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Title: Briarwood Girls

Author: Julia Lestarjette Glover

Release Date: January 9, 2011 [EBook #34894]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Barbara Tozier, Bill Tozier, Josephine Paolucci and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <https://www.pgdp.net>.

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BRIARWOOD GIRLS ***



Cover

BRIARWOOD GIRLS



BY

JULIA LESTARJETTE GLOVER

*"I follow, follow, sure to meet the sun,
And confident that what the future yields
Will be the right, unless myself be wrong."*

THE BOOK CONCERN
COLUMBUS, OHIO

MADE IN
Columbus

U.S.A.

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CHAPTER I

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ALISON'S WONDERFUL LAMP

"Mother, isn't there *any* way for me to go back?"

It was the first of June, and Alison Fair, just returned home for vacation at the end of her Freshman year, found herself confronted with the staggering knowledge that she could not return to Briarwood to finish her college course, so well and happily begun.

It was her mother who told her, breaking the hard news as gently as she could, that the pressure of hard times and financial stress made it impossible for her father to think of sending her back in the fall. She told it very tenderly and lovingly, making it clear that only stern necessity compelled them to deny her the opportunity; but the tenderness could not alter the hard fact.

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"You are not more disappointed than we are, darling," she said. "I would not have told you so soon, but it would be worse if I would leave you under the impression that you can return to Briarwood College. You will be brave, and try not to distress your father by showing your disappointment too much. I know how hard it is, dear. But be patient, and perhaps some way will open. You are only sixteen, you can afford to wait a little."

Alison swallowed the lump in her throat and said nothing. Wait—yes—but then she could not go on with her class—with Polly and Evelyn and Joan and the rest. And next year they would be Sophomores—and the fun and study would go on, and she would not be there; she would be out of it all. No other girls would be just the same as those girls, her chums of the Freshman year. And then she asked her one despairing question:

"Mother, isn't there *any* way for me to go back?"

But even as she asked it, she knew the answer, and gave it herself. "No, I know there isn't. Father would send me if he could. I'll try to be patient, mother. Don't worry. Don't mind, mother

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—" seeing that her mother's tears were flowing. "I'll try not to think of it or talk of it any more. I've had one year, anyway. And maybe I can take a correspondence course, or something—"

She tried to speak bravely, but it was more than she could manage just now, and she hastily kissed her mother, and ran away to have it out by herself.

The children thought it strange that "Sister," suddenly stopped talking of her college experiences and the pranks and frolics of the girls. To their questions and demands to hear more, she would reply quietly, "There isn't anything more to tell you, Floss. I guess I talked myself out those first few days. Now I want to hear all you have been doing during all the months I've been away."

Which effectually diverted the attention of Floss and Billy and Mat and opened a flood of reminiscences of their own school life, to which she tried to listen patiently. [Pg 8]

The summer dragged on. Alison had looked forward to it—and beyond it—with such eager pleasure; but the thought that she was not to go back seemed to take all the zest from life. Letters came from the girls—from Evelyn in the mountains, from Polly at the seaside, from Joan and Katherine in Europe—all telling of the good times they were having, and looking forward to their reunion at Briarwood in September. And she would not be there. Trying not to show her disappointment too much, not to distress her father and mother, was as far as Alison could get. She could not look forward; there seemed nothing to look forward to. And to look back to the happy days of last winter was more than she could bear.

So the days passed, and grew into weeks. August came, with glowing sun and deep blue skies. Summer was at its glorious height. One bright morning Billy came whistling in with the mail; a letter for Alison from Joan, her roommate of last winter, and a long, legal-looking envelope for Mr. Fair. Both became absorbed, and Alison, deep in Joan's news, scarcely heard when her father said gravely, [Pg 9]

"Aunt Justina is dead."

"Who is Aunt Justina?" asked Floss with some curiosity, wondering why father looked so "funny."

"An old great-aunt of mine, who lived far away, in New England. You children have scarcely heard of her, perhaps, but I used often to be at her house, as a boy, in my holidays. Now she is dead, and her lawyer has sent me a copy of her will. Wait, I will read it."

He unfolded a stiff typewritten document. All the family were listening now. Alison folded up Joan's sheet and looked up, interested.

"Did she leave you anything, father?" Floss inquired. "Was she very rich?"

"No, not very. She was eccentric, and I never expected anything from her. No, she has left me nothing. Most of her money was left to charities; but she has left you, Alison, a bequest. Whether it is of any value or not we cannot tell until we see it. Here it is in the will: 'To my great niece, Alison Fair, my brass lamp which stands on my dresser, with a letter, which I direct shall be sent to her along with it.' [Pg 10]

"The lawyer says: 'The lamp has been forwarded by express, the letter being enclosed with it.' It will probably arrive today, and you can see for yourself what Aunt Justina's legacy is like. It may be valuable; she had a fancy for collecting antiques, and she traveled a good deal in her younger days. On the other hand, it may be merely an old lamp on which she set some fictitious value. So don't raise your expectations too high."

The thought crossed Alison's mind: "I wish she had left me its value in money instead;" but she did not say it aloud. It seemed unsuitable to think of money when Aunt Justina was just dead, though she could not be expected to grieve over-much for an aged relative whom she had never seen. [Pg 11]

Later in the day the expressman brought a box for Alison. The family crowded around, all eager to help in unpacking the legacy. It was beautifully packed, and as layer after layer of wrappings was lifted off, curiosity rose to an almost irrepressible height. Finally the lamp itself came into view, a beautiful thing of shining brass; ancient Venetian work, hammered and beaten into a shape of exquisite loveliness by artist fingers, long since dust.

A cry of admiration arose as Alison lifted it from the last swathings and held it up to view. The letter from Aunt Justina was tied to one side, and she unfastened it with fingers that shook a little. It was a message from the dead. It was so strange that that old lady, so far away, should have thought of her and sent her this beautiful thing, and written her a letter with her own trembling hand. With an odd feeling of unreality she unfolded the letter and read it aloud to her excited family. [Pg 12]

"My dear great-niece, Alison," it began, "You have never seen me, perhaps you have never heard of me, until you will read this, after my death; and you will think it strange, perhaps, that I should take enough interest in you to send you my favorite lamp. Your father was my favorite nephew, and I had intended to make him my heir; but he displeased me by taking his own way in life, instead of the one I had planned for him. He had a right, I suppose, to do as he thought best, and I was wrong to try to force him to do as I wished. Whether he was wise or not, time will show. I am a lonely old woman with none of my own near me in my last years."

"I declared I would leave his name out of my will, and I must keep my word; but I have followed his career closely enough to know something of his family and circumstances. And so, though I am leaving him nothing, I want to leave to his eldest daughter a small token of my interest and affection. Take it, my dear, as an old woman's freak. I bought it long ago in a quaint old shop in Venice. It is not an heirloom, and if you should some day wish to sell it, you may do so. On one condition, however: That is, that you keep it, *as it is*, until you are in some strait when no other help is available. Then, if you have exhausted all other resources, fill the lamp and light it. It may cast a light on your perplexities.

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"Until then, keep it bright in remembrance of

"Your affectionate aunt,

"Justina Laurence."

A chorus of exclamations broke forth as Alison ceased reading. "What a strange old lady! Father, was she really angry with you for not doing as she wanted? And what was it?"

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"She wanted me to go into politics, backed by her money; but I had no fancy for a politician's career, and I refused. Poor Aunt Justina! She was a very ambitious woman, and would have liked to see me President. Well, I am glad she felt more kindly at the last. I never wanted her money; but I am glad she has remembered you, daughter," said Mr. Fair, examining Alison's legacy with interest.

"Keep it bright! Why, you can see your face in it now," cried Floss, peering into its shining sides. "Sister, I don't see how you can wait to 'fill and light it.' I would like to see it lighted right away."

"But she says, 'Keep it as it is until you are in some strait,'" said Alison thoughtfully. "I would rather do just as she wished."

"So it will be just an ornament to stand on your table," said Billy disgustedly. "What a cranky old lady! What good will it do you?"

But Alison was not listening to him. A thought had flashed into her mind, and glancing at her mother she read the same thought in her eyes. Quietly she lifted her "wonderful lamp" and placed it in the center of the table for all to admire.

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Then she went away to her own room to think it over. Was she ever likely to be in a much greater strait than she was now? And would not Aunt Justina want her to go to college? If the lamp was to shed light on her perplexities, surely now was the time it was needed.

