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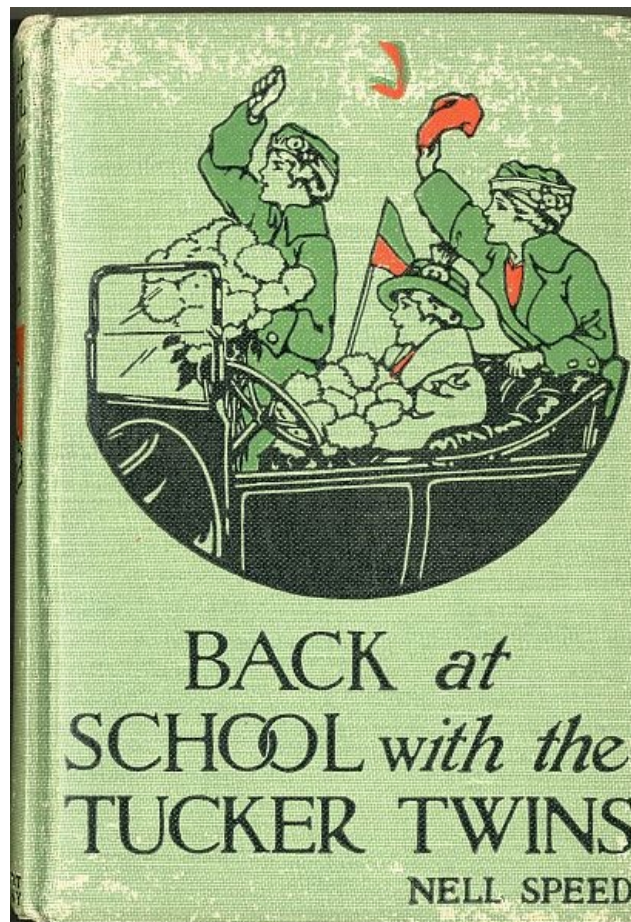
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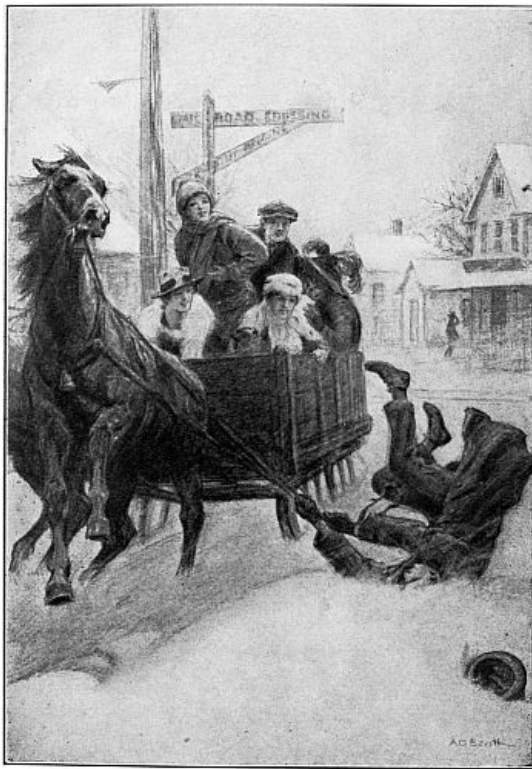
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Zebedee lost his balance and shot over our heads into the soft snow.—Page 190

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BACK AT SCHOOL WITH THE TUCKER TWINS

By NELL SPEED

AUTHOR OF
"The Molly Brown Series," "The Carter
Girls Series," etc.



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CHAPTER I.

THE GETAWAY.

Could it be possible that only one year had passed since I started to boarding school? So much had happened in that time, I had met so many persons, made so many friends, and my horizon had broadened so that it seemed more like ten years.

There I was once more on the train headed for Richmond, having arisen at the unearthly hour of five. Dear old Mammy Susan had as usual warmed up my bath water and prepared a bountiful breakfast. Father had been unable to accompany me to Richmond to put me on the Gresham train as we had planned, all because poor Sally Winn had made a desperate effort to depart this life in the night.

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It was all so exactly as it had been the year before, I had to pinch myself to realize it was not just a dream of what had happened. My new mail order suit was a little different cut from the last year's, as Cousin Sue Lee, in planning my wardrobe, insisted upon up-to-date style, and my suit case did not look so shiny new. That was about the only difference that I could see. The colt had had a year to settle down in, but he was quite as lively as ever. My last hug with Mammy Susan was cut short by his refusing to stand still another minute, and as I piled into the buggy with Father, the spirited horse whirled us around on one wheel and we covered the six miles to Milton in such a short time that I had half an hour to wait for my train.

Sitting in the station at Richmond awaiting the arrival of my dear Tuckers and Annie Pore, I thought that if the first part of my journey had been a repetition of last year, now, at least, some variation was in order. Here I was waiting for friends I had already made, instead of wondering if

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I should meet any one on the train going to Gresham.

Annie Pore came first, her boat, from Price's Landing, having arrived early. Could this be the same Annie? This young lady had a suit on rather too much like mine for my taste, as I simply hate to look like everybody else! But a mail order house does not profess to sell only one of a kind, and I myself had introduced Annie to the mysteries of ordering by catalogue, so I really had no kick coming; but I couldn't help wishing that our tastes and pocketbooks had not coincided so exactly. When I thought of the Annie of last September and the Annie of this, I hated myself for caring.

My mind still retained the picture of the forlorn little English girl with her tear-stained face and crumpled hat, her ill-fitting clothes and bulging telescope. Now she looked like other girls, except that she was a great deal more beautiful. In place of the battered old telescope, she carried a brand new suit case; and a neat little hand bag held her ticket and trunk check, also a reservation in the parlor car. She was still timid but when she spied me a look of intense joy and relief came over her face, and in a moment we were locked in each other's arms. How school girls can hug!

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"Oh, Page, I'm glad to see you! I had a terrible feeling I had missed my train, but of course if you are here, I couldn't have."

"Still the anxious traveler, aren't you, dear? We've at least twenty minutes."

"Harvie Price was to meet me at the boat landing and bring me up here, but I was afraid to wait for him. He believes in just catching a train and it makes me extremely nervous not to be ahead of time. I am afraid he will think it very rude of me."

"Maybe it will teach him a lesson and he will learn from the early bird how better to conduct himself," I comforted her. "Now the Tuckers say it is much better to have a train wait for you than wait for a train.—Speaking of angels,—here they are!"

In they trooped, Mr. Tucker laden with suit cases and umbrellas, and Dum carrying gingerly in both hands a box about a foot square which contained something very precious, it was evident, as she most carefully deposited it on a bench before she gave me her accustomed bear hug. Dee had Brindle, her beloved bull dog, in her arms and she dispensed with the ceremony of putting him down before she embraced Annie and me, so we both got a good licking in the left ear from that affectionate canine.

