locked doors—they always made her so curious.

"It's the nicest room—you can see way off over the city from its windows." She gave the offending door a little kick. "They put all of Uncle Peter's old books and papers and things up here—mother wouldn't have them brought to our house, you see. I remember she told Graham the key was down in the safety-deposit box at the bank. Well——" disappointed, Gyp turned down the stairs. "I've always loved tower rooms, don't you, Jerry? They're so romantic. Can't you just see the poor princess who won't marry the lover her father has commanded her to marry, languishing up there? Even chained to the wall!"

Jerry shuddered but loved the picture. She added to it: "She's got long golden, hair hanging down over her shoulders and she's tearing it in her wretchedness."

"And beating her breast and vowing over and over that she will *not* marry the horrible wicked prince——"

"And refusing to eat the dry bread that the ugly old keeper of the drawbridge slips through the door——"

At this point in the heartrending story the two laughing girls reached the outer door. Gyp slipped an affectionate hand through Jerry's arm. She forgot the languishing princess she had consigned to the prison above in her joy of the bright sunshine, the inviting slopes of Highacres, velvety green, and the new friend at her side.

"I'm so *glad* Uncle Johnny found you!"

CHAPTER VIII

SCHOOL

In the Westley home each school day had always begun with a rite that would some day be a sacred memory to Mrs. Westley, because it belonged to the precious childhood of her girls and boy. Graham called it "inspection." It had begun when the youngsters had first started school, Isobel and Graham proudly in the "grades," Gyp in kindergarten. The mother had, each morning, laughingly stood them in a row and looked them over. More than once poor Graham had declared that it was because his ears were so big that mother could always find dirt somewhere; sometimes it was Isobel who was sent back to smooth her hair or Gyp to wash her teeth or Tibby for her rubbers. But after the inspection there was always a "good-luck" kiss for each and a carol of "good-by, mother" from happy young throats.

So on this day that was to mark the opening of the Lincoln School at Highacres, Jerry stood in line with the others and, though each young person was faultlessly ready for this first day of school, Mrs. Westley laughingly pulled Graham's ears, smiled reminiscently at Isobel's primness, smoothed with a loving hand Gyp's rebellious black locks and thought, as she looked at Jerry, of what Uncle Johnny had said about her eyes reflecting golden dreams from within. And when she called Tibby "littlest one" none of them could know that, as she looked at them and realized that another year was beginning, it stirred a little heartache deep within her.

"Aren't mothers funny?" reflected Gyp as she and Jerry swung down the street. They had preferred to walk.

"Oh——" Jerry had to control her voice. "*I* think they're grand!"

"I mean—they're so *fussy*. When I have children I'm just going to leave them plumb alone. I don't care what they'll look like."

"You will, though," laughed Jerry. "Because you'll love them. If our mothers didn't love us so much I suppose they'd leave us alone. That would be dreadful!"

Jerry had slept very little the night before for anticipation. And now that the great moment was approaching close she was obsessed by the fear that she "wouldn't know what to do." The fear grew very acute when she was swept by Gyp into a crowd of noisy girls, all rushing for space in the dressing-rooms. Then, at the ringing of a bell, she was hurried with the others up the wide stairway. She caught a glimpse of Gyp ahead, surrounded by chums, all trying to exchange in a brief moment the entire summer's experiences. She looked wildly around for a familiar face. She

caught one little glimpse of Ginny Cox, who smiled at her across a dozen heads, then rushed away with the others.

In the Assembly room a spirit of gaiety prevailed. The eager faces of the boys and girls smiled at the faculty, sitting in prim rows on the stage; the faculty smiled back. There was stirring music until the last pupil had found her place. Then, just as Dr. Caton, the dignified principal, rose to his feet, a boy whom Jerry from her corner recognized as Dana King, leaped to the front, threw both arms wildly in the air with a gesture that plainly commanded: "Come on, fellows," and the beamed ceiling rang with a lusty cheer.

Dr. Caton greeted the students with a few pleasant words. There were more cheers, then everyone sang. Jerry thought it all very jolly. She wondered if "assembly" was always like this. She recalled suddenly how agitated poor Miss Sarah always became if there was the slightest noise in that stuffy schoolroom, back at the Notch.

"Look—there's the new gym. teacher—on the end—Barbara Lee," whispered Jerry's neighbor, excitedly.

Jerry looked with interest. In the entire faculty she had not found anyone who resembled, even ever so slightly, poor Miss Sarah. Miller's Notch, of course, had no gymnasium, therefore it had not needed any gymnasium assistant. Jerry had imagined that a gym. teacher must, necessarily, be a sort of young Amazon, with a strong, hard face. Miss Lee was slender and looked like one of the schoolgirls.

It had always been the custom at Lincoln School, on the opening day, to assign the new pupils to the care of the Seniors. These assignments were posted on the bulletin boards. Jerry did not know this: she did not know that Isobel Westley had been appointed her "guardian." Before assembly, Isobel had read her name on the lists and had promptly declared: "I just *won't!* Let her get along the best way she can." So, when assembly was over, Jerry found herself drifting helplessly, forlornly elbowed here and there, too shy to ask questions, valiantly trying to beat down the desire to run away. She envied the assurance with which the others, even the new girls, seemed to know just where they ought to go. She had not laid eyes on Gyp after that one fleeting glimpse on the stairs.

Suddenly a hand touched her arm and, turning, she found Barbara Lee beside her. The kind smile on Miss Lee's face brought a little involuntary quiver to her lips.

"Lost, my dear?"

"I—I don't know—where—"

"You are a new girl? What is your name?"

"Jerauld Travis."

"Oh—yes. Where is your guardian?" As she spoke Miss Lee stepped to the bulletin board that hung in the corridor. She read Isobel's name.

"You were assigned to Isobel Westley. It is strange that she has left you alone. Come to the library with me, Jerauld."

Jerry realized now why it had been so easy for all the other "new girls" to find their places—*they* had had guardians. She tried to smother a little feeling of hurt because Isobel had deserted her.

The library, gloriously sunlit on this golden morning, was empty. Miss Lee pulled two chairs toward a long table.

"Sit here, Jerauld. Now tell me all about your other school—so we can place you." And she patted Jerry's hand in a jolly encouraging way.

It was very easy for Jerry to talk to Miss Lee. She told of the work she had covered back at the Notch. Miss Lee listened with interest and, knowing nothing of Jerry's home life and Jerry's mother, some amazement.

"I believe you could go straight into the Junior class though you're—"

"Oh, *can't* I be in Gyp's room?" cried Jerry in dismay. "Gyp Westley, I mean. You see she's the only girl I know real well."

Barbara Lee, for all that she was trying to look very grown-up and dignified, as a teacher should, could remember well how much it meant in school life to be near one's "chum." So she laughed, a laugh that warmed Jerry's heart.

"I think—perhaps—that can be arranged," she said in a tone that indicated that she would help. "We will go to see Dr. Caton."

Even after the long consultation with Dr. Caton, Miss Lee did not desert Jerry. As they walked away from the office, she whispered assuringly to Jerry: "Dr. Caton thinks you had better go into the Third Form room—for a term, at least." Accordingly she led her into one of the smaller study rooms. And there was Gyp smiling and beckoning her to an empty desk beside her. But Miss Lee took Jerry to her classrooms; she introduced her to Miss Briggs, the geometry teacher, then to Miss Gray of the English department, and on to the French room and to the Ancient History

classroom. Bewildered, Jerry answered countless questions and registered her name over and over.

"There, my dear, you're settled for this term, at least," declared Miss Lee as they left the last classroom, "Now go back to your study-room and take that desk that Gyp Westley's saving for you."

Assigned to classes and with a desk of her own—and with Gyp close at hand—Jerry felt like a real Lincolnite and her unhappy shyness vanished as though by magic. During the long recess that followed, the bad half-hour forgotten, with a budding confidence born of her sense of "belonging," she sought the other "new" girls. Among them was Patricia Everett, who came directly to Jerry.

"I know you're Jerry Travis. I'm Aunt Pen Everett Allan's niece. I'm crazy to go and visit Cobble Mountain. That's very near your home, isn't it?" So sincere was her interest that Jerry felt as though she was suddenly surrounded by a wealth of friendship. Patricia seemed to know everyone else—they were nearly all Girl Scouts in her troop; she introduced Jerry to so many girls that poor Jerry could not remember a single name.

Ginny Cox, spying Jerry from across the room, bolted to her.

"You're going to sign up for basketball, aren't you? Of course you are. Wait right here—I'll call Mary Starr." She rushed away and before Jerry could catch her breath she returned with a tall, pleasant-faced girl who carried a small leather-bound notebook in her hand.

She wrote Jerry's name in it and went away.

"Miss Travis, will you sign up for hockey?" Jerry, on familiar ground, eagerly assented to this. Her name went into another book. Another girl waylaid her. She signed for swimming. She noticed that the others around her were doing the same thing. Patricia brought a girl to her whom she introduced as Peggy Lee. Peggy carried a notebook, too.

"Will you sign up for the debating club, Miss Travis?" she asked with a dignity that was belied by her roguish eyes.

Jerry was quite breathless; she had never debated in her life—but then she had never played basketball either.

"Oh, do sign. We're all joining and it's awfully exciting," pleaded Patricia. So Jerry signed for the debates.

"Whenever will I find time to study Latin and geometry? I know I'm going to be dumb in that," cried Jerry, that evening, to the Westley family. She spoke with such real conviction that everyone laughed.

Uncle Johnny had "dropped in." He was as eager as though he was a schoolboy, himself, to hear the children's experiences of the day. Though they all talked at once, he managed to understand nearly all that they were telling.

"And you, Jerry-girl, what did you think of it all?"

Because she had felt like one little drop in a very big puddle, Jerry simply couldn't tell. But her eyes were shining. Gyp broke in. "Jerry could be a Junior if she wanted to, but she's going to stay in my study-room for awhile. And they've signed her up for *every single thing!*"

Jerry, ignorant of Lincoln traditions, did not know that this was a tribute.

Then she had wondered when, with everything else, she would find time for her Cicero and geometry.

"Who you got? Speck-eyes?"

"Graham——" cried Mrs. Westley. "I will *not* have you speaking in that way of your teachers!"

Graham colored; he knew that this was a point upon which his mother had always been very firm.

"Oh, Miss Briggs is all *right*—I like her, but all the fellows call her that."

"Do you suppose they'll nickname Miss Lee?"

To Jerry it seemed that *that* would be sacrilege—she was too dear! Uncle John had, then, to hear all about her. He was much interested, he had not realized that she was grown-up enough to teach.

"But she really doesn't seem a bit so," Gyp explained.

Then quite suddenly Graham asked Jerry: "Say, Jerry, who was your guardian?"

Jerry's face turned very red. She caught a defiant look from Isobel. She did not want to answer; even the ethics of the little school at Miller's Notch had had no tolerance for a telltale.

"A—a Senior. She couldn't find me."

Poor Jerry—Graham's careless inquiry had dimmed her enthusiasm. Why hadn't Isobel found her? With the friendliness of spirit that was such a part of the very atmosphere of Lincoln, why had

Isobel, alone, stood aloof? She looked at Isobel—she was so pretty now as she talked, with animation, to Uncle Johnny. Jerry thought, as she watched her, that she'd rather have Isobel love her than any of those other nice girls she had met at Highacres—Patricia Everett, Ginny Cox, Peggy Lee, Keineth Randolph—

"I'll just *make* her," she vowed, gathering up her shiny new school-books. And that solemn vow was to help Jerry over many a rough spot in the schooldays to come.

CHAPTER IX

THE SECRET DOOR

The routine of Jerry's new life shaped into pleasant ways. She felt more like Jerry Travis and less like a dream-creature living in a golden world she had brought around her by wishing on a wishing-rock. She could not have found a moment in which to be homesick; twice a week she wrote back to Sweetheart and Little-Dad long scrawly letters that would have disgraced her in the eyes of Miss Gray of the English department, but expressed such utter happiness and contentment that Mrs. Travis, with a little regret, dismissed the fear that Jerry would be lonely away from her and Sunnyside.

After the first week of school the girls and boys settled down to what Graham called "digging." Geometry looked less formidable to Jerry, Cicero was like a beautiful old friend, Gyp was with her in English and history, Ginny Cox was in one of her classes, too, and Jerry liked her better each day. Patricia Everett was teaching her to play tennis until basketball practice began.

There were the pleasant walks to and from school through the city streets, whose teeming life never failed to fascinate Jerry; the jolly recess, breaking the school session, when the girls gathered around the long tables and ate their lunch; and then the afternoon's play on the athletic field at Highacres.

Had old Peter Westley ever pictured, as he sat alone in his great empty house, how Highacres would look after scores of young feet had trampled over its velvety stretches? Perhaps he had liked that picture; perhaps, to him, his halls were echoing even then to the hum of young voices; perhaps he had felt that these young lives that would pass over the threshold of the house he had built out into the world of men and women would belong, in some way, to him who had never had a boy or girl.

One afternoon Gyp and Jerry lingered in the school building to prepare a history lesson from references they had to find in the library. Gyp hated to study; the drowsy stillness of the room was broken by the pleasant shouting from the playground outside. She threw down her pencil and stretched her long arms.

"Oh, goodness, Jerry—let's stop. We can ask mother all these things."

Jerry was quite willing to be tempted. She, too, had found it hard to hold her attention to the Thirty-one Dynasties.

Gyp leaned toward her. "I'll tell you—let's go exploring. There are all the rooms in the back we've never seen."

During the past six months workmen had been rebuilding the rear wing of Highacres into laboratories. The changes had not been completed. Gyp and Jerry climbed over materials and tools and little piles of rubbish, poking inquisitive noses into every corner. Now and then Gyp stopped to ask a workman a few questions. They stumbled around in the basement where in a few weeks there would be a very complete machine-shop and carpentry room. Then they found a stairway that led to the upper floors and scampered up it.

"Oh, Jerry Travis, I *wish* you could see yourself," laughed Gyp as they paused on the third floor.

"Your face is dirty, too," Jerry retorted.

"Isn't this fun? It doesn't seem a bit like school, does it? I wonder if they're ever going to use these rooms. Let's play hide-and-seek. I'll blind and count twenty and you hide and we mustn't make a *sound!*" which, you know, is a very hard thing to do when one is playing hide-and-seek.

Gyp's charm—and there was much charm in this lanky girl—lay in her irrepressible spirits. Gyp was certain—and every boy and girl of her acquaintance knew it—to find an opportunity for "fun" in the most unpromising circumstances. No one but Gyp could have known what fun it would be to play hide-and-seek in the halls and rooms of the third floor of Highacres—especially when one had to step very softly and bite one's lips to keep back any sound!

It was Jerry's turn to blind. She leaned her arm against the narrow frame of a panel painting of George Washington that was set in the wall at a turn in the corridor. As she rested her face against her arm she felt the picture move ever so slightly under her pressure. Startled, she stepped back. Slowly, as though pushed by an invisible hand, the panel swung out into the corridor.

"Gyp——" cried Jerry so sharply that Gyp appeared from her hiding-place in a twinkling. "Look—what I did!" Jerry felt as though the entire building might slowly and sedately collapse around her.

"For goodness' sake," cried Gyp, staring. She swung the panel out. "It's a *door!* Jerry Travis, *it's a secret door!*" She put her head through the narrow opening. "Jerry——" she reached back an eager hand. "Look—it's a stairway—a secret stairway!"

Jerry put her head in. Enough light filtered through a crack above so that the girls could make out the narrow winding steps. They were very steep and only broad enough for one person to squeeze through.

"Come on, Jerry, let's——"

"Gyp, you don't know where it'll take you——" Jerry suddenly remembered their poor princess in her dungeon.

"Silly—nothing could hurt us! Come on. Close the panel—there, like that. I'll go first." She led the way, Jerry tiptoeing gingerly behind her.

The door at the top gave under Gyp's push and to their amazement the girls found themselves in the tower room.

It was a square room with a sloping ceiling and narrow windows; there was nothing in the least unusual about it. Gyp and Jerry looked about them, vaguely disappointed. It might have been, with its litter of old furniture, chests of books, piles of magazines and papers, an attic room in any house. The October sunshine filtered in thin bars through the dust-stained windows, cobwebs festooned themselves fantastically overhead. The opening that led to the secret stairway appeared, on the inside of the room, to be a built-in bookcase on the shelves of which were now piled an assortment of hideous bric-a-brac which Mrs. Robert Westley had refused to take into her own home.

"Well, it's fun, anyway, just having the secret stairway," decided Gyp, scowling at what she mentally called the "junk" about her. "Why do you suppose Uncle Peter had it built in?"

Jerry could offer no explanation.

"Hadn't we ought to tell someone?"

Gyp scorned the thought—part with their precious secret—let everybody know that that imposing portrait of George Washington hid a *secret door*? Why, even mother and Uncle Johnny couldn't know it—it was their very own secret!

"I should say *not*. At least——" she added, "not for awhile. I guess I'm a Westley and I have a right to come up here." Which argument sounded very convincing to Jerry.

"Oh, I have the grandest idea," Gyp dragged Jerry to the faded window-seat and plumped down upon it so hard that it sent a little cloud of dust about them. "Let's get up a secret society—like the horrid old Sphinxes."

Fraternities and sororities were not allowed in Lincoln School, but from time to time there had sprung up secret bands of boys and girls, that held together by irrevealable ties for a little while, then passed into school history. One of these was the Sphinxes. They were annoyingly mysterious and dark rumors were current that their antics, if known, would not meet, in the least, the approval of the Lincoln faculty. Isobel was a Sphinx, most faithful to her vows, so that all the teasing and bribing that Graham's and Gyp's fertile brains could contrive, failed to drag one tiny truth from her.

Of course Jerry had been at Lincoln long enough to know all about the Sphinxes. And she knew, too, that Gyp meant to suggest a society that would be like the Sphinxes only in that it was secret. She could not be one of that Third Form study-room without sharing the general scorn of the Sophomores for the Senior Sphinxes.

"We can meet up here, you see—once a week. And let's have it a secret society that'll stand ready to serve Lincoln with their very lives—like those secret bands of men in the South—after the Civil War."

Jerry declared, of course, that Gyp's suggestion was "wonderful."

"We'll have a real initiation when we'll all swear our allegiance to Lincoln School forever and ever and we'll have spreads and it'll be such fun making every one wonder where we meet. And we'll have terribly funny signs."

"What'll we call it?" asked Jerry, ashamed that she could offer nothing to the plan.

"Let's call it the Ravens and Serpents—that sounds so awful and we won't be at all. And a crawly snake is such a dreadful symbol and it's easy to draw." Gyp's brain worked at lightning pace in its initiative.

"What girls shall we ask?"

Gyp rattled off a number of names. They were all girls who were in the Third Form study-room.

"Can't we ask Ginny Cox?"

Gyp considered. "No," she answered decidedly. "She'd be fun but she's too chummy with Mary Starr and Mary Starr's a Sphinx. We can't ask her."

Gyp was right, of course, Jerry thought, but she wished Ginny Cox might be invited to join.

"Let's go down now. Oh, won't it be fun? Swear, Jerauld Travis, that burning irons won't drag our secret from you!"

"Nothing will make me tell," promised Jerry. They stole down the stairway, moved George Washington carefully back into place, tiptoed to the main floor and out into the sunshine.

Thus did the secret order of the "Ravens and Serpents" have its birth. Gyp assembled various symbols, impressive in their terribleness, that, during the study hours of the next day, conveyed, with the help of whispered explanations and a violent exchange of notes, invitations to six other girls to join the new order. And after the close of school eight pupils elected to remain indoors, ostensibly to study; eight heads bent diligently over the long oak table in the library until a safe passage into the deserted halls above was assured. Then Gyp and Jerry led the new Ravens to the secret door where, in a sepulchral whisper, Gyp extracted a solemn promise from each that she would not divulge the secret of the hidden stairway. One by one, quite breathless with excitement, they climbed to the tower room where Gyp with ridiculous solemnity called "to order" the first assembly of the Ravens and Serpents of Lincoln School.



ONE BY ONE, QUITE BREATHLESS WITH EXCITEMENT, THEY CLIMBED TO THE TOWER ROOM

All the Ravens agreed with Gyp that their secret society must pledge itself to protect and serve the spirit of Lincoln; then, having disposed of that they fell, eagerly, to discussing plans for "spreads."

"Let's take turns bringing eats."

"How often shall we meet?"

"Let's meet every Wednesday. Melodia always makes tarts on Tuesday and maybe I can coax her to make some extra ones," offered Patricia Everett.

"And the dancing class is in the gym. then and no one will notice us."

"We ought to have knives and forks and things like a regular club!"

"And a president and a secretary."

"I ought to be president." Gyp's tone was final.

The other Ravens assented amicably. "Of course you ought to be. And Jerry can be secretary because she helped find this spliffy room."

"Girls, at the next meeting let's each bring a knife, fork, spoon, plate and cup."

"Oh, *won't* it be fun?" A Raven pirouetted on her toes in a most unparliamentary and unbird-like fashion.

"Pat and I'll bring the eats next Wednesday," declared Peggy. "Some one has to start."

"If we've decided everything we have to decide this meeting's adjourned," and without further formal procedure Gyp summarily brought to an end the first meeting of the Ravens. After a merry half-hour they tiptoed down the secret stairway, George Washington went back into his place on the wall and the eight girls scattered, each to her own home, with hearts that were fairly bursting with excitement.

That evening at the dinner table Gyp, very obviously, made a secret sign to Jerry. She brought one hand, with a little downward, spiral movement, to rest upon the other hand, the first two fingers of each interlocked.

"Oh! Oh! That's a secret sign you made," cried Tibby.

"Well, maybe it is," answered Gyp, putting her spoon in her soup with assumed indifference.

"Some silly girls' society, I'll bet," put in Graham with a tormenting grin.

Gyp had passed beyond the age when Graham's teasing could disturb her. She smiled to show how little she minded his words.

"You'll know, my dear brother, *sometime*, whether we're silly or not," she answered with beautiful dignity. "*We're* not a society that's organized just for *fun!*" Which was, of course, a slap at the Sphinxes. Isobel roused suddenly to an active interest in the discussion.

"You're just copy-cats," she declared, with a withering scorn that brought Graham to Gyp's defence.

No wonder Jerry never found a moment in the Westley home dull!

"*You* needn't think," he shot across the table at Isobel, "that 'cause you have waves in your hair you're the whole ocean!"

"Funny little boy," Isobel retorted, trying hard to hold back her anger. "Mother, I should think you'd make Graham stop using his horrid slang!"

"That's not slang—that's *idiotmatic* English," added Graham, smiling mischievously at his mother. He chuckled. "You should have heard Don Blacke in geom. class to-day. He got up and said: 'Two triangles are equal if two sides and the included angle of one are equal *respectfully* to two sides,' and when we all laughed he got sore as a cat!"

CHAPTER X

THE DEBATE

"Gyp—*what* do you think has happened?" Jerry frantically clutched Gyp's arm as they met outside of the study-room door. Jerry did not wait for Gyp to "think." "My name's been drawn for the debate—this Friday night! Miss Gray just told me. I'm taking Susan Martin's place."

"What *fun*—"

Jerry had wanted sympathy. "Not fun at all! I am scared to death."

A bell rang and Gyp scampered off to her classroom, leaving Jerry to go to her desk, sit down and contemplate with a heavy heart the task that lay before her. She had never so much as spoken a "piece" in her life; since coming to Highacres she had listened, with fascination, to the weekly discussion of current topics, envying the ease with which the boys and girls of the room contributed to it. She had wondered whether she could ever grow so accustomed to large groups of people as to be able to talk before them. Now Miss Gray, waving in her face the little pink slip that had done all the damage, was driving her to the test.

However, there had been a great deal in Jerry's simple childhood, spent on the trails of Kettle Mountain, that had given to her an indomitable courage for any challenge. Real fear—that horrible funk that turns the staunchest heart cowardly, Jerry had never known—what she had sometimes called fear had been only the little heartquake of expectation.

Once, when she was twelve years old, she had ventured to climb Rocky Point, alone, in search of

the first arbutus of the year. Spring had come to the lower slopes of the mountain but its soft hand was just breaking the upper crusts of ice and snow. As she climbed up the trail a deep rumble warned her that a snowslide was approaching. She had only the briefest moment to decide what to do—if she retraced her steps she must surely be overtaken! Near her was a tall crag of rock that jutted out from the wooded slope of the trail; on this she might be safe. With desperate haste she climbed it and, as she clung to its rough surface, tons of ice and snow thundered past her, shaking her stronghold, uprooting the smaller trees, piling in fantastic shapes against the sturdier. As Jerry watched it had been fascination, not terror, that had caught the breath in her throat; she had not recognized the threat of Death; she had glimpsed only the picture of her beloved Kettle angrily shaking old Winter from his mighty shoulders.

So, as Jerry sat there in the study-room, her frowning eyes focussed on a spot straight ahead of her, her spirit slowly rose to meet the challenge of the debate. These others had all had to live through their "first," ease had come to them only with practice, she reminded herself.

It was pleasantly exciting, too, to be surrounded, after school, by a group of interested schoolmates, each with a suggestion.

"Just keep your hands tight behind your back," offered one.

"I 'most choked to death in one debate," recalled Peggy Lee, laughing. "I had a cough-drop in my mouth to make my voice smooth and when it came my turn I was so scared I couldn't swallow it and there I had to talk with that thing in my cheek, and every minute or two it'd get out and 'most strangle me! Oh, it was dreadful. I don't believe that story about Demosthenes and the pebble."

"I'd get some famous orator's speeches and practice 'em. It makes what you say sound grand!"

"Don't *look* at anybody—just keep your eyes way up," declared Pat Everett, whose experience went no farther than reciting four French verses before a room full of fond parents, at Miss Prindle's boarding-school.

All of this advice Jerry took solemnly to heart. Gyp volunteered to help her. Gyp was far more concerned that she should practice the arts of oratory than that she should build up convincing arguments for her side of the question. From the Westley library Gyp dug out a volume of "Famous Speeches by Famous Men." Curled in the deep rocker in Jerry's room she searched its pages.

"Listen, Jerry—isn't this grand? 'Let us pause, friends, let us feel the fluttering of the heart that preceded the battle, let us hear the order to advance, let us behold the wild charge, the glistening bayonets, the rushing horses, the blinding——'"

"But, Gyp, that's nothing about the Philippine Islands!"

"Of course not—at least all that about the horses and the bayonets—but you could say, 'Let us pause——' and wave your hand—like this! Here, he's used it again," her finger traced another line, "it sounds splendid; so—so sort of—calm."

Jerry pounced upon anything that might sound "calm." So, after she had compiled arguments that must convince her listeners that the Philippine Islands should be given their independence, she tried them out behind carefully-closed doors, with Gyp as a stern and relentless critic.

"Wave your hand *out* when you say: 'Let us pause and consider——' Oh, that's splendid! Try it again Jerry—slower. You're going to be *great!*" Gyp's loyal enthusiasm strengthened Jerry's confidence.

There was for her, too, an added inspiration in the fact that Uncle Johnny was to be one of the judges. She wanted to do her "very best" for him. As the school weeks had flown by, each full of joys that Jerry could realize more than any of the other girls and boys, her gratitude toward John Westley had grown to such proportions that she ached for some splendid opportunity to serve him. She had told Gyp, one day, that she wished she might save his life in some way (preferably, of course, with the sacrifice of her own), but as Uncle Johnny seemed extraordinarily careful in front of automobiles and street cars, as the Westley home was too fireproof to admit of any great fire and there could not be, in November, any likelihood of a flood, poor Jerry pined vainly for her great opportunity. Once, when she had tried to tell Uncle Johnny, shyly, something of how she felt, he had drawn her affectionately to him.

"Jerry-girl, you're doing enough right here for my girls to pay me back for anything I have done." Which Jerry could not understand at all. She could not know that only the evening before Mrs. Westley had told Uncle Johnny how Gyp and Tibby had both moved their desks into Jerry's room, and had added:

"Gyp and Tibby never quarrel since Jerry came. She has a way of smoothing everything over—it's her sunniness, I think. Gyp is less hasty and headstrong and Tibby isn't the cry-baby she was."

The day before the debate Isobel asked Jerry to show her the arguments she had prepared.

"Perhaps I can add some notes that will help you," she explained condescendingly.

Poor Jerry went into a flutter of joy over Isobel's apparent interest. She ran to her room and took from her desk the sheets of paper upon which were neatly written each step of her argument. She hoped Isobel would think them good.

"May I look over them in school?" Isobel asked as she took them.

Jerry would have consented to anything! All through that day her heart warmed at the thought of Isobel's friendliness. Like a small cloud across the happiness of her life at the Westleys had been the consciousness that Isobel disliked her; Gyp was her shadow, Tibby her adoring slave, between her and Graham was the knowledge that they two shared Pepper's loyalty, Mrs. Westley gave her exactly the same mothering she gave her own girls, but Isobel, through all the weeks, had maintained a covert indifference and coldness that hurt more than sharp words. Now—Jerry told herself—Isobel must like her a little bit!

Jerry discovered, when Friday night came, that the Lincoln debates were popular events in the school life. Every girl and boy of Lincoln attended; on the platform the faculty made an imposing background for the three judges. Six empty chairs were placed, three on each side, for the debaters who were to come up upon the stage at the finish of the violin solo that opened the program.