A tap at the door heralded her mother. "What is my daughter thinking of?" she asked, smiling.

"Of the same thing you are, mother. I see it in your face. Would it be against Aunt Justina's wishes, to light the lamp now? She must have meant *something*. And—if there is nothing more, after all—if it does not 'shed light on my perplexities,' at any rate, it is valuable in itself. But—I could hardly need its help more than I do now."

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"I thought of that, too, Alison, and I think it could not be wrong to investigate. Shall we fill it now, and wait until dark to light it?"

The question settled, they all gathered round while Alison unscrewed the old-fashioned burner of the lamp. "Maybe there is some magic about it," she said, laughing nervously. "I feel like Aladdin. Shall I try rubbing it first? But it doesn't need any rubbing to brighten it."

The screw was a little stiff, but presently it turned. She removed it and peered curiously in the top.

"It is stuffed full of paper," she said. "More packing, I suppose. Wait till I pull it out."

"Careful," her father said, as she drew out a folded paper. He took it from her, and waited while she drew out another and another of the thin folded slips, until he had a handful. The bowl was large, and held a good many of those folded papers. When Alison had drawn out the last one, and turned to him, quite pale with excitement, he placed the packet in her hand.

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"Alison, child, it is two thousand dollars!"

"Two thousand! Oh, father! Oh, mother!"

The children wondered why "Sister" should cry because her wonderful lamp was full of money; but her mother understood.

"Only I don't feel that it ought to be mine," she said presently. "It ought to be yours, father. Please take it. I am sure Aunt Justina meant it for you. It is too much money for me to spend."

"No, little daughter. I think Aunt Justina knew very well what she was about. She wanted me to know that she had forgiven my obstinacy, and so she left it to my daughter. You may use it with a clear conscience. You have borne the disappointment bravely, and we are glad you should have this bequest."

He kissed her, and Alison hid her face on his shoulder for a moment, quite overcome with joy and surprise and gratitude, and then ran away to her own room without another word.

"Mother," she said later, when it had been talked over and decided that she was to go back to Briarwood in September, "I wish Aunt Justina could know how happy she has made me." [Pg 18]

"Perhaps she does; and if so, I am sure it would please her to know that you are making a wise and good use of her legacy; all the more because these weeks of trial and disappointment have taught you the value of the school years; and the discipline of patience will have made you stronger and better able to use them wisely."

"Oh, I will; and I hope Aunt Justina knows," breathed Alison, dimming the shining surface of her wonderful lamp with a few happy tears.

CHAPTER II

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BRIARWOOD COLLEGE

Briarwood College was built on a terraced hillside, the buildings rising one above the other, the lowest, or Main Building, on a level with the street that ran at right angles with the hillside, while the topmost, known as "Hillview," crowned the summit and commanded a view of near and distant hills, blue, purple and opal-tinted, melting into the sky.

The Main Building had originally been a handsome old dwelling house, whose spacious rooms were now used as parlors, library, offices and teachers' rooms. There were wide, beautiful porches in front and back, and massive stone steps, ending in great stone urns overflowing with bright flowers at the foot of each flight. These steps led down into wide shady gardens, where the girls walked up and down with arms intertwined, or sat and studied and talked on rustic seats under the trees on the shady lawns. [Pg 20]

The other buildings, Briarley Hall, Elmtree Hall and Hillview, were devoted to class rooms and dormitories, each hall being presided over by a teacher.

In these pleasant courts of learning Alison Fair arrived on a golden September afternoon, and was warmly welcomed by Miss Harland, the Principal.

"We are so glad to have you back, dear," Miss Harland said, kissing the girl affectionately. "I was rather afraid from what you wrote some time ago, that you might not return to us this year."

"Oh, so was I, Miss Harland. I was dreadfully afraid of it. I was so disappointed, I hardly realize yet that it is all right, and I am really here. And may I have my same old room, and Joan for roommate?" [Pg 21]

"The same room, dear, but I am so sorry about Joan. You see, she has not come yet, and there was no one to claim that room, so I had to put a new girl in with you. We have a very large school this year, and the dormitories are overflowing. I really had no other place for her. You may be able to change later, if you don't find her congenial. You won't mind?"

Alison did mind; but after the first pang of disappointment, she spoke cheerfully. "It's all right, Miss Harland. I'm so thankful to be here at all, I shan't grumble at anything. Joan *is* coming, isn't she?" in sudden alarm.

"Oh, yes, I expect her this evening. Her father is driving her through the country. Run up, then, and get acquainted with your new roommate. Marcia West, is her name. She looked homesick."

Homesick at Briarwood! Alison marvelled as she ran lightly up the familiar staircase and along the corridor to the end room, which had been hers and Joan Wentworth's last year. She was so happy to find herself here again; but then she was not a new girl, and she knew there were many freshmen lying on their beds at this moment and crying their eyes out for homesickness. Well, it would not last long, one soon grew accustomed to the pleasant routine of school days. [Pg 22]

She reached her door and tapped lightly. It was opened, after an instant's delay, and the "new girl" stood there in silence, still holding the door and looking at her with an expression which, if not exactly forbidding, was certainly not encouraging. She was about Alison's own age, rather tall and slight, with dark, sombre eyes and dark heavy hair worn low on her forehead. The heavy hair and the unsmiling eyes gave her face a lowering look that was not attractive at first sight. She merely stood there without speaking, until Alison said pleasantly,

"Good evening. I am Alison Fair, and you are my new roommate. Miss Harland told me you were here. I'm sorry to be late. I hope you like our room." [Pg 23]

"Pretty, though it's not very large for two," said the girl nonchalantly. "I came in this morning. I've been unpacking."

It was evident, as Alison entered and looked about her. Marcia had unpacked her trunk, which stood open in the hall beside their door, and had strewed her belongings about as freely as though she had expected to occupy the room alone.

It was a fairly good-sized room, containing two single beds, and a dresser, chair and small table for each girl. A roomy closet was well supplied with hangers and shoe-racks. A glance showed

Alison that Marcia had placed her dresser and table close to the window and strewn them with photographs and toilet articles in lavish profusion. Also, that she had taken the best chair.

"I changed things a little. You don't mind, do you?" she asked, watching Alison.

"Oh, no, it's your room as well as mine," Alison answered good-humoredly, and proceeded to open her own trunk, which had been brought up and placed in the hall, according to custom, and to arrange her part of the room. Marcia had encroached on her side of the closet, she noticed, but she said nothing, only hanging up a few dresses and leaving the rest in her trunk. She placed a few favorite books between a pair of bronze bookends, her father's parting gift; laid her Bible beside them, and her pretty new portfolio her mother had given her; and finally set her cherished lamp on the dresser. She had scarcely finished, and stood surveying the effect, when there was a rush of little feet in the corridor, the door was flung open, and a small, rosy-faced curly-haired girl rushed in to fling herself into Alison's arms.

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"Oh, Alison, you darling thing! I'm so thrilled to be back, and in our same old room, too."

CHAPTER III

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SOME OF THE GIRLS

"Lovely to be back," said Alison, warmly kissing the pretty childish face, "but you are too late for us to be roommates, Jo. I have another roommate, a new girl, Marcia West. Marcia, this is Joan Wentworth, who roomed with me last year."

Joan shook back her light fluffy hair, looking rather taken aback for an instant, as Marcia emerged from the closet, where she had been invisible, arranging a rack of shoes. "How do you do?" Marcia said briefly. "I didn't know I was taking your room. Miss Harland put me in here. She said there wasn't any other room, or I'd go somewhere else. I'm sorry."

"Oh, it's all right," Joan answered, recovering her equanimity quickly. "I'll go and see if Kathy can take me in, for the night, anyway. She's just across the hall, and she's by herself. I'll look her up."

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She was gone, leaving Alison and Marcia to shake down together as best they could. Conversation languished. Alison tried to talk about her school work. It developed that they would be in the same classes; but Marcia seemed to have no enthusiasms. She had come to school because she was made to, and she looked forward to nothing but getting through.

Finally she said she was tired and lay down on her bed; and seeing presently that she had fallen asleep, Alison slipped out of the room across the hall to the room opposite, which was Katherine Bertram's. Katherine was better off financially than most of the girls. Her mother was dead and she had traveled and lived in hotel rooms for several years previously, and so her room at school was more like a home than anything she had known since her mother's death. It was prettily furnished, and her pictures and rugs were better and more luxurious than most schoolgirls' rooms could boast. Nevertheless, she was known as "a good fellow," and was popular with the girls.