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"Zebedee is mad with me for bringing him, as it means he will have to keep him in the newspaper office until luncheon time, but somehow I could not part with him before it was absolutely necessary. It hurt his feelings terribly when I went last year and did not let him see me off," and Dee wept a little Tucker tear on the wrinkled and rolling neck of her dog. To one who did not know Brindle, he seemed to be choking with emotion, but Brindle's make-up was such that every intaken breath was a snuffle and every outgoing one a snort.

Mr. Tucker's handsome and speaking countenance beamed with delight as he waited his turn to give Annie and me the warm handshake that was as much a part of the Tuckers as anything else about that delightful trio.

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"What a place this station would be to have the Lobster Quadrille!" he exclaimed. "I am so glad to see you, little Page, and you, Miss Annie, that I feel as though I must dance, but that might get us in bad with that dignified-looking porter over there and so maybe we had better refrain—Besides, I could not dance on this day when my Tweedles are leaving me," and instead of dancing as he had threatened, this youngest of all the Tuckers, in spite of being the parent, began to show decided signs of shedding tears.

"Now, Zebedee, this is ridiculous! You act worse than you did last year," admonished Dum.

"Well, it is worse than it was last year," and Zebedee drew his girls to him while Brindle choked and chortled and tried to lick all three of them at once. "You see, last year we did not know just how bad it would be, and this year we know."

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"That's so!" tweedled the twins. "If you could only go with us to Gresham, it wouldn't be so bad."

"If we had just been triplets instead of twins and a father!" said Zebedee, and then we all of us laughed.

Just then Harvie Price arrived in a state of breathless excitement, having missed Annie at the pier and, aware of her timidity, fearing something dire had befallen her.

Harvie had a great tenderness for his one-time playmate and usually assumed the big brother air with her, but the large box of candy he produced for the journey, and which he handed to her with very much a "Sweets to the sweet" expression, was not so very big brotherish to my way of thinking. Brothers have to be very big brothers indeed and sisters very little sisters for the former to remember that the latter might be pleased by some little attention in the way of candy on a trip. I don't mean to criticise brothers, as I'd rather have one than anything in all the world. I'd excuse him from all gallant attentions if he would only just exist.

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"If you had not brought Brindle, I believe I would go half way with you girls, and come back on the train we strike at the Junction," said Zebedee.

"If you go, I will, too," chimed in Harvie.

"Now, Virginia Tucker! Just see what you have done! You put that dog before your own flesh and blood!" exclaimed Dum.

"No such thing! He is my own flesh and blood, Caroline Tucker," and Dee held the ugly bull dog close in her arms.

"Tut! Tut! Don't have a row for Heaven's sake," begged their father. When Dum and Dee Tucker called one another by their Christian names, no one knew so well as their devoted parent how close they were to a breach that could only be healed by *trial de combat*. It was almost as serious a state of affairs as when they addressed him as Father or Mr. Tucker. "Do you know, I believe with a little strategy we can take Brindle, too, and not in the baggage car either. I know how he hates that." [13]

"Oh, Zebedee, how? Dum, I'm sorry I called you Caroline," and Dee gave her twin an affectionate pat.

"Forget it! Forget it! Besides, I called you Virginia first."

"Well, stop making up now. Sometimes you Tweedles make up with more racket than you do fighting it out. Now listen! We can dress Brindle up like a baby if you girls can dive in your grips for suitable apparel—anything white and fluffy will do. Take off that veil you've got twisted 'round your neck, Dum, and here is a cap all ready for baby," and he fashioned a wonderful little Dutch cap out of his large linen handkerchief and tied it under the unresisting and flabby chin of Brindle.

We were so convulsed we could hardly contain our merriment, but contain it we were forced to do, because of the exceedingly dignified and easily shocked porter who stood at the door of the elevator like a uniformed bronze statue. [14]

"Gather 'round me, girls," begged Dee, "so we can have a suitable dressing room for Brindle. He is very modest."

Brindle was so accustomed to being dressed up by Dee, who had played with him as though he were a doll ever since he had been a tiny soft puppy, that he submitted with great docility to the rôle he was forced to play. We all wanted Zebedee and Harvie to go with us to the Junction if it could be managed, but the cast-iron rules of the railroads forbade the carrying of dogs into the coaches. Brindle was there and there was nothing to do with him but take him, and take him we did. Annie had a short petticoat made of soft sheer material with lace whipped on the bottom and little hand tucks and hemstitching. This she took out of her new suitcase, proud to be the one to have the proper dress for baby. Dee tied the skirt around Brindle's neck and pulled it down over his passive legs.

"Yes, my baby has never worn anything but handmade clothes," said Dee with all the airs of a young mother. [15]

Then Dum's automobile veil, the pride of her heart because of its wonderful blue colour, covered the sniffling, snuffling nose of our baby. The transformation was completed just as our train was called, and with preternaturally solemn countenances we trooped through the gate, the handmade dress of the baby hanging over Dee's arm in a most life-like manner.

The man who punched the tickets at the gate looked rather earnestly at the very young girl with the rather large buncy baby, and of course just as Dee passed him, Brindle had to let forth one of his especially loud snorts. Dee turned pale but Zebedee came to the rescue with:

"My dear, I am afraid poor little Jo Jo has taken an awful cold. I have some sweet spirits of nitre in my case which I will administer as soon as we are settled in the Pullman."

Dee looked gratefully at her thoughtful father and whispered:

"Gather around me closely, girls."

We gathered, while Harvie and Zebedee brought up the rear. [16]

We passed the solicitous Pullman porter, who even offered to take the baby, and we sank finally into our seats in a state of collapse. I had long ago found out that she who followed the Tuckers, father and daughters, would get into more or less scrapes; but she would have a mighty good time doing it and would always get out with no loss of life or honour.

"Zebedee!" gasped Dee. "Why did you call Brindle, Jo Jo?"

"Why, Jo Jo, the dog-faced boy! He was one of the marvels of my youth. No side show was complete without him. If the worst comes to the worst we can be a freak show traveling West, on our way to the fair in Kalamazoo."

"What will you be?" I laughed.

"Oh, I'll be 'Eat-'em-alive' and Miss Annie will have to be the lion tamer. They are always beautiful blondes. Dum and Dee of course will be the Siamese Twins disconnected for the convenience of travel."

"And me—what will I be?"

"Oh, you will have to be the little white rabbit I'm going to eat alive," and he made a horribly big mouth that I know would have made poor Jo Jo bark if he could have seen it through his thick blue veil, but the conductor appeared at this crucial moment and Zebedee had to sit up and behave.

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CHAPTER II.

[18]

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY.

"Tickets, please!" this from the Pullman conductor, a tall, soldierly looking person with a very grim mouth.