In the back of the room Cora Stanton, a Senior, stood with Jerry and the boy who made up the affirmative side of the debate. Cora was prettily dressed in blue taffeta, with a yellow rose carelessly fastened in her belt. Her hair had been crimped and Jerry caught a whiff of perfume. Then she glimpsed a trim little foot thrust out the better to show a patent leather pump and a blue silk stocking. For the first time since she had come to Highacres, Jerry grew conscious of her own appearance. Over her, in a hot wave of mortification, swept the realization of what a ridiculous figure she would present, walking up before everybody in her brown poplin that she knew now was different from any other dress she had seen at school. And Jerry could not get that shiny pump out of her mind! Her own feet, in their sturdy black, square-toed shoes, commenced to assume such elephantine proportions that, when the signal came for the debaters to go forward, she could scarcely drag them along!

How much more weighty could her arguments be if she only had on a pretty dress—like Cora Stanton's; if she could only sit there in her chair smiling—like Cora Stanton—down at the girls she knew instead of crossing and uncrossing her dreadful feet!

After an interval that seemed endless to Jerry, Cora Stanton rose and made a graceful little bow, first to the judges, then to the audience. The speakers had agreed among themselves how much ground in the argument each should cover; Cora Stanton was to outline the conditions in the Philippine Islands before the United States had taken them over, Jerry was to show what the United States had done and how qualified the Islands were, now, to govern themselves, and Stephen Curtiss was to conclude the argument for the affirmative by proving that, in order to maintain a safe balance of power among the eastern nations of the world it was necessary that the Philippine Islands should be self-governing.

A hush followed the burst of applause that greeted Cora. Jerry settled back in her chair with something like relief—the thing had begun. She caught a little smile from Uncle Johnny that gave her courage. She must listen carefully to what Cora said.

But as Cora, prettily at ease, began speaking, in a clear voice, Jerry grew rigid, paralyzed by the storm of amazement, unbelief and anger that surged over her. For Cora Stanton was presenting, word for word, the arguments *she had prepared and written on those sheets of paper!*

And in the very front row sat Isobel, with Amy Mathers, their handkerchiefs wadded to their lips to keep back their laughter.

It was very easy for poor Jerry to recognize the treachery. She was too angry to feel hurt. And, more than anything, she was too confused—for, when it came her turn, what was *she* going to say?

Wildly she searched her mind for something clear and coherent on the hideous subject and all that would come was Gyp's "let us pause—let us feel the fluttering of the heart that preceded the battle, let us hear the order to advance—the wild charge——"

She did not hear one word that the first speaker on the negative side uttered, but the clapping that followed brought her to a pitiful consciousness.

She rose to her feet, somehow—those feet of hers still twice their size—and stepped out toward the edge of the platform. A thousand spots of black and white that were eyes and noses and hats danced before her; she heard a suppressed titter from the front row. Then, out of it all came Gyp's strained face. Gyp was leaning a little forward, anxiously.

Jerry gulped convulsively. From somewhere a voice, not in the least like her own, began: "You have been shown what the United States has done—" (no, no—Cora Stanton had said *that!*) "I mean we must go back (that was quite new) to—I mean—the ideals of America have been transplanted to——" (oh, Cora Stanton had said *that!*) Jerry choked. Out of the horror strained Gyp's agonized face. She lifted her chin, she must say *something*——

"Let us pause (ah, familiar ground at last)—let us pause——" There was a dreadful silence. "Let us pause and—and—let us pause——"

With the last word all power of speech died in Jerry's throat! With a convulsive movement she rushed back to her seat. If they'd only laugh—that crowd out there in the room. But that silence ——

Then, before anyone could stir, Dana King, the second speaker on the negative side, leaped to his feet with a burst of oratory that was obviously for the sole purpose of distracting attention from poor Jerry. And something in the good nature of his act, in his reckless wandering from the subject of the debate to gain his end, won everyone's admiration. As one wakes from a consuming nightmare so poor Jerry roused from her stupor of ignominy; she forgot Isobel, in the front row, and clapped with the others when Dana King finished.

Then came a determination to redeem herself in the rebuttal! She had caught something of the fire of Dana King's tone. She was conscious, now, of only two persons in the room, Gyp and Uncle Johnny. She turned, as she rose again to speak, so that she might look squarely at Uncle Johnny. Now she had no clamor of words jingling in her brain; very simply she set against the arguments of her opponent the full weight of those she had herself prepared—Cora Stanton, who had learned them at the last moment, parrot-fashion, had found herself, in rebuttal, left floundering quite helplessly.

Dana King, speaking again, referred to the "convincing way Miss Travis had cleverly upset the arguments of the negative side, leaving him only one premise to fall back upon"—and Jerry had decided then, with something akin to worship, that he was the very nicest boy she had ever, ever known.

There was tumultuous applause when the judges announced that the affirmative had won. And there was a little grumbling that Dana King had "sold" his side.

Jerry, wanting to hide her ignominy, contrived to get away without seeing Uncle Johnny. She could not, of course, escape Gyp, who declared valiantly and defiantly that she had been "splendid."

Gyp had not closely followed Cora Stanton's address, so she had not guessed the truth, and Jerry could not tell her—Jerry could not tell anyone. For, if she did, it must be traced to Isobel, and Isobel was Uncle Johnny's niece. At that very moment Uncle Johnny was talking, down in the front of the Assembly room, to Isobel and Amy Mathers, and he stood with one arm thrown over Isobel's shoulder.

But, alone in her own room, the pent-up passion that had been searing poor Jerry's soul burst; with furious fingers she tore off the brown poplin dress and threw it into a corner.

"Ugly—horrid—hideous—old—thing! I *hate* it!" It was not, of course, the brown poplin alone she hated! The offending shoes followed the brown dress. "I hate *everything* about me! I wish—I wish—to-morrow would never come! I wish—" Jerry threw herself face downward upon her bed. "I wish I—was—home!"

CHAPTER XI

AUNT MARIA

"A letter from Aunt Maria," announced Graham, appearing at the door of his mother's little sitting room, a large, square lavender envelope in his hand. He carried it gingerly between a thumb and finger, and as far as he could from his upturned nose, "I'd suggest, mother, that you put on my gas-mask before you open it!"

Gyp and Tibby laughed uproariously at his wit. Mrs. Westley reached for the envelope.

"Poor Aunt Maria, she must be so glad that the war is over and she can get her favorite French sachet."

Isobel perched herself upon the arm of her mother's chair.

"Hurry, read it, mother."

"I'll bet she's coming to visit us," groaned Gyp.

"Don't expect us to throw away money, sis! She never writes 'cept when she *is* coming. Break the news, mum; is it to be a little stay of a year or more?"

Mrs. Westley lifted laughing eyes from the open letter.

"She says she will come next Wednesday to spend a few days with us. She is very sorry that that must be all—she is on her way to New York to consult a famous nerve specialist. She sends love to 'the beautiful children.'"

Jerry was very curious—no one had ever mentioned an Aunt Maria! So Gyp and Graham hastened to explain that Aunt Maria wasn't a *real* aunt but was "only" Isobel's godmother and something of a nuisance—to the younger Westleys.

"She doesn't give us presents," Graham concluded.

"She's forgotten all the things she 'did promise and vow' when Isobel was baptized. She had a fad, then, for godchildren; she used to go around picking out the girl babies who had blue eyes.

She was a friend of Grandmother Duncan's and mother couldn't refuse her. She has nine altogether and always gives them the same things."

"And every time you see her she has a new fad," added Graham. "Once she was a suffragist but she switched because the suffs didn't serve tea at their meetings and the antis did. One time she was building a home for Friendless Females and another time she was organizing the poor underpaid shop girls, and the next——"

"Mother, listen," broke in Isobel. She had taken the letter from her mother and had been re-reading it. "She says she's going to France next spring and she's thinking about taking one of her godchildren with her. She's studying French and she wants us to talk French to her while she is here——"

"Well, I guess *not!* I'll eat in the kitchen," vowed Graham.

Gyp commenced to chuckle. "Let's say a whole lot of funny things in French—like when Sue Perkins translated 'the false teeth of the young man' and Mademoiselle sent her out of class."

"Mother!" Isobel's brain was working rapidly. "I ought to be the goddaughter she picks out." She did not consider it necessary to explain to her family the process of reasoning by which the other eight were eliminated. "Wouldn't it be wonderful?" But her beautiful vision was threatened by the mischief written in every line of Gyp's and Graham's faces. "Mother, *won't* you make the children promise to behave?"

"*Children*——" snorted Graham.

"——if they act dreadful the way they always do when Aunt Maria's here, they'll spoil all my chances!" Isobel was sincerely distressed.

"My dear," her mother laughed. "Don't build your castles in Spain—or France—quite so fast. I am not sure I would *let* you go over with Aunt Maria. But Gyp and Graham must promise to be very nice to Aunt Maria because she is an old lady——"

"But, mother, she's not exactly old; she's just—funny!"

"Anyway, Gyp, she will be our guest."

"*Make* them promise, mother——"

"Oh, you're just thinking of yourself——" declared Graham.

"Children, let's not spoil this Saturday by worrying over Aunt Maria. Even though, sometimes, she is very trying, I know each one of you will help make her visit pleasant and we'll overlook her little oddities. Who wants to drive down to the market with me?"

Gyp and Jerry begged eagerly to go; Tibby had to take a swimming lesson; Graham was going out to Highacres to practice football; Isobel said she preferred to stay home; "one of the girls" had promised to call up, she explained, a little evasively.

Mrs. Westley smothered the tiniest of sighs behind a smile; Isobel was living so apart from the rest of the family, she never seemed, now, to want to share the activities of the others. Her mother had always enjoyed, so much, taking her biggest girl everywhere with her; she had not believed that the time could come when Isobel would refuse to go.

Driving through the city with Jerry and Gyp beside her, Mrs. Westley, still thinking of Isobel, turned suddenly to Jerry.

"*How* your mother must miss *you*, dear," she said. Jerry was startled.

"Oh, do you think so?" she answered, anxiously.

"I mean—I was just thinking—mother love is such a *hungry* love, dear."

"Well——" Jerry, very thoughtful, tried to recall the exact words her mother had once used. "When I was little, mother used to tell me a story. She said that her heart was a little garden with a very high wall built of love and that I lived there, as happy as could be, for the sun was always shining and everything was bright and the wall kept away all the horrid things. But there was a gate in the wall with a latch-way high up; I had to grow big before I could lift the latch and go through the wall—and she made lovely flowers grow over the little gate, too, so that perhaps I might not find it! I always liked the story, but once I asked mother what she'd do if I found the gate and went out of the garden for just a little while and she answered me that the garden would be very quiet, but the sun would go on shining because our love was there. Now I'm older I think I understand the story, and maybe coming here was like going through the gate. But if it *is* like the story, then mother knows how much I love her, so she won't be *dreadfully* lonely—only a little bit, maybe."

"What a beautiful story," Mrs. Westley's eyes glistened. "I would like to hear her tell it! Some day I want to know your mother, Jerry."

That was such a pleasant thought—her dear mother meeting Mrs. Westley, who was almost as nice as her mother—that Jerry's face grew bright again. She answered the pressure of Mrs. Westley's fingers with an affectionate squeeze.

Except for the first dreadful ordeal of facing her schoolmates and the hurt of Isobel's unkindness, Jerry had suffered little from the ignominy of the debate. And she had found that the girls, instead of laughing at her, envied her because Dana King had so gallantly come to her rescue!

"You should have seen Isobel Westley's face—she was *furios*," Ginny Cox had confided to her. And Jerry would not have been human if she had not felt a momentary thrill of satisfied revenge.

The attention of the younger Westleys was centered, during the intervening days, on Aunt Maria's approaching visit. Isobel was much disturbed over the dire hints which Gyp and Graham dropped at different times. One of Graham's friends had a pet snake and Graham had asked to borrow it "just over Wednesday."

"It'll strengthen her nerves better'n any old doctor," Graham declared, loftily.

"Mother, *do* you hear them——" appealed Isobel, almost in tears.

Isobel had been building for herself a rosy dream; she had even, casually, told a few of the girls at school that "in June I'm going abroad with my godmother, Mrs. Cornelius Drinkwater—you know her mother was a second cousin to the Marquis of Balencourt and the family has a beautiful chateau near Nice. Of course we'll stay there part of the time——" A very little fib like that, Isobel had decided, could hurt no one! She had lain awake at night, staring into the half-darkness of her room, picturing herself sauntering beside Aunt Maria through long hotel corridors, to the Opera, to the little French shops, driving beside Aunt Maria through the Bois de Boulogne and walking on the Champs Élysées, admired everywhere, envied, too. And perhaps, through Aunt Maria's relatives (it was very easy in the dark to pretend that there *was* a Marquis of Balencourt) she might meet a handsome, dashing young Frenchman who would go quite crazy about her, and it would be such fun writing home to the girls——

"Graham," and Mrs. Westley made her voice very stern. "You must not play a single trick on Aunt Maria!"

"But, mother, she may stay on and on——"

"If you'll be very good," Mrs. Westley blushed a little, for she knew she was "buying" her children, "while Aunt Maria's here I'll take you all to see 'The Land o'Dreams.'"

"We promise! We promise!" came in an eager assent.

"I'll tell Joe I don't want his snake," said Graham.

"I won't laugh all the while she's here," declared Gyp.

"We'll be angelic, mother," they chorused, and they really meant it.

Aunt Maria's arrival, an hour before dinner, was nothing short of majestic. The taxi-driver (by a slight effort of the imagination easily transformed into a uniformed lackey) unloaded a half-dozen bags and boxes; next there alighted from the taxi a trim little maid in black with a rug over her arm, a hamper in one hand, a square leather box, books and magazines in the other. Then, by degrees, Aunt Maria emerged, first a purple hat, covered with nodding purple plumes, then a very red face, turned haughtily away from the driver, whom she was calling "robber"; yards and yards of purple velvet hung and swished about her, while a wide ermine mantle, set about her shoulders, added the royal touch without which the picture would have been spoiled!

"Isn't she *gor-ge-ous*?" whispered Gyp to Jerry as they peeped over Mrs. Westley's shoulder.

Jerry thought Aunt Maria very grand—she was like the picture of the Duchess in her old Alice in Wonderland, only much more regal. It seemed to her that the entire Westley family should bow their heads to the floor—instead Mrs. Westley was embracing the purple and ermine in the most informal sort of a way!

"——*such* a train—a *disgrace* to the government, but then the government is going *all* to pieces, I believe! And that miserable *robber* of a taxi man! *Mon Dieu!*" She suddenly remembered her French, "Ma chere amie Beaux Infants!" She sputtered her newly-acquired phrases with little guttural accents. She beamed upon them all, graciousness (as became a duchess) in every nod of the purple plumes. With the tips of her fat, jeweled fingers she touched Isobel's cheek. "Plus jolie que jamais, ma chere!"

"Nous sommes si heureux de vous avoir ici, chere Aunt Maria," answered Isobel, falteringly.

"Aunt *Marie*, my dear. I have forsaken the good name that was given to me in baptism. One *must* keep apace with the times, and though Maria might be good enough for my greatgrandmother, my parents did not foresee that it was scarcely suitable for *me!*" The purple folds swelled visibly. "Peregrine, carry my bags upstairs."

That was plainly more than one Peregrine could do. It was the welcome signal for a general movement—none too soon; one glance at Gyp and Graham told that a moment more must have broken their pretty manner!

Peregrine took one bag, Graham seized two, Gyp and Jerry tugged one between them. The procession marched up the stairway to the guest-room. Gyp and Jerry heard Aunt Maria, behind them, explaining that Peregrine's name was really Sarah!

"I changed it—Peregrine is so much more 'chic.' I'm teaching her French myself; in a little while she'll pass as a French maid and she will have all the plain common-sense of her Hoosier bringing-up which those fly-by-night French maids don't. A *very* good arrangement—I think."

Thereafter, Peregrine, to the girls, was always Peregrine-Sarah.

Mrs. Westley, at dinner, looking down the table at the prim, sober faces of her youngsters, had an irresistible desire to laugh. Graham's solemn eyes were glued to his plate, Gyp, spotlessly groomed, spoke only in hoarse whispers, Jerry looked a little frightened—what would she do if the Duchess should speak to *her*. (Not that there was much danger; Aunt Maria, except for a "from the wilds of our mountains, how interesting," had scarcely noticed her.) Isobel sat next to Aunt Maria and was nervously attentive.

Aunt Maria was more "duchessy" than ever in her dinner dress. Jewels shone in the great puff of snowy hair that lay like a crown about her head. (Graham had always wanted to poke his finger into this marvel to see if it would burst and flatten like a toy balloon.) Jewels shone in the laces of her dress and on her fingers. She sat very straight, as even a make-believe duchess should, and led the conversation. To do so was very easy, for everyone agreed with everything she said, remarked Isobel with pathetic enthusiasm. Behind her smile Mrs. Westley was thinking that Maria Drinkwater was a very silly woman!

Aunt Maria spent most of her time berating the "government." That was why, she explained, she was going to France. The officials in Washington were just sitting there letting everything go to the dogs! "Look at the prices! We're being *robbed* by Labor—actually robbed, every moment of our lives!" She clasped her hands and rolled her eyes tragically upward. "A crêpe de chine chemise—hardly good enough for Peregrine—*fifteen dollars*! And Congress just talking about the League of Nations! Ah, mon Dieu!"

Graham, catching a fleeting glint of laughter in his mother's eyes, slowly and solemnly winked, then dropped his glance back to his plate.

"Let's say we have to study," whispered Gyp to Jerry, when the family moved toward the library. Even Graham welcomed the suggestion. As they approached Aunt Maria to say good-night, she poked each in the cheek.

"Not going to wait to have coffee with us? *So* sensible—it hurts the complexion! *Nice* children! Bon soir, Editha. Bon soir, Elizabeth. What's *your* name, child? Jerauld? A *nice* name. Bon soir, Graham!"

"She's the only creature in the whole world that calls me Editha and Tibby Elizabeth," cried Gyp disgustedly. "*That's* why I just can't endure her!"

Safe in Jerry's room, Gyp cast off her "company" manner by a series of somersaults on the pink-and-white bed.

"Hurray, Jerry, we needn't see her again until to-morrow night! That Peregrine-Sarah will take her breakfast up on a tray. Wasn't Isobel funny, trying to be a nice little goddaughter? For goodness' sake, what's *that*?"

For there was a wild rush through the hall, then sharp shrieks from the library!

Out of consideration for Aunt Maria, Pepperpot had been shut on the third floor. He would have found the separation from his beloved master and mistress most irksome if he had not discovered, on Graham's table, the box of white mice which Graham had brought from the garage during the afternoon. To pass the time Pepper amused himself by tormenting the imprisoned mice. When Graham startled him at his pleasant occupation he jumped so hurriedly from the table that he sent the box tumbling to the floor. The fall broke the box; the poor mice, mad to escape from their persecutor, went scampering down the stairs and through the hall, Pepper in pursuit and Graham frantically trying to catch them all. Of course the chase led straight to the library!

Aunt Maria, at the startling interruption, dropped a precious vase she had been examining to the floor, where it lay in a hundred pieces. With a shriek and an amazing agility she climbed to the safety of the davenport. The mice circled the room and fled through another door, Pepper and Graham after them. In the pantry Graham caught Pepper; Mrs. Hicks, aided by her broom, succeeded in capturing two of the mice, but the third escaped. Gyp and Jerry listening from the banisters, their hands clapped over their mouths to suppress their laughter, heard Isobel and Mrs. Westley in the library, trying to quiet poor Aunt Maria!

"We didn't promise we'd make *Pep* behave," grumbled Graham as they shut Pepperpot, for punishment—and protection—in Jerry's clothes closet.

An hour later Jerry heard Isobel, outside of the guest-room door, bidding Aunt Maria good-night. Jerry thought that she did not blame Isobel for wanting to go abroad with Aunt Maria; it would be very wonderful to travel with such a fine lady and with Peregrine! She hoped Pepper had not spoiled everything!

Quiet settled over the Westley home. A door opened and shut and uncertain footsteps came down the hall. Jerry, half asleep, thought it must be the faithful and sensible Peregrine-Sarah, groping her way to the third floor after having put the Duchess to bed. Then, across the quiet pierced the

wildest shrieking—a shrieking that brought back a frightened Peregrine-Sarah, Graham, leaping in two bounds down the stairway, Isobel, Mrs. Westley, Gyp and Jerry to the guest-room door!

In the middle of the room, her hands clasped tragically over her heart, her mouth open for another shriek, stood Aunt Maria, trembling. Stripped of her regal trappings she made an abject picture; the snowy puff lay on her bureau and from under a nightcap, now sadly awry, straggled wisps of yellow-gray hair. Her round body was warmly clad in a humble flannelette nightdress, high-necked and long-sleeved. And, strangest of all, her face was covered with squares and strips of courtplaster!

"Sarah!" (It was not Peregrine now.) "*Stupid*—standing there like an *idiot*—my smelling salts! Won't *anyone* call a doctor? My heart—" She shrieked again. "This *miserable* place! These *brats*!"

"Maria Drinkwater, will you calm yourself enough to tell us what has happened?" Mrs. Westley shook ever so slightly the flanneletted shoulders.

"*Happened*—" snapped Aunt Maria. "Is it not *enough* to have my digestion spoiled by dogs and mice and boys but—oh, my poor heart, to find a *mouse* under my pillow—"

If the children had not been struck quite dumb by Aunt Maria's grotesque face, with its wrinkles, they must surely have shouted aloud! The third little mouse had sought refuge in Aunt Maria's bed!

Peregrine-Sarah and Mrs. Westley spent most of the night ministering vainly to Aunt Maria's nerves. The next day, unforgiving, she departed, bag and baggage.

Poor Isobel, thus burst the pretty bubble of her dreams! "I don't care, they've spoiled my whole life," she wailed, tears reddening her eyes.

"*Who* spoiled it—who did anything?" laughed Graham.

"What's this all about?" asked Uncle Johnny coming in at that moment.

Gyp told him what had happened. She talked too fast to permit of any interruption; her story was Gyp-like.

"*You* say, Uncle Johnny, *did* we break our promise just 'cause a poor little mouse hid under her pillow?"

"If it hadn't been for that miserable dog—" Isobel saw an opportunity for sweet revenge. "Mother, why don't you send it away? You made Graham give back that Airedale puppy Mr. Saunders sent him; I don't think it's fair to keep this horrid old mongrel!"

Jerry's face darkened. Graham came hotly to Pepper's rescue.

"He's *not* a mongrel—he's better'n *any* old Airedale! He's got more sense in his *tail* than Aunt Maria's got in her whole body! If he goes I'll—I'll—go, too!"

"Children," protested Mrs. Westley, giving way to the laughter that had been consuming her from the first moment of Aunt Maria's arrival. "Let's all feel grateful to Pepper. She's a poor, silly, selfish, vain old woman, and if she ever comes here again I'm afraid that *I* won't promise to be good myself! Isobel Westley, dry your eyes—do you think I'd let any girl of mine go to France with her? She can take her eight other goddaughters, if they want to stand her quarreling with every single person in authority—I won't let her have *my* girl. Why," she turned to John Westley and her face was very earnest, "she's such a *waste*—of human energy, of brains—of just breath! How terrible to grow old and be like—that."

Gyp was furtively feeling of her firm cheeks. "I'd rather be ugly, mother, than wear those funny things. *Look*, mummy," she ran to her mother's chair and touched her cheek. "*You've* got a wrinkle! But—I love it." With passionate tenderness she kissed the spot.

"I'll take you to France myself some day," laughed Uncle Johnny, patting Isobel's hand.

"And can we go to see the 'Land o' Dreams'?" asked Graham, anxiously.

"Indeed we will—as a celebration," assented his mother.

CHAPTER XII

THE PARTY

The Christmas holidays brought a welcome respite from the steady grind of school work. And there was every indication, in the Westley home, that they were going to be very merry! Mrs. Westley had one fixed rule for her youngsters: "Work while you work and play while you play." So she and Uncle Johnny, behind carefully closed doors, planned all sorts of jolly surprises for the holiday week.

But Jerry had a little secret, too, all of her own. She had written to her mother begging to be

allowed to go home "just for Christmas." She had had to write two letters; the first, with its burst of longing, had sounded so ungrateful that she had torn it up and had written another. Then she waited eagerly, hopefully, for the answer.

It came a few days before Christmas, and with it a huge pasteboard box. Something told Jerry, before she opened the envelope, what her mother had written. Her lips quivered.

"...It will be hard for us both, dear child, not to be together on Christmas, but it seems unwise for you to go to the trouble and expense of coming home for such a short stay. We are snowed in and you would not have the relaxation that you need after your long weeks of study. Then, darling, it would be all the harder to let you go again. I want you to have the jolliest sort of a holiday and I shall be happy thinking each day what my little girl is doing. I have had such nice letters from Mrs. Westley and Mr. John telling all about you—they have been a great comfort to me. We are sending the box with a breath of Kettle in it. The bitter-sweet we have been saving for you since last fall...."

When Jerry opened the box the room filled with the fragrant odor of pine. In an ecstasy she leaned her face close to the branches and sniffed delightedly; she wanted to cry and she wanted to laugh—it was as though she suddenly had a bit of home right there with her. Her disappointment was forgotten. She lifted out the pine and bitter-sweet to put it in every corner of her room, then another thought seized her. Except for Gyp, practicing in a half-hearted way downstairs, the house was empty. On tiptoe she stole to the different rooms, leaving in each a bit of her pine and a gyp cluster of the bitter-sweet.

The postman's ring brought Gyp's practice, with one awful discord, to an abrupt finish. In a moment she came bounding up the stairs, two little white envelopes in her hand.

"Jerry—we're invited to a real party—Pat Everett's." She tossed one of the small squares into Jerry's lap. "Hope to die invitations, just like Isobel gets!"

Jerry stared at the bit of pasteboard. Gyp's delight was principally because it was the first "real" evening party to which she had been invited; it was a milestone in her life—it meant that she was very grown-up.

"Jerauld Travis—you don't act a *bit* excited! It will be heaps of fun for Pat's father and mother are the jolliest people—and there'll be dancing and boys—and spliffy eats."

"I never went to a party—like *that*." Jerry, with something like awe, lifted the card.

"Oh, a party's a party, anywhere," declared Gyp loftily, speaking from the wisdom of her newly-acquired dignity.

"And—I haven't anything to wear," added Jerry, putting the card down on her desk with the tiniest sigh.

Gyp's face clouded; that was too true to be disputed. Her own clothes would not fit Jerry but Isobel's—

"We'll ask Isobel to let you—"

"No—*no*!" cried Jerry vehemently. Her face flushed. "Don't you *dare*!"

Gyp looked aggrieved. "I don't see why not, but if you feel like that—only, it'll spoil the whole party. Oh——" she suddenly sniffed. "*What's* that woodsy smell? Where did you get it?"

And the pine and the berries made Gyp and Jerry forget, for the moment, the Everett party.

The holiday frolics began with the appropriate ceremony of consigning all the school books to the depths of a great, carved chest in the library, turning the curious old key in the lock and handing it over to Mrs. Westley. Jerry had demurred, but she recognized, behind all the fun, a real firmness. "Every book, my dear! Not one of you children must peep inside of the cover of even a—story, until I give back the key." Mrs. Westley pinched Jerry's cheek. "I want to see red rosies again, my dear girl."

Christmas eve brought a glad surprise to the family in the unexpected arrival of Robert Westley. Jerry had wondered a little about Gyp's father; it was very nice to find him so much like Uncle Johnny that one liked him at the very first moment. He had, it seemed, resorted to all sorts of expedients to get from Valparaiso to his own fireside in time for Christmas, but everyone's delight had made it very worth while.

"That's one thing that makes up for father being away so much," explained Gyp. "He 'most always just walks in and surprises us and brings the jolliest things from queer places."

On Christmas morning Jerry opened sleepy eyes to find soft flurries of snow beating against her windows, a piney odor in her nostrils and Gyp in a red dressing-gown by the side of her bed.

"Merry Christmas!" In her arms Gyp carried some of the contents of her own Christmas stocking. "Wake up and see what Santa has brought you!"

On the bedpost hung a bulging stocking; queer-shaped packages, tied with red ribbon, were piled close to it, and across the foot of Jerry's bed lay a huge box.

"Open this first. What *is* it? I don't know." Gyp was as excited as though the box was for her. Jerry

untied the cord and lifted the cover. Within, beneath the folds of tissue paper, lay two pretty dresses, a blue serge school dress and a fluffy, shimmery party frock; beneath them a gay sweater and tam o'shanter. Upon a card, enclosed, had been written, plainly in Uncle Johnny's handwriting: "From Santa Claus."

Jerry did not know that ever since the eventful debate there had been much secret planning between Uncle Johnny and Mrs. Westley over her wardrobe. He had realized that night, for the first time, that Jerry, in her queer, country-made clothes, was at a disadvantage among the city girls and boys. It was all very well to argue that fine feathers did not make fine birds—Uncle Johnny knew the heart of a girl well enough to realize how much a pretty ribbon or a neat new dress could help one hold one's own! He had wanted to buy out almost an entire store, but Mrs. Westley had held him in restraint. "You may offend her and spoil your gift if you make it seem too much," she had warned him.

Jerry knew too little of the price of the materials that made up her precious dresses to be distressed with the gift. In rapture she kissed the shimmering blue folds. And Gyp executed a mad dance in the middle of the room.