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Alison's tap at the door was answered by a cordial "Come in," and she entered, to find Katherine and Joan curled up on the bed, talking vigorously, but both sprang up to greet her joyously. She found a seat on a velvet-covered stool beside the couch, and Joan resumed her interrupted grumble.

"I'm just too disappointed and cross for anything," she lamented. "Here I came flying back to our old quarters like—like a homing pigeon, only to find my place taken by that cross-looking thing. I don't believe you are going to like her a bit, Alison. She doesn't look as if she would fit in."

"It is too bad; but then it gives me Joan for a roommate, which is a silver lining," said Katherine equably. "I didn't know there was a chance of your losing your place, or I would have spoken to Miss Harland and tried to get one of the old girls to change with her."

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"Oh, well, it's only the first day; maybe something will happen; or we may like her better when we know her," said Alison hopefully.

"And in the mean time, Joan is welcome with me as long as she likes. I'll ask for a cot for her. There's plenty of room," said Katherine hospitably. "We shall be close by and can get together whenever we like. So cheer up, Jo, it won't be so bad."

They fell into an animated discussion of school matters, which was presently interrupted by a tumultuous rush outside, the door was opened without ceremony, and in flocked the rest of the "Kindred Spirit,"—Evelyn and Polly, boon companions, unlike as they were; studious Rachel; Rosalind, the school beauty, whose golden head and apple-blossom face scarcely suggested books or scholarship. These with Alison, Katherine and Joan, made up the seven "Kindred Spirits," an informal little club of loyal friends. Their favorite gathering place last year had been the room occupied by Alison and Joan, and consternation reigned when the news spread that the newcomer had usurped Joan's place.

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"It won't be the same thing at all," complained Polly, flinging herself back on the bed in a paroxysm of disappointment.

Katherine poured oil on the troubled waters. "You can meet here just as well. And maybe, as Alison says, we shall like her when we know her. Don't let us judge her too hardly beforehand."

"So charitable, Kathy always is," murmured Evelyn.

Rachel changed the subject.

"Well—did you know we have a new English teacher?"

"No. What's her name?"

"Miss Burnett—Cecil Burnett. She's lovely. And she's to be at our table."

"Are Helen Yorke and Brenda Thornton back?"

"Yes. I saw them this morning. As musical as ever. Oh, is that the supper bell? It can't be six o'clock already."

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"It seems it can—for it is," said Alison, consulting her wrist watch and finding it correspond with the bell. "I must go and see if my roommate is awake, and take her down to supper. Please be nice to her, girls. I don't know yet whether she is cross or just shy." She gave the group an appealing look as she left the room, and Katherine answered it with a reassuring smile.

But Joan shrugged her shoulders and made a face. She had not been prepossessed in favor of the new girl.

CHAPTER IV

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ESSAYS AND ESSAYS

The dining room was a large, square, light room, filled with tables, each holding twelve. Alison piloted her roommate to a seat next to herself, at her old table, where Evelyn, Katherine and Joan were already seated, the rest of the group being at the next table. The new English teacher, Miss Burnett, presided—a pretty girl, not many years older than her prospective pupils. Brown-haired and brown-eyed, with a deep, soft rose color in her cheeks, she was exactly the type that girls a few years younger would naturally fall in love with on sight.

Accordingly, the group of girls at her table, running true to form, promptly "fell for her" with schoolgirl unanimity; copied the way she did her hair, whether it was becoming to them or not, practiced her engaging smile, and even copied her clothes, as far as possible. Brown was her favorite color—a deep, rich brown that suited her eyes and hair and blended with the rose glow in her cheeks. This shade of brown promptly became popular.

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Life at Briarwood soon settled into an accustomed routine of classes, sports and recreation, and the days were full and busy. Miss Burnett had an eager class, more interested in the study of their mother tongue than they had ever been before, simply because she taught it.

Toward Thanksgiving she gave them an essay contest, and Alison and her roommate became more congenial as they discussed subjects and titles. But their tastes and ideas were very different.

"I don't believe I could write anything worth reading, but I'll try, because Miss Burnett wants us to," said Alison, to whom the study of English was genuine enjoyment.

"And I'll try because I've got to," responded Marcia with a wry face.

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"Just let her hear you saying *got*, that's all," laughed Alison, reaching for her book.

"I hate all lessons, but I believe I hate English worst of any," said Marcia crossly. "I don't see why we have to study it."

"Why did you come to college, if you hate it so?" asked Alison curiously.

"Oh, because one must do something, I suppose."

"But why do you take English?"

"Because the rest of you do, and I don't like to be left out. Besides, Miss Harland made me. Are you going to track meet this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Then, will you lend me your English Literature? Rosalind borrowed mine and hasn't returned it."

"And welcome. There it is on the table."

"Thank you. I'll work while you play, like the ant and the grasshopper," said Marcia more

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graciously than usual.

It was a brilliant autumn afternoon, and most of the girls were tempted out. The hall was deserted, save for Marcia, scribbling hard in her room.

"Finished already?" asked Alison, coming in just in time for supper, flushed and breathless after a basketball game.

Marcia was just putting away her writing materials. She looked up nonchalantly. "Almost. I've only to correct and copy it."

"You've had a grand quiet time to work. I wish I had been as industrious; but it was so lovely out. We had a splendid practice."

Nothing was talked of in school for the next few days but the essays, which were to be handed in the week before Thanksgiving, and the prize winner would be announced on the day before—"to give us extra reason to be thankful," said Joan.

Katherine had written a scholarly essay, giving a sort of bird's-eye view of the entire field of English literature, concisely expressed. Privately, she believed herself sure of the prize, but no such self-laudatory opinion was hinted at in her dignified demeanor. [Pg 35]

Joan had skipped airily over the earlier periods, coming rapidly down to present-day fiction in the space of four pages. "She'll like mine because it's short, anyway," she congratulated herself.

Most of the other girls had tried, because Miss Burnett wished it. Some of the efforts were better, some worse, than others, some impossible. Alison, coming from her history class one morning, suddenly realized that the time was almost up, and her essay was still unwritten. A few unfinished beginnings, rejected as unsatisfactory, were all she had to show.

She had a vacant period next, and she took a sudden resolve. "I'll write that essay in the next forty-five minutes, or know the reason," she told herself sternly, and going to her room she posted a "busy" sign on the door as a gentle hint that visitors were not desired, and fell to work. [Pg 36]

As she opened her English Literature, several half-sheets of paper fell out, each scribbled over with her unsuccessful beginnings.... She laughed and dropped them into the wastebasket. Then she picked up a folded paper that she did not recognize. When had she written an exercise in blue ink? She opened it, puzzled. What did it mean? An essay, apparently, in Rosalind's unmistakable writing, which was like herself, pretty, but entirely characterless. It was entitled "*The River of Time*." Plainly, it was Rosalind's idea of an essay on English literature, which she described as a river flowing down the ages, on whose waters were found lovely pearls. These pearls were represented by the names of a few outstanding writers, but after a few inadequate sentences Rosalind's imagination had apparently failed her.

Realizing after a glance at the first page that it was not meant for her eyes, Alison resolutely folded the paper, smiling. Literature was not Rosalind's strong point, but she was so pretty and winning that one forgave and smiled, as at the efforts of a child. [Pg 37]

"Poor little Rosalind," she thought, and put the paper aside, to be given back to the writer at the first opportunity. Then she fell to work on her own essay, and had finished her first copy by the time the period ended.

CHAPTER V

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THE TANGLED SKEIN

"May I come in?" asked Rosalind's voice, and in response to Alison's cordial invitation, she entered, a perplexed cloud on her face.

"I'm so worried, Alison," she began. "I saw your 'busy' sign, so I waited. I thought you might help me."

"Was it about this?" Alison held up the folded paper. "I've been worried about it, too."

Rosalind pounced on the paper. "Oh, that's it. It's my essay. Where in the world did you find it?"

"It was in my English book. How it got there I can't imagine. It was certainly not there when I saw the book last. I lent it to Marcia. She said you had borrowed hers, and she didn't like to go and rummage in your room while you were out—"

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"She wouldn't have had to rummage. It was right on the table," said Rosalind simply. "Did you read this, Alison? It's dreadful—"

"I couldn't help seeing the title and the first few sentences, but of course I didn't read any further. Honestly, Rosalind, I am puzzled to guess how your essay could have got into my book. Can you think?"