He punched all of us in sober silence. Harvie and Zebedee had not had time to buy Pullman seats, as they had been so taken up with the robing of Brindle. At the last minute Harvie had rushed to the ticket window and secured their tickets but they had to pay for their seats on the train. In making the change the conductor dropped some silver, and in stooping for it he and Zebedee bumped heads. Then the official was thrown by a lurching of the train against our precious baby's feet. This was too much for the patient Brindle and he emitted a low and ominous growl. The conductor looked much startled. We sat electrified. The ever tactful Dee arose to the occasion.

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"Why, honey, Mother didn't tell you to go like a bow wow. I thought my precious was asleep." Turning to the mystified conductor she continued, "He has so many cunning little tricks and we never know when he is going to get them off. He can go moo like a cow, and mew like a kitty, and can grunt just like a piggy wiggy," and what should that dog, with human intelligence, do but give a most astounding lifelike grunt. The conductor's grim mouth broke into a grin and we went off into such shouts of laughter that if Brindle had not been a very well-behaved person he would certainly have barked with us.

Zebedee followed the man to the end of the car and with the aid of one of his very good and ever ready cigars, and a little extra payment of fare, persuaded him to let our whole crowd move into the drawing-room, explaining that we were to lunch on the train. When we were once settled in the drawing-room with a little table ready for the spread to which all of us were prepared to contribute (remembering from the year before the meagre bill of fare the buffet on that train offered), Dum disclosed the contents of the precious big box which she carried. It was a wonderful Lady Baltimore cake. A single pink candle was tucked in the side of the box and this was stuck in the centre of the delectable confection.

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"Whose birthday is it? I didn't know it was anybody's," I said.

"Why, this is the birthday of our friendship, yours and Annie's and the Tuckers'," tweedled the twins.

"We felt like commemorating it somehow," explained Zebedee. "You see, it is one of the best things that ever happened to us."

"Me, too!" chimed in Annie and I. And so it was.

When, the year before, Annie and I had been sitting in the station waiting for the train to Gresham, Annie was as forlorn a specimen of little English girl as could be found in America, I am sure; and while I was not forlorn, just because I never am forlorn as my interest in people is so intense that I am always sure something exciting is going to happen in a moment, no doubt I looked almost as forlorn as Annie, alone and friendless. The Tuckers, ever charming and delightful, came bounding into our presence, and they have been doing it ever since. They always come with some scheme for fun and frolic and their ever ready wit and good humour has an effect on all with whom they come in contact. Annie was certainly made over by a year's friendship with them. Some of the teachers at Gresham thought I had worked the change in Annie, but I just know it was the twins.

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As for Mr. Tucker—Zebedee—he was next to my father in my regard, and so different from my father that they could go along abreast without taking from each other. There was never such a man as Mr. Tucker. Thirty-seven himself and the father of twins of sixteen, he seemed to have bathed in the fountain of eternal youth,—and yet I have seen him, when occasion demanded it, assume the dignity of a George Washington.

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Occasion did not demand it at that birthday party and so he "frisked and he frolicked" very like the little rabs in the Uncle Remus story. One could never tell where he would be next. I knew a great deal of his glee was assumed to keep up the spirits of his dear Tweedles as the time for the arrival at the fateful junction was slowly but surely approaching.

It was very early for luncheon but have it we must before Harvie and Zebedee left us. Mammy Susan had as usual put up enough food for a regiment in my lunch box. But enough food for a regiment seems to vanish before a mere squad if it happens to be as good food as my dear old Mammy Susan was sure to provide.

What fun we had! The little table groaned with good things to eat. Even the baby's blue veil was carefully removed and he was allowed a large slice of Lady Baltimore, which he gobbled up in most unseemly haste. The little pink candle burned merrily and the toasts were most sincere: that there would be many, many happy returns of the day, as many, in fact, as there were to be days. Our friendship, now only a year old, was to live as long as we did, and we determined then and there to celebrate every year that we could. September fifteenth was to be a red letter day with us wherever we might be.

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The Junction was imminent and it meant telling good-bye to Zebedee, Harvie and Brindle. Dum grumbled a little about the loss of her veil but Brindle had to make his return trip in the same rôle of baby, and Annie's petticoat and Dum's veil had to be sacrificed. Zebedee promised to return them in short order. The pain of parting was much lessened by the amusement caused by the appearance of man and baby. He held the infant with great and loving care and Brindle chortled and gurgled with satisfaction.

The Pullman conductor said nothing as Zebedee disembarked but his eyes had an unwonted twinkle and his grim mouth was twitching at the corners. I believe he knew all the time but could not bear to break up our pleasant party by consigning Brindle to the baggage car. The train conductor was in a broad grin and the porter looked dazed.

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"Is you partin' from yo' baby, lady?" he said to Dee.

"Yes!" wept Dee with real Tucker tears, "he has to go back with his grandfather."

"Grandpaw? That there ain't no grandpaw, that young gent."

"Yes, he is," sobbed Dee. "He is just as much Jo Jo's grandfather as I am his mother, and I am certainly all the mother he has, poor lamb," and the kindly coloured man looked very sorry for the grieving young mother.

"Is you fo'ced by circumstantial over which you ain't got controlment to abandon yo' offspring?" he questioned.

"Yes," blundered Dee, something rare with her, "I have to go to boarding school and they don't allow do—babies there."

"Well, well, too bad! Too bad! It pears like a pity you couldn't a got studyin' off'n yo mind befo' you indulged in matrimonial venturesomes. When a young lady gits married, she—"

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"Oh, I'm not married!" The porter's eyes turned white, he rolled them up so far. Dee saw her break and hastened to her own rescue. The rest of us were petrified with suppressed merriment. "That is, I'm not to say much married; you see, my husband is dead."

"Oh! Sorrow is indeed visited you early. But grieve not. One so young as you is kin git many husbands, perhaps, befo' the day of recognition arrives."

We were glad when his duties called him off because the laugh in us was obliged to come out. Our train backed up to get on the other track and the last we saw of Zebedee and Harvie they were standing in dejected attitudes, Zebedee grasping a squirming Brindle firmly in his arms while Harvie, acting as train-bearer, gracefully held aloft the trailing petticoat. Brindle had espied through the blue veil a possible canine acquaintance and was struggling with all his might to get down and make either a friend or enemy as the case might prove.

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Dee simply had to stop crying; in fact, she had stopped long before she felt that she should. She was forced to squeeze tears out to keep up the deception she had begun.

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practice to deceive."

"You came mighty near making yourself your own grandmother, you got so mixed up," laughed Dum. "Brindle is so pedigreed I don't believe he would thank you for the bar sinister you put on him."

CHAPTER III.

[27]

GRESHAM AGAIN.