"Now you've just got to go to the Everett party."

On Christmas afternoon Mrs. Allan walked into the Westley home. She and her husband had come to the Everetts for the holidays. She brought a little gift to Jerry from her mother. It was a daintily embroidered set of collar and cuffs. Jerry pictured her mother in the lamplight of the dear living-room at Sunnyside, working the shining needle in and out and loving every stitch! Oh, it was *much* nicer than the grandest gift the stores could offer.

Christmas past, Gyp and Jerry thought of nothing but the Everett party. Isobel, flitting here and there like a pretty butterfly, divided her enthusiasm. She indulged in a patronizing attitude—she would go, of course, to the Everetts', though it was a kids' party and *she'd* probably be bored to death.

But within a few hours of the Great Event a horrible realization overtook Gyp's and Jerry's golden anticipation. Santa Claus had forgotten to put any dancing shoes in the Christmas box!

The two girls shook their heads dolefully over Jerry's three pairs of square-toed shoes.

"I just can't wear *one* of them," cried Jerry.

Gyp would not be disappointed. "Then you'll *have* to squeeze your feet into my last summer's pumps. They won't hurt very much, and anyway, when the party begins you'll forget them!"

Jerry wanted so much to wear the new blue dress that she was persuaded. Gyp helped her get them on and Jerry stumped about in them—"to get used to them!"

"Now, *do* they hurt awfully?" Gyp asked, in a tone that said, "Of course they don't," and Jerry, fascinated by the strange girl she saw in the mirror, answered absently: "Oh, they just feel queer!"

Anyway, going to a "real" party *was* too exciting to permit of thinking of one's feet. Jerry moved as though in a dream. Like Gyp, she felt delightfully grown-up. The spacious, old-fashioned Everett home was gay with holiday greens, in one corner an orchestra played, Patricia with her mother and her older sister greeted each guest in such a jolly way that one felt in a moment that one was going to have the best sort of a time.

For awhile, very happily, Jerry trailed Gyp among the young people, exchanging merry greetings. Then suddenly dreadful pains began to cut sharply through her feet; they climbed higher and higher until they quivered up and down her spine. Poor Jerry found it hard to keep the tears from her eyes. She limped to a half-hidden corner near the orchestra, and slipped off the offending pumps.

Isobel spied her in her hiding-place. Isobel did not know about the pumps—she thought Jerry had retreated there from shyness. A disdainful smile curled her pretty lips. She had had moments, since the debate, when her conscience had bothered her, the more so because Jerry had not told what had happened; but, as is sometimes the way, after such moments, she had hardened her heart all the more toward Jerry. She was savagely jealous, too, over Uncle Johnny's Christmas box to Jerry; she had figured that the dresses had cost a great deal more than the bracelet he had given her! So into her head flashed a plan that should have found no place there, for Isobel was indisputably the prettiest girl in the room and the most-sought-for dancing partner.

She beckoned gaily to Dana King. She would kill two birds with one stone, she thought—though not in just those words; she would have the pleasant satisfaction of seeing Jerry make a ridiculous figure of herself trying to dance (for Jerry had told her she only knew the "old-fashioned" dances) and she would see Dana King embarrassed before all the others! Isobel had never forgiven him for championing Jerry the night of the debate.

"Will you do me a favor, Dana?" she asked sweetly. "Dance with that poor Jerry Travis over there. She's *perfectly* miserable."

Dana hastened, politely, to do what Isobel asked. He had never exchanged a word with Jerry; however, after the debate, no introduction seemed necessary. When Jerry saw him approach a flood of color dyed her cheeks—not from shyness, but because she did not know what to do with

her unshod feet!

"Will you dance this, Miss Travis?"

Jerry lifted eyes dark with laughter. She did not look in the least "perfectly miserable." "I—I—can't!" She put out the tips of her unstockinged toes. Then she told him how she had had to wear Gyp's pumps. "And they hurt so dreadfully that I slipped them off and now *nothing'll* get them back on. I guess I've got to stay here the rest of my life."

There was something so refreshing in Jerry's frankness and unaffectedness that Dana King sat down eagerly beside her.

"Let me sit here and talk, then. Say, what on earth was the matter with you the night of the debate? Was it your shoes—*then*? You *could* have talked—I know!"

He spoke with such conviction that Jerry's eyes shone.

"No, it wasn't—entirely—my shoes. Something *did* happen—but I can't tell. Isn't this the jolliest party? I never went to one before—like this. There aren't this many people in all Miller's Notch."

Isobel, watching Jerry's corner, grew very angry when she saw that Dana King lingered with Jerry. She wondered what on earth Jerry could be saying that made him laugh so heartily; they were acting as though they had known one another all their lives.

Just as Dana King was asking Jerry what she would do if the midnight hour struck and found her slipperless, Mrs. Allan discovered them. *She* had to hear about the pumps, too.

"You blessed child, I'll get a pair of Pat's—they'd fit anything!" She returned in a few moments, two shiny, patent-leather toes protruding from the folds of her spangled scarf. Pat's pumps slipped easily over Jerry's poor swollen feet.

"There, now, Cinderella, let's go and get some ice cream." And Dana King led Jerry through the dancers, past Isobel and a fat boy whose curly red head only reached to her shoulder, to the dining-room where, around small tables, boys and girls were devouring all sorts of goodies.

The party was spoiled for Isobel; not so for Gyp who, besides having had the jolliest sort of a time herself, was bursting with satisfaction because Jerry had "captured" the most popular boy in the room.

"He sat out *six* dances with you—I counted! He took you to *supper* I heard him ask you, Jerry Travis, if you were going out to the school Frolic. And why did he call you Cinderella?" asked Gyp as the young people rode homeward.

Jerry had no intention of telling Isobel of the ignominy of the pumps, so she answered evasively: "Because it was my first party, I guess," then, with a long, happy sigh, she cuddled back against Gyp's shoulder and watched the street lamps flash past. Oh, surely the Wishing-rock had opened a wonderful new world to little Jerry!

"Did you tell him it *was* your first party?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Oh—nothing. I wouldn't have been honest 'nough to—I'd have pretended I'd gone to lots."

"*I'm* not going to the Frolic," Isobel broke in. "I'm too old for such things."

Gyp straightened indignantly.

"Too old to coast? Well, I hope *I* never grow as old as *that*!" she cried.

"*You* never *will*!" was Isobel's withering answer.

CHAPTER XIII

HASKIN'S HILL

"Jerry—it's *perfect*! Come and look." Gyp, shivering in her pajamas, was standing with her small nose flattened against Jerry's cold window. Downstairs a clock had just chimed seven.

Jerry sprang from her bed with one bound. She peeped over Gyp's shoulder. A thaw the day before had made the girls very anxious, but now a sparkling crust covered the snow and the early sun struck coldly across the housetops.

This was the day of the Lincoln Midwinter Frolic.

"Bring your clothes into my room and we'll dress in front of the fire. Uh-h-h, isn't it cold? But won't it be *fun*? Don't you wish it was ten o'clock now? It's going to be the very best part of the whole holiday!"

Jerry thought so, too, when, a few hours later, she and Gyp joined a large group of the Lincoln

girls and boys at the trolley station. A special car, attached to the regular interurban trolley, was to take them and their sleds and skis—and lunch—out to Haskin's Hill where the Midwinter School Frolic was always held.

Jerry had not caught a glimpse of the country since arriving with Uncle Johnny at the Westley home. As the car sped along she sat quiet amid the merry uproar of her companions, but her eyes were very bright; these wide, open stretches of fields, with the little clusters of buildings and the hills just beyond, made her think of home.

The founders of Lincoln School had wanted to thoroughly establish the principle of co-education. "These young people," one of them had said, "will have to live and work and play in a world made up of both men and women; let them learn, now, to work and play together." The records of the school showed that they worked well together and one had only to give the briefest glance at the merry horde that swarmed over Haskin's Hill on that holiday morning to know that they played well together, too.

"It's most like Kettle," cried Jerry, excitedly, for at Haskin's station, where the picnickers left the trolley, the hills pressed about so close that they, indeed, seemed to Jerry like her beloved mountains. "But how horrid to call a lovely place like this Haskin's!"

"It's named after a funny little hermit who lived for years and years—they say he was 'most one hundred and fifty when he died—in the little cabin at the foot of the hill where we coast. He used to write poetry about the wind and the trees and he'd wander around and sit in his door playing a violin and singing the verses he'd written."

"Then his name could be any old thing," declared Jerry, delighted at the picture Gyp had drawn, "if he did such lovely things! Let's *us* call it the Singing Hill."

The scent of pine on the frosty air and the knowledge that her new sweater and tam-o'shanter were quite as pretty as the prettiest there, transformed Jerry into a new Jerry. She felt, too, that out here in the open she was in her element; a familiarity with these sports that had been her winter pastime since she was a tiny youngster gave her an assurance that added to her gay spirits.

Thanks to long hours of play with Jimmy Chubb she could steer the bob-sled with a steadier hand than any of the others; Barbara Lee, looking more like a schoolgirl than ever in a jaunty red scarf and cap, declared she'd trust her precious bones to no one but Jerry!

The morning passed on swift wings; only the pangs of hunger persuaded the girls and boys to leave their fun. They gathered in front of the picturesque old cabin about a great bonfire over which two of the older boys were grilling beefsteak for sandwiches. And from a huge steaming kettle came a delicious odor of soup.

"Imagine Isobel saying she's too *old* for all this fun," exclaimed Gyp as she stood in the "chow line" with her mess tin ready in her hand. "Why, a lot of these girls and boys are older than she is! The trouble with Isobel is"—and her voice was edged with scornful pity—"she's afraid of mussing her hair!"

Skiing was a comparatively new sport among the Lincoln boys and girls. Only a few of the boys had become even fairly skillful at it, yet there had been much talk of forming a team to defeat Lincoln's arch-enemy—the South High. While the young people ate their lunch their conversation turned to this.

"We haven't anyone that can touch Eric Hansen, though—he learned how to ski, I guess, in the cradle," declared Dana King, frowning thoughtfully at the long hill that stretched upward from where they were grouped.

During the morning Ginny Cox had borrowed Graham Westley's skis and had, after many tumbles, succeeded in one thrilling descent. She declared now to the others, between huge mouthfuls of sandwich, that it was the most exciting thing she'd ever done—and Ginny, they all knew, had done many! Jerry, next to her, had agreed, quietly, that skiing *was*—very exciting. Ginny's head was a bit turned by that one moment of victory when she had stood flushed—and upright—at the foot of the hill, trying to appear indifferent as the boys showered laughing congratulations upon her for her feat, so, now, she turned amused eyes upon Jerry.

"Can *you* ski?" There was a ring of derision in her voice. Jerry nodded. "Then I *dare* you to try it from the *very top*!"

The face of Haskin's Hill was divided by a road that wound across it. Because of the steep descent of the upper part and because the level stretch of the road made a jump too high for anyone's liking, only one or two of the boys had attempted to ski from the very top, and they had met with humiliating disaster.

Jerry looked up to the top of the hill. Ginny's tone fired her. She was conscious, too, that Ginny's dare had been followed by a hush—the others were waiting for her answer.

"If someone will lend me their skis——" She tried to make her tone careless.

"Jerry Travis, you never would!"

"Take Dana King's skis. They're the best."

"The *very* top——" commanded Ginny.

"May I use your skis, Dana?"

"Let her use your skis, King."

"Jerry, *don't*——" implored Gyp.

Jerry put down her plate and cup. Miss Lee was in the little cabin, so she did not know what was happening. The girls and boys pressed about Jerry, watching her with laughing eyes. Not one of them believed that she had the nerve to accept Ginny Cox's "dare."

But when, very calmly, she shouldered Dana King's skis and started off up the hill alone, their amusement changed to wonder and again to alarm. Jerry looked very small as she climbed on past the level made by the road.

"Oh, she'll fall before she even *gets* to the jump—that part's awfully steep," consoled one boy, speaking the fear that was in each heart.

"If she kills herself you'll be her murderer," cried Gyp passionately to Ginny Cox.

Ginny was wishing very much that she hadn't made that silly, boastful dare—trying to make someone else do what she was afraid to try herself! She was very fond of Jerry. The red faded from her face; she clenched her hands tightly together.

Tibby commenced to cry hysterically. One of the older girls declared they ought to call Jerry back. The boys shouted, but Jerry, catching the sound faintly, only waved her hand in answer.

At the top of the hill Jerry turned and looked down the long stretch. She had skied over many of the trails of Kettle, but none of them had had "jumps" as difficult as this. Quite undaunted, however, she told herself that she needed only to "keep her head." She adjusted her skis, then tried the weight of her pole, carefully, to learn its balance. She began to move forward slowly, her eyes fixed on the narrow tracks before her, her knees bent ever so little, her slim body tilted forward. Only for one fleeting moment did she see the group below, standing immovable, transfixed by their concern—then their faces blurred. The sharp wind against her face, the lightning speed sent a thrill through every fibre of Jerry's being; her mind was intensely alert to only one thing—that moment when she must make the jump! It came—instinctively she balanced herself for the leap, her back straightened, her arms lifted, her head went up—as though she was a bird in flight she curved twenty feet through the air ... her skis struck the snow-crueted tracks, her body doubled, tilted forward ... then, amid the unforgettable shouts of the boys and girls she slid easily, gracefully, on down the trail.

Ginny Cox was the first to reach her. She threw her arms about her and almost strangled her in a passionate hug.

"You *wonder!* Oh, if anything had happened to you——"

The boys were loud and generous in their praise.

"Now we've found someone that can put it all over Hansen," shouted one of them. "Let's challenge South High right off!"

"Who'd ever believe a little *kid* like you could do it," exclaimed Dana King with laughable frankness, but he stared at Jerry with such open admiration that any sting was quite taken from his words.

Jerry could not know, of course, that, all in a moment, she had become a "person" in Lincoln School. Uncle Johnny, that afternoon in the Westley library, had said very truly that it was usually some unexpected little thing that set a style or made a leader. He had not, of course, foreseen this episode of Haskin's Hill, but he had known that Jerry had determination with her sunniness and a faith in herself that could never be daunted.

"Come on, fellows, let's *us* try it. We can't let little Miss Travis beat us," challenged one of the boys.

There was general assent to this. Half a dozen picked up their skis. But Jerry lifted an authoritative hand—Jerry, who, until this moment, had been like a little mouse among them all!

"Oh, boys, *don't* try it. Unless you can ski *very* well, a jump like that's awfully dangerous. I've skied all my life and I've jumped, too, but never any jump as high as that and—and *I* was a little scared—too!" And, because Jerry was a "person" now, they listened. She had spoken with appealing modesty, too, not at all with the arrogance that comes often with success and can never be tolerated by fellow-students.

"Miss Travis is right, fellows," broke in Dana King. "Let's learn to ski a little better before we try that jump. This very minute we'll begin practice for the everlasting defeat of South High! You can use my skis, Jerry. Come on, Ginny—the All-Lincoln Ski Team!" He led the way up the hill followed by a number of the boys and Ginny Cox and Jerry—Jerry with a glow on her cheeks that did not come entirely from the wintry air; she "belonged" now, she was not just a humble student, struggling along the obscure paths—she was one of those elected ones, like Ginny and Dana King, to whom is given the precious privilege of guarding the laurels of the school at Highacres!

CHAPTER XIV

THE PRIZE

"Good-morning, Mr. Westley!"

Barbara Lee's demure voice halted John Westley in a headlong rush through the school corridor.

"Oh—good-morning, Miss Lee." If a stray sunbeam had not slanted at just that moment across Miss Lee's upturned face, turning the curly ends of her fair hair to threads of sheen, John Westley might have passed right on. Instead, he stopped abruptly and stared at Miss Lee.

"I declare—it's hard to believe you're grown-up! And a teacher! Why, I could almost chuck you under the chin—the way I used to do. I suppose I'd get into no end of trouble if I ever tried it——"

"Well," her face dimpled roguishly, "I don't think it's ever been done to anyone in the faculty. I don't know what the punishment is. Anyway, I'm trying so hard to always remember that I *am* very much grown-up that it is unkind of you to even hint that I am failing at it—dismally."

"I think—from what my girls say—that you're succeeding rather tremendously, here at Highacres."

"That is nice in you—and them! I wonder if I can live up to what they think I am." Miss Lee's face was very serious; she was really grown-up now.

"Miss Lee, can you give me half an hour? I was on my way to Dr. Caton's office when——"

"You nearly knocked me over!"

"Yes—thinking you were one of the school children——"

"We can go into my library or—down in my office."

"Your office, by all means." John Westley was immensely curious to see Miss Lee's "office."

It was as business-like in its appearance as his own. A flat-topped desk, rows of files, a bookcase filled with books bearing formidable titles, and three straight-backed chairs against the wall gave an impression of severity. Two redeeming things caught John Westley's eye—a bowl of blooming narcissi and a painting of Sir Galahad.

"I brought that from Paris," explained Barbara Lee. "I stood for hours in the Louvre watching a shabby young artist paint it and—I *had* to have it. It seemed as if he'd put something more into it than was even in the original—a sort of light in the eyes."

"Strange——" John Westley was staring reflectively at the picture. "Those eyes are like—Jerry Travis!"

"Yes—yes! I had never noticed why, but something familiar in that child's expression *has* haunted me."

Though John Westley had come to Highacres that morning with an important matter on his mind and had, on a sudden impulse, begged Miss Lee to give him a half-hour that he might talk it over with her, he had to tell her, now, of Jerry and how he had found her standing on the Wishing-rock, visioning a wonderful world of promise that lay beyond her mountain.

"Her mother had made an iron-clad vow that she'd always keep the girl there on Kettle. Why, nothing on earth could chain that spirit anywhere. She's one of the world's crusaders."

Barbara Lee had not gone, herself, very far along life's pathway, yet her tone was wistful.

"No, you can't hold that sort of a person back. They must always go on, seeking all that life can give. But the stars are so very far off! Sometimes even the bravest spirits get discouraged and are satisfied with a nearer goal."

John Westley, sitting on the edge of the flat-topped desk, leaned suddenly forward and gently tilted Miss Lee's face upward. There was nothing in the impulsive movement to offend; his face was very serious.

"Child, have *you* been discouraged? Have you started climbing to the stars—and had to halt—on the way?"

The girl laughed a little shamefacedly. "Oh, I had very big dreams—I have them still. And I had a wonderful opportunity and had to give it up; mother wanted me at home. She isn't well—so I took this position." She made her little story brief, but her eyes told more than her words of the disappointment and self-sacrifice.

"Well, mothers always come first. And maybe there's a *different* way to the stars, Barbara."

There was a moment's silence between them. John Westley was the first to break it.

"I want your advice, Miss Lee. I believe you're closer to the hearts of these youngsters out here

than anyone else. I've something in my mind but I can't just shape it up. I want to build some sort of a scholarship for Lincoln that isn't founded on books.

"The trouble is," he went on, "that every school turns out some real scholars—boys and girls with their minds splendidly exercised and stored—and what else? Generally always—broken bodies, physiques that have been neglected and sacrificed in the struggle for learning. Of what use to the world are their minds—then? I've found—and a good many men and women come under my observation—that the well-trained mind is of no earthly value to its owner or to the rest of the world unless it has a well-trained body along with it."

"That's my present business," laughed Miss Lee. "I must agree with you."

"So I want to found some sort of a yearly award out here at Highacres for the pupil who shows the best record in work—and play."

"That will be splendid!" cried Miss Lee, enthusiastically.

"Will you help me?" John Westley asked with the diffidence of a schoolboy. "Will you tell me if some of my notions are ridiculous—or impossible?" He picked up one of the sharpened pencils from the desk and drew up a chair. "Now, listen——" and he proceeded to outline the plan he had had in mind for a long time.

One week later the Lincoln Award was announced to the pupils of the school. So amazing and unusual was the competition that the school literally buzzed with comments upon it; work for the day was abandoned. Because the award was a substantial sum of money to be spent in an educational way, most of the pupils considered it very seriously.

"Ginny Cox has the best chance 'cause she always has the highest marks and she's on all the teams."

"It isn't just being on *teams*," contradicted another girl, studying one of the slips of paper which had been distributed and upon which had been printed the rules covering the competition. "It's the number of hours spent in the gym, or in out-of-door exercise. And you get a point for setting-up exercises and for walking a mile each day. And for sleeping with your window open! *Easy!*"

"And for drinking five glasses of water a day," laughed another.

"And for eating a vegetable every day. And for drinking a glass of milk."

"That lets *me* out. I just loathe milk."

"Of course—so do I. But wouldn't you drink it for an award like *that?*"

"Look, girls, you can't drink tea or coffee," chimed in another.

"And you get a point for nine hours' sleep each school night! That'll catch Selma Rogers—she says she studies until half-past eleven every night."

"I suppose that's why it's put in."

"And a point for personal appearance—and personal conduct in and out of school! Say, I think the person who thought up *this* award had something against us all——"

Patricia Everett indignantly opposed this. "Not at all! Miss Lee, and she's the chairman of the Award Committee, said that the purpose of the award is to build up a Lincoln type of a pupil whose physical development has kept pace with the mental development. *I* think it will be fun to try for it, though eating vegetables will be lots worse than the bridge chapter in Cæsar!"

Jerry Travis, too, had made up her mind to work for the award. She had read the rules of the competition with deep interest; here would be an opportunity to make her mother and Little-Dad proud of their girl. And it ought not to be very hard, either—if she could only bring up her monthly mark in geometry! She had, much to her own surprise, lived through the dreaded midwinter examinations, though in geometry only by the "skin of her teeth," as Graham cheerfully described his own scholastic achievements.

Jerry found that Gyp had been carefully studying the rules—Gyp who had never dreamed of trying for any sort of an honor! But poor Gyp found them a little terrifying; like Pat Everett she hated vegetables and she despised milk; there was always something awry in her dress, a shoelace dangling, a torn hem, a missing button. But if one could win a point for correcting these little failings just the same as in chemistry or higher math., was it not worth trying?

"Whoever do you s'pose thought of it all?" Gyp asked Jerry and Graham. The name of the Lincoln "friend" who was giving the award had been carefully guarded.

Not one of the younger Westleys suspected Uncle Johnny who sat with them and listened unblushingly and with considerable amusement to their varied comments.

"Well, I'll *try* for it," conceded Graham. "Who wouldn't? Even Fat Sloane says he's goin' to and he just hates to move when he doesn't have to! But *five hundred dollars* for washing your teeth and walking a mile——"

"And standing well in Cicero," added Uncle Johnny, mischievously.

"Do you s'pose Cora Stanton will be marked off in personal appearance 'cause she rouges and uses a lipstick?" asked Gyp, with a sly glance toward Isobel, who turned fiery red. "I *know* she does, 'cause Molly Hastings went up and deliberately kissed her cheek and she said she could taste it—awfully!"

"Cora's a very silly girl. Anyway, if she lives up to the rules of the competition she won't need any artificial color—she'll have a bloom that money couldn't buy!"

"Well, *I'm* not going to bother about the silly award," declared Isobel. "Grind myself to death—no, indeed! I don't even want to go to college. If you're rich it's silly to bother with four whole years at a deadly institution—some of the girls say you have to study awfully hard. Amy Mathers is going to come out next year and I want to, too." Isobel talked fast and defiantly, as she caught the sudden sternness that flashed across Uncle Johnny's face.

Mrs. Westley started to speak, but Uncle Johnny made the slightest gesture with his hand.

Into his mind had come the memory of that half-hour with Barbara Lee and something she had said—"the stars are very far off!" *Her* face had been illumined by a yearning; he was startled now at the realization that, in contrast, Isobel's showed only a self-centered, petty vanity—his Isobel, who had been so pretty and promising, for whom he had thought only the very noblest things possible.

But although he saw the dreams he had built for Isobel dangerously threatened, he clung staunchly to his faith in the good he believed was in the girl; that was why he lifted his hand to stay the impulsive words that trembled on the mother's lips and made his own tone tolerant.

"Making plans without a word to mother—or Uncle Johnny? But you'll come to us, my dear, and be grateful for our advice. I don't believe just a lot of dances will satisfy my girl—even if they do Amy Mathers. And after they're over—what then? Will you really be a bit different from the other girl because you've 'come out'? What do you say to taking up your drawing again and after a few years going over to Paris to study?"

The defiant gleam in Isobel's eyes changed slowly to incredulous delight. Uncle Johnny went on:

"And even an interior decorator needs a college training."

"John Westley, you're a wonder," declared Mrs. Westley after the young people had gone upstairs. "You ought to have a half-dozen youngsters of your own!"

He stared into the fire, seeing visions, perhaps, in the dancing flames. "I wish I did. I think they're the greatest thing in the world! To make a good, useful man or woman out of a boy or girl is the best work given us to do on this earth!"

CHAPTER XV

CUPID AND COMPANY

"The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea——"

scanned Gyp in a singsong voice. Then she stopped abruptly; she realized that Miss Gray was not hearing a word that she was saying!

Miss Gray had asked Gyp to come to her after school. It was a glorious winter day and Gyp's friends were playing hockey on the little lake. Gyp had faced Miss Gray resentfully.

"Please scan three pages, Miss Westley," Miss Gray had said, putting a book into Gyp's hands. And now, in the middle of them, Miss Gray was staring out across the snowy slopes of the school grounds, not hearing one word, and blinking real tears from her pale-blue eyes!

Little Miss Gray, for years, had come and gone from Lincoln in such a mouse-like fashion that no one ever paid much attention to her; upon her changing classes, as an individual, she left scarcely any impression; as a teacher she was never cross, never exacting, gave little praise and less censure; she worked more like a noiseless, perfect machine than a human being.

Gyp had never noticed, until that moment, that she had blue eyes—very pretty blue eyes, fringed with long, dark lashes. No one could see them because she was nearsighted and wore big, round, shell-rimmed glasses, but now she had removed these in order to wipe her tears away. Gyp, fascinated by her discoveries, stared openly.

Gyp's heart never failed to go out to the downtrodden or oppressed, beast or human. Now she suddenly saw Millicent Gray, erstwhile teacher in Second-year English, as an appealing figure, very shabby, a pinched look on her oval-shaped face that gave the impression of hunger. Her hair would really be very pretty if she did not twist it back quite so tight. She was not nearly as old as Gyp had thought she was. And her tears were very pathetic; she was sniffing and searching in a pocket for the handkerchief that was probably in her knitting bag.

"T-that will d-do, Miss Westley," she managed to say, still searching and sniffing.

But Gyp stood rooted.

"I'm sorry you feel bad, Miss Gray. Will you take my handkerchief? It's clean," and Gyp, from the pocket of her middy blouse, proudly produced a folded square of linen.

"You wouldn't believe that just *that* could open the flood-gates of a broken heart," she exclaimed later to Jerry and Pat Everett, feeling very important over her astonishing revelation.

"Who'd ever dream that Miss Gray could squeeze out the littlest tear," laughed Pat, at which Gyp shook her head rebukingly.

"Teachers are human and have hearts, Pat Everett, even if they *are* teachers. And romance comes to them, too. Miss Gray is very pretty if you look at her real close and she's quiet because her bosom carries a broken heart."

Sympathetic Jerry thought Gyp's description very wonderful. Pat was less moved.

"What did she tell you, Gyp?"

Gyp hesitated, in a maddening way. "Well, I suppose it was giving her the handkerchief made her break down and I don't believe she thought I'd come straight out here and tell you girls. And I'm *only* telling you because I think maybe we can help her. After she'd taken the handkerchief and wiped her nose she took hold of my hand and pressed it hard and told me she hoped I'd never know what loneliness was. And then I asked her if she didn't have anyone and she said no—not a soul in the whole wide world cared whether she lived or died. Isn't that dreadful? And she said she didn't have a home anywhere, just lived in a horrid old boarding house. Well, she was beginning to act more cheerful and I was afraid she was recovering enough to tell me to go on with the scanning, so I got up my nerve and I asked her point-blank if she'd ever had a lover——"

"*Gyp Westley*——" screamed Pat.

"Well, there wasn't any use beating 'round the bush and I knew we'd want to know and I read once that men were the cause of most heartaches, so I asked her——"

"What *did* she say? Wasn't she furious?"

"No—I think she was glad I did. Maybe, if you didn't have any family and lived in a great big boarding house where you couldn't talk to anyone except 'bout the weather and the stew and things, you'd even like to confide in me. She just blushed and looked downright pretty, but dreadfully sad. She said she'd had a very, very dear friend—you could tell she meant a lover—but that it was all past and he had forgotten her. I suppose I should have said to her that it's 'better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all,' but I just asked her if he was handsome, which was foolish, because she'd think he was if he was as homely as anything."

"And was he?"

"She said he was distinguished—a straight nose and a firm chin and black hair with a white streak running straight down through the middle, like Lee's black-and-white setter dog, I guess. Girls, mustn't it be *dreadful* to have to go on day after day with your heart like a cold stone inside of you and no one to love you and to teach school?"

Each girl, with her own life full to brimming with love, looked as though they felt very sorry, indeed, for poor little Miss Gray.

"Let's do something to make her happy," suggested Pat.

"Do you suppose we could find the man? They must have quarreled and maybe, if he knew——"

"There can't be many men with white streaks in their hair and if we get the other girls to help us, perhaps by watching real closely, we can find him."

"And I thought, too, we might send her some flowers after a few days without any name or any sign on them where they came from. She'll be dreadfully excited and curious and then in a week or so we can send some more——"

"Aren't flowers very expensive?" put in Jerry. Gyp understood her concern; Jerry had very little spending money.