Rosalind frowned and puckered up her sunny face in a great mental effort.

"I haven't any book, myself," she confessed. "Mine fell out of the window, and I forgot to pick it up, and it rained in the night, and ruined it. It was so sopping wet, it just fell to pieces. So I've been getting along by borrowing the other girls' books. I borrowed Marcia's the other day, and forgot to return it to her—"

"So a lot of the trouble is due to your bad habit of forgetting to do things," said Alison severely. But she smiled as she said it, and Rosalind took the reproof with her usual sweet temper. "I know it was. But what then, Alison?"

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"Then she borrowed mine, to study. She returned it to me, all right, but she forgot to explain what your essay was doing in it. I went out to track meet, and left Marcia studying for her essay. I hadn't looked through my book carefully, and if I saw any papers sticking out, I thought they were just my own notes. That is all I know about it, till I found your essay just now."

"Well, it's all right, now I've found it," said Rosalind easily. "They have to be handed in tomorrow. I'm so glad I'm on time, for once."

And with a relieved mind she danced lightly away, just as Marcia entered.

Alison looked up pleasantly. "Just in time, Marcia, to help solve a mystery, or straighten out a muddle."

Marcia stopped short and her face changed to the stony expression it wore when she was not pleased. "Well," she said, "What can *I* do about it?"

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"Rosalind was here just now," Alison explained patiently. "She came to ask if I knew anything about her essay, which she could not find. I had just found it inside my English book, and we were wondering how it got there. That was all. I thought perhaps you might be able to tell us."

Marcia grew paler than her wont, but she spoke clearly and coldly.

"Why, Rosalind lost her book I suppose, and borrowed yours, and left the essay in it. You know what a careless thing she is."

"No; she never had my book. She had finished her essay and put it away, that same afternoon, when you borrowed my book because she was out, and had left yours in her room."

"I don't know anything about it," said Marcia stolidly. "Are you trying to accuse me of anything?"

"Marcia! You are not in earnest?"

"Well, you seemed to imply it. I didn't think you would mind lending me your book—"

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"Of course I didn't, Marcia. You know that."

"I put it back on your table that same afternoon. You can testify to finding it there. I haven't seen it since."

"I don't want to 'testify' to anything," said Alison, astonished. "I was only wondering how Rosalind's essay came to be in my book. Please don't think I meant to be personal, Marcia."

"I don't know anything about it," repeated Marcia, "and I'll thank you, Alison Fair, not to be hinting at anything, instead of saying out plainly what you think."

"I wasn't hinting," began Alison, wounded to the verge of tears; but to her relief, Marcia left the room, and she turned to the window, her hands pressed to her eyes, trying to recover her composure enough to think her way out of the tangle.

Entered Joan, excited and curious.

"Alison! We just saw Marcia stalking down the hall, looking like a thundercloud, or a tragedy queen, or something! She wouldn't look at us. Rosalind had just been in to tell us about your finding her essay, she had been mourning as lost. It ought to be a fine one, to cause so much excitement. So when I saw Marcia leaving the room in such offended dignity, I just came to get you to come and tell Kathy and me all about it before we burst with curiosity. You can't deny there's something, when I find you swallowing tears—"

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The tears overflowed at the mention of them.

"Oh, Joan, I didn't mean to say anything about it, but since Rosalind has told you—Mind, I'm not accusing Marcia, though she said—she asked if I meant to hint—" Alison choked again.

"Nonsense," said Joan, briskly. "Nobody would think it, unless she had a guilty conscience. I dare say she has. Wait till I call Kathy—or no, you come into our room, and tell us all about it."

An interested audience was assembled in the room across the hall, for Rosalind had not been reticent, and Evelyn, Polly and Rachel were all there to hear what was to be heard. So Alison was obliged to tell the facts of the finding of the essay in her book after it had been borrowed by Marcia.

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"Truly, I did not mean to even imply that she was to blame in any way," she ended, almost apologetically, "but she seemed to think I was. I would never have spoken of it at all, if Rosalind had not told you while she was searching for her essay. Nobody was more surprised than I was when I found it. And even now I don't—I can't understand what it all means."

"I can," said Joan, addressing the company at large. "It means that Marcia is trying to put on Alison the onus of a thing she did herself, and couldn't quite succeed."

"Oh, but I *couldn't* think that of her," Alison cried, distressed.

"My dear Alison, the trouble is that you think everybody is as honest as yourself. People like that usually do get taken in."

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"Well, we can't do anything about it now, and we had better not talk about it any more," pronounced Katherine. "Let's forget it. Talk about something else. For instance—has anyone seen my ring? I've lost it again."

"Not that lovely pearl ring of yours, Kathy?"

"Yes. I've missed it for a week, but I kept thinking it would turn up. I generally remember to take it off when I wash my hands, but I can't remember—I wash my hands so often—"

"Kathy, you really are too careless—"

"Oh, the girls all recognize it and give it back to me when they find it; but they always find it in less than a week."

"There are the maids," suggested Polly.

"Oh, but I don't believe one of them would take anything."

"There you go again, Alison, with your 'everybody's honest.' I tell you everybody is not. There's a ghost or something in this school," insisted the incorrigible Joan. "Rachel lost her gold pencil a fortnight ago. Ever find it, Ray?"

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"No. But I do leave my things about. It may have slipped out of sight somewhere."

"So it may. Let me know when it returns of its own accord. This thing reminds me of the title of a little French book I read once: *Les Petits Mysteres de la Vie Humaine*. If I've made mistakes, Mademoiselle is not here to correct me, and the rest of you couldn't. Anyway, it means 'The Little Mysteries of Human Life,'" said Joan, looking defiantly about her.

"Well, I don't like mysteries," remarked Evelyn. "What we need is a clean-up day, to find all these missing valuables, and clear up all the mysteries."

The supper bell broke up the conclave.

CHAPTER VI

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MYSTERIES

The essays were handed in the next day, and after two days of what the girls termed "agonizing suspense," Miss Burnett announced to her class that the judges had made their decision. The best was Katherine's. No one had expected anything else, and there was heartfelt applause with no jealousy, as she received the prize, a handsome set of books. Alison's received second place, to her own surprise, for she was modest as to her own acquirements.

The rest were of about the same degree of excellence—laborious efforts, showing no originality of thought or discrimination. Still, they had tried, and Miss Burnett expressed in a few pleasant words her appreciation of their endeavors, as she returned their papers.

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Finally, there were but two papers left on the desk. Miss Burnett took up one and glanced at the title.

"This one, *The River of Time*," she said, "has at least the merit of brevity. In the space of about seven hundred words the author has reviewed the history of English literature from its source to the present time—"

"Oh, that is mine, Miss Burnett," exclaimed Rosalind, starting. "Please don't read it. I know it's awful." She smiled frankly and beguilingly into the teacher's eyes. "It's the best I could do."

Miss Burnett could not help returning the smile with the essay.

"Is it really the best you could do, Rosalind?"

"It is, truly, Miss Burnett. I could hardly do that."

"Then, Rosalind, all I can say is that it is a pity. But at least you really tried, and perhaps next time you will try harder and do better."

She took up the last paper on the desk. "I have kept this one for the last because I wanted to talk with you a little about it, Marcia. I should like you to remain a few minutes after the class is dismissed."

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Marcia said nothing. One after another the girls filed out, until she and the teacher were alone

together. Then Miss Burnett unfolded the paper and turned to the girl before her.

"This essay is signed with your name, Marcia, in the sealed envelope that was kept in my desk until the judges' decision had been reached. No one knew who had written it. No one knows now, except myself. I have not even mentioned the title, *The River Road*, until I had talked with you alone. Did you talk with anyone else about your essay? You know I wished them to be entirely original."

"No, Miss Burnett, I never said a word to anybody about it," said Marcia, quite truthfully.

Miss Burnett looked grave and troubled. "Then it is very peculiar, Marcia, that your essay has nearly the same title as Rosalind's, and says the same thing, only in different words. How could that be, unless you talked over your essays together?"

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"But we did not, truly, Miss Burnett. It just happened so." Marcia looked the teacher straight in the face, as if defying her to find a flaw in her statement. "Rosalind lost her book, and borrowed mine. Then she went out to play basketball without returning it. I had to borrow Alison's book to study for mine. She said she found the essay in it when she opened it to study. That is all I can tell you."

If there were any guile in this speech, Miss Burnett was too transparently honest herself to find it out. She looked troubled.