How strange it was to be back at school and to belong there, greeting old girls and being greeted as an old girl! We piled into the same bus, this time not getting separated as we had the first year, and who should be there saving seats for us but dear old Mary Flannagan, her head redder than ever and her good, fine face beaming with joy at our appearance. Our bus filled up with Juniors, all of us happy and gay and glad to see one another. Miss Sayre, a pupil teacher of last year and a full teacher for the present, got in with us. She was very popular with our class and not very much older than we were, so we talked before her without the least restraint.

"I'm glad to see you, Page," she said, finding a place between Mary and me that Mary's bunched skirt had successfully filled before.

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"You girls look so well and rosy I know you have had a good summer."

"Splendid!" I exclaimed. "You know Tweedles had a house party down at Willoughby, and there was a boys' camp near us, and the fun we had with them! I never had such a good time in my life!"

"Guess who came on the train with me!" broke in Mary. "Shorty Hawkins! He said——"

"Well, who do you think came down to see us off and brought Annie a big box of candy and rode as far as the Junction and went back with Zebedee? Harvie Price, and he said——"

But Dum interrupted Dee to inform the crowd that Stephen White, Wink, had taken them to the Lyric on his way to the University when he had come through Richmond. Before she could tell us what he said, which she was clamoring to do, Annie Pore spoke up to say that Harvie Price was going to the University to-morrow. What he said about going was cut short by Mary Flannagan who blurted out:

"Shorty says that he hears that George Massie is so stuck on Annie that he is getting thin—He has waked up and has fallen off a whole pound." George Massie's nickname was Sleepy and he weighed about two hundred, so this set us off into peals of laughter. [29]

"Rags wrote me that Sleepy was drinking no water with his meals and eating no potatoes, trying to fall off," I ventured when I could get a word in edgewise. "I can't fancy Sleepy thin, but I think he is just as sweet as he can be, fat or thin." I caught a very amused look on Margaret Sayre's face. "What is it?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing! I can't help wondering where the Sophomores go and the Juniors come from. You are the same girls who a year ago said you would bite out your tongues before you would spend your time talking about boys all the time, and since we got in the bus there has not been one word about anything but boys, boys, boys."

"Oh, Miss Sayre, how silly you must think we are!" I whispered.

"Not a bit of it! I just had to tease you a little. It is a phase girls usually go through and I knew it would hit you and your friends this year. If it doesn't hit you too hard it does not hurt you at all, just so none of you gets beau-crazy." [30]

"Well, I hope to gracious we will have too much sense for that," and I quietly determined to put a bridle on my tongue when boys were the subject of conversation. Here I was acting like a crazy Junior, that from the Sophomore standpoint of the year before I had so heartily condemned. I remembered the pranks of the class ahead of us and was amazed when a bus filled with rather sober girls came abreast of us and I recognized in them last year's Juniors, this year's Seniors. They were so much quieter and more dignified than the rollicking busload of which I made one.

"Do you know Miss Peyton is ill and may have to take the whole year to get well?" asked Miss Sayre.

"Oh, oh! How sorry we are!" came from the whole load of girls.

Miss Peyton, the principal of Gresham, was much beloved by all the pupils. She was a person of infinite tact and charm and her understanding of the genus, girl, was little short of uncanny. [31]

"Who on earth is to take her place at Gresham?" I asked. "One of the teachers?"

"There was no teacher to call on to fill the place, now that Miss Cox is married, so a principal from North Carolina has been engaged. She is a B.A., an M.A., a Ph. D., and every other combination of letters in the alphabet, from big Eastern colleges. I hope we will all pull together as we have under Miss Peyton's kindly hand. Her name is Miss Plympton. I have not met her yet," and Margaret Sayre looked very sad. She had been under Miss Peyton for many years, as a pupil first, then a pupil teacher and now she had hoped to have her first year of real teaching under the careful and understanding guidance of her beloved friend.

All of us felt depressed, but it takes nothing short of an overwhelming calamity to keep down the spirits of girls of sixteen for any length of time. By the time our straining horses had pulled their load up to the top of Gresham hill we were bubbling over again, and I must say that now my attention had been called to it, there were certainly a great many "he said" and "I told him" to be distinguished in the hubbub. [32]

Miss Sayre and I stopped a minute before going into the building to look at the mountains. They were out in full force to greet us. Sometimes mountains behave so badly; just when you need them most they disappear and will not show their countenances for days and days. Gresham was looking very lovely, and in spite of the little empty feeling I always had about being away from Father and my beloved home, Bracken, I was glad to be there. It meant seeing my old friends and, no doubt, making many more new ones, and making friends was still the uppermost desire of my heart.

"117 Carter Hall is still ours, so let's go up and shed our wraps and leave our grips and come down later to see the new principal," and Dum hooked her arm in one of mine and Dee took possession of my other side. [33]

"Annie and Mary Flannagan are to be right next to us. Isn't that great? I feel terribly larky, somehow. I reckon it's being a Junior that is getting in on me," and Dum let out a "Junior! Junior!"

Rah! Rah! Rah!"

117 was as bare as it had been when first we took possession of it, as all of our doo-dads had to come down when we left in June. One of the rules of the institution was that no furnishings could be left from year to year.

"I wish our trunks would come so we could cover up this bareness. The nakedness of these walls is positively indecent," sighed Dee. "Wink is going to send me some pennants from the University. I just adore pennants."

I could see the finish of our room. Last year there had been very little wall space showing and this year there was to be none. It was against the rules to tack things on the wall and everything had to hang from the picture railing, so the consequence was most of the rooms looked like some kind of telephone system gone crazy, wires long and short crossing and recrossing. Sometimes a tiny little kodak picture that some girl wanted to hang by her dresser would have to suspend from yards of wire. Sometimes an ingenious one would bunch many small pictures from one wire and that would remind me of country telephones and a party line where your bell rang at every one's house and every one's bell rang at yours. [34]

We stopped in 115, where Annie and Mary were to live, and found them very much pleased with their room, happy to be together and to be next to us.

"Won't we have larks, though?" exclaimed Mary. "I feel terribly like I'm going to be one big demerit. I hear the new principal is awfully strict. A girl who knew a girl whose brother married a girl who went to the school Miss Plympton used to boss in North Carolina told me she heard she was a real Tartar. They say she makes you toe the mark."