"I know—Pat and I'll buy the flowers and maybe some of the others will help, and you write some verses to go with them, Jerry."

Though to write verses would, ordinarily, to Jerry be a most alarming task, she was glad of anything that she could do to help Miss Gray and assented eagerly.

Peggy Lee was enlisted in the cause, and the next day the conspirators made a trip to the florist's shop. They were dismayed but not discouraged by the exorbitant price of flowers; they scornfully dismissed the florist's suggestion of a "neat" little primrose plant—they were equally disdainful of carnations. Patricia favored roses, and when the florist offered them a bargain in some rather wilted Lady Ursulas, she wanted to buy them and put them in salt and water overnight, to revive them. Finally they decided upon a bunch of violets, which sadly depleted their several allowances. And Jerry attached her verses, painstakingly printed on a sheet of azure-blue

notepaper in red ink. "Blue's for the spirit, you know, and the red ink is heart's blood. Listen, girls, isn't this too beautiful for words?" Gyp read in a tragic voice:

"Only to love thee, I seek nothing more,
No greater boon do I ask,
Only to serve thee o'er and o'er,
And in thy smile to bask.

"Only to hear thy sweet voice in my ear,
Though thy words be not spoken for me,
Only to see the lovelight in thy eyes,
The love of eternity.

"They're *wonderful*, Jerry! And so sad, too."

"Do they sound like a lover?" asked Jerry anxiously.

"*Exactly*," declared Pat, solemnly. "Oh, *won't* it be fun to see her open it? And she'll think, of course, that it comes from the black-and-white man."

"And we must each one of us pledge to keep our eyes open for the creature."

"Think of it, girls—if we could make Miss Gray happy again it would be something we could remember when we're old ladies. Mother told me once that things we do for other people to make them happy come back to us with interest."

In the English class, on the following day, four girls sat very demurely in the back row, their eyes riveted on their books. When presently there was a knock at the door (Gyp had timed carefully the arrival of the messenger), Pat Everett exclaimed, "my goodness" aloud, and Jerry dropped her book to the floor. But their agitation passed unnoticed; Miss Gray's attention was fixed upon the little square box that was brought to her.

Jerry had a moment of panic. She scribbled on the top of a page in her text-book: "What if she's angry?" To which Gyp replied: "If *your* life was empty, wouldn't you jump at a crumb?"

Only for a moment was the machinelike precision of the English class broken. Miss Gray untied the cord, and peeped under the cover. The girls, watching from the back row, saw a pink flush sweep from her small nose to the roots of her hair, then fade, leaving her very white. Then:

"Please continue, Miss Chase."

When the class was dismissed even Gyp had not the courage to linger and watch Miss Gray open the box. "She might suspect you," Patricia had warned. But at recess she rushed to the girls, her eyes shining.

"*Jerry! Pat!* She's *crazy* about 'em! I went in after the third hour and pretended I was hunting for my book. The violets were sitting up on her desk and she had a few of them fastened in her old cameo pin—and she looked *different*—already! Let's keep up our good work! Let's swear that we'll leave no stone unturned to find the black-and-white man!"

CHAPTER XVI

FOR THE HONOR OF THE SCHOOL

"Oh, I'm *sick* of winter! I wish I was a cannibal living on a tropical island eating cocoanuts."

"—Missionaries, you mean," laughed Isobel.

Virginia Cox threw her skates over her shoulder; Isobel, Dorrie Carr and herself were the last to leave the lake. The school grounds were deserted.

"Oh, look at the snowman someone's started," cried Ginny, as they walked through the grounds. "Say, this is spliffy snow to pack! Let's finish up the work of art." In her enthusiasm over her suggestion her ennui was forgotten. "I know, let's make him into a snowlady."

Ginny's fingers were clever. Her caricatures, almost always drawn in ridicule of the faculty or her fellow-classmates, were famous. If, in her make-up, she had had a kindlier spirit and a truer sense of the beautiful, she might have become a great artist or sculptor.

Now she worked feverishly, shaping a lifelike figure from the huge cakes of snow that the others brought to her. As she stood back to view her handiwork a naughty thought flashed into her mind.

"Girls—it's going to be Miss Gray! And mother's got a funny old lavender crocheted shawl like that thing Miss Gray wears when it's cold, that the moths won't even eat. And I can fix a hat like the dreadful *châpeau* of hers that came out of the ark. And glasses, too—"

Isobel and Dorrie laughed delightedly.

"How can you get them out here?"

"Oh, *I'll* find a way!" Ginny always could! "Do you think that nose is pug enough?" She deftly packed it down on each side with a finger, then gave it a quick, upward touch. "Isn't that better?"

Her companions declared the likeness perfect—as far as snow could make it.

"And I can hunt up two blue glass allies for eyes." There was, plainly, no end to Ginny's resourcefulness. "You just wait and see what you'll see in the morning."

During the night King Winter maliciously abetted Ginny in her work, for a turn in his temper laid a sparkling crust over everything—and especially the little snowlady who waited, immovable, on a little rise of ground near the main entrance of the school.

The pupils, arriving at Highacres the next morning, rubbed their eyes in their amazement. Not one failed to recognize the English teacher in the funny, shawl-draped figure, with enormous glasses framing round blue eyes, shadowed by a hat that was almost an exact counterpart of the shabby one Miss Gray had hung each morning for the past three winters on her peg in the dressing-room. But there was something about the rakish tilt of the hat that was in such strange contrast to the severe spectacles and the thin, frosty nose, that it gave the snowlady the appearance of staggering and made her very funny.

All through the school session groups of pupils gathered at the windows, laughing. There was much speculating as to who had built the snowlady; the three little sub-freshmen who had begun the work Ginny had finished were vehement in their assertions that they had not. Gradually it was whispered about that Ginny Cox had done it.

"We might have known that," several laughed, thinking Ginny very clever.

Then, over those invisible currents of communication which convey news through a school faster than a flame can spread, came the rumor that trouble was brewing. One of the monitors had told Dorrie Carr that Miss Gray had had hysterics in the office; that, in the midst of them, she had written out her resignation and that, after the first period, not an English class had been held!

Another added the information that Barbara Lee had quieted Miss Gray with spirits of ammonia and that Dr. Caton had refused to accept her resignation and had been overheard to say that the culprit would be punished severely.

Ginny's prank began to assume serious proportions. Ginny was more thoughtless than unkind; it had not crossed her mind that she might offend little Miss Gray. But she was not brave, either—she had not the courage to go straight to Miss Gray and apologize for her careless, thoughtless act.

There had been, for a number of years, one well-established punishment at Lincoln; "privileges" were taken away from offenders, the term of the sentences depending upon the enormity of the offence. And "privileges" included many things—sitting in the study-room, mingling with the other pupils in the lunch rooms at recess, sharing the school athletics. This system had all the good points of suspension with the added sting of having constantly to parade one's disgrace before the eyes of the whole school.

"If Ginny Cox is found out, she can't play in the game against the South High," was on more than one tongue.

Gyp, deeply impressed by the criticalness of the situation, summoned a meeting of the Ravens. Her face was very tragic.

"Girls—it's the chance for the Ravens to do something for the Lincoln School! We've had nothing but spreads and good times and now the opportunity has come to test our loyalty."

Not one of the unsuspecting Ravens guessed what Gyp had in mind!

"Ginny Cox did build that snowlady—Isobel saw her. But if she gives herself up she'll be sent to Siberia!"

"Well, it'll serve her right. She needn't have picked out poor little Miss Gray to make fun of."

Gyp frowned at the interruption. "Of course not. *We* know all about Miss Gray and feel sorry for her, but Ginny doesn't. And, anyway, that isn't the point. I was talking about loyalty to Lincoln." Gyp made her tone very solemn. "Disgrace—everlasting, eternal, black disgrace threatens the very foundations of our dear school!" She paused, eloquently.

"Next week, Tuesday, our All-Lincoln girls' basketball team plays our deadly enemy, South High. And what will happen without Ginny Cox? Who *else* can make the baskets she can? Defeat—ignominious defeat will be our sad lot——" Her voice trailed off in a wail that found its echo in every Raven's heart.

"I'd forgotten the game! *What* a shame!"

"Why *couldn't* Ginny have thought of that?"

"Maybe Doc. Caton will just let her play that once."

"Not he—he's like iron. Didn't he send Bob Morely down for three whole days just before the

Thanksgiving game 'cause he got up in Cæsar class and translated 'bout the 'Garlic Wars'?"

Gyp sensed the psychological moment to strike.

"Never before in the history of our secret order has such an opportunity to serve our school been given to us——"

"What can we do?"

"One of us can offer ourself on the altar of loyalty——"

Her meaning, stripped of its eloquent verbage, slowly dawned upon six minds! A murmur of protest threatened to become a roar. Gyp hastily dropped her fine oratory and pleaded humbly:

"It's so *little* for one of us to do compared to what it means, and if we *didn't* do it and South High beat us, why, we'd suffer lots more with remorse than we would just taking Ginny's punishment for her. Anyway, what did the promise we solemnly made *mean*? Nothing? We're a nice bunch! *I'm* perfectly willing to take Ginny Cox's place, but I think each Raven ought to have the chance and we should draw lots——"

"Yes, that would be the fairest way," agreed Pat Everett in a tone that suggested someone had died just the moment before.

"I always draw the unlucky number in everything," shivered Peggy Lee.

"There'll have to be two this time, then, for I always do, too," groaned a sister Raven.

"Shall we do it, girls? Shall we prove to the world that we Ravens can make any sacrifice for our school?"

"Yes—yes," came thickly from paralyzed throats.

In a dead silence Gyp and Pat prepared seven slips of paper. Six were blank; upon the seventh Pat drew a long snake with head uplifted, ready to strike. The slips were carefully folded and shaken in Jerry's hat. Gyp put the hat in the middle of the room.

"Let's each one go up with her eyes shut tight and draw a slip. Then don't open it until the last one has been drawn." They all agreed—if they had to do it they might as well make the ceremony as much of a torture as possible!

So horrible was the suspense that a creaking board made the Ravens jump; a shutter slamming somewhere in another part of the building almost precipitated a panic. After an interval that seemed hours each Raven sat with a white slip in her nervous fingers.

"Now, one—two—three—*open!*" cried Gyp.

Another moment of silence, a sharp intake of breath, a rattle of paper, then: "Oh—*I have it!*" cried Jerry in a small, frightened voice.

CHAPTER XVII

DISGRACE

"Will the young gentleman or lady who built the snow-woman that stood on the school grounds yesterday morning go at once to my office?"

Dr. Caton's tone was very even; he might have been asking the owner of some lost article to step up and claim it, but each word cut like a sharp-edged knife deep into poor Jerry Travis' heart.

She sat in the sixth row; that meant that, to reach that distant door, she must face almost the entire school! Her eyes were downcast and her lips were pressed together in a thin, bluish line. She heard a low murmur from every side. Above it her steps seemed to fall in a heavy, echoing thud.

Not one of the Ravens dared look at poor Jerry; each wondered at her courage, each felt in her own heart that had the unlucky slip fallen to *her* lot she could never have done as well as Jerry had——

Then, instinctively, curious eyes sought for Ginny Cox—Ginny, who had been unjustly accused by her schoolmates. But Ginny at that moment was huddled in her bed under warm blankets with a hot-water-bag at her feet and an ice-bag on her head, her worried mother fluttering over her with a clinical thermometer in one hand and a castor-oil bottle in the other, wishing she could diagnose Ginny's queer symptoms and wondering if she had not ought to call in the doctor!

Jerry had had a bad night, too. At home, in her room, Gyp's eloquent arguments had seemed to lose some of their force. Jerry persisted in seeing complications in the course that had fallen to her lot.

"It's acting a lie," she protested.

"The cause justifies *that*," cried Gyp, sweepingly. "Anyway, I don't believe Dr. Caton will be half as hard on you as he would have been on Ginny Cox. It's your first offence and you can act real sorry."

"How can I act real sorry when I haven't *done* anything?" wailed Jerry.

"You'll *have* to—you must pretend. The harder it is the nobler your sacrifice will be. And some day everyone will know what you did for the honor of the school and future generations will—"

"And I was trying so hard for the Lincoln Award!" Real tears sprang to Jerry's eyes.

"Oh, you can work harder than ever and win it in spite of this," comforted Gyp, who truly believed Jerry could do anything.

"And I can't play on the hockey team in the inter-class match this week!"

"Of *course* it's hard, Jerry." Gyp did not want to listen to much more—her own conviction might weaken. "But nothing matters except the match with South High. *That's* why you're doing it! Now if you want to just back out and bring shame upon the Ravens as well as dishonor to the school—all right! Only—I've told Ginny."

"I'll do it," answered Jerry, falteringly. But long after Gyp had gone off into dreamless slumber she lay, wide-eyed, trying to picture this sudden and unpleasant experience that confronted her. Her whole life up to that moment when, in Mr. John's automobile, she had whirled around her mountain, bound for a world of dreams, had been so simple, so entirely free from any tangles that could not be straightened out, in a moment, by "Sweetheart" that her bewilderment, now, made her lonely and homesick for Sunnyside and her mother's counsel. The glamour of her new life, happy though it was, lifted as a curtain might lift, and revealed, in the eerie darkness of the night, startling contrasts—the rush and thronging of the city life against the peaceful quiet of Jerry's mountain. It was so easy, back there, Jerry thought, to just know at *once*, what was right and what was wrong; there were no uncertain demands upon one's loyalty to the little old school in the Notch—one had only to learn one's lesson and that was all; even in her play back there there had not been any of the fierce joy of competition she had learned at Highacres!

And mother, with wonderful wisdom, had brought her so close to God and had taught her to understand His Love and His Anger. Jerry dug her face deep into her pillow. Wouldn't God forgive a lie that was for the honor of the school? Wouldn't He know how Ginny was needed as forward on the Lincoln team? It was a perplexing thought. Jerry told herself, with a sense of shame, that she had really not thought much about God since she had come to the Westleys. She had gone each Sunday with the others to the great, dim, vaulted church, but she had thought about the artists who had designed the beautiful colored saints in the windows and about the pealing music of the organ and not about God or what the minister was saying. Back home she had always, in church, sat between her mother and the little window where through the giant pines she could see a stretch of blue sky broken by a misty mountain-top; when one could see that and smell the pine and hear, above the drone of the preacher's voice, the clear note of a bird, one could feel very close to the God who had made this wonderful, beautiful world and had put that sweet note in the throat of a little winging creature.

Then Gyp's words taunted her. "You can back out—if you want to!" Oh, no—she would not do that—now; she would not be a coward, she would see it through; she would measure up to the challenge, let it cost what it might she would hold the honor of the school—*her* school (she said it softly) above all else!

Jerry had never been severely punished in her life; as she sat very quietly in Dr. Caton's office waiting for assembly to end she wondered, with a quickening curiosity, what it would seem like. Anyway, *nothing* could be worse than having to walk out of the room before all those staring boys and girls.

But Jerry found that something *was*! Barbara Lee came into the room, looking surprised, disappointed and unhappy.

"Jerry," she exclaimed, "I can't believe it."

Jerry wanted to cry out the truth—it wasn't fair. Miss Lee sat down next to her.

"If you had to make fun of someone, why *didn't* you pick out me—anyone but poor little Miss Gray! I think that if you knew how unhappy and—and *drab* poor Miss Gray's life has been, how for years she had to pinch and save and deny herself all the little pleasures of life in order to care for her mother who was a helpless invalid, you'd be sorry you had in the smallest measure added any to her unhappiness."

"I wouldn't hurt her feelings for the world," burst out Jerry. Did she not know more about poor little Miss Gray than did even Barbara Lee?

"Then *why*—" But at this dangerous moment Dr. Caton walked into the room.

Jerry's sentence was very simple. She listened with downcast eyes. She was to lose all school privileges for a week; during that time she must occupy a desk in the office, she must eat her lunch alone at this desk, she must not share in any of the school activities until the end of suspension. She must apologize to Miss Gray.

In Jerry's punishment there was an element of novelty that softened its sting. It was very easy to apologize to Miss Gray, partly because she was really innocent and partly because a fresh bunch of violets adorned Miss Gray's desk toward which Jerry had contributed thirty-four cents. Then a message from the Ravens was spirited to her.

You're *wonderful!* We're proud of you. Keep up your nerve. Blessed is the lot of the martyr when for honor he has suffered.

The Ravens.

P. S. Coming out of history I heard Dana King say to another boy that he didn't believe you did it at *all*—that you are shielding SOME ONE else!

Your Adoring Gyp.

Too, Jerry found the office a most interesting place. No one glanced toward her corner and she could quietly watch everything that happened. And on the second day Uncle Johnny "happened"—in a breezy fashion, coming over and pinching her cheek. Uncle Johnny did not know of her disgrace; by tacit agreement not a word of it had been breathed at home. Dr. Caton, annoyed and disapproving, crisply intimated why Jerry was there. Uncle Johnny tried to make his lips look serious but his eyes danced. Over Dr. Caton's bald head he winked at Jerry.

Uncle Johnny had come to Highacres to talk over some plans for an enclosed hockey rink. For various reasons, of which he was utterly unconscious, he was enjoying "mixing" school interests with the demands of his business. He lingered for half an hour in the office, talking, while Jerry watched the back of his brown head and broad shoulders. Before leaving he walked over to her corner.

"My dear child," he began in a severe tone. He leaned over Jerry so that Dr. Caton could not hear what he said. A trustee had privileges!

"I wouldn't give a cent for a colt that never kicked over the traces!" Which, if Jerry had really been guilty of any offence, would have been very demoralizing. But she was not and she watched Uncle Johnny go out of the room with a look of adoration in her eyes.

A sense of reward came to Jerry, too, when Ginny Cox returned to school. Having fully recovered from the funk that had laid her, shivering and feverish, in bed, that first day she came back in gayer spirits than ever, declaring to many that she thought Miss Gray a "pill" to make such a fuss over just a little joke and, to a few, that it was fine in Jerry to shoulder the blame so that she might play in the game against South High. But her gaiety covered the first real embarrassment she had ever suffered, for Ginny, who had always, because of her peculiar charm, coming from a sense of humor, a hail-fellow spirit, an invariable geniality and an amazing facility in all athletics, exacted a slavish devotion from her schoolmates, and was accustomed to dispense favors among them, hated now to accept, even from Jerry, a very, very great one! And Jerry sensed the humility that this embarrassment called into being.

Ginny waylaid Jerry going home from school. Jerry was carefully living up to the terms of her "sentence"; each day, directly after the close of school, she walked home alone.

"Jerry, I—I haven't had a chance to tell you—oh, what a *peach* you are," Ginny's words came awkwardly; she knew that they did not in any way express what she ought to be saying.

Jerry did not want Ginny's gratitude. She answered honestly: "I didn't want to do it. I *had* to—I drew the unlucky slip, you see. And you were needed on the team."

"It's all so mixed up and not a bit right. Can I walk along with you? Who'd ever have thought that just building that silly snow-woman would have made all this fuss!"

"Dr. Caton says thoughtlessness always breeds inconsiderateness and inconsiderateness develops selfishness, selfishness undermines good fellowship and good fellowship is the foundation of the spirit of Lincoln," quoted Jerry in a voice so exactly like Dr. Caton's that both girls laughed.

"He's dead right," answered Ginny, with her characteristic bluntness. "I just wanted to amuse the others and make them think I was awfully clever and that was plain outright conceit and selfishness. I guess that's the way I do most things. Well, I've learned a lesson. And there isn't anything I wouldn't do for you, Jerry Travis. If I don't play better basketball Friday night than I ever have in my life, well, you can walk all over me like dirt." There was a humble ring in Ginny's voice that had surely never sounded there before!

But the hard part of Jerry's punishment came when the others, without her, trooped off to the game against South High, the blue and gold colors of Lincoln tied on their arms. It promised to be the most exciting game of the season; if Lincoln could defeat South High it would win the Interscholar cup.

There had, alas, to be practiced a little more deception to explain why Jerry remained at home. Gyp had announced that Jerry had a headache and Mrs. Westley had been much concerned—Jerry, who never had an ache or a pain! She had gone to Jerry's room, had tucked her in bed and had sat by the side of the bed gently smoothing Jerry's guilty forehead.

"When I get through this I'll never, never tell a lie for anybody or anything," vowed Jerry in her heart, as she writhed under the loving touch.

Two hours later Gyp tiptoed to her door, opened it softly and peeped in. Jerry, expecting her, sat bolt upright. Gyp bounded to the exact centre of the bed.

"We *won!* We *won!* But, oh, *Jerry*, it was a squeak! Honest to goodness, my heart isn't beating right *yet*. *Tied*, Jerry—at the half. Then Muff Bowling on the South High made two spliffy baskets—they were *great*, even if she made 'em! Our girls acted as though they were just dummies, but didn't they wake up? You should have seen their passing *then*. Why, honest, Midge Fielding was *everywhere!* Caught a high ball and passed it *under*—before you could *wink!* And, oh, Ginny—*she* was *possessed*. She could make that basket *anywhere*. And, *listen*, Jerry, with *only two minutes more to play* if they didn't make *another* and then Ginny *fell—flat*, Jerry, with the South High guard *right on her chest* and her wrist doubled under her—and she got up like a *flash* and her face was as white as that sheet—and *she made a basket!* *And we won!*" And Gyp, drawing a long, exultant breath, dropped her chin on her knees.

"Did—did they all cheer, then, for Ginny?"

"I should *say* so." With a long yawn Gyp uncurled her legs. "I'm dead. I'm going to bed." She turned toward the door. "Oh, say, I most forgot. Ginny told me to tell you that the reason she played the way she did to-night was 'cause she kept thinking of you and what you'd done for her and she wanted to prove that she was worth it. Ginny *is* a good sort, isn't she?"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RAVENS CLEAN THE TOWER

The Ravens, now enjoying a pleasant distinction among the Lincoln students because of Jerry's suffering, the truth of which had become known after a few weeks to nearly everyone in the school, except, of course, the faculty, decided to admit more members to their circle. This necessitated an elaborate ceremony of initiation, and an especially elaborate spread.

"Let's us clean the tower room," suggested Gyp one afternoon, with this in mind. "I don't mean sweep or scrub or anything like that—'cause the dust and the cobwebs make it lots more romantic. I mean just shove things further back. We'll need more room."

Jerry agreed. So the two pushed George Washington aside and climbed the little stairway. A sharp wind howled around the tower room, making weird, wailing sounds.

"Isn't it spooky up here this afternoon?" whispered Gyp. "Let's hurry. Here, I'll hand you these books and you pile them over there in that corner."

Gyp tossed the books about as though they were bricks. Jerry handled them more carefully. From her infancy she had been brought up to respect any kind of a book; those at home had seemed almost a part of her dear mother and Little-Dad; these had belonged to Peter Westley. He must have spent a great deal of his time reading, she thought, the volumes were worn about their edges, the pages thumbed. She peeped into one or two. Peter Westley, who had shunned the companionship of his fellow-mortals, had made these his friends.

Gyp divined what was passing in Jerry's thoughts.

"These books look all dried up and dreary—just like Uncle Peter was," she exclaimed, throwing one over.

Jerry opened it at random.

"Oh, *this* isn't! Listen, isn't it beautiful?"

"Now morn, her rosy steps in th' eastern clime,
Advancing, sow'd the earth with orient pearl—"

"It makes me think of a sunrise from Rocky Point. Often Little-Dad takes me up there and we sleep all night rolled in blankets."

"I wish I could do things like that," sighed Gyp longingly. "I hate just doing the regular sort of things that everyone else is doing."

Jerry regarded her in astonishment; that Gyp might, perhaps, envy her the childhood she had had on Kettle had never occurred to her!

"Perhaps sometime you can visit me in Sunnyside." Her eyes shone at the thought. "Don't you love poetry?" She read again:

"If 'chance the radiant sun with farewell sweet
Extend his ev'ning beam, the fields revive,
The birds their notes renew, and bleating herds
Attest their joy, that hill and valley ring—"

"It's like that—at sunset—in the Witches' Glade," Jerry said slowly. She closed the book. "I think

Peter Westley must have had something nice in him to like this. There used to be an old, old lady who lived in a funny little house in the Notch; I always pretended she was old Mother Hubbard who lived in the cupboard. Jimmy Chubb used to throw apples at her roof to make her run out and chase him. But her garden was the loveliest anywhere around—mother used to beg seeds from her. And she'd talk to her flowers—sometimes when we'd hide behind the hedge next door to her house we'd hear her. And mother said that there must be something lovely in her soul if she cared so much for flowers. Perhaps that's the way it was with your Uncle Peter and his books."

Gyp frowned as though she was trying very hard to think this possible. She lifted a huge Bible and dusted it thoughtfully with her handkerchief.

"I don't know—I heard Uncle Johnny say once to my father that Uncle Peter was as hard as rocks when it came to driving a bargain and he'd never give a cent to anyone. Mother said that riches that came like that only brought unhappiness and she was sorry we had any of it, though—" Gyp laughed. "Money's funny. It wouldn't matter how much of an allowance father gave Graham or me we'd never have any and I don't know where it goes. And Isobel always has a lot. Maybe she's going to be like Uncle Peter—" There was horror in Gyp's voice.

Jerry sat on the table, the huge Bible on her knees. Her eyes stared out through the dusty window-glass.

"She wouldn't be *like* him because *she* won't have to work hard to get the money the way he did! Mother says—" Jerry had a way of saying "mother says" as though it was precious, indisputable wisdom. "Mother says that sometimes when a person sets his heart on just one thing in this world and thinks about it all the time, he kills everything else in him. Doesn't that seem dreadful? Not to enjoy all the beautiful, jolly things in the world?"

Jerry's philosophy was beyond Gyp's practical mind. "What would you do if you had lots and lots of money, Jerry?"

This was a stupendous question and one Jerry had often liked to ask of herself. Her answer was prompt.

"I'd keep going to school just as long as ever I could. And then I'd go all over the world—to Japan and Singapore and India and to the Nile and Venice and Switzerland and Gibraltar—" her tongue stumbled in its effort to circle the globe. "Oh—*everywhere*. I'd want to see everything."

How many young hearts have dreamed of such adventure!

"And yet," Jerry went on, "if I had all the gold in the world right in my hand I don't believe I could make myself go so far away from Sweetheart and Little-Dad and the dogs and—and Sunnyside!"

"Oh," Gyp quickly settled such an obstacle. "If you had all the gold in the world you could take 'em with you."

At that moment they were startled by a loud thud in the hall beneath them. The Bible crashed to the floor. Each girl instinctively clapped her hand to her mouth to smother a cry. Then they laughed.

"What *ever* do you suppose it was? Hark—I hear footsteps." Gyp spoke in sepulchral tones.

"They're going away," whispered Jerry, relieved. "Goodness, how it frightened me!" Jerry leaned over to lift the poor Bible. From its pages had dropped a long envelope. It lay, white and smooth, the address side upward, on the dusty floor.

"Look, Gyp—a *letter*! It must have been in this Bible."

Gyp took the envelope gingerly.

"It's addressed to father! It's never been opened. It looks as though it had *just* been written! Jerry—*that's Uncle Peter's handwriting!*"

Jerry stared at the envelope—except that the letter had been pressed very flat, it did indeed look as though it had just been written.

"Isn't it *creepy*?" Gyp shivered. "Do you believe in ghosts? *Could* Uncle Peter Westley have come here and written that—just—maybe, *last night*?"

It was a horrible thought—Jerry tried not to entertain it. But the wailing wind made it seem possible!

"What'll we do with it?" Gyp had laid it on the table.

"Let's put it back in the Bible"—that seemed a safe place—"and take it home. Maybe there is an important message in it that someone ought to see! But I wish we'd never come here this afternoon."

"And see how dark it is—it's getting late. Let's let these other things go." Jerry's voice, betraying her eagerness to quit the tower room, made Gyp feel creepier than ever.

Each took a corner of the ghostly envelope and slipped it between the pages of the Bible.

"There—it's safe enough now. We can take turns carrying it." The girls hurriedly donned their outer wraps. Then, without one backward glance, they tiptoed down the narrow stair. But, to their amazement, the panel at the foot of the stair would not budge. Vainly they shoved, and pressed their shoulders against the solid oak. Breathless, Gyp sat down on the Bible.

"*What'll* we do?"

"We'll have to shout and bring someone—'cause we can't open the other door."

"Then Old Crow will know our secret," wailed Gyp.

"But we don't want to stay here all *night!*"

Gyp gave one swift, backward glance up the secret stairway to the haunted tower room.

"No—no! Well, let's shout together."

They shouted and shouted, with all the strength of their young lungs. But Old Crow, who really was Mr. Albert Crowe, for many years janitor of Lincoln School, had gone, ten minutes earlier, in his Sunday best, to attend the annual banquet of the Janitors' Association and his assistant had made his last rounds of the School, so that the shouts of the girls echoed and re-echoed vainly through the deserted halls of Highacres.

Jerry leaned, exhausted, against the wall.

"I don't believe it's a bit of use—not a soul can hear us."

"What'll we do?" asked Gyp again—Gyp, who was usually so resourceful. "If we only hadn't found that old letter we never'd have *thought* of ghosts and we wouldn't have minded a bit being shut in the tower room."

Jerry commenced to laugh nervously. "Gyp, maybe you don't *know* you're sitting on the Bible!" Gyp sprang up.