"Well, Marcia, it is very strange, but I must take your word for it. That is all, then."

Thanksgiving had come and gone, and the girls were settled down for the uneventful stretch that comes between Thanksgiving and Christmas. The seven friends were gathered in Alison's room, one raw, cold "Novemberish" afternoon for one of their old-time talks. Marcia had gone out shopping with Rosalind, for whom she seemed to have developed a sudden great friendship, and the girls had availed themselves of the opportunity to meet in their favorite gathering place without the embarrassment of her presence.

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Polly had a question to propound.

"Why don't we like Marcia?"

"Well?" said Evelyn, when the silence had lasted for several minutes while each waited for the others to speak.

"Alison ought to be able to answer that question," said Kathy.

Alison was slow to speak. "I don't know," she said at last. "She is in all our classes; she is pretty; she obeys all the college regulations. She seems all right; but—well, she is my roommate, I don't like talking of her behind her back."

"Well, I don't mind a bit," said Joan the outspoken. "I can tell you what's wrong with her. She doesn't like us. She hates school. She calls it a jail. She hates lessons. She hates Miss Harland. I heard her say so once, when Miss Harland said no to something she wanted to do. I don't see why she came to Briarwood at all."

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"Neither does she," put in Evelyn. "Her father sent her, that was why."

"Well, I don't like her, and I wish she roomed in another hall," said Joan; and no one gainsaid her, for there was no denying that Marcia took no pains to make herself popular.

Polly changed the subject abruptly.

"Kathy, did you ever find your ring?" she asked.

Katherine looked startled. "No. And I've lost something else—my great-grandmother's pearl necklace. Mother said I shouldn't take it to school with me, but I was sure I would be careful with it. And I was, girls, I really was. It stayed always in the bottom of my trunk, in its velvet case. I don't believe any of you ever knew about it. I haven't even taken it out since I left home. But yesterday I thought I would make sure that it was safe under everything in the trunk. And I looked, and it was not there. I cannot understand it, but it is true. Mother was right, as usual. I don't know how I am ever to tell her."

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There was a dead silence—the silence of dismay. What was this that was among them?

Joan broke it, saying briefly, "Ghost. Rosalind's essay. Kathy's ring. Rachel's gold pencil. Now, Kathy's necklace. Look out for your lamp, Alison!"

"Oh, nonsense," Alison said laughing nervously. "You *can't* suspect—Oh, I don't like being suspicious."

"All right. I only say, look out."

WITHOUT LEAVE

"Want to go to a party, Rosalind?"

It was a dull, uninteresting-looking day in early December. Snow was threatening and out-of-doors looked anything but attractive. Rosalind was toiling over a history lesson and wishing that all the kings and queens of France had been guillotined before they made trouble for future generations of schoolgirls, instead of afterward, when a tap at the door heralded Marcia and her exciting question.

Rosalind dropped her book, casting Louis XIV to the winds.

"Of course I do. Where? And when? And how? Tell me quick."

Marcia shut the door carefully. "Any chance of your roommate coming in?"

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"No, she's gone home for the week-end. No one will disturb us. I'm supposed to be studying. Didn't you see the sign?"

"Yes, but I knew you weren't hurting yourself with study. Now listen. I am invited to a party at Sara Marshall's tonight, and I can bring a friend with me. Her brother will meet us at the corner with a car, at nine o'clock. I thought of you. Will you go?"

"I'd love to. Have you asked Miss Harland? Will she let us?"

"Rosalind, you *are* green. What Miss Harland doesn't know won't hurt her. I haven't asked her, and I don't intend to. If you would be afraid to go without leave, I'll ask Alison—but she's such a stickler for rules, I didn't think she would. And this is such a good chance, with your roommate away, and all. We can dress in here after supper, and I'll spend the night with you, if anybody asks. As soon as lights are out, we'll slip down to the basement. There'll be a window unlatched. Ann will do anything for me. See how easy it will be."

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It did strike Rosalind that the plan was too clearly arranged to have been settled on such short notice. She said doubtfully, "But when did you see Sara Marshall?"

"Oh, she sent me a note yesterday. I've been thinking of it ever since, and planning it out." But Marcia did not explain that she had seen Sara Marshall the day before, and that all the arrangements had been carefully canvassed before a word was to be said to Rosalind. The note had been merely to say that all was as they had planned, and that her brother and a friend would be waiting at the corner for them. To Rosalind it seemed an impromptu plan for a little fun, and her pleasure-loving little head was quite turned at the prospect.

"The only trouble is," Marcia was off on a fresh tack, "I haven't a thing that is decent to wear. I spoiled my old blue the last time I wore it. It was dreadfully unbecoming, anyway. I don't believe I can go, after all."

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"I'll lend you my pink," offered Rosalind, dismayed at the thought of disappointment. "I have a new white dress mother just sent me. Please wear my pink. It would be so becoming to you."

Marcia knew it would be, and after a proper amount of hesitation and protest, she yielded, and the die was cast. The afternoon was an exciting one, and after supper they retired to Rosalind's room, ostensibly to study together. Marcia had asked and obtained permission to spend the night with Rosalind, and with the door securely shut and fastened, the business of dressing was before them.

All went as they had planned. At nine o'clock they cautiously opened the door. All was dark and still in the corridor, and they crept noiselessly downstairs to the basement, where the window had been unlatched for them by one of the maids, bribed by Marcia.

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They climbed out, ran swiftly across the lawn, in terror lest someone might be looking from an upper window. But there was no sound or movement from the sleeping rooms. They climbed over the low place in the wall and found themselves out in the quiet street.

No one was in sight, and they scurried along, only intent on getting out of sight of those dark windows. At the corner two dark figures confronted them, and Rosalind barely suppressed a scream. But it was only Tom Marshall, who greeted them cordially.

"Hello, girls, here you are. This is Ray Gordon. We've got a car here. Hop in, it's cold out here. Glad to see you have warm coats."

The coats had been put on chiefly to cover their evening dresses, but they were shivering with cold and excitement, and were glad to find themselves in the warm car.

They were soon in Mrs. Marshall's bright parlors, where a merry crowd was gathered, and were pleasantly welcomed by Mrs. Marshall herself, and by Sara, who introduced them to her friends, some of whom were known to Marcia, but not to Rosalind.

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"Miss Harland did not object to your coming, dear?" Mrs. Marshall asked. "I was sure she would not, she and I are old friends—"

"Oh, no, she did not object in the least," said Marcia quickly, forestalling the words she saw on Rosalind's lips, and replying, as she argued to herself, quite truthfully, since Miss Harland had

not objected, not having been consulted.

The evening went on. Marcia was very bright and animated. The pink dress was becoming to her. Her cheeks glowed with bright color. A pearl necklace clasped her throat, and on one finger gleamed a ring—a beautiful pearl ring which she certainly had not worn when they left the school. Rosalind wondered. Could she have had the jewels in her hand-bag, and put them on in the comparative darkness of the car? That must have been it, she decided. But she felt uncomfortable, and could not throw herself into the spirit of whole-souled enjoyment as the others did. She was glad when the time came for breaking up, and their two escorts took them back through the quiet streets.

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"Here we are," said Tom Marshall, drawing up at the corner. "We'll see you safe to the gate—"

"Oh, no, thank you. It is only a step, and we have to climb the wall. Thank you, and goodnight," protested Marcia, her teeth chattering with cold and nervousness.

Not daring to speak aloud, the girls sped along, keeping close to the wall until they reached the low place where they could climb over without risking the opening of the gate. The basement window was still unlatched. Carefully they scrambled through, and finally stood on the floor—"Safe, and nobody saw us," exulted Marcia in a whisper.

And then, without warning the light flashed on, and the culprits stood revealed to the accusing eyes of Miss Charlton, the teacher on their hall.

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For a long minute they faced each other, the girls too dismayed and startled to speak a word in their own behalf. At length Miss Charlton said slowly and very distinctly,

"I thought so. Marcia West and Rosalind Forrest, I shall report you absent without leave. You will both go to Miss Harland's office after chapel tomorrow morning. She will deal with you as she thinks best. Go to your rooms now. Goodnight!"

Thankful to be thus summarily dismissed, the girls scurried noiselessly up two long flights of stairs and reached Rosalind's room without meeting anyone. Every door was shut, the occupants of the rooms sleeping safely and sweetly. How passionately Rosalind envied them. If she were only safe in her own bed now, with no sense of wrongdoing to hound her, no punishment awaiting her.