When I saw Miss Plympton I could well believe the girl that Mary knew, who knew a girl, whose brother married a girl who knew Miss Plympton, was quite truthful in her statement that Miss Plympton was something of a disciplinarian. She was mannish in her attire and quite soldierly in her bearing. Her tight tailored clothes fitted like the paper on the wall. She gave one the impression of having been poured into them, melted first. But above her high linen collar, her chin and neck seemed to have retained the fluid state that the rest of her must have been reduced to to get her so smoothly into her clothes. Her neck fell over her collar in soft folds and her chin—I should say chins—were as changing in form as a bank of clouds on a summer day. We never could agree how many she had, and Dum and Dee Tucker actually had to resort to their boxing gloves, something they seldom did in those days, to settle the matter. Dee declared she had never been able to count but four but Dum asserted that she had distinctly seen five, in fact that she usually had five. Be that as it may, she certainly had more than her share, and what interested me in her chins was whether or not the changing was voluntary or involuntary. I never could decide, although I made a close study of the matter. Her face was intelligent but very stern, and I had a feeling from the beginning that it was going to be difficult, perhaps impossible, to make a friend of her. [35]

"She is as hard as a bag of nails!" exclaimed Dee, when we compared impressions later on.

"I'd just as soon weep on her back as her bosom," wailed Dum. "I don't believe there is one bit of difference. She's got about as much heart as Mrs. Shem, Ham, and Japheth in a Noah's ark."

"She almost scared me to death," shivered poor Annie Pore. "Just think of the contrast between her and Miss Peyton."

"I was real proud of you, the way you spunked up to her, Annie," broke in Mary Flannagan. "Wasn't she terrifying when she decided I was too young to be a Junior? I don't know what I should have done if you had not told her I led my class in at least one subject. I hope it is not the one she teaches or it will be up to me to hustle." [36]

"Well, girls," I said, "I see breakers ahead for all of us unless we can find a soft side to Miss Plumpton, I mean Plympton, and keep on it." A roar from the girls stopped me.

"What a good name for her—Plumpton—" tweedled the twins. "Plumpton! Plumpton! Rah, rah, rah!"

No great dignity was possible after that. No matter how stiff and military Miss Plympton could be, and she could out-stiffen a poker, we knew her name was Plumpton and were ahead of her. I had a feeling during our whole interview with her that she did not approve of us for some reason. I don't know what it was. It almost looked as though some one had got us in bad before we ever met her; but some of the other girls told me they had the same feeling, so no doubt it was just her unfortunate manner that made you think she looked upon you as a suspicious character.

Looking back soberly and sanely on that year at school, I can understand now that the substitute principal was not quite as impossible as we thought she was, but the keynote of her character was that she lacked all sense of humour. A joke book meant no more to her than a grocery book. She was nothing but a bundle of facts. She thought in dates and eras (History being her subject) and if you could not begin at the creation and divide time up into infinitesimal bits and pigeon hole every incident, you were nothing but a numskull. Any one who had to learn a verse of poetry to remember the kings of England had softening of the brain in her eyes. She did not even think it permissible to say: [37]

"Thirty days hath September,

[38]

April, June, and November."

"Facts are much simpler to master than fancies," she would lecture, and my private opinion was that she could not learn poetry any more than some of us could learn dates. The calendar to her was just another month marked with black figures to be torn off. I usually resorted to some form of poetry to take the taste of her classes out of my mouth. I remember once when the lesson had been the making and remaking of the calendar by the arbitrary parties who took upon themselves that task, I got so bored and sleepy that all I could do was to keep on saying to myself:

[39]

"January brings the snow,
Makes our feet and fingers glow.

February brings the rain,
Thaws the frozen lake again.

March brings breezes, loud and shrill,
To stir the dancing daffodil.

April brings the primrose sweet,
Scatters daisies at our feet.

May brings flocks of pretty lambs
Skipping by their fleecy dams.

June brings tulips, lilies, roses,
Fills the children's hands with posies.

Hot July brings cooling showers,
Apricots and gillyflowers.

August brings the sheaves of corn;
Then the harvest home is borne.

Fresh October brings the pheasant;
Then to gather nuts is pleasant.

[40]

Dull November brings the blast;
Then the leaves are whirling fast.

Chill December brings the sleet,
Blazing fire and Christmas treat."

CHAPTER IV.

[41]

RULES AND RESULTS.

The strangest thing about Miss Plympton was that she never was able to tell the Tucker Twins apart. This was an unforgivable offense in their eyes and in the eyes of their friends. They were as alike as two peas in some ways and the antipodes in others. They might mystify you from the back but once you got a good look in their eyes, the mirrors of their souls, you were pretty apt to get them straight and keep them straight. Then their colouring was so different. Dee's hair was black with blue lights and Dum's was black with red lights; Dee's eyes were grey and Dum's hazel; Dee had a dimple in her chin, while Dum's chin had an uncompromising squareness to it that gave you to understand that her character was quite as fixed as Gibraltar, and she had no more idea of changing her mind than Miss Plympton had of toying with unalterable facts, such as 1066 or 1492.

[42]

From the very beginning I scented trouble between the new principal and the Tuckers. Miss Plympton called them Miss Tucker indiscriminately, and sometimes both of them answered and sometimes neither of them. Either way irritated Miss Plympton. She seemed to think they should know by instinct which one she meant. She finally grasped the fact that they had separate names but was more than apt to call Dee, Virginia, and Dum, Caroline, which was quite as unpardonable as saying Columbus discovered America in 1066 would have been to her.

"The very next time she calls me Caroline, I'm going to call her Plumpton," declared Dum. "I don't mean that Dee ain't as good as I am and a heap better, but I'm me——"

"Yes, and in the same vernacular Dee's her," I teased. We had a compact to correct the grammar of our roommates.

"I stand corrected about ain't but I still stick to 'I'm me.' It is more forceful and means more than 'I'm I.' Of course I'm I, but in Miss Plumpton's mind there seems to be strong doubt whether

[43]

I'm me. I is a kind of ladylike, sissy outside of a person, but me is the inmost, inward, soul self—I'm me—me—me!"

"Well, you certainly are and there is no one quite like you. I don't see why Miss Plympton can't see it, too."

"I know why! It's because she doesn't understand people. She thinks of us as being human beings of the female sex, who weigh a certain amount, are just so tall and so wide, have lived a certain time and come from such and such a city. Why, the only difference she sees between you and Mary Flannagan is that you are in 117 and Mary is in 115, and you have brown hair and Mary has red, and Mary is better on dates than you are. The real true Page Allison is a closed book to that fat head. I believe Miss Peyton knew our souls as well as she did our bodies."

We missed Miss Peyton every hour of the day. Her reign had been wise and gentle and always just. We never forgot her kindness to us the time Dee kept the kitten in her room all night. She won us over for life then and there. Miss Plympton had retained all of Miss Peyton's rules and added to them. She fenced us around with so many rules that the honour system was abolished. [44]

Study hall was a very different place from what it had been in Miss Peyton's time. Then order had ruled because we were on our honour not to communicate with one another by word or sign. Of course some girls do not regard honour as a very precious thing and they broke their word, but most girls, I am glad to say, have as keen a sense of honour as the best of men. Miss Plympton's attitude toward us was one of doubt and suspicion and, the honour system being abolished, we naturally felt that the most serious fault we could commit would be breaking the eleventh commandment: "Thou shalt not be found out." We developed astonishing agility in evading the authorities and getting out of scrapes. From having been five law-abiding citizens, we turned into extremely slick outlaws. Even Annie Pore would sometimes suggest escapades that no one would dream could find harbour behind that calm, sweet brow. [45]

The same unrest pervaded the whole school. A day never passed that some group of girls was not called to the office to have a serious reprimand. We got so hardened that it meant no more to us than the ordinary routine of the day, while the year before to be called to the office to have Miss Peyton censure you about something was a calamity that every one earnestly prayed to avoid. Miss Peyton never talked to you like a Dutch Uncle unless you needed it, while Miss Plympton never talked to you any other way.