"I don't think it's anything to laugh about! Not me, I mean, but—but having to stay all night—up *there!*"

Jerry started back up the stairway.

"Come on," she encouraged. "*I'm* not afraid. If there *are* ghosts I want to see one." Gyp followed with the Bible. The tower room was shadowy in the fast-falling twilight. The girls tried to open each of the small windows; though they rattled busily enough they would not budge.

Gyp sat down resignedly on the window-seat. "We'll just sit here until we're rescued. Only—no one will *guess* where we are."

"I think it's a grand adventure," declared Jerry valiantly.

"If we only hadn't begun to *think* about ghosts! You never can see them, anyway—you just feel them. Is that the wind? Sit close to me, Jerry."

Jerry sat very close to her chum and they gripped hands; it was easier, that way, to endure the dreadful silence.

"I'm hungry," whispered Gyp, after awhile. Then, a moment later, "Did you hear something, Jerry—like a long, long sigh?"

Jerry nodded and Gyp drew closer to her, shivering.

"Of course," she murmured in a voice lowered to the etiquette of a haunted room. "*You're* not frightened because you didn't *know* Uncle Peter. If I was afraid of him when he was *alive* what ___"

"Sh-h-h!" commanded Jerry. Uncle Peter's ghost might be hovering very close to them and might hear! Gyp's words did not sound exactly respectful.

Jerry tried to talk of everyday things but it was of no use—what mattered the color of Sue Knox's new sweater when the very air tingled with spirits?

"*Oh-h!*" Gyp clutched Jerry in a spasm of fright. "*Something* grabbed my elbow——" her voice was scarcely audible. "Jerry—*true* as I live—cross my heart! Long—bony—fingers—just like Uncle Peter's used to feel—*Oh-h!*"

CHAPTER XIX

THE LETTER

"I don't understand——" Mrs. Westley lifted anxious eyes from her soup-plate. "Gyp *always* telephones! And *both* of them——"

"I saw Peggy Lee and Pat Everett coming home from the dressmaker's and she wasn't with

them," offered Isobel. "But she's all right, mother."

"Such dreadful things happen——"

"I'd like to see anyone try to kidnap *Gyp*," laughed Graham. Then he added, in an off-hand way: "The ice broke on the lake out at Highacres to-day. Guess the skating's over."

"Graham!" cried Mrs. Westley, springing to her feet so precipitously that her chair fell backward with a crash. Her face was deathly white.

Graham, frightened by his careless remark, went to her quickly.

"Mother—I didn't mean to frighten you! Why there's only one chance in a hundred the girls were on the ice. If they'd been skating *some* of us would have seen them!"

"Where *are* they?" groaned the mother. "They might have gone on the lake—afterwards—and not known—and broken through—and—no one would—know——" She shuddered; only by a great effort could she keep back the tears.

"Mother, please don't worry," begged Isobel. "Let's call up every one of the girls and then we'll surely find them."

Not one of them wanted any more dinner. They went to the library and Graham began telephoning to Gyp's schoolmates—a tedious and discouraging process, for each reported that she had not seen either Gyp or Jerry since the close of school.

"I can't *bear* it! We must do something——" Mrs. Westley sprang to her feet. "Graham, call Uncle Johnny and tell him to come *at once*."

Something of the mother's alarm affected Isobel and Graham. Graham's voice was very serious as he begged Uncle Johnny, whom he found at his club, to come over "at once." Then he slipped his arm around his mother as though he wanted her to know that he would do anything on earth for her.

Uncle Johnny listened to the story of Gyp's and Jerry's disappearance with a very grave face. He made Graham tell twice how the ice had broken that afternoon on the lake, frightening the skaters away.

"What time was that?"

"Oh—early. About three o'clock. There were only four or five of us on the lake. You see, hockey practice is over."

"But I remember Gyp saying this morning that she was going to have one more skate!" cried Isobel suddenly.

"Before we report this to the police, Mary, we'll go out to Highacres," Uncle Johnny said. And the thought of what he might find there made Mrs. Westley grip the back of a chair for support. "Come with me, Graham. Isobel—stay with your mother."

Graham went off to the garage to give such directions as Uncle Johnny had whispered to him. Just then Barbara Lee, whom Isobel had reached on the telephone, came in, hurriedly.

"I talked to the girls for a moment after the close of school. They were standing near the library door. They had on their coats and hats." Her report was disquieting.

"May I go with you?" she asked John Westley. He turned to her—something in her face, in her steady eyes, made him feel that if out at Highacres he found what he prayed he might *not* find—he would need her.

"Yes—I want you," he answered simply, wondering a little why, at this distressed moment, he should feel such an absurd sense of comfort in having her with him.

They drove away, two long poles and a coil of rope in the tonneau. In the library Isobel sat holding her mother's hand, wishing she could say something that would drive that white look from her mother's face. But her distress left room for the little jealous thought that Uncle Johnny had told *her* to stay at home and then had taken Barbara Lee! And she wondered, too, if it were *she* who was lost, and not Gyp, would mother care as much?

At that moment Mrs. Westley threw her arms about her and held her very close.

"I just must feel *you*, dear, safe here with me—or I couldn't—stand it—waiting."

"Jerry! Look! That flash—it comes—and goes!" Gyp's voice, scarcely a whisper, breathed in Jerry's ear.

The two girls were huddled in the little window of the tower room. Gyp was almost hysterical; Jerry had had all she wanted of ghosts. Gyp had felt thin fingers grip her elbow, her shoulder—even her ankle. Someone had breathed in her ear. Jerry, too, had admitted that she had heard sounds of irregular breathing from a corner of the room near the secret door. And there had been a constant tap-tapping! And something had laughed—a horrible, thin, ghost laugh, though Jerry

said afterwards that it *might* have been the wind.

Gyp had seen white figures floating about outside, too. Uncle Peter had brought spirit-cronies with him! And now the ghostly flash of light—

"Gyp—" Jerry suddenly spoke aloud. "It's a—*flashlight!* See, someone is swinging it as they walk. *Oh—*" Inspired to action, Jerry seized a huge book and sent it crashing through the window. "*Help! Help!*" she screamed, through the broken glass.

Startled, Uncle Johnny, Graham, Barbara Lee and the assistant janitor, whom they had aroused, halted. Graham, dropping the coil of rope, pointed excitedly to the tower.

"Look—they're in the tower room! *Well, I never—*" That the tower room and its mysteries should remain under lock and key had been a grievance to Graham.

Uncle Johnny shouted to the girls; a great relief, surging through him, made his voice vibrate with joy. And in the light of the electric flash he saw that Barbara Lee's eyes were glistening with something suspiciously like tears.

"Now, to rescue the imprisoned maidens," he laughed, turning to the engineer.

It took but a few moments for the little party to reach the third floor. Then from above came a plaintive voice.

"If you'll just touch George Washington on the left-hand side of the—the frame—he'll move—and —"

For a moment, John Westley, staring at the panel, wondered if *he* were crazy or if Gyp and Jerry —

"We got in—that way," the voice explained. "You can't open the other door! And *please* hurry—it's *dreadfully* dark and—"

The truth flashed over Graham. "Of all *things!* A secret door!" he shouted. He put his shoulder to the huge box of books that had been shoved close to the picture, until it could be unpacked. "Give a hand here!" he commanded excitedly.

They all obeyed him—even Barbara Lee, next to Uncle Johnny, shoved with all the strength of her muscular arms. And Uncle Johnny commenced to chuckle softly.

"The imps," he muttered. "Trapped in their lair."

The box well out of the way, Graham pressed the left-hand side of the panel picture and it swung out under his amazed eyes, revealing a white-faced Gyp standing in the narrow aperture, and Jerry close behind. Their big, frightened eyes blinked in the flashlight.

Uncle Johnny managed to embrace both at once. He wisely asked no explanations, for he could see that tears were not far away. Barbara Lee hugged them, too, and the assistant janitor, who had a girl of his own and at the suggestion of dragging the lake, had been startled "out of a year's growth" as he said afterwards (though he was six feet tall, then), beamed on them as though *he* would like to caress them, too. Graham was excitedly swinging the panel back and forth and peering longingly up the dark, narrow stairway.

"How'd you find it? Does it open right into the tower room? Were you scared?" he asked.

"I'm hungry," declared Gyp.

"Let's hear all about it on the way home," suggested Uncle Johnny. "And we'll put George Washington back in place—there's no use letting the entire school know about this." His words were directed to Graham and to the janitor. "Now, my girlies—what in the world have you got?" For Jerry had picked up the huge Bible.

"It's a—a letter we found—in the Bible—"

"So you brought the whole thing?" Uncle Johnny laughed. "Lead the way, Miss Lee."

In the automobile Gyp had to have an explanation of the poles and the rope. When she heard of their fears her face grew troubled.

"Oh—*how* mumsey must have worried!" As the automobile drew up at the curb she sprang from it and rushed into the house, straight into her mother's arms—Mrs. Westley had heard the car stop and had walked with faltering steps to the door.

"Mother, I didn't *want* you to be worried—not for the *world!* But we couldn't help it."

With the girls safe at home the horrible fears that had tortured them all seemed very foolish. The entire family listened with deep interest while Gyp told of that first afternoon when she and Jerry had discovered the secret stairway and of the subsequent meetings of the Ravens in the tower room.

"Please, Uncle Johnny, make Isobel and Graham promise they won't tell *anybody!* It ought to be ours 'cause we found it and we're Westleys," begged Gyp.

"Whatever in the world possessed Peter Westley to build a secret stairway in his house?" Mrs.

Westley asked John Westley. "Who ever heard of such a thing in this day and age?"

"It's not at all surprising when one recalls how persistently he always avoided people. He planned that as a way of escaping from anyone—even the servants. Can't you picture him grinning down from those windows upon departing callers? Doubtless many a time I've walked away myself, after that man of his told me he couldn't be found."

"I think it's deliciously romantic," exclaimed Isobel, "and I have just as much right to use it as Gyp has."

"My girls—I am afraid the whole matter will have to go to the board of trustees. Remember—Uncle Peter gave Highacres to Lincoln School—we have nothing to say about it."

"Wasn't it *dark* up there?" asked Graham.

Gyp looked at Jerry and Jerry looked at Gyp. By some process of mental communication they agreed to say nothing about Uncle Peter's ghost. Back here in the softly-lighted, warm living-room, those weird voices and clammy fingers seemed unreal. However, there was the letter—Gyp reached for the Bible.

"We were looking through some books—and we found this." Holding the envelope gingerly between her thumb and forefinger, she handed it to Uncle Johnny.

He read the address, turned the envelope over and over in his hand.

"How strange—it has never been opened. It's addressed to Robert. I'll give it to you." He handed it to Mrs. Westley.

She took it with some of Gyp's reluctance. "It's Uncle Peter's handwriting—but how fresh it looks. It's dated two days before he died, John! I suppose he put it in that Bible and it was never found." She tore the envelope open and spread out the sheets. "It's to both you and Robert—read it."

My Dear Nephews:

It won't be long before I go over the river, and I'm glad—for I am an old man and I've lived my life and I can't do much more, and I'd better be through with it. But I wish I could live long enough to right a few things that are wrong. I mean things that I've done, especially one thing. Lately there isn't much peace of mind for me. I've tried to find it in the Bible, but though there's a lot about forgiveness I can't figure out what a man ought to do when he's waited almost a lifetime to get it. I've always been hard as rock; I thought a man had to be to make money, but now it all don't seem worth while, for what good is your money when you're old if your conscience is going to torment you?

Right now I'd give half I possessed if I could make up to a young fellow for a contemptible wrong I did him. So I'm writing this to ask you to do it for me, and then I guess I'll rest easier—wherever I am.

Neither of you knew, I suppose, just what made the Westley Cement Mixer a success; it came near not being one. Back there when we were just starting it up, Craig Winton, a young, smart-looking chap, came to me with a mechanical device he'd invented that he believed we needed in our cement-mixing machine. We did—I knew right off that that invention was what we had to have to make our business a success; without it every cent the other stockholders and myself had put into the thing would be lost. I offered the young fellow a paltry amount, and when he wouldn't accept it, I let him go away. Our engineers worked hard to get his idea, but they couldn't. After a few months he came back. He looked ill and he was shabby and low-spirited. I told him we wouldn't give him a cent more, that I didn't think his invention would help us much, and I let him go away again. The directors were all for paying him any amount, but I told them that if we'd wait he'd come back and as good as give the thing to us or I couldn't read signs, for I'd seen something mighty like desperation in the chap's eyes. Even though the directors talked a lot about failure, I thought the gamble was worth a try, and I made them wait. I was right—young Winton came back, looking more like a wreck than ever, and he took just what I offered him, which was a little less than my first price. And I made him sign a paper waiving all future claims on the patents or the stockholders of the firm. That little invention made all our money. But lately I can't get the fellow's eyes out of my mind—they were queer eyes, glowing like they were lighted, and that last time they had a look in them as though something was dead.

I'm too old to face this thing before the world, but I want you to find Craig Winton and give him or his heirs a hundred thousand dollars, which I've figured would be something like his percentage of the profits if I had drawn an honorable contract with him. The time he came to me he lived in Boston. I've always laughed at men that talked about honor in business, but now that I'm looking back from the end of the trail I guess maybe they're right and I've been wrong....

CHAPTER XX

THE FAMILY COUNCILS

Uncle Johnny laid Peter Westley's letter down. A silence held them all; it was as though a voice from some other world had been speaking to them. Mrs. Westley shivered.

"How I hate money," she cried impulsively. Then, the very comfort and luxury of the room reproaching her, she added: "I mean, I hate to think that wherever big fortunes are made so many are ground down in the process."

Graham was frowning at the letter.

"Of course you're going to hunt up this fellow?" he asked, anxiously, a dull red flushing his cheeks. "Wasn't that as bad as stealing?"

"Maybe he's dead now and it's too late," cried Gyp, who thought the whole thing full of intensely interesting possibilities.

"Uncle Peter cannot defend himself, now, Graham, so let us not pass judgment upon what he has done. And I don't suppose I can act on this matter until your father comes home."

"Oh, John, I know he will want to carry out his Uncle Peter's wish! You need not wait; too much time has been lost already," urged Mrs. Westley.

Graham was standing in front of the fire, his back to the blaze. It struck Uncle Johnny and his mother both that there was a new manliness in the slim, straight figure.

"I want to help find him. It's when you know about such tricks and cheating and—and injustice that you hate this trying to make money. I think things ought to be divided up in this world and every fellow given an equal chance."

John Westley laid his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Real justice is the hardest thing to find in this world, sonny. But keep the thought of it always in your mind—and look out for the rights of the other fellow, then you'll never make the mistakes Uncle Peter did."

"Poor old man, all he cared about in the world was making money, and then in his old age it gave him no joy—only torment. And he'd killed everything else in him that might have brought him a little happiness! I'm glad you and Robert aren't like him," Mrs. Westley added.

"I am, too," cried Gyp, so fervently that everyone laughed.

"How do you find people?" put in Tibby, who was trying very hard to understand what it was all about.

"It *will* be somewhat like the needle in the hay-stack. Boston is a big place—and a lot can happen in—let me see, that must have been fifteen years ago."

"Will you hire detectives?" Gyp was quivering with the desire to help hunt down the mysterious Craig Winton.

"I don't want to; I've always had a sort of distrust of detectives and yet we may have to. We have so little to start on. I'll get Stevens and Murray together to-morrow—perhaps they can tell me more about the buying of the patent. And I'll have Watkins recommend some reliable Boston attorney." Uncle John's voice sounded as though he meant business.

Isobel had said nothing during the little family council. She suddenly lifted her head, her eyes dark with disapproval.

"Won't giving this person all that money make *us* poor?"

Something in her tone sent a little shock through the others.

"My dear——" protested her mother.

"Oh, *you'd* go on cheating him—just like Uncle Peter! That's like you—just think about yourself," accused Graham, disgustedly.

"Do you *want* tainted money?" cried Gyp grandly.

Isobel's face flamed. "You're hateful, Graham Westley. I don't like money a bit better than you do—*you'd* be squealing if you couldn't get that new motorcycle and go to camp and spend all the money you do. And I think it's *silly* to hunt him up after all this time. He's probably invented a lot of things since and doesn't need any money, and if he hasn't—well, inventors are always poor, anyway." Isobel tried to make her logic sound as reasonable to the others as it did to her.

"Bonnie, dear——" That was the name Uncle Johnny had given to her in nursery days; he had not used it for a long time. "There are two reasons why we must carry out the wish Uncle Peter has expressed in this letter. One is, because he *has* asked it. He thought he would have time to give the letter to us himself—perhaps tell us more about it; he did not dream that it would lie for two years in that Bible. The other reason is that it is the honorable thing to do—and it not only involves the honor of Uncle Peter's name but your father's honor and mine—your mother's, yours,

Graham's—even little Tibby's. We would do it if it took our last cent. But it won't—"

"Oh, Uncle Johnny, you're great——" Graham suddenly turned his face to the fire to hide his feeling. "When I'm a man I want to be just like you—and father."

Isobel would not let herself be persuaded to accept her family's point of view. In her heart there still rankled the thought that Uncle Johnny had taken Barbara Lee with him to Highacres and had made *her* stay at home. And it had been silly for them all to get so excited and make such a fuss over Gyp and Jerry—they might have known that they'd turn up all right. When she had seen Uncle Johnny pull Jerry down to a seat beside him on the davenport she had hated her!

Mrs. Westley followed John Westley to the little room that was always called "father's study."

"Won't it be exciting hunting up this Craig Winton?" Gyp asked the others. "Isn't it an interesting name? Maybe he'll have a lot of children. I hope there'll be some girls." Gyp hugged her knees in an ecstasy of anticipation. "If they're dreadfully poor it'll be like their finding a fairy godmother. Think of all they can have with that money!"

"All *I* hope"—Isobel's voice rang cruelly clear—"is that Uncle Johnny won't want to bring any more *charity* girls here!" She rose, then, and without looking at any of them, walked from the room.

Gyp opened her lips to speak, then closed them quickly. Whatever she might say, she knew, instinctively, would only add to the hurt Isobel had inflicted. She could not even throw her arms around Jerry's neck and hug her the way she wanted to do, because the expression of Jerry's face forbade it. It was a very terrible expression, Gyp thought, a little frightened—Jerry's eyes glowed with such a fierce pride and yet were so hurt!

After a moment Jerry said slowly, "I—I am going to bed." Gyp wished that Graham would say something and Graham wished Gyp would say something, and both sat tongue-tied while Jerry walked out of the room.

"Do you think we ought to tell mother?" Gyp asked, in a hushed voice.

"N-no," Graham hated the thought of tale-bearing. "But Isobel's an awful snob. It's her going around with Cora Stanton and Amy Mathers." To think this gave some comfort to Graham and Gyp.

"Well—I don't know what Jerry will *do*," sighed Gyp forlornly.

The door of Jerry's room was shut and Gyp had not the courage to open it. She listened for a moment outside it—there was not a sound from within. She went into her own room and undressed slowly, with a vague uneasiness that something was going to happen.

There had been no sound in Jerry's room because she had been standing rigid in the window, staring with burning, angry eyes out into the darkness. Her beautiful, happy world, that she had thought so full of kindness and good-fellowship, had turned suddenly upside down! "Charity girl——" She did not know just what it meant, but it made her think of homeless, nameless, unloved waifs—motherless, fatherless, dependent upon the world's generosity. Her hand went to her throat—*charity girl*—was not her beloved Sunnyside, with Sweetheart and Little-Dad, richer and more beautiful than anything on earth? And hadn't she always had——Like a flash, though, she saw herself in the queerly-fashioned brown dress that had seemed very nice back at Miller's Notch, but very funny when contrasted with the pretty, simple serge dresses that the other girls at Highacres wore. Perhaps they had all thought she *was* a "charity girl," a waif brought here by Uncle Johnny. To be sure, her schoolmates had welcomed her into all their activities, but perhaps they had felt sorry for her and, anyway, it *had* been after Uncle Johnny had given her the Christmas box——

She looked down at the dress she wore—it was the school dress that had been in the box. Perhaps she should not have taken it—taking it may have made her a charity girl. She should never have come here. It was costing someone money to send her to Highacres and to feed her; and often Mrs. Westley gave little things to her—and none of this could she repay!

With furious fingers Jerry unfastened and tore off the Christmas dress. From its hook in her clothes closet she took down the despised brown garment. Her only thought, then, was to sort out her very own possessions, but, as she collected the few things, the plan to go away—anywhere—took shape in her mind. She would go to Barbara Lee until her mother could send for her!

Then her door opened slowly. On the threshold stood Gyp in her red dressing-gown. It was not so dark but that Gyp could see that Jerry wore her old brown dress and that she held her hat in her hand. With one bound she was at her friend's side, holding her arm tightly.

"Jerry, you're *not* going away! You're *not*——"

"I've—got—to. I *won't* be——"

"You're *not* a—whatever Isobel said! She's horrid—she's jealous of you because Dana King and— and *everybody* thinks you're the most popular girl at Lincoln. Peggy Lee said she heard a crowd of girls saying so—that it was 'cause you're always nice to everybody and 'cause you like to do everything—I won't *let* you go!" There was something very stubborn in Gyp's dark face; Jerry

wished she had not come in. Just before it had seemed so easy to slip away to Barbara Lee's and now—

"I never should have come here. I never should have let you all—"

Gyp gave her chum a little shake.

"Jerry Travis, Uncle Johnny brought you 'cause he said he knew you could give Lincoln School and Isobel and me a lot—oh, of something—mother read it in his letter—I remember. He said it was like a sort of scholarship. And I heard mother tell him the day I was teasing her to let me cut my hair short like yours, that she'd be willing to let me do anything if I could learn to be as sunny as you are—I heard her, 'cause I was listening to see if she was going to let me. So you've *more* than paid for everything. There's something more than just *money*! *You're* too proud; you're prouder than Isobel herself—"

Jerry dropped her hat on the bed. Gyp took it as a promising sign and she closed her arms tight around Jerry's shoulders.

"If you go away it will break my heart," she declared. "I love you more'n any chum I ever had—more than *anybody*—except my family, of course, and I love them differently, so it doesn't count. And mother loves you, too, and so does Tibby, and so does Uncle Johnny. And if you don't tell me right off that you won't go away I'll go straight to mother and then we'll have to tell her how nasty Isobel was, and that'll make *her* unhappy. And I mean it." There was no doubt of that.

Gyp's concluding argument broke down Jerry's determination to go. No, she could not; as Gyp had said, if she went away Mrs. Westley and Uncle Johnny must know why. She could not do a single thing that would make either of them the least unhappy. That would be poor gratitude. Perhaps Gyp was right, too—that *she* was too proud! Surely her mother would never have let her come if it was going to bring the least humiliation to her.

Gyp with quick fingers began to unbutton the brown dress. "Let's just show Isobel that we don't care what she says. I think it's that horrid Cora Stanton and Amy Mathers that makes her act so, anyway. They're horrid! Amy Mathers puts peroxide on her hair and Cora Stanton cheated in the geometry exam—everyone says so—I know what let's do, Jerry, there were some cup cakes left; I saw them in the pantry—let's go down ever so quietly and get them—and we'll have a spliffy spread." As she spoke she caught up Jerry's warm eiderdown wrapper and threw it around her.

Gyp's devotion was very soothing to poor distraught Jerry—so, too, was the suggestion of the cup cakes. But half-way down the stairs Jerry stopped short and whispered tragically in Gyp's ear:

"Gyp—we *can't eat them!* Our school record—no sweets between meals!" And at the thought of school Jerry's world suddenly righted again.

"Oh, well—" Gyp would have liked to suggest missing a point. "We can eat crackers and peanut butter—instead."

CHAPTER XXI

POOR ISOBEL

The rawness of March gave way to a half-hearted April, days of pelting rain with a few hours now and then of warm sunshine. Patches of grass showed green against the dirty snowbanks lingering stubbornly in sheltered corners; here and there a tiny purple or yellow crocus put up its bright head; a few brave robins started their nest-keeping and, perched shivering on bare boughs, valiantly sung the promise of spring.

There were other signs to mark the changing of the seasons—an organ-grinder trundled his wagon down the street, rag-pickers chanted, small, scurrying figures darted in and out on roller-skates, marbles rattled in ragged pockets, and the Lincoln boys and girls at Highacres turned their attention from basketball and hockey to swimming and the school dramatics.

Isobel Westley had been chosen to play the part of Hermia in "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Her family shared her pleasure—they felt that a great distinction had come to them. Gyp and Jerry, particularly, were immensely excited. Jerry, who had only been to the theatre twice in her life, thought Isobel far more wonderful than the greatest actress who ever lived. Both girls sat by the hour and listened admiringly while Isobel rehearsed her lines before them.

Mrs. Westley, who had never quite outgrown a love of amateur dramatics, gave her approval to Isobel's plans for her costume. The other girls, Isobel explained, were making theirs, but Hermia's should be especially nice—so couldn't Madame Seelye design it? Madame Seelye did design it—Isobel standing patiently before the long mirror in the fashionable modiste's fitting-room while Madame, herself, on her knees, pinned and unpinned and pinned again soft folds of pink satin which made Isobel's face, above it, reflect the color of a rose.

"You'd think the whole world revolved 'round your old play," exclaimed Graham, not ill-humoredly. He had asked to be allowed to use the car to take a "crowd of the fellows" out to see

if any sap was running in the woods and Mrs. Westley had explained that Isobel had to have her last fitting, stop at the hair-dresser's to try on a wig, and then go on to Alding's to match a pair of slippers.

"It does," laughed Isobel back, her eyes shining. She was very happy, and when she was happy she was a gay, good-natured Isobel and a very beautiful Isobel. All through the school year her spirit had smarted under the prominence attained by her schoolmates in the various school activities—Ginny Cox was conspicuous in everything and on the honor roll, besides; Peggy Lee played hockey and basketball, Dorrie was in the Glee Club, Pat Everett was a lieutenant in her scout troop, Cora Stanton was editor of the school paper, Sheila Quinn was the class president—even Gyp was a sub on the all-school basketball team, and Jerry—since that day she had skied down Haskin's Hill *she* had pushed her way into everything (that was the way Isobel thought of it); she played on the hockey team and had "subbed" on the sophomore basketball team and it was certain she would be picked on the swimming team. Though Isobel scorned all these activities because they were not "any fun," according to her creed, deep in her heart she had envied the girls who could enjoy them. But now her vanity was soothed and satisfied; anyone could play basketball or skate or swim, but no one could be the Hermia that *she* was going to be! Miss Gray had complimented her upon the interpretation she gave the rôle and her eyes told her what she saw in Madame Seelye's mirror.

And Dana King was playing Lysander—a fine Athenian lad he made. Isobel could afford now to forget the grudge she had nursed against him ever since the Christmas party. He looked so really grown-up that it pleased her to be a little shy with him, as though she had just met him—to forget that they had been schoolmates since kindergarten days. She read admiration in his eyes. What would he think, she said to herself, with a little flutter, when he saw the rose-pink costume?

"Isobel Westley, what *fun* to have a rehearsal every afternoon," had cried one of a group of girls which surrounded her.

"Does Lysander walk home with Hermia every day?" asked another, with a meaning laugh.

"Tell us all about it," coaxed Amy Mathers. "It's too romantic for anything."

Isobel blushed and laughed and pushed them away. She knew that they all envied her—she *wanted* them to envy her. She knew that anyone of them would gladly change places with her. Even Gyp and Jerry had sighed and begged their mother to help them get up some sort of a play in which they could take part. Gyp had asked Miss Gray to be allowed to help in the make-up room, even if she did nothing more than pass the little jars of cream and sticks of paint. And to Jerry had been assigned the especial task of shoving Puck, who was sadly rattle-brained, upon the stage, when the cues came.



GYP, JERRY, TIBBY, EVEN GRAHAM, SUPERINTENDED ISOBEL'S PREPARATIONS FOR THE DRESS REHEARSAL

The play was to be given on Saturday evening. On Friday evening a full-dress rehearsal was called. Hermia's costume was finished and was spread, in all its ravishing beauty, across the guest-room bed. On the floor from beneath it peeped the slippers which had been made to order.

"It'll make all the others look cheap," declared Isobel, thrilling at the pretty sight.

Mrs. Westley looked troubled. Certain doubts had been disturbing her ever since that first moment of enthusiasm when she had yielded to Isobel's coaxing. Isobel had said that the other girls were making their own costumes—she knew that the faculty disliked any extravagance or great expenditures of money in any of the school affairs—might it not have been better to have helped Isobel fashion something simple and pretty at home? Then when she watched Isobel's flushed, happy face, radiantly pretty, she smothered her doubt.

"Pride goeth before a fall, daughter mine. Take care that your costume doesn't make you forget your part," she laughed. After all, Isobel was so pretty that she would outshine the others, anyway—let her costume be ever so dowdy!

Gyp, Jerry, Tibby, even Graham, superintended Isobel's preparations for the dress rehearsal. Gyp sat back on her heels and declared that Hermia was "good enough to eat." Jerry thought so, too, though she had not the courage to say so. Graham straddled the footboard of the bed and passed scathing remarks concerning girls' "duds," but his eyes were proudly admiring and in his pocket he treasured a ticket for the first row that he had bought from another fellow at an advanced price. Isobel ready, they all squeezed merrily into the automobile, taking care not to crush the rose-pink finery, and whirled off to Highacres.