"It's all your fault, Marcia," she sobbed, tearing her white dress in her hurry to get it off. "I wish I had never listened to you—"

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"My fault! Well, I like that. You were very willing to listen at the time, it seems to me," returned Marcia crossly, pulling at the clasp of the pearl necklace so roughly in her irritation that it snapped, and the beautiful thing lay broken in her hand. "There! see what you made me do," she added angrily.

"I didn't," contradicted Rosalind, too exasperated to sympathize; and presently she was in bed, with the covers pulled over her head.

Frightened and ashamed, she remembered that she had not said her prayers. She tried to say them in bed, but the first words of contrition brought tears, and she cried herself to sleep.

As for Marcia, she lay long awake, wondering what she should do with the broken necklace she had "borrowed," in anticipation of this very party. Finally she rose softly, and without turning on the light, found a small box in the dresser drawer, placed the broken necklace in it, and opening the door noiselessly, slipped past the line of trunks in the hall until she came to the one she wanted. She placed her little tissue-paper-wrapped parcel behind it, and returned as noiselessly to Rosalind's room, and slipped into bed beside her.... Daylight was brightening the windows before she fell into a troubled doze.

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CHAPTER VIII

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IN MISS HARLAND'S OFFICE

Two very frightened girls presented themselves at the door of Miss Harland's office the next morning.

They showed their feeling very differently. Rosalind was trembling and weeping, the picture of grief; but Marcia's dark face was settled into an expression of sullen determination not to speak. It might have been carved out of stone as she stood with her lowering brow, and sombre dark eyes fixed on the floor.

Miss Harland looked at them very gravely and sadly. Marcia's eyes were raised presently with a defiant and stubborn expression that was unpromising. Rosalind did not look up at all. She was frankly crying. At last Miss Harland spoke.

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"I am sorry to have to send for you, girls, but Miss Charlton has reported that you were both absent without leave last night until a later hour than I like my girls to be out—especially without

permission. I must ask you, therefore, to give me a full account of your expedition—where you went, and with whom. I am sorry you had not confidence enough in me to tell me about it, and to ask my leave; but since you have not done so, I must require an explanation, Marcia, you may speak."

But Marcia remained stubbornly silent, only looking up from under her dark brows with her sullen, defiant expression.

After waiting a few minutes, Miss Harland turned to Rosalind.

"You will not refuse to answer me, Rosalind? I think you have not found me a hard mistress in the past, have you?"

Rosalind could scarcely speak for tears. "Oh, no, Miss Harland. I'll tell you—what I can—"

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"Thank you. Then tell me at whose house you were, and what took you there?"

"It was a party. They invited Marcia, and said she could bring a friend."

"And did she suggest that you come without permission?"

"Oh, no, Miss Harland. She—she said she was glad you did not object—"

Here Marcia gave a warning glance in Rosalind's direction, which was not lost on Miss Harland. "There was no harm in it," she muttered.

"Then, Marcia, if there was no harm, why not have come and told me, and had my leave to go openly?"

"I thought you wouldn't let us," in a hoarse, defiant voice.

Miss Harland was silent an instant. How could she make this girl, with her innately deceitful and secretive nature, understand where the wrong lay?

"And who escorted you there, and brought you back?" she asked.

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Rosalind answered, as Marcia seemed determined not to speak again.

"Mrs. Marshall's son and another boy; I don't know his name. At least, they told us, but I can't remember."

Miss Harland felt relieved. Rosalind's replies bore the stamp of truth. In fact, as Miss Harland knew, she was too simple and straightforward to be other than truthful. Her mind did not work fast enough to concoct a falsehood; she was silly and easily led, but when it came to the point, she would blunder out the truth. Marcia, on the other hand, was extremely secretive, and would rather weave a tangled web of evasions than give a clear and truthful answer. Miss Harland felt that there was some confusion somewhere. Mrs. Marshall was a good friend of her. She could be sure that she would not have countenanced any underhand dealing. Why, then, did Marcia wish to conceal the fact of the invitation? She was puzzled, but relieved that the affair was no worse than a schoolgirl's natural love of a secret adventure. But it would not do to pass it over lightly.

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"And so you thought to deceive me, and slipped out without my permission. Don't you see, Marcia, that *there* is where the harm lies? I must not pass over such an infringement of the school regulations, and so I must punish you both. You will be restricted for one month, or until after Christmas. And the next time you wish to go out, come to me frankly and ask permission. If possible, I will grant it; and if I do not see fit, I shall expect you to submit cheerfully to my decision in the matter. Now you may go to your classes."

Marcia left the room without a word, looking like a thunder cloud. Rosalind lingered, sobbing, to speak the words of contrition for which Miss Harland had been waiting.

"Please forgive me, Miss Harland. I'm sorry—so sorry, truly. I'll never do it again. It wasn't a bit of fun, anyway, for I didn't like going without leave, and I was scared all the time that somebody would recognize us. I don't like doing things in that underhand way; it frightens me. I knew all the time it was wrong, but I let Marcia persuade me. It was my own fault, and I'm sorry. Forgive me."

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The pretty face was very pleading as Rosalind looked up with blue eyes drowned in tears. Miss Harland's kiss of forgiveness was ready, as she put her arm around the repentant sinner and drew her close into her kind arms.

"I forgive you, Rosalind, but there is Another whose pardon you must ask," she said tenderly.

"You mean God. I will, indeed, Miss Harland. I have already, and I will again," promised Rosalind.

CHAPTER IX

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ADVENTURE OF THE LAMP

Late one afternoon, a few days later, five of the Kindred Spirits gathered in Kathy's room to talk things over, for the excitement over the recent happenings in the school still ran high. Evelyn, Polly and Joan sat on the bed, Rachel in the window seat, and Kathy on a low velvet stool, known as the "Stool of Repentance." A light snow was falling outside, making a pleasant contrast with the warmth and comfort within.

The girls were all talking at once, yet, mysteriously, each hearing what all the others said. In the midst of the Babel the door was pushed quietly open, and Rosalind slipped in, looking ashamed and sorry and confused all at once; doubtful of her welcome, yet anxious to be back in her old place among them.

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"May I come? I knocked, but you were all talking so hard, you didn't hear me."

"Of course you may. Here, sit down beside me on the 'stool of repentance,'" said Kathy, making room for her.

"It's the right place for me, I know," said Rosalind meekly. "I've been horrid lately, girls, but I'm one of the 'K. S.' still, unless you've turned me out."

"We haven't. You deserted us," said Polly the blunt. "But we are glad to see you back, Rosy," she added, frankly.

"I'm dreadfully glad to be back, if you've all forgiven me. I've missed you terribly. I don't exactly know how it happened. But I'm sorry. What were you all talking about when I came in?" asked Rosalind, as completely one of the group as if she had never left it.

"Why, of these odd things that have been happening lately," explained Joan. "You know, the disappearance of Kathy's ring and necklace, and——"

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"But I found the necklace this morning," interrupted Kathy. "I meant to tell you, but you haven't given me a chance."

"Why, Kathy!" "Where?" "How?" A chorus arose.

"When I moved my trunk out from the wall to sweep behind it," explained Kathy, "I found a little parcel wrapped in tissue paper. I opened it, thinking I might have dropped something there, and inside was my necklace, all crushed together into a ball, and the clasp broken. If anyone knows anything about it, explanations will be in order."

The girls, silent in sheer amaze, looked at each other and then at Rosalind, who gazed blankly at them in return.

"I didn't put it there, girls, indeed. I don't know in the least how it got there——"

"But do you know anything about it?" asked Kathy.

"No, I don't. It looks like the one Marcia wore the night of that party, but I thought it was hers, and it may have been."

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"She said nothing about it to you?"

"Not a word. Please believe me, girls."

"Of course we believe *you*," said Joan, with an emphasis on the last word.

"Well, at any rate, the necklace is found, and I am very glad. I will have it mended, and take better care of it," said Kathy gravely. "I haven't found my ring yet, nor has Rachel's pencil case been discovered."

"That is what I came about," said Rosalind, gathering courage. She opened the handkerchief which she had held crumpled in her hand, and showed the two missing articles under discussion, a locket and chain and one or two other small articles. "I found them in my dresser drawer just now, in a little box. Honestly, I don't know anything about them, or how they got there."

"How did it happen that you didn't find them before?" asked Rachel, reclaiming her property.