"She makes me feel like an inmate of a detention home or some place where the criminally insane are sent," stormed Dee. "She makes out I have done things I never even thought of doing and has not got sense enough to know I never lie."

"What was it this time?" I asked.

"She said I changed the record on the Victrola Sunday night from 'Lead, Kindly Light,' sung by Louise Homer, to 'A-Roaming in the Gloaming,' by Harry Lauder. You see all that bunch of preachers was here, and, of course, only sacred music was permissible under the circumstances." [46]

"Why, I did that!" exclaimed Dum, "and didn't the preachers like it, though! Well, I reckon it is up to me to go 'fess up."

"Not a bit of it!" declared Dee. "She never asked who did it—that's not her way. She works with a spy system, so let her work that way. I bet we can outwit any spy she can get."

It seems strange when I look back on it that this spirit of mischief had entered into our crowd to such an extent, but we were not the same girls we had been the year before, all because of this head of the school who did not understand girls. If she had trusted us, we would have been trustworthy, I am sure.

There was a printed list of don'ts a yard long tacked up in every available spot, and I can safely declare that during the year we did every single thing we were told not to do. If we missed one of them it was an accident. They were such silly don'ts. "No food must be kept in the rooms." Now, what school girl is going to keep such a rule as that? "No talking in the halls or corridors." That would be impossible except in a deaf and dumb institution. "No washing of clothes of any sort in the rooms or bath rooms." Then what is the use of having little crêpe de chine handkerchiefs and waists if they must be sent in the laundry and come back starched and all the nice crinkle ironed out of them? Who would put her best silk stockings in wash to have them come back minus a foot? "No ink to be taken to rooms." We would just as soon have written with pencils except that the rule made us long to break it. Of course, break it we did. "No talking after lights are out." Now what nonsense was that? When lights are out is the very time to talk to your roommate. I verily believe that there was not one single rule on that list that was necessary. There were lots more of them and all of them equally silly. The worst one of all was: "Absolutely no visiting in rooms." That meant no social life at all. [47]

We had looked forward to having Annie and Mary next to us, but if there was to be no visiting it would not do us much good. Annie thought up a scheme that surprised and delighted us.

"Let's have telephonic communication. Our closets adjoin."

"Good! So they do," tweedled the Tuckers. "We'll get Zebedee to send us the things to make it." Of course Zebedee sent them the required things as he always aided and abetted us in every scheme to have a good time. He bought one of the toy telephones that has a tiny battery attached [48]

and is really excellent as a house telephone. We installed it quite easily with the aid of an auger that Zebedee had the forethought to send with the toy. The things came disguised as shoes. That telephone was a great source of pleasure to us and at times proved to be a real friend. It was concealed behind Dum's Sunday dress and it would have been a clever detective who could have discovered it.

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"Let's not tell a soul about it," said Mary, "because you know how things spread. You know," holding up one finger, "and I know," holding up another, "and that makes eleven."

We kept our secret faithfully and often mystified the other girls by communicating things to our neighbours when they knew we had not been to their room and had not spoken to them in the halls. Of course we did not have a bell as that would have been a dangerous method of attracting attention, but three knocks on the wall was a signal that you were wanted at the phone.

Annie was the originator of another scheme that saved us many a demerit. Every one of us had a dummy that could be made in a few moments, and these we always carefully put in our beds when we went off on the spreads or what not that took us out of our rooms when we were supposed to be in them.

"How on earth did you ever think of such a thing, Annie?" asked the admiring Mary.

"I am ashamed to say the Katzenjammer Kids in the comic supplement put it in my head," blushed Annie. "I know it is not very refined but I always read it."

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It was rather incongruous to think of Annie Pore, the timid, shy, very ladylike English girl, who a little more than a year ago looked as though she had not a friend in the world and had never read anything more recent than Tennyson's "Maud," not only reading the funny paper but learning mischief from it and imparting the same to the Tucker Twins, past masters in the art of getting into scrapes. These dummies were topped by boudoir caps with combings carefully saved and stitched in the edge of the caps, giving a most life like look when stuffed out with anything that came to hand. A sofa cushion dressed up in a night gown, tucked carefully under the cover with the boudoir cap reposing on the pillow, would fool any teacher who came creeping into our room after lights out to see if we were in any mischief.

Mary's hair, being that strong healthy kind of red hair, never came out, so she had no combings, never had had any. We ravelled out Dum's old red sweater sleeve and made a wonderful wig, some redder than Mary's, but in the subdued light in which it was to be viewed it did very well.

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"Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care," Mary would quote as she tucked her counterfeit self up in her warm bed preparatory to some midnight escapade.

CHAPTER V.

[52]

SOME LETTERS.

From Virginia Tucker to Mr. Jeffrey Tucker.

Gresham, Oct. 15, 19—

Dearest Zebedee:

It gets worse and worse—We've had a whole month of it now and my demerits are much more numerous than my merits. I see no way of getting out of the hole I am in. Everything I do or don't do means just another black mark for me. Now who can help sneezing when a sneeze is crying out to be sneezed? And who can help making a face when a sneeze is imminent? Not a Tucker! You know yourself what a terrific noise you make when you sneeze and how you jump up and crack your heels together just as you explode. If you were in church and a sneeze came you could not contain yourself within yourself without the risk of breaking yourself up into infinitesimal bits. I inherit my sneeze as directly from my paternal parent as I do my chin and my so-called stubbornness (we call it character, don't we, Zebedeedlums?). I do think it is hard to be kept in bounds a week for an inherited weakness—or shall we say strength? Our Tucker sneeze certainly should not be put down as a weakness.

[53]

Another thing about this new principal is that she can't tell me from Dee or Dee from me. She seems to think both of us are me, lately, although at first she thought both of us were Dee. I kicked over the first condition, but Heaven knows the last is much more trying, as I get all of Dee's demerits; not that Dee does not behave like a perfect gentleman and insist on her share of blame and even more than her share. There is no use in arguing with Miss Plympton. She won't believe you if you say you didn't do a thing, and she won't believe you when you say you did. She just sits there and marks in her book and has the expression of:

[54]

"The Moving Finger writes; and having writ,
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit

Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line
Nor all your tears wash out a Word of it."