Isobel, who loved dramatic situations in real life quite as well as in make-believe, planned to conceal her radiance until her first appearance on the stage, when she would startle them all, and especially Lysander, with her dazzling loveliness. She stood in a shadow of the wings with her coat wrapped about her. Except for Jerry, waiting to do her humble part, she was alone. She listened to the ceaseless chatter in the dressing-room with a happy smile. She heard Mr. Oliver, the coach, giving sharp orders. There was some trouble with the curtain. She took a quick step forward to see what it was; the high heel of her satin slipper caught in a coil of rope from the staging and she fell forward to her knees. With the one thought to save the satin gown, she jerked her body quickly backward.

"Oh, Isobel, are you hurt?" Jerry was at her side in a moment.

"N-no, only—" Isobel managed to get to her feet, but she leaned dizzily against the scene propping. "Whoever left that old rope here! They ought to be reported!" She glared angrily at poor Jerry as though the fault must be hers. "I've—I've ruined my dress," she sobbed.

Jerry examined the satin skirt. "There isn't the tiniest spot, Isobel. But are you sure you are not hurt? Please try to walk."

That was exactly what Isobel did not want to do, for there was a horrible aching pain around her knee. Then she heard Mr. Oliver's voice again. The curtain had been fixed; in a moment—

"*Leave* me alone! You'd just *like* it if I couldn't go on—"

"Isobel! Oh, here you are." Dana King stuck his head around the corner. Isobel let her cape drop to the floor. The whiteness of her face only added to the pleasing effect. "*Whew!*" Lysander whistled. "Some class! Say, you're *great!* Come on—old Oliver's throwing a fit."

With Jerry's anxious eyes and Dana King's admiring gaze upon her, it was possible for Isobel to walk out upon the stage. Somehow or other she got through her part—miserably, she knew, for again and again Mr. Oliver made her repeat her lines and once, in despair, stopped everything to ask her if she was ill, and did not wish to have Miss Lee take her part. Isobel did not intend giving up her part to anyone; she gritted her little white teeth and went on.

Upon arriving home she declined the hot cocoa Mrs. Westley had waiting for her and hurried to her room on the plea of being very tired. She sat huddled in her dressing gown waiting, with a white, strained face, until she heard the girls' steps on the stairs. Then she called Jerry.

"Close the door," she whispered, without further greeting. "I want you to promise not to tell mother or—or anyone that—I hurt myself. I didn't hurt myself—*much*, and, anyway, I'm going to be in that play *if I die!*" Isobel had hard work to keep back the tears.

Jerry was all sympathy. "I won't tell anyone, Isobel, if you don't want me to. And let me look at your knee—it is your knee, isn't it? I know a lot about those things 'cause Little-Dad's a doctor, you see." Jerry knelt by the side of Isobel's chair and gently drew aside the dressing gown. "Oh, Isobel!" she cried softly. The knee was badly swollen and the flesh had discolored. "That looks—maybe you ought—"

Isobel jerked away from her. "If you're going to make a fuss you can go to bed! But if you *know* anything—oh, it hurts—terribly—"

Without another word Jerry went after hot water and towels. Half through the night she sat by Isobel's bed, her eyes heavy with sleep, patiently administering pack after pack. Gradually the pain subsided and Isobel dropped off into slumber.

All the next day Isobel's secret weighed heavily on Jerry's conscience; with it, too, was an uncertain admiration for Isobel's grit. But Jerry wondered if she, even though she might be the Hermia that Isobel was and wear the rose satin—could want it enough to endure the pain silently.

Isobel had begged to be allowed to stay in bed all day and "rest" and her mother had willingly acquiesced, carrying her meals to her room and chatting with her, unsuspecting, while she nibbled at what was on the tray.

Jerry helped Isobel dress. The pain caused by the effort to stand on the injured leg brought a deep flush to Isobel's cheeks and tiny purplish shadows under her pretty eyes, so that she made even a lovelier Hermia than on the evening before. That knowledge, the murmur of admiration that swept through the crowded hall, the envy she read on the other girls' faces, the shy, boyish wonder in Lysander's lingering glance, helped her through the agony of it all until the very end when, quite suddenly, she crumpled into Lysander's quickly-outstretched arms! The last scene had a touch of reality not expected; no one had the presence of mind to ring down the curtain; the girls and boys rushed pell-mell upon the stage.

Graham and Dana King carried Isobel to an empty classroom where she quickly regained consciousness. Her first sensation was a deep thankfulness that the play was over and that she could tell about her injured knee. Jerry had already done so, a little conscience-smitten, and Uncle Johnny had rushed away for a doctor. Isobel looked at her crumpled rose-pink skirts with something akin to loathing and clung tightly to her mother's hand. Graham, in a voice that sounded far off, was assuring her that he could carry her out to the car without hurting her the least bit! And Dana King was asking, at regular intervals, and in an anxious voice, if she felt better. Oh, it was *nice* to have them all care—it made the pain easier—

...She liked the funny bright lights swimming all around her and the quick steps and the hushed voices.... Mrs. Hicks' little round eyes blinking at her ... the feel of the soft sheets and the doctor's cold touch on her poor, swollen knee ... the swinging things before her eyes and the far-off hum of voices that were really very close and the tiny star of light over the blur in the other end of the room ... the million stars ... the slippery taste of the medicine someone gave her ... and always mother's fingers tight, tight about her own....

"This is very serious," came in a small voice that couldn't be the doctor's because *he* spoke with a deep boom ... then she went to sleep....

CHAPTER XXII

JERRY WINS HER WAY

Poor, pretty Hermia—trying days followed her little hour of triumph. While the whole school buzzed over the gorgeousness of her costume, over the satin and silver-heeled slippers, over her prettiness and how she had really acted just as well as Ethel Barrymore, she lay very still on her white bed and let one doctor after another "do things" to her poor knee. There were consultations and X-ray photographs, and all through it old Doctor Bowerman, who had dosed her through mumps and measles, kept saying, at every opportunity, with a maddening wag of his bald head: "If you only hadn't been such a little fool as to walk on it!" Finally, after what seemed to Isobel a great deal of needless fuss, the verdict was given—in an impressive now-you'll-do-as-I-tell-you manner; she had torn the muscles and ligaments of her knee; some had stretched, little nerves had been injured; she must lie very quietly in bed for a few weeks and then—perhaps—

"I know what he means," Isobel had cried afterwards, in a passion of fear; "he means he can tell then whether I will ever be able to—to dance again or not!" The thought was so terrible that her mother had difficulty soothing her.

"If you do what he tells you now you'll be dancing again in less than no time," reassured Uncle Johnny. "Dr. Bowerman wants to frighten you so that you will be careful."

The first week or so of the enforced quiet passed very pleasantly; mother had engaged a cheery-faced nurse who proved to be excellent company; every afternoon some of the girls ran in on their way home from school with exciting bits of school gossip and the whispered inquiry—of which Isobel never wearied—how had it felt to faint straight into Dana King's arms? Uncle Johnny brought jolly gifts, flowers, books, puzzles; Gyp tirelessly carried messages to Amy Mathers and Cora Stanton and back again.

But as the days passed these pleasant little excitements failed her, one by one. Mother decided that the nurse was not needed—there was no medicine to be given—and a tutor was engaged, instead, to come each morning. Her school friends grew weary of the details of Isobel's accident and the limitations of her pink-and-white room; other things at school claimed their attention—a new riding club was starting, and the Senior parties; they had not a minute, they begged Gyp to tell Isobel, to play—they were "awfully" sorry and they'd run in when they could. Gyp and Jerry, too, were swimming every afternoon in preparation for the spring inter-school swimming meet. The long hours dragged for the little shut-in; she nursed a not-unpleasant conviction that she was abused and neglected. She consoled her wounded spirit with morbid pictures of how, after a long, bedridden life, she would reap, at its end, a desperate remorse from her selfish,

inconsiderate family; she refused to be cheered by the doctor's assertion that she was making a tremendously "nice" recovery and would be as lively on her feet as she'd ever been—though he never failed to add: "You don't deserve it!"

One afternoon, three weeks after the accident, Isobel looked at her small desk clock for the fourth time in fifteen minutes. A ceaseless patter of rain against the window made the day unusually trying. Her mother had gone, by the doctor's orders, to Atlantic City for a week's rest, leaving her to the capable ministrations of Mrs. Hicks. That lady had carried off her luncheon tray with the declaration that "a body couldn't please Miss Isobel anyways and if Miss Isobel wanted anything she could ring," and Isobel had mentally determined, making a little face after the departing figure, that she'd die before she asked old Hicks for anything! It was only half past two—it would be an hour before even Tibby would come, or Gyp or Jerry. What day was it?

When one spent every day in one small pink-and-white room it was not easy to remember! Thursday—no, Wednesday, because Mrs. Hicks had said the cook was out—

A door below opened and shut. Footsteps sounded from the hall; quick, bounding, they passed her door.

"Gyp!" Isobel called. There was no answer. Someone was moving in the nursery; it was Jerry, then, not Gyp.

"Jerry!" Still there was no answer. Jerry was too busy turning the contents of her bureau drawer to hear. She found the bathing-cap for which she was hunting and started down the hall. A sudden, pitiful, choky sob halted her flight.

When she peeped into Isobel's room Isobel was lying with her face buried in her pillow.

"Isobel——" Jerry advanced quickly to the side of the bed. "Is anything wrong? What is the matter?"

"I—I wish I—were dead!"

"Oh—*Isobel!*"

"So would you if you had to lie here day in and day out a—a helpless cripple and left all alone——"

Jerry looked around the quiet room. There was something very lonely about it—and that patter of the rain——

"Isn't Mrs. Hicks——"

"Oh—*Hicks*. She's just a crosspatch! You all leave me to servants because I can't move. Nobody loves me the least little bit. I—I wish I were dead."

To Jerry there was something very dreadful in Isobel's words. What if her wish came true, then and there? What if the breath suddenly stopped—and it would be too late to take back the wish——

"Oh, *don't* say that again, Isobel. Can't I stay with you?"

Isobel turned such a grateful face from her pillow that Jerry's heart was touched. Of course poor Isobel was lonely and she and Gyp *had* selfishly neglected her. Even though Isobel did not care very much for her, she would doubtless be better company than—no one. She slipped the bathing-cap in her pocket and slowly drew off her coat and hat.

"Do you mind staying?" Isobel asked in a very pleading voice.

Jerry might reasonably have answered: "I do mind. I cannot stay; this is the afternoon of the great inter-school swimming meet and I am late, now, because I came home for my cap," but she was so thrilled by the simple fact of Isobel's wanting her—*her*; that everything else was forgotten.

"Of course I don't. It's horrid and stupid for you to lie here all day long. Shall I read?"

"Oh, *no*—after that dreadful tutor goes I don't want to see a book!"

"Let's think of something jolly—and different. Would you like to play travel? It's a game my mother and Little-Dad and I made up. It's lots of fun. We pick out a certain place and we say we're going there. We get time-tables for trains and boats and we decide just what we'll pack—all pretend, of course. Then we look up in the travel books all 'bout the place and we have the grandest time—most as good as though we really went. Last winter we traveled through Scotland. It made the long evenings when we were shut in at Sunnyside pass like magic. Little-Dad has a perfect passion for time-tables and he never really goes anywhere in his life—except in the game."

"What fun," cried Isobel, sitting up against her pillows. A few weeks before Isobel would have scorned such a "babyish" suggestion from anyone. "Where shall we go?"

"I've always wanted to go to Venice. We got as far as Naples and then 'Liza Sloane's grandson got scarlet fever and Little-Dad went down and stayed with him. I'd love to live in a palace and go everywhere in little boats."

"Then we'll go to Venice and we'll travel by way of Milan and Florence. Jerry, down in father's

desk there are a whole lot of time-tables and folders he collected the spring he planned to go abroad. And you can get one of Stoddart's books in the library—and a Baedeker, too. We ought to have a whole lot of clothes—it's warm in Italy. Bring that catalogue from Altman's that's on mother's sewing table and we'll pick out some new dresses. What fun!"

Jerry went eagerly after all they needed for their "game." She sat on the other side of Isobel's bed and spread the books out around her. First, they had to select from the colored catalogue suitable dresses and warm wraps for shipboard; then they had to fuss over sailing dates and cabin reservations. In the atlas Jerry traced from town to town their route of travel, reading slowly from Baedeker just what they must see in each town. She had a way of reading the guidebook, too, that made Isobel see the things. It was delightful to linger in Florence; Jerry had just suggested that they postpone going on to Venice for a few days, and Isobel had decided to send back to America for that pale blue dotted swiss, because it would blend so wonderfully with the Italian sky and the pastel colors of the old, old Florentine buildings, when they were interrupted by Gyp and Uncle Johnny.

Gyp was a veritable whirlwind of fury, her eyes were blazing, her cheeks glowed red under her dusky skin, every tangled black hair on her head bristled. She confronted Jerry accusingly.

"So *here's* where you are!" Her words rang shrilly. "Here—fooling 'round with Isobel and you let the South High beat us by two points! You *know* you were the only girl we had who could beat Nina Sharpe in the breast stroke. They put in Mary Reed and she was like a *rock*. And you swam thirty-eight strokes under water the other day. I saw you—I counted. And—and the South High girl only got up to *twenty!* *That's* all you cared."

Jerry turned, a little frightened. She had hated missing the swimming meet—contests were such new things in her life that they held a wonderful fascination for her—but she had not dreamed that, through her failure to appear, Lincoln might be beaten! She faced Gyp very humbly.

"Isobel was alone——"

Gyp turned on her sister.

"You're the very selfishest girl that ever lived, Isobel Westley, and you're getting worse and worse. You never think of anyone in this whole world but yourself! You never would have hurt your knee so badly only you wanted to save your precious old dress, and you wouldn't give in and let Peggy Lee take your part! Maybe you *are* lonely and get tired lying here and everyone's sorry 'bout that, but that's not any reason for your keeping Jerry here when we needed her so badly—and she missed all the fun, too!"

Isobel drew herself back into her pillows. She was no match for her indignant sister. And she was aghast at the enormity of her selfish thoughtlessness.

"I didn't know—honestly, Gyp. I thought the match was on Thursday——"

"It was. *This* is Thursday," scornfully.

"Oh, it's *Wednesday*. Isn't it Wednesday? Mrs. Hicks said cook was out and——"

"As if the calendar ran by the cook! Cook's sister's niece's sister was married to-day and she changed her day out. If you'd think of someone else——"

Jerry took command of the situation.

"It's my fault, Gyp. I could have told Isobel but—I didn't. I sort of realized how I'd feel if I had to lie there in bed day after day when everyone else was having such a good time and—well, the swimming match didn't seem half as important as making Isobel happy and—I don't believe it was!" There was triumphant conviction in Jerry's voice, born of the grateful little smile Isobel flashed to her.

Gyp turned disgustedly on her heel. From the doorway where Uncle Johnny had been taking in the little scene came a chuckle. As Gyp walked haughtily out of the room he came forward and laid his hand on Jerry's shoulder.

"Right-o, Jerry-girl. There's more than one kind of a victory, isn't there? Now run along and make peace with Miss Gypsy and let me get acquainted with my Bonnie—four whole days since I've seen you." There was a suspicious crackling of tissue-paper in his pocket. One hand slowly drew forth a small, blue velvet box which he laid in Isobel's fingers.

"Oh, Uncle Johnny!" For, within, lay a dainty bracelet set with small turquoise. Quite unexpectedly Isobel's eyes filled with tears.

"What is it, kitten?"

"It's lovely only—only—everybody's too good to me for—I guess—I'm—what Gyp said I was!"

There was everything in Isobel's past experience to warrant her expecting that Uncle Johnny would vehemently protest the truth of her outburst and assure her that no one could do enough for her. She *wanted* him to do so. But, alas, she read in his face that he, too, thought what Gyp had said was very true.

"Isobel, dear—I think I ought to try and make you see something—for your own good. Have you

ever pictured the fight that's going on in the human blood all the time—the tiny warriors struggling constantly, one kind to kill and the other to keep alive? The same sort of fight's going on in our natures, too. Every one of us is born with a whole lot of good things; they're our heritage and it's our own fault when we don't keep 'em. I don't mean outward things, dear—like your golden hair and those sky-blue eyes of yours—I mean the inside things, the things that grow and make our lives. But they've got to fight to live. If vanity and selfishness get the upper hand—where do they lead you? Well," he laughed, "I can't make you understand any more clearly what I mean than just to point to poor old Aunt Maria!"

Isobel had turned her face away; he could not see how she was taking his clumsy little lecture.

"*She's* just a pathetic waste of God's good clay—moulded once as He wants His children, but what has she done? She's lived—no one knows how many years—only to feed her own body and glorify her own nest; she's grown *in* instead of *out*; she's never given an honest thought to making this world or anyone in it one bit better for her having lived in it. She's stealing from God. And what's done it—vanity, that years ago mastered all the good things in her. Poor old soul—she was once a young, pretty girl, like you—"

Isobel jerked her head petulantly. The blue velvet box lay neglected on the counterpane.

"I think you're horrid to lecture me, Uncle Johnny. Mother and father—"

Uncle Johnny smiled whimsically at the childish face.

"Mothers and fathers sometimes don't see things as clearly as mere uncles—because they're so close. And Bonnie, dear, it's because we all want so much of you! Let me tell you something else—this isn't a lecture, either. It's a little thing that happened when you were a baby and I've never forgotten it. I didn't see you until you were a year old—I was abroad, studying, when you were born. When I went up to your nursery that first time, and looked at you, I thought you were the most wonderful thing God ever made. You lay there in your little white crib and stared at me with your round, blue eyes, and then you smiled and thrust out the tiniest scrap of a hand. I didn't dare breathe. And everything around you was so perfect—white enamel, blue and yellow and pink birds and squirrels and dogs and things painted on your walls, the last word in baby furniture and toilet things. That very day a friend of mine asked me to help drive the orphans of the city on their annual outing. I was glad to do something for someone—you see, having a new niece made me feel as though I was walking on air. They loaded up my car with kids of all sizes and then the last moment someone snuggled a bit of humanity into the front seat between two older youngsters—a poor little mite with big, round, blue eyes like yours and the lower part of her face all twisted with a great scar where she'd been burned. I couldn't see anything on the whole ride but that little face—and always, back in my mind were your two blue eyes and your dimpled smile. I wanted to get through with the whole trip and hurry back to your nursery to see if you were all right. But I stopped long enough at the orphanage to ask about the poor baby. She'd been found in a filthy cellar where she'd been abandoned—that's all they knew. How's *that* for a heritage? Stripped of everything—except the soul of her—to fight through life with, and horribly disfigured in the bargain. I asked what they did for such children and they told me that they'd keep her until she was fourteen—then they'd have taught her some sort of work—probably domestic—and she could make her own way. God help her—fourteen, a little younger than our Gyp! I went back to your mother's. She was out and I rushed up to your nursery. Your very professional nurse thought I was mad. I sent her out. I took you in my arms. I had to hold you to feel that you were safe and sound and had all the arms and legs you needed and your face not half scarred away. And sitting there I sort of talked to God—I begged Him to let you keep the blessings you had at that moment and to make you worthy of them. You're a beautiful girl, Isobel, and you have every advantage that love and thought and money can give you, but—so was Aunt Maria beautiful at your age, before vanity and selfishness—"

"Uncle Johnny, I've known for a long time—that you didn't love me! That's why I've been so nasty to Jerry. You love her—"

"Bonnie!" Uncle Johnny's arm was around her now. He half shook her. "Foolish girl! I love you now just the way I loved that mite of a baby. I've always been fonder of you than any of the others and I'm mighty fond of them. But you were the first—the most wonderful one."

"But you'd like to have me—like Jerry?"

"Yes," he answered, very decidedly. "I'd like to have you—that kind of a girl, who walks straight with her head up—and sees big visions—and grows toward them."

"I hate goody-goody girls," sighed poor Isobel.

"So do I!" laughed Uncle Johnny. "But you couldn't hate a girl who would rather make someone else happy than win in a swimming match?"

"N-no, and I wouldn't blame Jerry if she'd just enjoy seeing me miserable—I've been so nasty to her. And she *isn't* goody-goody, either! She's just—"

"A very normal, unspoiled, happy girl who's always been so busy thinking of everything else that she's never had a moment to think of herself. Now to show that you forgive my two-a-penny lectures, will you let me eat dinner with you off your tray? And what are you doing with these books? And did you know Dr. Bowerman's going to let you try crutches on Sunday?"

Two hours later, when Jerry, a little shyly, tiptoed into Isobel's room to say good-night, Isobel impulsively pulled her head down to the level of her own and kissed her. She wanted to tell Jerry what Uncle Johnny had made her feel and see but she could not find the right words, and Jerry wanted to tell her that she wouldn't for the world trade the jolly afternoon they had had together for any swimming match, but *she* couldn't find the right words, so each just kissed the other, wondering why she was so happy!

"I'm going to walk on crutches Sunday, Jerry."

"Oh, great! It will only be a little while before you're back in school, Isobel."

"Good-night, Jerry."

"Good-night, Isobel!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE THIRD VIOLINIST

"Hello! Is that you, Gyp? I want Centre 2115, please. Is this Mr. Westley's house? Is that *you*, Gyp?... This is Pat Everett. *Listen*—" came excitedly over the wire, though Gyp was listening as hard as she could. "Peg and I've found *the black-and-white man!*"

Gyp declared, afterwards, that the announcement had made her tingle to her toes! Immediately she corralled Jerry, whom she found translating Latin with a dictionary on her lap and a terrible frown on her brow, and together they hurried to Pat's house. It was a soft May evening—the air was filled with the throaty twitter of robins, the trees arched feathery green against the twilight sky. Pat and Peggy sat bareheaded on the steps of the Everett house, waiting for them. A great fragrant flowering honeysuckle brushed their shoulders. A more perfect setting could not have been found for the finish of their conspiracy.

Pat plunged straight into her story.

"Peg and I were coming back from Dalton's book store and we ran bang into the man—he'd taken his hat off 'cause it was so warm and was fanning himself with it. We both saw it at exactly the same moment and we just turned and clutched each other and *almost* yelled."

"And then, what? Why didn't you grab him?"

"As if we could lay our hands on a perfect stranger! Anyway, we've got to be tactful. But I'm *sure* it's the one—there was a white streak that ran right back from the front of his face. And he was very handsome, too—at least we decided he would be if we were as old as Miss Gray. *I* thought he was a little—oh, biggish."

"And to think how we've hunted for him and he was right here—" Then Gyp realized that Pat did *not* have the gentleman in her pocket.

"But how will we find him again?"

"We followed him—and he went into the Morse Building and got into the elevator and we were going right in after him when who pops out but Dr. Caton, and he looked so surprised to see us that we hesitated, and the old elevator boy shut the door in our faces. But we asked a man who was standing there in a uniform, like a head janitor or something, if that gentleman in a black coat and hat and lavender tie had an office in the building, and he said, "Yes, seventh floor, 796." He leered at us, but we looked real dignified, and Peg wrote it down on a piece of paper and we walked away. So now all we've got to do is to just go and see him," and Pat hugged her slim knees in an ecstasy of satisfaction.

The girls stared meditatively at a fat robin pecking into the grass in search of a late dinner. To "just go and see him" was not as simple to the conspirators as it sounded, slipping from Pat's lips.

"Who'll go?" Gyp put the question that was in each mind.

"Perhaps it would be too many if all four of us went—so let's draw lots which two—"

"Oh, *no!*" cried Jerry, aghast.

The others laughed. "It'd be fairest to leave Jerry out of the draw."

"I'll go," cried Gyp grandly, "if Pat or Peggy will go with me and do the talking."

"What'll we say?" Now that the Ravens faced the fulfillment of their plans they felt a little nervous.

"I know—" Gyp's puzzled frown cleared magically. "Mother has five tickets for the Philadelphia Symphony to-morrow night—I'll ask her to let us go and invite Miss Gray to chaperone us. Then we'll write a note and tell this man that if he'll go to the concert and look at the third box on the left side he'll see the lady of his heart who has been faithful to him for years in spite of her many other suitors—we'll put that in to make him appreciate what he's getting. It'll be much easier

writing it than saying it."

"Gyp—you're a wonder," cried the others, inspired to action. "Let's go in and write the note now."

The Ravens, who met now at Pat Everett's house, had neglected Miss Gray of late. Carnations had succeeded the violets, then a single rose. Pat had even experimented with a nosegay of everlasting which she had found in one of the department stores. It had been weeks since they had sent anything. For that reason a little feeling of remorse added enthusiasm now to their plotting.

Mrs. Westley was delighted at Gyp's desire to hear the concert and to include Miss Gray in the party. And Miss Gray's face had flushed with genuine pleasure when Gyp invited her.

"Everything's all ready," Gyp tapped across to Pat Everett, and Pat, nodding mysteriously, pulled from her pocket the corner of a pale blue envelope.

Directly after the close of school Gyp and Pat, with Jerry and Peggy Lee close at their heels, to bolster their courage, walked briskly downtown to the Morse Building. If any doubts as to the propriety of their action crept into any one of the four minds, they were quickly dispelled—for the sake of sentiment. It, of course, would not be pleasant, facing this stranger, but any momentary discomfort was as nothing, considering that their act might mean many years of happiness for poor, starved, little Miss Gray!

To avoid the leering elevator man the two girls climbed the six flights to the seventh floor. Pat carried the letter. Gyp agreed to go in first.

"746—748——" read Pat.

"It's the other corridor." They retraced their steps to the other side of the building. "784-788-792——" Gyp repeated the office numbers aloud. "7-9-6! *Wilbur Stratman, Undertaker!*"

"*Pat Everett!*" Gyp clutched her chum's arm. "*A—undertaker! I won't go in—for all the Miss Grays in the world!*"

Pat was seized with such a fit of giggling that she had difficulty in speaking, even in a whisper. "Isn't that *funny*? We've *got* to go in. The girls are waiting—we'd never hear the *last* of it! He can't bury us alive. Oh, d-dear——" She wadded her handkerchief to her lips and leaned against the wall.

"If Miss Gray wants an undertaker she can *have* him! For my part *I* should think she'd rather have a policeman or—or the iceman! Come on——" Gyp's face was comical in its disgust. She turned the knob of the door.

A thin, sad-faced woman told them that Mr. Stratman was in his office. She eyed them curiously as, with a jerk of her head, she motioned them through a little gate. As Gyp with trembling fingers opened the door of the inner office, a man with a noticeable white streak in his hair pulled his feet down from his desk, dropped a cigar on his pen tray and reached for a coat that lay across another chair.

"Is—is this Mr. Stratman?" asked Gyp, wishing her tongue would not cling to the roof of her mouth.

He nodded and waited. These young girls were not like his usual customers, probably they had some sort of a subscription blank with them. He watched warily.

"Our errand is—is private," stammered Gyp, who could see that Pat was beyond the power of speech. "It's—it's personal. We've come, in fact, of—our own accord—she doesn't know a thing about it——"

"She? Who?"

"Miss—Miss Gray." Gyp glanced wildly around. Oh, she was making a dreadful mess of it! Why *didn't* Pat produce the letter instead of standing there like a wooden image?

Being an undertaker, Mr. Wilbur Stratman met a great many women whom he never remembered. "H-m, Miss Gray—of course," he nodded. Encouraged, Gyp plunged on, with the one desire of getting the ordeal over with.

"She's dreadfully unhappy. She's been faithful to you all these years and she's lived in a little boarding house and worked and worked and wouldn't marry anyone else and——"

With an instinct of self-defense Mr. Stratman rose to his feet and edged ever so little toward the door. Plainly these two very young women were stark mad!

"I am very sorry for Miss Gray but—what can I do?"

"Oh, *can't* you marry her *now*? She's still very pretty——" Gyp was trembling but undaunted. The precipice was there—she had to make the leap!

The undertaker paused in his contemplated flight to stare—then he laughed, a loud, hoarse laugh that sent the hot blood tingling to Gyp's face.

"Who ever heard the beat of it! A proposal by proxy! *Ha! ha!* My business is *burying* and not

marrying! Ha! Ha! Pretty good! *I* don't know your Miss Gray. Even if I did I can't get away with a husky wife and six children at home!"

Pat pulled furiously at Gyp's sleeve. A chill that felt like a cold stream of water ran down Gyp's spine.

"I don't get on to what you're after, Miss what-ever-your name is, but you're in the wrong pew. *I* never knew a Miss Gray that I can remember and I guess somebody's been kidding you."

Pat suddenly found her tongue—in the nick of time, too, for a paralysis of fright had finished poor Gyp.

"We must have made a mistake, Mr. Stratman. We are very sorry to have bothered you. We are in search of a certain—party that—that has—a white streak—in his hair."

"O-ho," the undertaker clapped his hand to his head. "So *that's* the ticket, hey? Well, I've always said I couldn't get away from much with that thing always there to identify me—but I never calculated it'd expose me to any proposals!" He laughed again—doubling up in what Pat thought a disgustingly ungraceful way. She held her head high and pushed Gyp toward the door. "We will say good-by," she concluded haughtily.

"Say, kids, who are you, anyway?" His tone was quite unprofessional.

"It is not necessary to divulge our identity," and with Gyp's arm firmly in her grasp Pat beat a hasty retreat. Safe outside in the corridor they fell into one another's arms, torn between tears and laughter.

With mingled disgust and disappointment the Ravens decided then and there to let love follow its own blind, mistaken course.