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"I haven't cleared out my drawer lately, and the box was at the back, under a pile of handkerchiefs and things. The drawer was in an awful mess, and I was hunting for a collar," confessed Rosalind with a shame-faced grin, for her untidiness was a proverb. "I brought it to you as soon as I found it," she added, and there was truth in her face and voice. The girls believed her.

"But what does it mean?" asked Joan. "Don't cry, Rosy, we know you didn't take them. You are silly enough sometimes, but you wouldn't steal."

The others assented readily. They all knew that, while Rosalind might be led away for a time by folly and vanity, yet her nature was true and sound, and she had a conscience. She knew quite well that she had been led astray by her love of pleasure, and her penitence was sincere.

"I can't understand it a bit," she began, when the door was opened again—abruptly, and Alison appeared—a pale and dismayed Alison with wide frightened eyes.

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"Girls—have you hidden it on purpose, just to frighten me? Please don't tease me, but tell me it is just a joke. I know you only meant to frighten me!"

"Why, Alison, what can you mean? We haven't done a thing," said Kathy, speaking for them all.

Alison flung herself across the bed, already sufficiently occupied by three substantial girls. Joan caught her and pulled her into her lap.

"Here," she said, shaking Alison roughly by the shoulder. "No hysterics, or I'll slap you. Just tell us what is the matter."

Thus importuned, Alison checked her sobs and raised a tragic face. "My lamp! I'll never see it again!"

"Nonsense. How could you never see it again? Tell us. Is it broken?"

"It's gone!"

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"Gone! Not your beautiful Aladdin lamp, Alison? Why, it *couldn't* be lost. What do you mean?"

Alison pulled herself together and tried to speak collectedly.

"I've been down in the library all the afternoon, taking notes for my English; I came up to my room a few minutes ago, and as I looked round I missed the lamp. You all know where it always stands, on my table. Well, it wasn't there. And I thought—I hoped—that some of you might have hidden it for a joke. If you didn't, then I don't know what to think."

"What a ridiculous idea," said Polly indignantly. "A fine joke it would be. What do you take us for?"

"I couldn't think what else could have become of it," said Alison, beginning to cry again. Joan began to comfort her, but Kathy checked the words on her lips.

"Listen, Alison. Who was in your room while you were gone?"

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"Only Marcia. I left her studying algebra."

"And where is she now?"

"I don't know. She was gone when I came up."

"And your lamp with her," added Joan. "I have an idea. Wait a minute, all of you."

She ran across the hall to Alison's room, returning promptly. "Come, all of you, and see."

The girls followed her, and stood puzzled in the doorway.

"Where are Marcia's things?" demanded Joan.

A glance around the room showed it empty of all that had belonged to Marcia. The girls looked at each other. Kathy was the first to speak.

"We must find Marcia, girls—if she is to be found—and ask her if the lamp was in the room when she left it."

A hasty but thorough search established the certainty that Marcia was not in any of the buildings. Neither, apparently, was the lamp. It was almost supper time when the girls came together again to report failure.

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"What do you think?" Alison asked.

Joan, as usual, was the spokeswoman. "It looks to me as if she wanted to go away, and has taken the lamp to sell it in order to get the money for her ticket. She could not sell jewelry, of course, but a handsome lamp might bring a good price. She has looked even more forbidding than usual the last few days, and I know she hated school. She put back the other things she 'borrowed,' and tried to throw the blame on Rosalind by hiding them in her drawer. She knew Rosy was in Kathy's room with us, and she had a clear field. So she carried out her plans, and ran away."

"Well," said Kathy after a pause. "If Joan is right, we ought to report Marcia's disappearance at once. If she has really run away from school, Miss Harland will have to know it."

CHAPTER X

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DISCOVERIES

The whole school was thrown into a ferment of excitement over the discovery of Marcia's disappearance. No one exactly told anyone, but the news flew from lip to lip with the speed of that little bird so famous for its gossiping tendency. The school buildings were searched again, with no result. No one had seen Marcia go out; yet she was certainly not in the school. Miss Harland telephoned to all her friends in the town with whom Marcia might be supposed to be staying, but no one had seen her or heard from her.

In great distress Miss Harland called up Marcia's father, Mr. West, who was staying in a hotel in a nearby town, and asked him if his daughter was with him, and to her intense relief, received a

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quick and reassuring reply. Yes, his little girl had just arrived by the late train. She was so homesick for her Daddy, she could not stay away from him any longer, she told him.

Could she speak to Marcia herself, Miss Harland asked. There was a brief colloquy at the other end of the line, and then Mr. West spoke courteously. Marcia had just gone to bed with a bad cold, and could not talk that night. Tomorrow he would talk with her. And with a pleasant "Goodnight," he hung up.

Relieved from her fears for Marcia's safety, Miss Harland gladly relinquished the search for the night, and the girls were forced to restrain their excitement and go to bed. The next morning Mr. West came in person to talk with Miss Harland. Marcia was still in bed, and too hoarse to talk, so she had asked her father to explain to Miss Harland why she had left school without a word to her. She could not bear to be away from him, and hearing that he was about to leave for Chicago to accept a position there, had hurried to join him, and being in haste to catch the afternoon train, had not had time to take leave of her friends and teachers. It was foolish, he said indulgently, but he had spoiled his little girl, and could not be hard on her.

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Miss Harland asked him quietly whether Marcia had said anything of having borrowed something of one of the girls. But Mr. West shook his head. He would ask her, and let Miss Harland know; and politely bowed himself out. Later, he telephoned to say that he had talked to Marcia, and she had declared she had borrowed nothing of her friends. She and her father were going to start for Chicago the same night, and she would have no opportunity to say goodbye to the girls and Miss Harland. Her cold was better, and she sent her love, and wished them all a merry Christmas.

Miss Harland returned a similar wish, and smiled as she hung up. She was glad Marcia was safe with her father, and was not sorry to have seen the last of her.

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So Marcia left Briarwood, and with her departed something that had spoiled the spirit of concord and happiness which usually prevailed in the school. The girls were happy and at peace again. Joan returned to her old place as Alison's roommate, and their room became as before Marcia's coming, the rendezvous of the "Kindred Spirits."

All would have been well with Alison, but for the grief for the loss of her lamp. No trace of it had been found. There was no certainty that Marcia had had anything to do with its vanishing, but Joan, always practical and logical, maintained that since Marcia and the lamp had been alone together the whole afternoon, and since the lamp, having no feet, could not have left the room by itself, it was plain that Marcia must have assisted its departure. Alison said nothing, but she grieved deeply, with no hope of ever seeing her treasure again.

The Christmas holidays were drawing near. The girls were busy with plans for the two weeks' vacation, looking forward eagerly to going home, and the teachers were equally anxious for the coming of the last day of school.

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Alison felt as if she could scarcely wait. Her gifts for the family were bought—the book she knew her father had long wanted but had not felt he could afford to buy for himself; the new dress for her mother, who would never get it for herself; the roller skates for Billy, the pretty scarf for Floss, the doll for little Mat, who had not yet outgrown them.

She hovered over them lovingly, fondling each package as she wrapped and tied them with a lavish expenditure of tissue paper and ribbon. How she blessed the memory of Aunt Justina, whose generosity had made her gifts possible! "I *can't* wait," she said, and laughed at herself for her impatience.

The only flaw in her happiness was the prospect of having to confess at home that she had lost her "Aladdin lamp."

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Two days before the 23rd, Joan, looking over her lists, made a discovery. "Alison, I'll have to have some more cards. I forgot a whole bunch of cousins out in Texas, who will be sure to send to me. I must run down and get some more before they are all gone. Come with me. It's snowing a little, but not too much."

"All right. Run and get permission while I put on my hat and coat."

In a few moments Joan came back with the required permission, and the two girls set out, running down the steps of the terrace and out into the snowy street. The snow was coming down more briskly, but they only laughed and enjoyed the frolic as they ran down the steep hillside and reached the level street on which the stores were. The "ten-cent store," the shoppers' delight, was packed with late shoppers like themselves. Joan struggled through the dense crowd at the counter, pushed and jostled by the good-natured crowd, while Alison waited, amused and interested.

It was a lengthy ordeal, but at last Joan had found all she wanted and was ready to go. It was nearly dark by this time, and the snow was thicker, swirling about so as almost to blind them.

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"We must run, or we shall be late for supper," Joan said, and they made what speed they could. Suddenly Alison stopped short before the well-lighted window of a little jewelry and antique shop. "Look, Joan!"

"What are you looking at? Do let's hurry," urged Joan.