The other day I sneezed, in fact I out-sneezed all the dead and gone Tuckers. I couldn't help it. I don't like to sew on hooks any more than Miss Plympton herself would and that sneeze popped off two. She looked up from the chronological page of dates she had been hammering into us and said sternly: "Caro-ginia Tucker, that unseemly noise must stop." "Yessum!" I gasped, holding my nose about as Dee does Brindle when he tries to get away from her to eat some little dog up. I held on with all my might, but every one knows that sneezes never come singly. The other one is as sure to come out as murder. When the next one came, it was worse than the first because of my efforts to hold it in, just as it makes more noise to shoot down a well than to shoot up in the air. (Don't you think my language sounds rather Homeric? I do.) Well, when the second report sounded, Miss Plympton put down her pencil and sat looking at me. She said nothing, but kept on making chins. As fast as she made one, another one disappeared, but nothing daunted, she just made another. I kept thinking: "I wish every time she made a chin something would go bang! and then maybe she would sympathize with me. I certainly can't help making sneezes any more than she can making chins." What do you think happened at this psychological moment? Why, Dee sneezed! As a rule, Dee is not quite so eruptive as you and I are; in fact, sometimes she irritates me by giving cat sneezes, but this time, whew! The Great Sneezeeks himself would have envied her. And do you know what that old stick-in-the-mud did? She looked square at me and said: "Violine, ten demerits, a page of dictionary and two hymns." That isn't as bad as it sounds, as I know so many hymns I can get one up in no time, and I got even with her by saying the page of the dictionary beginning with chin. It goes Chin, China, Chinaman, Chincapin, Chinch, Chinchilla, Chin-cough, Chine, Chinese, Chink, etc. I took especial pains to accent the first syllable too. Of course Dee stood up and clamored to be heard and to claim the sneeze. It was certainly one to be proud of. Miss Plympton changed her expression from the Moving Finger to

[55]

[56]

"That inverted Bowl they call the Sky,
Whereunder crawling cooped we live and die,
Lift not your hands to *It* for help—for *It*
As impotently moves as you or I."

You know yourself, Zebedee, how hard it is to keep in the straight and narrow path when you are blamed whether you are there or not. I feel that I might as well be "killed for an old sheep as a lamb," so I do get into lots of scrapes. The school is not the same with Miss Peyton ill and Miss Cox married. Dee and Page and I are real blue sometimes, but not all the time. We do have lots of fun breaking rules and keeping the eleventh commandment. Now don't get preachy! You would stand Miss Plympton just about one minute and then you would pack your doll rags and go home.

[57]

We like the new teacher in English a lot. She is much more interesting than last year's and seems to have some outlook. Miss Ball is her name.

Zebedee, since Miss Plympton seems to have such a feeling against me, don't you think it would be well for me to stop history and take up china painting? I don't think much of the art course here, but it would be real fun to do china painting and I could paint you a cup and saucer to drink your coffee out of when we get to housekeeping. I am crazy to do some modelling and think another year you better let me go to New York and study at the art school. Dee and Page think so, too, and they want to specialize in something.

We are nearly dead to see you. What say you to coming up here for Thanksgiving? You would miss the football game in Richmond, but we are certainly honing for you, honey. Dee will write soon. Page is just the same. She cheers us up a lot. She is awfully game—there is no prank going that she stays out of, but she kind of holds us down if our idea of a good time is too wild. Thanks for the little 'phone. It works splendidly.

[58]

Good by,

Your own
DUMDEEDLEDUMS.

From Page Allison to Dr. James Allison.

Gresham,
October 15, 19—

My dearest Father:

We are having the most interesting course in English and I feel that I am really going to learn a whole lot about writing. I am glad I have read all my life, but I find that I have not half taken in what I have read. Miss Ball is teaching me to analyze the things I like best. She reads beautifully and gets meaning out of poetry without

ruining the metre. She doesn't elocute (I hate that) but she has a full rich voice and her reading is just like music. She has us write a daily theme, any kind of snap-shot that suits us to write about—something we have seen or might have seen. It is awful funny what different things we choose. Dum always has descriptions of sunsets and moonrises and figures against the sky—how things look, in fact. Dee is great on animal stories, sick kittens and kindly beasts and abused horses and lame ducks. Mary usually gets a comic twist to her stories and has people falling off ladders and upsetting the ink and sitting down in the glue, etc. Annie is rather sentimental and wishy-washy in her compositions, willowy maidens in the moonlight with garlands of flowers. She is fond of using such expressions as: "Hark! From out the stillness," and "A dark and lonesome tarn." She is rather Laura Jean Libbyish I think. As for me, I always want to write about people, no difference what kind of people, old or young, black or white, rich or poor,—just so they are people. I made a real good little sketch of Christmas morning at Bracken. I described our going out with the colt and leaving Christmas cheer at the cabins, making an especial feature of Aunt Keziah, the "Tender." Miss Ball liked that a lot and wants me to do some more of our neighbours. I am dying to do Sally Winn, but somehow I am afraid she might know about it some day and it would hurt her feelings so. I think her character would be a very interesting one to write about. I may use her and put her in such a different environment that she would not know herself in broad day-light. Miss Ball is very complimentary about my efforts and I feel so encouraged. She is not a bit of a purist and thinks more of a good thought forcefully put than of a slip in the way of a split infinitive. [59]

We are having a right strenuous time getting out of scrapes. I have never been so unruly in my life, but somehow our new principal makes you want to break rules. I believe it is because she doesn't trust girls, and the consequence is we all of us feel like giving her something to cry about since she is going to raise a rumpus whether we do or don't. She is a mighty poor judge of human nature if she thinks any of our quintette could lie; but she doesn't believe us on oath. We argue that if she thinks we do things when we don't, we might just as well do them, since they are, after all, not really wicked things. There is nothing very bad about creeping out of your warm bed at midnight and flying down a cold hall to a class room, where you will meet other girls just out of their warm beds and when there you will, through smothered giggles, eat burnt fudge made on a fire surreptitiously kindled behind the barn, when you were supposed to be piously engaged in darning stockings in the mending class. I don't know just what the fun is, but it certainly is fun. The best fun is scaring the night watchman, who is an Irishman and horribly superstitious. He is afraid of ghosts and when he spies a flitting white figure down the end of a long corridor while he is making his rounds, he jumps to the conclusion it is a "hant" and not a naughty pupil. He never reports it to the principal, but adds it to his already interminable list of ghost stories. He makes his rounds as noisily as possible, so if anything is there it will hear him and depart. He is a little fat man with a military carriage, just as pompous in the back as the front. He has been told he looks like Napoleon, so he always wears very tight trousers and a long cape which he throws over one shoulder. One night I peeped out the window and saw him marching up and down in front of the building in the bright moonlight. The heavy cane he always carries he was holding like a musket and the poor little conceited thing actually had his hat on sideways, which gave him very much the look of the Emperor keeping guard for the sleeping sentry. I gave three taps on the wall, although it was the middle of the night, and got Mary Flannagan to the 'phone and told her to poke her head out of the window and go like a screech owl. You remember I told you how fine Mary was as an impersonator. Of course, Mary did as she was bid and poor Napoleon ran like a rabbit. It was kind of mean of me, but it was awfully funny. [61]

We are planning a party for Hallowe'en. Tell Mammy Susan to try to get me a box of goodies here in time for it. Don't send it to the school, but wait until I tell you where you can send it. They open everything and dig out all the contraband, and since everything is contraband but crackers and simple candy, they usually dig out everything of importance. [62]

I miss you and Mammy Susan mighty bad. Please give the dogs an extra pat for me and tell them not to forget me.