"Miss Gray can die an old maid before I'll ever face another creature like that!" vowed Gyp, and Pat echoed her words.

"No one ever gets any thanks for meddling in other people's affairs, anyway," Peggy Lee offered.

"Nice time to tell us *that*," was Gyp's irritable retort.

That evening Miss Gray, charming in a soft lavender georgette dress, which her clever fingers had made and remade, wondered why her four young charges were so glum. There was nothing in the world *she* loved so much as a symphony orchestra. She sat back in her chair, close to the edge of the box, with a happy sigh, and studied her program. Everything that she liked best, Chopin, Saint-Saëns, and Wagner—Siegfried's Death. Gyp, eyeing her chaperon's happy anticipation, indulged in a whispered regret.

"Doesn't she look pretty to-night? If that horrible creature only hadn't been——" The setting would have been so perfect for the dénouement. She sprawled back, resignedly, in her chair, smothering a yawn. A flutter of applause marked the coming in of the orchestra. There was the usual scraping of chairs and whining of strings. Then suddenly Miss Gray leaned out over the box-rail, exclaiming incoherently, her hands clasping and unclasping in a wild, helpless way.

An opening crash of the cymbals covered her confusion. The four girls were staring at her, round-eyed. They had not believed Miss Gray capable of such agitation! What *ever* had happened——

"An old friend," she whispered, her face alternately paling and flushing. "A very dear—old—friend! The—the third—violin——" She leaned weakly against the box-rail. The girls looked down at the orchestra. There—under the leader's arm—sat the third violinist—and a white streak ran from his forehead straight back through his coal black hair!

As though an electric shock flashed through them the four girls straightened and stiffened. A glance, charged with meaning, passed from one to another. Gyp, remembering the moment of confidence between her and Miss Gray, slipped her hand into Miss Gray's and squeezed it encouragingly.

Not one of them heard a note of the wonderful music; each was steadying herself for that moment when the program should end. Their box was very near the little door that led behind the stage. Gyp almost pushed Miss Gray toward it.

"Of *course* you're going to see him! *Hurry*. You look so nice——" Gyp was so excited that she did not know quite what she was saying. "Oh—*hurry!* You may never see him again."

Then they, precipitously and on tiptoe, followed little Miss Gray. Though it did not happen as each in her romantic soul had planned, it was none the less satisfying! In a chilly, bare anteroom off the stage, at a queer sound behind him resembling in a small way his name, the third violinist turned from the job of putting his violin into its box.

"*Milly*," he cried, his face flaming red with a pleased surprise.

"George——" Miss Gray held back, twisting her fingers in a helpless flutter. "I—I thought—when you sent—the—flowers—and the verses—that maybe, you—you still cared!"

Just for a moment a puzzled look clouded the man's face—then a vision in the doorway of four wildly-warning hands made him exclaim quickly:

"Care—didn't I tell you, Milly, that I'd never care for anyone else?"

"He took her right in his arms," four tongues explained at once, when, the next day, the self-appointed committee on romance reported back to the other Ravens. "Of course, he didn't know we were peeking. He isn't exactly the type *I'd* go crazy over, but he's so much better than that undertaker! And going home Miss Gray told us all about it. It would make the grandest movie! She had to support her mother and he didn't earn enough to take care of them both, and she wouldn't let him wait all that time; she told him to find someone else. But you see he didn't. Isn't love funny? And then when her mother finally died she was too proud to send him word, and I guess she didn't know where he was, anyway, or maybe she thought he *had* gone and done what she told him to do and married some one else. And she believed all the time that he sent her those flowers—I s'pose by that say-it-with-flowers-by-telegraph-from-any-part-of-the-country method. Oh, I *hope* she'll wear a veil and let us be bridesmaids!"

But little Miss Gray did not; some weeks later, in a spick-and-span blue serge traveling suit, with a little bunch of pink roses fastened in her belt, she slipped away from her dreary boarding house and met her third violinist in the shabby, unromantic front parlor of an out-of-the-way parsonage; the parson's stout wife was her bridesmaid—so much for gratitude!

CHAPTER XXIV

PLANS

"Oh, dear—how dreadfully fast time passes. It seems only a little while ago we were planning for the winter and now here comes Mrs. Hicks about new summer covers for the furniture, and Joe Laney wants to know if there's going to be any painting done and I haven't thought of any summer clothes—and with those two great growing girls! I suppose if we're going to the seashore we ought to make some reservations, too——" and Mrs. Westley concluded her plaint with a sigh that came from her very toes.

John Westley, from the depths of the great armed chair where he stretched, laughed at her serious face. But the expression of his own reflected the truth of what she had said.

"It's the rush we live in, Mary. Why don't you cut out the seashore and find a quiet place—out of this torrent? Something—like Kettle." The mention of Kettle brought him suddenly to a thought of Jerry.

"Well, my Jerry-girl's year of school is almost up. What next?"

Mrs. Westley laid down her knitting. "Yes—what next?" she asked.

"Somehow, I can't picture Jerry going back to Miller's Notch and—staying there——"

"That's it—I've thought of it often. Have we been doing the girl a kindness? After all, John, contentment is the greatest thing in this world, and perhaps we've hurt the dear child by bringing her here and letting her have a taste of—this sort of thing."

John Westley regarded his sister-in-law's plump, kindly face with amusement. She had the best heart in the world and the biggest, but she had not the discernment to know that there were treasures even in Miller's Notch and Sunnyside, and, anyway——

"Isn't contentment, Mary, a thing that depends on something inside of us, rather than our surroundings?"

She nodded, speculatively.

"And I rather think my girl from Kettle will be contented anywhere. She's gone ahead fast here. I was talking to Dr. Caton about her. He says she is amazingly intense in her work. I suppose that has come from her way of living there at Sunnyside. But what can the school there at Miller's Notch give her now?"

"And what is there for a girl, living in a small place like that, after school? Contentment *does* depend upon our state of mind, I grant, but one's surroundings affect that state of mind—so there you are! How is a girl going to be happy if she knows that she is far superior mentally to everything that makes up her life? Jerry will grow to womanhood in her little mountain village—marry some native and——"

Uncle Johnny ignored the picture.

"We can trip ourselves up at almost every turn, Mary. Aren't places really big or small as we ticket them in our own minds? If you think of Miller's Notch and Kettle by figures of the census, they *are* small—but, maybe, reckoning them from real angles they're big—very big, and it's our cities that are small. To go back to Jerry—when I think of her I always think of something I said to Barbara Lee—that nothing on earth could chain a spirit like that anywhere—she was one of the world's crusaders. Oh—youth! If nothing spoils my Jerry, she'll always go forward with her head up! But *that's* what has made me worry, more than once, during my "experiment." *Have* we risked the girl to the danger of being spoiled? Will our little superficialities, so ingrained that we

don't realize them, taint her splendid unaffectedness? I don't know—I can't tell until I see her back at Kettle—in that environment the like of which I've never found anywhere else. If she isn't the same shining-eyed Jerry plus considerable wisdom gleaned from her books and her school friends, I'll have it on my conscience—if she's the same, well, the winter's been worth a great deal to all of us! When I see her and watch her back there—I'll know. And that leads me to what I really came here to tell you." John Westley drew a letter from his pocket. "I had word from Trimmer—the Boston attorney. He's found traces of a Craig Winton who was a graduate of Boston Tech. He lived in obscure lodgings in a poorer part of Boston and yet he seemed to have quite a circle of friends of an intellectual sort. Some of them have given enough facts to be pieced together so as to prove, I think conclusively, that this chap is the one we're looking for. He was an inventor and of a very brilliant turn of mind, but unpractical—the old story—and desperately poor. He married the only daughter of a chemist who lived in Cambridge. His health broke down and he took his wife and went off to the country somewhere—his Boston friends lost track of him after that. Later one received a letter telling of the birth of a son."

"How interesting! Robert will be home in two weeks and then we can make the settlement."

"But, Mary—the search hasn't ended. He left Boston for the 'country'—that is very vague. And I don't like the tone of Trimmer's communication. He advises dropping the whole matter. He says that sufficient effort has been made to meet the spirit of the letter left by the late Peter Westley ___"

"You will *not* drop it, will you?"

"Indeed not. I wired him to put all the men he could find on the case. And I am going to do some work on my own account."

"You?"

"Yes—I have a clue all of my own." He laughed, folding the letter and putting it away.

"Really, John?"

"Yes—a foolish sort of a clue—I can scarcely tell it to a man like Trimmer. It's only a pair of eyes ___"

"I suppose if you're like all other sleuths you will not tell *me* anything more," said Mrs. Westley, wondering if he was really in earnest. "When and where will your personal search begin?"

"I'd like to start this moment, but I happened to think I could drive Jerry home, and then I can make the test of my experiment."

"Drive Jerry home——" his words reached the ears of the young people, coming into the hall. It was Friday evening and they had been at the moving-pictures.

"*Who's* going to drive Jerry home? You, Uncle Johnny? Can't I go, too? Oh, please, *please*——" Gyp fell upon him, pleadingly.

"Oh, I wish the girls *could* go," added Jerry.

"Why not?" Uncle Johnny turned to Mrs. Westley. "Then you wouldn't have to worry your head over clothes and hotel space at the seashore! And Mrs. Allan's up there across at Cobble with a house big enough for a dozen—"

"But they must stay at Sunnyside," protested Jerry, her face glowing.

Always, now, at the back of her head, were persistent thoughts of home. She had counted the days off on her little calendar; she saw, in the bright loveliness with which the springtime had dressed the city, only a proud vision of what her beloved Kettle must be like; she hunted violets on the slopes of Highacres and dreamed of the blossoming hepaticas in the Witches' Glade and the dear sun-shadowed corners where the bloodroot grew and the soft budding beauty of the birches that lined the trail up Kettle. She longed with a longing that hurt for her little garden—for the smell of the freshly-turned soil, for the first strawberries, for the fragrance of the lilacs that grew under her small window, for the clean, cool, grass-scented valley wind. And yet her heart was torn with the thought that those very days she had counted on her calendar marked the coming separation from Gyp and the schoolmates at Highacres—Highacres itself. She must go away from them all and all that they were doing and they would in time forget her, because they would know nothing of Sunnyside. And now, quite suddenly, a new and wonderful possibility unfolded—to have Gyp at home with mother and Little-Dad, sleeping in the tiny room under the gable, climbing the trails with her, working in the garden, playing with Bigboy, sharing all the precious joys of Kettle, meant a link; after that, there could be no real separation.

And she wanted Isobel, too. Between the two girls had sprung a wonderful understanding. Isobel was grateful that Jerry had not humiliated her by mentioning the debate, or the many other little meannesses of which she had been guilty; Jerry was glad that Isobel had not raked them up—it was so much nicer to just know that Isobel liked her now. Isobel was a very different girl since her accident—perhaps Uncle Johnny, alone, knew why. She had decided very suddenly that she *did* want to go to college. The week before she had "squeezed through" the college entrance exams—luck she did not deserve, she had declared with surprising frankness. And after college she planned to study interior decorating.

Everyone wondered why they had not thought before of such wonderful summer plans. Mrs. Westley would go with Tibby to Cousin Marcia's at Ocean Point in Maine—"quiet enough there"; Graham was going to a boys' camp in Vermont, and Isobel and Gyp could divide their time between Sunnyside and Cobble.

"We are not consulting Mrs. Travis," laughed Mrs. Westley.

"Oh, she'd *love* them to be there," cried Jerry with conviction.

"And anyway, if she frowns, we'll move on to Wayside, and *we* know the trail in between, don't we, Jerry?"

"Say, Jerry," Graham thought it the psychological moment to spring a request he had been entertaining in his heart for some time. "Will you let me take Pepper to camp? Lots of the boys have dogs but none of them are as smart as Pep."

Jerry could not answer for a moment. In her picture of her homegoing, Pepper had had his part; but—it would be another link—

"Of course you may take him. He'll love—being with you." Long ago she had reconciled herself to sharing Pepper's devotion with Graham.

"Oh, I think that's the wonderfulest plan ever made," exclaimed Gyp rapturously—Gyp, who with her mother had visited some of the most fashionable summer and winter resorts. "I want to sleep up on—where is it, Jerry—and see the sunrise. How will we *ever* exist until school's over!"

"Examinations will help us do that," laughed Isobel.

"And Class-day and Commencement. And who's going to win the Lincoln Award?"

CHAPTER XXV

THE LINCOLN AWARD

"Who's going to win the Lincoln Award?"

That question was on every tongue at Highacres. That interest rivaled even the excitement of Class-day and its honors; of the Senior reception, Commencement itself. It shadowed the accustomed interval of alarm that always followed examinations. Everyone knew that the contest was close; no one could conjecture as to whom the honor would fall, for, though one student be a wizard in trigonometry, he might have failed dismally in the simple requirement of setting-up exercises or drinking milk.

"I've eaten spinach until I feel just like a cow out at pasture," declared Pat Everett disgustedly, "and what good has it done! For I was only *eighty-five* in English!"

"But think of all the iron in your system," comforted Peggy Lee. "I hope Jerry wins the prize, but I'm afraid it is going to Ginny Cox. She was *ninety-nine* in Cicero. I wish *I* had her brains—"

"And her luck! Ginny says herself that it is luck—half the time."

"Look how she got out of that scrape last winter—"

spoke up another girl. The Ravens, who were in the group, suddenly looked at one another.

"It won't be *fair* if Ginny wins the Award," was the thought they flashed.

The records for the contest were posted the day before Class-day—the last day of the examinations. A large group of boys and girls, eagerly awaiting them, pressed and elbowed about the bulletin board in the corridor while Barbara Lee nailed them to the wall. Gyp's inquisitive nose was fairly against the white sheet.

"*Vir-gin-i-a Cox!*" she read shrilly. "Jerauld Travis *only two points behind!* And Dana King third ___"

An uncontrollable lump rose in Jerry's throat. She had hoped—she had dared think that she was going to win! She was glad of the babble under which she could cover her moment's confusion; she struggled bravely to keep the disappointment from her face as she turned with the others to congratulate Ginny.

The plaudits of the boys and girls were warm and whole-hearted. If any surprise was felt that it had been Ginny Cox and not Jerry Travis who had won the Award it was carefully concealed.

"We might have known no one could beat you, Coxie."

"It was that ninety-nine in old Cicero."

"Hurrah for Ginny!"

Dana King trooped up a yell. "Lincoln—Cox! Lincoln—Cox!"

Through it all Ginny Cox stood very still, a flush on her face but a distressed look in her eyes. The Ginny Cox whom her schoolmates had known for years would have accepted the hearty congratulations with a laughing, careless, why-are-you-surprised manner; the Ginny Cox whom Jerry had glimpsed that winter afternoon preceding the basketball game was honestly embarrassed by the turn of events. She had not dreamed she could win—it *had* been that ninety-nine in Cicero.

"Ginny Cox, you don't look a *bit* glad," accused one clear-sighted schoolmate.

Alas, Ginny was not brave enough to clean her troubled soul with confession then and there; she tried to silence the small voice of her conscience; she made a desperate effort to be her own old self, evoking the homage of her schoolmates as she had done time and time again. She answered, uneasily, with a smile that took in Jerry and Dana King:

"I hate to beat anyone like Jerry and Dana. It's so close——"

Whereupon the excited young people yelled again for "Travis" and again for "King." The crowd gradually dispersed; little groups, arm-in-arm, excitedly talking, passed out through the big door into the spring sunshine. A buoyance in the very air proclaimed that school days were over.

In one of these groups were Ginny Cox, Gyp, Jerry, Pat Everett, Peggy Lee and Isobel. Among them had fallen a constraint. Isobel broke it.

"Ginny Cox, you haven't any more right to that Award than I have! You *know* you built the snowman and Jerry took the blame so's you could play basketball. *She's* the winner!"

Each turned, surprised, at Isobel's defence of Jerry's right, marveling at the earnestness in her face.

"Oh—*don't*," implored Jerry. "I'm *glad* Ginny won it."

Ginny stamped her foot. "*I'm* not—I wish I hadn't. I never dreamed I would—honest. What a mess! I wish I'd just turned and told them all about it, but I didn't have the nerve! I'm just yellow." That—from Ginny Cox, the invincible forward! Breathless, the girls paused where they were on the grassy slope near the entrance of Highacres. A great elm spread over them and through its shimmering green a sunbeam shot across Ginny Cox's face, adding to the fire of its sternness.

"Girls——" she spread out her hands commandingly, "I don't know what *you* think—but *I* think Jerry Travis is the best ever at Lincoln! She's made me show up like a bad old copper penny 'longside of her. A year ago I could have taken this old Award without a flicker of my littlest eyelash, but just *knowing* her makes it—impossible! Now—what shall we do?"

Jerry's remonstrance—a little quivery, because she was deeply moved by Ginny's unexpected tribute—was drowned out in a general assent and a clamorous approval of Ginny's words.

"I know——" declared Isobel, feeling that, because she was a Senior, she must straighten out this tangle. "Let's tell Uncle Johnny all about it." Uncle Johnny—to whom had been carried every hurt, every problem since baby days.

The others agreed—"He's a trustee, anyway," Gyp explained—though just how much a trustee had to do with these complicated questions of school honor none of them knew.

And, as though Uncle Johnny always sprang up from the earth at the very instant his girls needed him, he came up the winding drive in his red roadster. They hailed him. He brought the car to a quick stop.

"Uncle Johnny, we want you to decide something for us! Please get out and come over here."

He stared at the serious faces. What tragedy had shadowed the customary gladness of the last day of school? He let them lead him to the old elm.

"If you'll please sit down and—and pretend you're *not*—our uncle but sort of a—a judge—and listen, we'll tell you."

"Dear me," Uncle Johnny murmured weakly, sitting down on the slope. "This is bad for rheumatism and gray trousers but—I'll listen."

Isobel began the story with the building of the snowman; Gyp took it up. Dramatically, with an eloquence reminiscent of that meeting of the Ravens when the ill-fated lot had fallen to Jerry, she explained how "for the honor of the school" Jerry had shouldered Ginny's punishment. Peggy Lee interrupted to say that she thought Miss Gray had made an awful fuss about nothing, but Ginny hushed her quickly. Then the story came to the winning of the Award.

"Two points—Jerry only needed two points. And she lost ten as a punishment about the snowman. Don't you see—she's really the winner?"

Uncle Johnny had listened to the story with careful gravity; inwardly he was tortured with the desire to laugh. But he could not affront these girls so seriously bent on keeping unsullied that pure white thing they called honor. "Oh, youth—youth!" he thought, loving them the more for their precious earnestness.

"And—it's *such* a mix-up, we don't know what to do. If I knew who had given the prize I'd go

straight to him," exclaimed Ginny bravely.

Uncle Johnny straightened his immaculately gray-trousered legs and laid his straw hat down on the grass.

"If that'll help things any—I'm he," he explained with a little embarrassment.

"You? You? Really—Uncle Johnny?" came in an excited chorus.

"Yes, me," with a fine scorn for grammar. "I'm the one who's to blame for all the carrots," pinching Gyp's cheek. "But you *have* sort of mixed things up."

"But we *had* to win that basketball game," cried Gyp, "and we couldn't unless Ginny played."

"Yes—you had to win the basketball game," he nodded with a judicious appreciation.

"You see, Lincoln got the cup for the series."

"And Jerry paid the price—yes."

"For the honor of the school!"

"Then—I'm afraid this is the last payment. You see, girlies, everything we do—no matter what it is—is fraught with consequences. If I were to go over to yonder lake and throw in a pebble—what would we see? Little ripples circling wider and wider—further and further. That's like life—our everyday actions are so many pebbles—we have to accept the ripples. It's sometimes hard—but I guess Jerry sees the truth."

There was no doubt from the expression of Jerry's face but that she saw the truth—Uncle Johnny's homely simile had made it very clear.

"But *I* won't take it—that wouldn't be fair." It was the new Ginny who spoke. "So it'll go to Dana King."

"Yes, it will go to Dana King." Uncle Johnny was serious now. "Ginny should not have accepted Jerry's sacrifice. Girls, there's a simple little thing called 'right' that we find in our hearts if we search that's finer than even the precious honor of your school—and Gyp, you speak very truly when you say that *that* is something you must valiantly always uphold. Now if you'll let me tell this story of yours to the committee I think it can all be straightened out—and we'll feel better all around."

"And I'm glad it's Dana King," exclaimed Peggy Lee. "Garrett said he had had to give up his plans to go to college next fall and he was terribly disappointed and now maybe he won't have to—"

Jerry and Ginny linked arms as they walked away with the others behind Uncle Johnny. The shadow dispelled—in youth the sun is always so happily close behind all the little clouds—the girls' spirits went forth, joyously, to meet the interests of the moment, the class oration, the class gift, the class song, Isobel's graduating dress, the Senior bouquets—the hundred and one exciting things about the proud class of girls and boys who were, in a few days, to pass forever from the school life—graduates.

Uncle Johnny watched his girls join others and troop away, with light step, heads high. He chuckled, though behind it was a little sigh.

"Doc, my boy, you were right—it *has* made me ten years younger to mix up with these youngsters."

As he turned to go into the building he met Barbara Lee coming out. He suddenly remembered that the business of the Award had to do with Barbara Lee—somehow, he almost always had, nowadays, to consult her about something! Very sweetly she went back with him to her office. He told her what the girls had told him. She listened with triumph in her face.

"I *knew* Jerry Travis did not do that. But, oh, aren't they funny?" However, her tone said that these "funny" girls were very dear to her. "It will take something very real out of my life when I leave Lincoln."

"What do you mean?" John Westley's voice rang abruptly.

"Of course—you haven't heard. I have had a wonderful offer from a big export house in San Francisco. It's the same firm to which I expected to go last summer—before I came here. You see the road I chose to climb to the stars wasn't entirely along—physical training. My last year in college I specialized in export work. There was a fascination in it to me—it's such a *growing* thing, such a challenging work, and it carries one into new and untried fields. There's an element of adventure in it—" her eyes glistened. "I shall spend a year at the main office, then they're going to send me into China—because I can speak the Chinese language."

John Westley stared at her—she seemed like such a slip of a girl.

"And mother is so much better now that there is no reason why I cannot go."

Though they had yet to straighten out the matter of the Award she quite involuntarily held out her hand as she spoke, and John Westley took it in both of his.

"I hope this—*is* the road to the stars." That did not sound properly congratulatory, so he added,

lamely: "I'm glad—if you want to go. But what will we do without you here?"

CHAPTER XXVI

COMMENCEMENT

"Commencements——" declared Gyp, wise with her fifteen years, "are like weddings—all sort of weepy."

"What do *you* know of weddings, little one?" from Graham.

"I guess I've been to five, Graham Westley! And some one is always crying at them. Why, when Cousin Alicia Stowe was married she cried herself!"

"Did you cry, mother?" asked Tibby curiously.

Mrs. Westley laughed. "I did—really. And I cried at my Commencement. There were only twelve of us graduated that spring from Miss Oliver's Academy and none of us went to college, so you see it really *was* the end of our school days. I was very happy until it was all over—then, I remember, as I walked down the aisle in my organdie dress—we wore organdie then, too, girls—with a big bouquet of pink roses on my arm and everyone smiling and nodding at all of us, it came over me with a rush that my school days were all over and that they'd never come back. So I cried—for a very weepy half-hour I wanted more than anything else to be a little girl again with all childhood before me. I was afraid—to look ahead into life——"

"But there was father—you knew him then, didn't you?"

A pretty color suffused Mrs. Westley's cheeks. "Yes—there was father. I said I only cried for half an hour. Two years afterward I was married—and I cried again. Of course I was very, very happy—but I knew I was going away forever from my girlhood."

"Mother——" protested Isobel. "You make me feel dreadfully sad. I wanted to cry yesterday when Sheila Quinn spoke at the Class-day exercises. Wasn't she wonderful when she said how Lincoln School had given us our shield and our armor and that *always* we must live to be worthy of her trust! I thrilled to my toes. But if it makes one cry to be *married*——"

"Darling"—and Mrs. Westley took Isobel's hand in hers—"we leave our childhood and again our girlhood with a few tears, perhaps, but always there is the wonder of the bigger life ahead. I think even in dying there must be the same joy. And though we do shed tears over the youth we tenderly lay aside, they are happy tears—tears that sweeten and strengthen the spirit, too."

"Well, I'm glad *I* have two more years at Highacres," cried Gyp, looking with pity at Isobel's thoughtful face.

"And *I'm* glad," Isobel added, slowly, "that I decided to go to college. It must be dreadful to know that school is all over. I wouldn't be Amy Mathers for *anything*. It sounds so silly to hear her talk of all she's going to do next winter—such *empty* things!" Isobel, in her scorn, had forgotten that only a few weeks back she had wanted to do just what Amy Mathers was planning to do!

"Well,"—Graham stretched his arms—"school's all right but *I'm* mighty glad vacation has come."

Through their talk Jerry had sat very still. To her the Class-day exercises of the school had opened a great well of sentiment. All through her life, she thought, she would strive to repay by worthiness the great debt of inspiration she owed to the school. She had not thought of it in just that grand way until she had heard Sheila Quinn, until Dana King had given the class prophecy, until Ginny had read the school poem, until Peggy Lee had presented the class gift to the school. A young alumna of the preceding class had welcomed the proud graduates. Dr. Caton had presented the Lincoln Award—to Dana King. A murmur had swept the room when he announced that, through a mistake in the records, the Award went to Dana King instead of either Miss Cox or Miss Travis. Jerry sat next to Ginny and, as Dr. Caton spoke, she squeezed Ginny's hand in a way that said plainly, "If I had it all to do over again I'd do the same thing!" Afterward Dana King had shaken her hand warmly and had declared that he "couldn't understand such good fortune and it meant a lot to him—for it made college possible."

It seemed to Jerry as though they were all standing on a great shining hill from which paths diverged—attractive paths that beckoned; that precious word college—Isobel, Dana King, Peggy Lee were going along that path; Sheila Quinn was going to study to be a nurse. Amy Mather's had chosen a more flowery way. Would her happiness be more lasting than the pretty flowers that lured her? Jerry's own path was a steep, narrow, little path, and led straight away from Highacres—but it led to Sunnyside! So with the little ache that gripped her when she thought that she must very soon leave Highacres forever, was a great joy that in a few days now she would see her precious Sweetheart—and Gyp and Isobel would be with her.

The whole family was in a flutter over the Commencement. Graham's class was to usher; the undergraduates were to march in by classes, the girls in white, carrying sweet-peas, the boys wearing white posies in the lapels of their coats.

Mrs. Westley inspected her young people with shining eyes.

"You look like the most beautiful flowers that ever grew," she cried in the choky way that mothers have at such moments. "I wish I could hug you all—but it would muss you dreadfully."

"Thank goodness, mammy, that you don't find any *dirt* on me," exclaimed Graham, whose ruddy face shone from an extra "party" scrubbing.

"Am *I* all right, mother?" begged Isobel, pirouetting in her fluffy white.

Uncle Johnny rushed in. He was very dapper in a new tailcoat and a flower in *his* buttonhole. He was very nervous, too, for he was to give the address of the day. He pulled a small box from his pocket.

"A little graduating gift for my Bonnie." It was a circlet pin of sapphires. He fastened it against the soft, white folds of her dress. "You know what a ring is symbolic of, Isobel? Things eternal—everlasting—never ending. That's like my faith in you." He lifted the pretty, flushed, happy face and kissed it. "Come on, now—everybody ready?"

If they had not all been so excited over the Commencement they must have noticed that there was something very different in Uncle Johnny's manner—a certain breathless exaltation such as one feels when one has girded one's self for a great deed.

He *had* made up his mind to something. The day before, while he had been preparing the Commencement address, all kinds of thoughts had haunted him—thoughts concerning Barbara Lee. That half-hour with her in her little office, when she had told him she was going away, had opened his eyes. He had cried out: "What will we do without you?" He had really meant, "What will *I* do without you?"

Absurd—he tried to reason the whole thing calmly—absurd that this slip of a girl, who knew *Chinese*, had become necessary to his happiness! How in thunder had it happened? But there is no answer to that—and he was in no state of mind to reason; she was going away—and he could not *let* her go away.

So all the while he was dashing off splendid things about loyalty (John Westley had won several oratorical contests at college) his brain was asking humbly, "Will she laugh at an old bachelor like me—if I tell her?" He had hated the face he saw in the mirror, edged above his ears with closely-clipped gray hair. Thirty-six years old; he had not thought that so very old until now; contrasted with Barbara Lee's splendid youth it seemed like ninety.

"I'll tell her—just the same," was his final determination; she was on her way to the "stars," but he wanted her to know that he loved her with a strength and constancy the greater for his thirty-six years.

From the platform he stared out over the sea of serious young faces—and saw only the one. He stood before them all, speaking with an earnestness and a beauty of thought that was inspired—not by the detached group of graduates, listening with shining eyes, but by Barbara Lee, sitting with a rapt expression that seemed to separate herself and him from the others and bring them very close.

"Loyalty" was his theme; "loyalty to God, loyalty to one's highest ideals, loyalty to one's country, to one's fellowmen."