But Alison stood still. "Do you see? There, in Mr. Delany's window. Is that my lamp, or isn't it?"

Interested now, Joan stopped. "It is yours, or its twin," she decided. "I didn't think there was but one."

"I believe it *is* mine. I'm going in to ask about it," said Alison, and turned into the warm bright little shop, followed by Joan.

The proprietor was a friendly little Frenchman, well known to the girls, who frequently purchased their gifts there. He came forward, bowing and rubbing his hands. "You want something for Christmas, is it not? I haf many pretty things," he offered. [Pg 86]

"I came to ask about that lamp in the window, Mr. Delany," Alison said, too eager to beat about the bush. "It is exactly like one I lost. Will you tell me where you got it?"

"That?" The old man looked disconcerted. "It was not meant to be in the window at all; but my assistant, he has not much sense. It is not for sale, Mademoiselle."

"But how did you get it?" Alison persisted, and seeing her earnestness he looked puzzled.

"It was sold to me, Mademoiselle, by a young lady, I think from your school. I haf seen her pass with the other young demoiselles. She asked me not to sell it again. She needed money, and if I would buy it from her, she would come back and redeem it later. Her father was ill, very ill, and she had no money to go to him. She was coming back to get it later. So I lent her the money on it—but I haf not seen her yet." [Pg 87]

The girls looked at each other. So, Alison's generous heart said, perhaps Marcia *did* mean only to borrow the lamp. Perhaps she really meant to return it; but in the mean time, what if it should be sold by mistake, or even stolen before that time came? Should she risk leaving it in Mr. Delany's shop, even overnight?

"Mr. Delany," she said, "I know all you say is true. I know the young lady who sold you the lamp, or borrowed money on it. She was my roommate at school, and she has gone to her father, as she said. That part is true. But I want my lamp back at once, to take home for Christmas. Can I get it from you now?"

Mr. Delany looked puzzled and doubtful. "I promised the young demoiselle—" he began.

"If she were here, she would give it back to me. If Miss Harland comes to you herself and explains about it, will you let me have it?" Alison asked persuasively. "I will pay you, of course, just what you advanced to the young lady." [Pg 88]

"But certainly, if Mademoiselle Harland herself assures me that it is all right," agreed Mr. Delany affably.

"Then please put it away for a little while until she comes," begged Alison.

They flew home to report the discovery and the difficulty to Miss Harland, and late though it was, she went with them at once to the little Frenchman's shop. Mr. Delany was so impressed by her quiet dignity and authority that he readily parted with the lamp for the sum he had paid to Marcia for it, considering that he had come out very well on the transaction at that.

And in triumph Alison carried her treasure home, feeling that her Christmas was assured.

CHAPTER XI

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CLASS PROPHECY

Christmas came, with all its anticipated joys, and went all too swiftly into the past, leaving behind it a precious store of happy memories.

The New Year found the girls of Briarwood back at school, fresh from their holiday and ready for the hardest work of the year. The days were well filled with study and play. New friendships were formed and old ones strengthened, and a spirit of happiness and of honest comradeship prevailed in the school as the girls worked together.

Marcia was gone, and no one regretted her absence. She never returned to redeem the lamp or, as Miss Harland had half hoped she would, to offer an apology and explanation of why she had "borrowed" Alison's lamp, and the other pieces of property belonging to others, which she had appropriated without leave, and returned in so cavalier a fashion. They heard of her now and then in the course of the next few years—sometimes in the lists of schools in the different cities to which her father's business took him; later, she appeared occasionally in the society pages of the papers. [Pg 90]

Later still came the announcement of her marriage to a young man well known in society circles; after which she was heard of no more, and the trouble she had caused in the school was forgotten in the other interests that had taken its place.

The Sophomore, Junior and Senior years of the "Kindred Spirits" and their friends were successfully passed, and at length came the day, so long worked for and looked forward to, when,

with their school honors won, the members of the Senior class were ready to throw off the cap and gown, receive their diplomas and step forth as full-fledged graduates, equipped for life in their various ways, each hoping to fulfill her ambition and to realize the cherished hope that lay nearest her heart.

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The "Kindred Spirits" were gathered for the last time in Alison's and Joan's room, to look over and comment on the new Annual, *Briarwood Bells*. The class history was pronounced fairly good. In their Freshman year they had made good in athletics. As Sophomores, there had been some drawbacks in the first half of the year, but these had been made up by the work of the latter half. Their "verdant days" were past, and they realized the importance of faithful work.

With the Junior year came new interests and hopes. The principal event in this year, in the girls' memories, was the "Junior-Senior banquet," the end and aim of existence for the time being. And now, with the close of the Senior year the class had won its laurels, concluded the Historian; and one sensed the long breath of relief with which she finished her task.

"Pretty good, on the whole," Joan pronounced. "Nothing brilliant, but I think Miss Harland will consider that we have upheld the honor of Briarwood."

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Kathy turned the pages, and then suddenly closed the book.

"Girls, I have an idea. Before we read the class prophecy, let us each tell our plans and ambitions for the future, and see how they tally with what Helen has foretold for us—"

"And let us meet here in this very room, ten years from now, and see how many of her prophecies have come true." That was Joan's suggestion.

"All right," assented Kathy. "Who will begin?"

"You. You started this thing," said Rachel.

"Very well. I expect to teach for a few years, and then to be a trained nurse. Now you, Alison."

"I want to do a lot of things, but most of all, I want to come back here and teach at Briarwood," said Alison earnestly.

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"Good! Then you'll be here to welcome us when we meet in ten years," Joan applauded. "As for me, I'm going to fly.... You will hear of me some day as the famous woman aviator."

"I'm going to travel to the ends of the earth," was Polly's contribution. "Perhaps I'll fly with Polly."

It was Rachel's turn. "I'm not so ambitious as Polly and Jo. Mine is to be the best teacher of Domestic Science that I know how to be. I specialized in that, you know."

"Fine! Mine is to teach music and play at big concerts," said Evelyn. "Now, Rosalind, how are you going to distinguish yourself?"

Rosalind smiled and blushed all over her pretty flower-like face.

"Why—I hadn't quite made up my mind. I guess I'll just have a good time for a while, and then be—a lawyer."

There was a shout of laughter. Kathy had been writing, and now read her notes: "A teacher at Briarwood; a flyer; a great traveler; a Domestic Science teacher; a musician; a lawyer; and a trained nurse. Most of the professions seemed to be represented. Briarwood will have cause to be proud of us. Now let us see what the Class Prophet has to say of us."

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She turned the pages to one headed

CLASS PROPHECY

and began to read. The "prophecy" purported to be items from newspapers of the future, and some of the extracts are of interest to our readers. The first ran thus:

"Misses Polly Worthington and Evelyn Kingsley have recently opened their Music Studio. Miss Worthington will give instruction in voice and Miss Kingsley in piano. Both young ladies distinguished themselves in these branches at college."

"The public will be glad to hear that the best equipped hospital in the South will shortly be opened, with Miss Alison Fair as head nurse."

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"After finishing her course in Math. at the University of — in which she did brilliantly, Miss Rachel Cameron has accepted a position as Math. teacher at her Alma Mater."

"The best seller of the month is a novel by Miss Katherine Bertram, who is winning for herself an

enviable name as a writer. Her former classmates will read her work with interest and pleasure."

"A recent item in a missionary magazine tells us that Miss Joan Wentworth has decided to devote her life and talents to the missionfield. She will sail this week for China."

"Miss Rosalind Forrest, the fairest ornament of her class in college, is deeply interested in Social Service work, and is doing valuable work along this line."

"Helen May, Historian."

Kathy looked up. "So there is our future, girls, as our Historian has foretold it. We never know. Perhaps some of us may follow the paths she has pointed out. But in any case we can only do our very best in whatever place in life we may find ourselves, content and humbly glad if we merit the Lord's commendation, 'Well done, good and faithful servant—'"

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There was a pause as Kathy stopped speaking. She had not meant to preach, but the words had come to her instinctively, and they touched a responsive chord in their hearts. The young faces were serious as thoughts deeper than their merry surface banter made themselves felt.

A sweet-toned bell called them to supper. The spring evening was falling, soft and dewy, over the gray old walls and terraces of Briarwood. Tomorrow they would separate, never to meet again as care-free schoolgirls; and the shadow of the parting lay on their faces and hearts as they rose to go down. It was Joan who cheerfully said,

"To meet again—this day ten years!"

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