After he had finished there was the stir which always marks, in a gathering of people, a high pitch of feeling. Then someone sang, clear, soprano notes that drifted through the room and mingled with the spring gladness. The air was fragrant with the sweetness of the blossoms which decked the big room; through the long windows came the freshness of the June world outside. It was a day, an hour, sacred to the rites of youth. More than one man and woman, worn a little with living, sat there with reverence in their hearts for these young people who, strong with the promise of their day, stood at the start—

Then the school sang their Alma Mater—the undergraduates singing the first two verses, the graduates singing the last. The dear, familiar notes rang with a truer, braver cadence—one voice, clearer than the others, broke suddenly with feeling.

"Wasn't it all perfectly *beautiful*?" cried Gyp as the audience moved slowly after the files of graduates. "You couldn't *tell* which was best of the program and it *was* sad, wasn't it? Wasn't Uncle Johnny *splendid*? And didn't the girls look fine? You know Sheila Quinn was just sick over her dress—it was so plain—and she looked as lovely as *any* of the others. Oh, goodness, *think* how you'd feel if we were graduating. But I hope our Commencement will be just as nice! There's Barbara Lee, let's *hug* her—think how *dreadful* to have her go away. And Dana King's just waiting for you, Jerry—" Gyp ended her outburst by rushing to Miss Lee and throwing her long arms about her shoulders.

John Westley advanced upon them—with the strange new look still in his eyes.

"Gyp—you're wrinkling Miss Lee's pinkness." He tried to make his tone light. "Will you come into the library for a moment, Miss Lee? There's a book I want you to find for me." His eyes pleaded. Wondering a little, Barbara Lee walked away with him.

"Well, I never—" declared Gyp, disgusted. Then, in the stress of saying good-by to some of her

schoolmates, she forgot Uncle Johnny and Barbara Lee.

John Westley had felt that the library would be quite deserted. Standing in the embrasure of the window through which the June light streamed, he told Barbara Lee in awkward, earnest words all that was in his heart. There was a humility in his voice, as he offered her his love, that brought a tender smile to the corners of her lips.

"I wanted you to know," he finished, simply. "I don't suppose—what I can offer—can find any place in your heart alongside of your splendid dreams—but, I wanted you to know that you have ___"

"There's more than *one* way to the stars——" she interrupted, lifting glowing eyes to his.

Gyp had said good-by to everyone she could lay a finger on. Then she remembered Uncle Johnny.

"Do you s'pose they're in the library *yet*?"

She and Jerry tiptoed along the corridor and peeped in the door. To their embarrassed amazement Uncle Johnny and Barbara Lee were standing looking out of the window—with their hands clasped.

Gyp coughed—a cough that was really a funny sputter.

"Did—did you find your book, Uncle Johnny?"

Uncle Johnny turned—without a blush.

"*Hello*, Gyp!" (As though he'd never seen her before!) "I didn't find the book—because I wasn't really after a book. But I *did* find what I wanted. What would you say, Gyp and Jerry, if I told you that your Barbara Lee is *not* going away?"

CHAPTER XXVII

CRAIG WINTON

"Ka-a-a-a-a-a" echoed through the wooded slopes of Kettle. Startled, birds winged away from the treetops, little wild creatures skurried through the undergrowth, yet in the care-free, silvery tinkle of those merry voices there was no note to alarm.

Jerry was leading Isobel and Gyp down the trail from Rocky Top. Baskets, swinging from their shoulders, told of the jolly day's outing. Isobel and Gyp were dressed in khaki middies and short skirts; Isobel's hair was drawn back simply from her face and bound with a bright red ribbon; Gyp's cheeks were tanned a ruddy brown, against which her lips shone scarlet. Jerry wore the boyish outfit in which John Westley had found her. Three happier, merrier girls could not have been found the world over.

A week—a week of hourly wonders, had passed since the girls had arrived at Sunnyside with Uncle Johnny. To Jerry the homecoming was even sweeter than she had dreamed. And to find her precious mother "exactly" the same, she whispered in the privacy of a close hug, dispelled a little fear that had tormented her.

"Why, darling, did you think *I'd* be different?"

"I don't know——" Jerry had colored, but tightened the clasp of her arms. "It's been so dreadfully long! I thought maybe—I'd forgotten——"

And Little-Dad had not changed a bit, nor the house, nor the garden, nor Bigboy—not a thing, Jerry had found on an excited round. The old lilac bushes were in full leaf, the syringas were in blossom, there were still daffodils in the corner near the fir-tree gate; glossy, spiky leaves marked a row of onions just where her onions had always grown—Little-Dad had put in her seed; the sun slanted in gold-brown bars across the bare floor of the familiar, low-ceilinged living-room, softening to a ruddy glow the bindings of the familiar books everywhere. Her own little room was just as she had left it. Oh, the wonder, the joy of coming back! How different it would have been if there *had* been any change. What if Sweetheart—she rushed headlong to hug her mother again.

Then there was the fun of taking Gyp and Isobel everywhere. They were genuinely enraptured with all her favorite haunts; the magic of Kettle caught them just as it had caught Uncle Johnny that day he ran away from his guide. Every morning they were up with the birds and off over the trail to return laden with the treasures of Kettle, wild strawberries, lingering trillium, wild currant blossoms, moist baby ferns. Together these girls brought to quiet Sunnyside a gaiety it had not known before. To Mrs. Westley, after her lonely winter, it was as though a radiant summer sun had flooded suddenly through a gray mist.

And Jerry had to tell her mother everything that had happened all through the winter. She saved it all for such moments as she and her mother stole to wander off together; it was easier to talk to mother alone, and then there were so many things she wanted only mother to know—concerning most of them she had written, to be sure, but she liked to think it all over again, herself—those first days of school, the classes, the teachers, the Ravens, basketball and hockey and that never-

to-be-forgotten day at Haskin's Hill, the Everett party, the two "real plays," the great vaulted church where music floated from hidden pipes—only concerning the debate and that stormy evening when she had discarded her "charity" clothes did she keep silent. School, school, school; Mrs. Westley, listening intently, smiling wistfully at her big girl, in spirit lived with her through each experience, happy or trying, rejoicing that she had had them. And yet in her eyes there lingered a furtive questioning. Jerry, reveling in her own happiness, did not realize that her mother was watching her every expression with the anguishing fear that her Jerry might have changed. And she *had* changed; she had grown, though she was still as straight as one of Kettle's young fir trees; her winter's experience had left its mark on her sunny face in a new firmness of the lips, a thoughtfulness behind the shining eyes.

"Will these new friends, Jerry, these fine times you have had make you love Sunnyside less—or be discontented here?" Her mother had interrupted her flood of confidences to say.

Jerry stared in such astonishment that her mother laughed, a shaky laugh, and kissed her.

"Because, my dear, remember you are only Jerauld Travis of Kettle Mountain, and your life must lie just here. Oh, my precious, I thank God I have you back!" she added with an intensity of emotion that startled and puzzled Jerry.

"Why, mother, honest truly there's never been a moment when I wasn't glad I was only Jerauld Travis, and I wouldn't trade places with a soul, only—" and Jerry could not finish, for she did not know just what she wanted to say. She was oddly disturbed. Did her mother begrudge her those happy weeks at Highacres? Had she been afraid of something? And *was* she the same Jerry who had wished on the Wishing-rock to just *see* the world which lay beyond her mountain? Didn't she want to go away again—sometime, to college? And what would her mother say if she told her that?

Jerry managed to lock away these tormenting thoughts while she and the girls were roaming Kettle. Certainly there was not a shadow in the face she lifted now to the caress of the mountain breeze nor in the voice that caroled its "Ka-a-a-a-a" and laughed as the echoes answered.

From the Witches' Glade where the trail sloped down between white birches, the girls ran fleetly, leaped the little gate through the fringe of fir trees and, laughing and panting, tumbled upon the veranda of the bungalow straight into Uncle Johnny's arms!

Uncle Johnny had only stopped at Kettle long enough to unload his girls and their baggage, then he had hurried on to Boston to consult the lawyers who were tracing Craig Winton. He had not expected to return for three or four weeks. "Not until I have this thing off my mind," he had explained to Isobel and Gyp.

Isobel, though she now looked at it from another angle, still thought it very foolish to pursue the search for this Craig Winton. The Boston men had reported that their search had led them to a blank wall and that there was little use spending more money on it. But in spite of this, Uncle Johnny had persisted in going ahead on some clue of his own and wasting precious time away from Barbara Lee. Both Isobel and Gyp, from thinking that no woman in the world was good enough for Uncle Johnny, had now veered around to the happy conviction that heaven had patterned Barbara Lee especially for Uncle Johnny's pleasure. They beamed upon the engagement with such approval that even Uncle Johnny, head over heels in love as he was, grew a little embarrassed by their enthusiasm. Gyp also became reconciled to the school library as a setting for the proposal and declared that, thereafter, the library at Highacres would be enshrined in her heart as something other than a room to "make one's head ache." But both girls were disgusted that Uncle Johnny could cheerfully leave the lady of his choice and go off on a search that appeared so useless! It was contrary to all their rules of romance.

Something in Uncle Johnny's face and his unexpected appearance drew an exclamation from each of the girls. Almost in the same voice, with no more greeting than to vigorously grasp him by shoulder and arm, they cried: "Did you find her? Have you come to stay?"

He hesitated just a moment and glanced questioningly at Mrs. Travis. Then for the first time the girls noticed that Mrs. Travis was very pale, that her eyes burned dark against the whiteness of her skin as though she had been racked by a great agitation and her hands clasped tightly the back of a chair. She nodded to John Westley.

"Yes, my search is ended. You see I had the right clue—though it was only the mention of a pair of eyes. Do you remember in Uncle Peter's letter about Craig Winton's eyes? 'They were glowing like they were lighted within.' Well, have you ever seen a pair of eyes like that? I have—only where Craig Winton's were sad with disappointment, these others glow from the pure joy of being alive—"

"Jerry?" interrupted Gyp, in a queer, tangled voice.

"Yes—Jerauld."

"Oh-h!"

The girls stared at Jerry and Jerry stared at John Westley. Was he just joking? How *could* it be? She turned to her mother. Her mother nodded again.

"Yes, dear, you are Jerauld Winton. But—we gave you your stepfather's name—he was so good to

us!"

In that moment of unutterable surprise Jerry's loyal little heart went out quickly to Little-Dad.

"Oh, even if he *is* a stepfather I love him just the same!" she exclaimed, wishing he was there that she might hug him.

"You see, beginning at this end made my search quicker. It was hindered a little, though, because the county courthouse at Waytown, where the records of Jerry's birth and Craig Winton's death were filed, burned a few years ago with everything in it. But I stumbled on an old codger who used to be postmaster at Waytown and he told me more in a few moments than all the Boston detectives had found in months. I went on to Boston to interview those old friends the lawyers there had found and then came back."

There was a puzzled look on each face. Hesitatingly, Jerry put the question that was in each mind.

"But, mother, why didn't you ever tell? Were you—ashamed?"

Her mother's face flared with color. She stepped forward and laid an entreating hand on Jerry's. "Oh, no—*no!*" she cried. "You must not think that—no one must. He—your father—was the finest man that ever lived. But he made me promise, when you were a wee, wee baby, that I would try to protect you from the bitterness of the world that had—broken his heart. Oh, he died of a broken heart, a broken spirit. He lived in his dreams, his inventions were a part of him—like his right arm! When they failed he suffered cruelly. Then he had one that he knew was good. But ——" she stopped abruptly, remembering that these people were Westleys. "But he could never have been happy. He was not practical or—or sensible. His brain wore out his body—it was always, always working along one line. And before he—died, he seemed to have the fear that you might grow up to be like him—'a puppet for the thieves to fleece and feed upon,' he used to say. After he—died, we stayed on in Dr. Travis' cabin, where he had sheltered and cared for your father. He moved down into the village but, oh, he was so good to us! When, two years later I married him and we built this home, I vowed that I would keep only the blessed peace of Sunnyside for you. So I never told you of your own father and those dreadful years of poverty. But I was not *ashamed!*"

Jerry, not knowing exactly why, put one arm around her mother's shoulder in a protecting manner. "Poor, brave Sweetheart," she whispered, laying her cheek against her mother's arm.

Isobel and Gyp were held silent by a disturbing sense of embarrassment. That it should have been Jerry's father whom their Uncle Peter had "fleeced"—the horrible word which had slipped reminiscently from Mrs. Travis' lips burned in their ears! But a sudden delight finally broke loose Gyp's tongue.

"Oh, *Jerry*, isn't it *exciting* to think we've been hunting everywhere and all the time it's *you!* I'm glad—'cause it sort of makes you a relation." And her logic was so extremely stretched that everyone laughed.

"I'd rather you got the money than anyone in the world," added Isobel.

The money—Jerry had not thought of that! Her face flushed scarlet, then paled.

"Oh, I don't want it," she cried. "You've done so much for me."

"My dear," Uncle Johnny's voice was very business-like. "It is something you have not the right to decline, because it was given by a dying man to purchase a peace of mind for his last moment on earth. And now let me look you over, Jerry-girl." He tilted her chin and studied her face. Then he glanced approvingly down her slim length, smiling at her boyish garments. "I guess my experiment hasn't hurt you," he said, though no one there knew what he meant.

The evening was very exciting—why would it not be when Jerry had found the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow right in her very own lap? Uncle Johnny stayed on overnight; some repairs to a tire were necessary before he started homeward.

"Do you remember what you said once, Jerry, when I asked you what you would do if you had a lot of money?" Gyp had asked as they sat out on the veranda watching the stars. "And you said you'd go to school as long as ever you could and then——"

Jerry had raised suddenly to an upright position from the step where she was curled.

"Oh"—she cried, her voice deep with delight—"now I can go back to Highacres——"

Then, at the very moment of her ecstasy, she was strangely disturbed by the quick touch of her mother's hand laid on her shoulder.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HER MOTHER'S STORY

Sometime after she had gone to sleep, Jerry awakened suddenly with the disturbing conviction that someone needed her. At the same moment her ear caught a sound that made her slip her bare feet quickly to the floor and stand, listening. It had been a soft step beneath her window—a little sigh.

In a flash Jerry sped down the narrow stairway, past the open door of the room where Little-Dad lay snoring, and out across the veranda. In the dim light of the moon that hung low in the arc of the blue-black sky, Jerry made out the figure of her mother, standing near the rough bench that overlooked the valley.

"Mother!"

"Jerry, child, and in your bare feet!"

"I heard you out here. Isn't it dreadfully late? Can't you sleep? Mother, look at me," for Mrs. Westley had kept her face averted. "Mother, darling, why do you look so—sort of—sad?" Jerry's voice was reproachful. "We're so happy now that we are together, aren't we? And it *will* be nice to have lots of things and Little-Dad won't ever have to worry and——"

Mrs. Travis lifted her hand suddenly and laid it across Jerry's lips. "Child, I am not sad. I have been out here fighting away forever the foolish fears that have stalked by my side since you were a very little girl. Some day, when you're a mother, you'll know how I've felt—how I've dreaded facing this moment! How often I've sat with you and watched the baby robins make their first flight from the nest and have laughed at the fussy mother robin scolding and worrying up in a nearby branch——"

"But, mamsey, you've always told me how the mother robin *pushes* the little ones out of the nest to make them *know* that they can fly!"

Mrs. Travis accepted the rebuke in silence. Jerry slipped her hand into her mother's. Her mother held it close.

"Jerry, dear, I've never told you much about myself because I could not do that without telling you of your own father. I was a very lonely little girl; I had no brothers or sisters—no near relatives. My mother died when I was eight years old, and a housekeeper—good soul—brought me up. My father was a professor of chemistry in Harvard, as you know, and he was a queer man and his friends were peculiar, too—not the sort that was much company for a young girl. But I was very fond of my father and I was very content with my simple life until I met Craig Winton. He was so different from anyone else who had ever crossed our threshold that I fell in love with him at once. My father died suddenly and Craig Winton asked me to marry him. It was the maddest folly—he had nothing except his inventive genius and he should never have tied himself to domestic responsibilities; they were always—such as they were—like a dreadful yoke to his spirit. But we were happy, oh, we were *happy* in a wonderful, unreal way. Sometimes we didn't have enough to eat, but he always had so much faith in what he was going to do that *that* somehow, kept us going. But when his faith began to die—it was dreadful. It was as though some hidden poison was killing him, right before my eyes."

"What made his faith die?" asked Jerry, curiously.

"Because he grew to distrust his fellowmen. That second visit to Peter Westley——" Mrs. Travis spoke quickly to hide her bitterness. "He was so sure that what he had made was good—an inventor has always, my dear, an irrational love for the thing he has created—and to have it *spurned*! He was supersensitive, super—everything. Then my own health went to pieces. I suppose I simply was not getting enough to eat to give me the strength to meet the mental strain under which I had to live—and you were coming. From his last visit to Peter Westley he returned with a little money, but he was as a crushed, broken man—his bitterness had unbalanced his mind. He said that it was for my health that he came away with me, but I knew that it was to get away from the world that he hated—and to hide his failure! Your Little-Dad took us in. He knew at once that your father was a very sick man and he brought him to his cabin here on Kettle. But even here your father suffered, and after you were born he feared for you. He was obsessed with the thought that *you* had all life to face——"

"How dreadfully sorry you must have felt for him," whispered Jerry, shyly, trying to make it all seem true.

"I felt sorry for him, child, not that he had been so disappointed but because he had not the strength to rally from it. I don't believe God made him that way; I think he sacrificed too much of himself to his genius. This world we live in demands so much of us—such *different* things, that, if we are to meet everything squarely, we cannot develop one side of our minds and let the other side go. I am telling you all this, Jerry, that you may understand how I have felt—about you. The months after your father died were sort of a blank to me—I lived on here because I had nowhere else to go. Gradually my gratitude to John Travis turned to real affection—not like what I had given your father, but something quite as deep. And the years I have lived with him here have been very happy—as though my poor little ship had found the still waters of an inland stream after having been tossed on a stormy sea. And I've tried to make myself think that in these still waters I could keep *you* always, that you would grow up here and—perhaps—marry someone——" she laughed. "Mothers always dream way ahead, darling. But as you grew older I could see that that was not going to be easy. You've so quickly outgrown everything I can give you—or that anyone—here—can; you have grown so curious, your mind is always reaching out. What is here,

what is there, what is this, where is that—questions like these always on your tongue! And you *are* like your father—very."

Jerry shivered the least little bit, perhaps from the night air, warm as it was, perhaps from the thought that she was like poor, poor Craig Winton, who did not seem at all like a real father.

In a moment her mother had wrapped her in the soft shawl she carried. Something in the loving touch of her hands broke the spell of unreality that had held Jerry.

"I don't understand, mamsey," she whispered, cuddling close, "if you felt like—*that*—and worried, why did you let me go away?"

"Because, my child," there was something triumphant in her mother's voice, "some inner sense made me believe that though you look like your father and act like him in many ways, you have a nature and a character quite of your own. I tried to put away the fears I had had which I told myself were foolish and morbid. John Westley's arguments helped me. I knew immediately that he was related to the Peter Westley who had crushed your father, but I felt certain he knew nothing of it—and I was glad; to bury the past entirely was the only way to bury forever the bitterness that had killed your father. And when John Westley made the offer to give you a year of school, I thought it was only justice! I had known school life in a big city where I had many schoolmates and I lived for several years in the shadow of a great university, though the life in it only touched me indirectly, and when the opportunity opened, I wanted you to have the same experience; I felt it might solve the problem that confronted me. And I told myself that I was *sure* of you that you could go away to school, go anywhere, and come back again and be my same girl! Jerry, these people have been very, very good to you; out of pure generosity they have given you a great deal, do you now—now that you know the truth—feel any bitterness toward them?"

Never had Jerry associated Uncle Johnny and Mrs. Westley, nor the younger Westleys, nor the charming, hospitable home, with the Peter Westley she had pictured from Gyp's vivid descriptions. And, too, remembering the pathetic loneliness of the old man's last days, she felt nothing but pity.

"Oh, no," she answered, softly, decidedly. "Anyway, he made up for everything he'd done when he gave beautiful Highacres to Lincoln School," she added, loyally.

Then Jerry fell silent. "I was sure of you," her mother's words echoed. Had she not glimpsed more, in those months at Highacres, than her mother dreamed? A promise of what college might hold for her—new worlds to conquer?

"Mother, am—am I the—same girl?" She put the question slowly.

"No, Jerry—and that's what I've been fighting out here—all by myself. For I realize that it was only selfishness made me dread finding a change! A mother's selfishness! That you should grow and go on and forward, even though you leave me behind, darling, I know must be my dearest wish. But oh, my dear, I understand how the poor mother robin feels just before she shoves her babies out of the nest! For don't you think *she* hates an empty nest as much as any human mother? Do you remember the little story I used to tell you when you were small enough to cuddle your whole self on my lap? How yours and my love was a beautiful, sunny garden where you dwelt and that the garden had a very high wall around it?"

"I love that story, mamsey. I told it once to Mrs. Westley and she loved it, too. And you used to say that there was a gate in the wall with a latch but the latch was quite high so that when I was little I could not find it!"

"And then you grew bigger and your fingers could reach the latch—you wanted to open it to go out and see what was outside. I had made the little garden as beautiful as I knew how and it was very sunny and the wall was so high that it shut out all trouble—but you wanted so much to open the gate that I knew I must let you!"

"And then I went away to Highacres——" put in Jerry, loving the story as much as ever.

"And I was alone in the garden our love had built, but I was not lonely—I *will* not be lonely, for—wherever you go—you are my girl and I love you and you love me! *Nothing* can change that. And I shall leave the gate open—it will always be open!" She said it slowly; her story was finished.

Jerry's face was transfigured. "You mean—you *mean*"—she spoke softly—"that—if I want to go—back to Highacres—you'll *let me*? I can *go to college*? Oh, mamsey, you're wonderful! Mothers *are* the grandest things. And the gate will always be open so's I can always come back? And you won't be lonely for I'll always love you most in the world of anybody or anything. And when I'm very grown-up and can't go to school any more we'll travel, won't we? You and me and Little-Dad—won't we, mamsey?"

"Yes, dear." But the mother's eyes smiled in the darkness—she was thinking of the empty nest.

Jerry laid her cheek against her mother's arm. She drew a long breath.

"The world's so wonderful, isn't it? It's dreadful to think of anyone in it, like my—father, who's set his heart so hard on just one thing that he can't see all the other things he might do! I shall *never* be like that! And it's dreadful"—she frowned sorrowfully out over the starlit valley—"to think of girls who haven't mothers and who can't go to school. Why, I'm the very, very richest girl in the world!" Then she blushed. "I don't mean *that* money, mamsey, I mean having you and—Sunnyside

and Kettle and just knowing about—our garden!"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE WISHING-ROCK

Three girls sat on the Wishing-rock, beating their heels against its mossy side. And the world stretched before them. It was the end of a momentous day—momentous because so many things had been decided and such nice things! First, Uncle Johnny had said that he'd "fix" it with Mrs. Westley that Isobel and Gyp should remain at Kettle a month longer, then Mrs. Allan had driven over from Cobble and announced that she was going to have a house-party and her guests were going to be Pat Everett, Renée La Due and her brother, and Peggy and Garrett Lee, and Garrett Lee was going to bring Dana King. And Jerry and Uncle Johnny had prevailed upon Little-Dad to accept an automobile.

"You can keep Silverheels for just fun and work in the automobile and then we can go over to Cobble and to Wayside and——"

Little-Dad had not liked the thought at first. Somehow, to bring a chugging, smelling, snorting automobile up to Sunnyside to stay seemed an insult to the peace and beauty and simplicity of his little tucked-away home. But when Jerry pleaded and even Mrs. Travis admitted it would be nice and reminded him that Silverheels was growing old, he yielded, and Uncle Johnny promised to order one immediately—he knew just the kind that would climb Kettle and run as simply as a sewing-machine.

But the best of all that had been "decided" since sunrise was that Jerry should go back to Highacres——

"*Pinch* me, Gypsy Editha Westley—pinch me *hard!*" she cried as she sat between Gyp and Isobel. "I don't believe I'm me. And *really, truly* going back to Highacres! I *can't* be Jerauld Clay Travis who used to sit on this rock and watch the little specks come along that silver ribbon road down there and disappear around the mountain and hate them because *they* could go and *I* couldn't. But it used to be fun pretending I knew just what the world was like."

Isobel stared curiously at Jerry. "Hadn't you really ever been anywhere?"

"Oh, yes, in books I'd been everywhere. But that isn't the same as being places and seeing things yourself."

Gyp laid her fingers respectfully on the rough brown surface of the great rock.

"Do you suppose it really *is* a 'wishing-rock'?"

"Goodness, no. But when I was little I used to play here a lot and I pretended there were fairies—fern fairies and grass fairies and tree fairies. We'd play together. And when I grew older and began to wish for things that weren't—here, I'd come and tell the fairies because I did not want my mother to know, and, anyway, just telling about them made it seem as nice as having them. So I got to calling this my wishing-rock. Sometimes the wishes came true—when they were just little things."

"Well, it's funny if it wasn't *some* sort of magic that made Uncle Johnny get lost on Kettle and slip right down here in the glade when you were wishing! And your wish came *true*. And if he hadn't—why, you'd never have come to Highacres and we'd probably never have found that secret stairway nor the Bible nor the letter and wouldn't have known that you were *really* Jerauld Winton. Oh, it *has* magic!"

Neither Isobel nor Jerry answered, nor did they smile—after all, more than one name has been given to that strange Power that directs the little things which shape our living!

"So, I say, girls, let's wish now, each one of us! A great big wish! It's so still you could 'most believe there *were* fairies hiding 'round. I'll wish first."

Gyp sprang to her feet and stood in the exact centre of the flat top of the rock. She stretched her arms outward and upward in ceremonial fashion. She cleared her throat so as to pitch a suitably sepulchral note.

"I wish," she chanted, "I wish to make the All-Lincoln basketball team—I wish *that* dreadfully. I wish that I can get through the college entrance exams.—I don't care how much. I wish to get through college without "busting." Then I wish that I'll have a perfectly spliffy position offered to me somewhere which I shall refuse because a tall man with curly yellow hair and soulful, speaking gray eyes has asked me to marry him. Then I'll marry him and have six children and I'll bring them to the mountains to live. Then"—she paused for breath—"if I'm not asking too much I wish that my hair'll get curly."

"Did I remember everything?" she asked anxiously, jumping down from the rock. "Who's next?"

Jerry politely waved Isobel to the top.

Isobel laughed in her effort to frame all that she wanted to wish.

"I just want to be the most famous decorator in the country. I want to have women coming to me from all over, begging me to do their houses. And if the women are cross and ugly I'll make everything pink to cheer them up and if they're smug and conceited I'll make their houses dull gray, and if they are too frivolous I'll make things a spiritual blue. Oh, it will be *fun*! And I want to go to Paris to study just as soon as I get through college, and I don't want to get married for a long, long time, maybe never."

It was Jerry's turn. Isobel and Gyp stood aside. Jerry's eyes were shining—it *was* fun to pretend that, maybe, a shadowy, spectral Fate waited there in the valley to hear what they were saying!

"I wish—oh, it seems as though just going back to Highacres is all anyone *could* wish! I want to go to school as long as ever I can and then I want to go all around the world, and then I want to study to be a doctor like Little-Dad and take care of sick people and make them well, so they can enjoy things. And I want to marry a man who's jolly and always young-acting and loves dogs and has light brown hair and a very straight nose and——"

"Jerry Travis, that's just like Dana King," cried Gyp, accusingly.

Jerry flushed scarlet. "It isn't anything of the sort! I mean—can't there be lots of men with light brown hair and straight noses—hundreds of them? And anyway," loyalty blazed, "Dana King *is* the nicest boy I've ever known!"

"And he thinks *you're* the nicest girl," Gyp laughed back. "I know it—he told Garrett Lee and Garrett told Peggy. So there——"

"You've interrupted my wish and I don't know where I left off," Jerry rebuked. "Oh, I wish most of all that I can always, no matter where I am, come back to Sunnyside and Sweetheart and Little-Dad and—my garden! There, I've wished everything!"

The distant tinkle of a cowbell sounded faintly; a thrush sang; the sun, dropping low toward the wooded crest of the opposite mountain, cast a golden glow over valley and slope. The air was filled with the drowsy hum and stirring of tiny unseen creatures, the birches that fringed the glade leaned and whispered. The three girls sat silent, staring down into the valley, each visioning a golden future of her own. But a thoughtfulness shadowed the radiance of Jerry's face. Yesterday she had been just Jerry Travis of Kettle, now she was another Jerry; on a page far back in her life's book, opened to her, she had glimpsed the tragedy of disappointment, of blighted hope, of defeat—her own young, undaunted spirit cried out that none of this must come into *her* life! Or, if it did, she must be strong to meet it——

Gyp roused. For her the golden spell was broken. She yawned and stretched.

"Isn't school funny? You think you hate it and then when vacation comes you keep thinking about going back. And you bury geometry and Cæsar forever and try to forget them and then first thing you're thinking about what you're going to take next year and whom you'll get and what new girls will come and what sort of a team we'll have! We've just *got* to train a forward who'll be as good as Ginny when she graduates and I believe, Jerry Travis, you're *it*."

Jerry and Isobel turned promptly from their dreaming.

"I wonder who'll take Miss Gray's place—and Barbara Lee's——"

"And, oh," Jerry hugged them both. "I'll be *there*! I'll be *there*! I hated to *think* of your all going on without me. It would have broken my heart! Dear old Highacres!"

"To thy golden founts of wisdom,
Alma Mater, guide our step——"

caroled the young voices, softly.

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