Your devoted daughter,
PAGE.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HALLOWE'EN PARTY.

[64]

"Girls! Miss Plympton has actually given her consent to a Hallowe'en party in the Gym. We have to start at eight and stop at ten, though," called Mary through the concealed 'phone.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Dee, who had the receiver at her ear, although Dum and I were both crowding into the closet to get the news that Mary was giving so loudly that you could really hear it through the walls without the aid of the toy telephone. "That's no good. Witches don't walk so early in the night."

"Well, it's better than nothing," answered Mary. "It can be a masquerade. We are thinking of having a sheet and pillow case party. The Seniors want all of our quintette to serve on the committee of entertainment. You see, the Seniors are really getting this up. That's why old Lady Plumpton will let us do it. She lets the Seniors do lots of things, but she certainly has got it in for the poor Juniors."

[65]

Then there was a confused sound of Annie's trying to talk through the 'phone with Mary, and Dum decided Dee had had a long enough turn. Some mixup ensued in the two closets with the result that Dum's best dress, that served as a portiere for the batteries, had to be sent to the presser, and I got possession of our end of the line and found Annie on the other.

"Page, Harvie Price writes me from the University that he is going to be at Hill Top, visiting Shorty Hawkins for a day or so soon, and he wants to come see me. Do you think Miss Plympton will permit it?"

"Can't you work the cousin racket on her?"

"No, she knows I have no relatives in the States."

"Well, then, he may be allowed to sit in the same church with you if he should happen to be here over Sunday and his voice can mingle with yours in praise and thanksgiving," I teased. "You know how Miss Plympton sat on Jean Rice when her third cousin once removed from Georgia came to call. She refused positively to let her see him until his kinship was proved and then she only let him call fifteen minutes. If he had been a plain third cousin she would have permitted half an hour; second once removed an hour; plain second two hours; first once removed four hours; plain first eight hours——"

[66]

"Page! This is not a problem in arithmetical progression. Please tell me how he can manage."

"Bless you if I know—unless he can come to the sheet and pillow case party. You might let him know one is in prospect." A giggle from Annie answered me and a shout of joy from Mary as her roommate imparted this suggestion to her.

"Of course it would never do," Annie said to me later on in the day when no wall divided us, "but wouldn't it be a joke on Miss Plympton and the faculty if some of the boys would come?"

"Yes, quite like Tennyson's Princess, but if we got mixed up in it, it would be a serious misdemeanor." I was willing to go pretty far in fun, but I had no intention of being imprudent and giving Miss Plympton any real cause for the suspicion she seemed to entertain for our crowd. "I tell you, Annie, if I were you I'd go and ask Miss Plympton if Harvie can call and if she will not consent, just write and tell him so."

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Miss Plympton refused to grant permission for the call unless Harvie could obtain a request from Annie's father, and as that was seemingly impossible the matter had to be dropped. Annie wrote to the youth and told him the state of affairs and that was all she had to do with it.

The Gresham girls and the Hill Top boys usually met at football games at Hill Top, and basketball games at Gresham; they sat across the church from each other on Sunday and prayer meeting night. As is the way with boys and girls and has been the way since the world began, I fancy, there were a few inevitable flirtations going on. Some of them, under the cloak of great piety, kept up a lively conversation with their eyes during the longest prayers, or sang hymns at each other with the greatest fervor. One ingenious boy actually wrote a love letter (at least that is what we loved to designate it) and sent it to his inamorata on the collection plate. With meaning glances he placed it on the plate together with his mite. The deacon, all unconscious of the important mission with which he was intrusted, proceeded with slow dignity to pass the plate to pew after pew of boys and then up the aisle on the girls' side. Every boy and girl in that church knew what was going on, but there was not a flicker of an eyelash as the exceedingly pretty and rosy Junior, for whom the note was intended, put out her daintily gloved hand, dropped in her nickel and quickly closed her fingers over the billet-doux and slipped it into her muff. There was a noiseless noise of a sigh, a sigh of extreme relief, that went over all the expectant pupils, boys and girls. Then with what vim and spirit did we rise and sing the appointed hymn: "A charge to keep I have"! The old gentleman who took up the collection was ever after known to us as "Deacon Cupid."

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Hallowe'en arrived. It was a splendid crisp, cold day, which put us in high spirits. Even Miss Plympton was in a frisky humour and actually cracked a joke, at least she almost did. She stopped herself in time and made another chin instead, but by almost cracking it she had shown herself to be almost human, which was in itself encouraging. Our quintette was out of bounds. We had worked off all of our demerits and were in good standing with the faculty.

"Now if we can just stay good a while!" wailed Mary. "I, for one, am tired of getting into scrapes and mean to be a little tin angel for at least a week. I wouldn't think of putting a greater

task on my sub-conscious self."

I wasn't so sure of myself, as that minute I had under my mattress a box from Mammy Susan, filled to the brim with contraband food that would put me in durance vile for at least a month if I should be caught with the goods.

The committee on arrangements for the sheet and pillow case party had determined that ice cream and cake should be the refreshments for the evening. The ice cream was usually cut in very slim slices and the cake was served in mere sample sizes, so I thought when the big ball was over I could gather a few chosen spirits and we could dispose of Mammy Susan's box in short order. I had not divulged to the others that this box had arrived, knowing it would be such a delightful surprise for them. [70]

Mammy Susan had sent it in care of a coloured laundress who did up our best shirt waists and collars, things we did not dare trust to the catch-as-catch-can method of the school laundry. Shades of my honourable ancestors! She had brought the box to the school concealed beneath the folds of fine linen.

"Ef Miss Perlimpton ketch me she won't 'low me to set foot in this here place agin, but you young ladies is been so kin' an' ginerous to me that I's willin' to risk sompen fer yo' pleasure," the old woman had said as she lifted out the carefully ironed shirt waists and then the large flat box that had come by parcels post from Bracken. I had warned Mammy Susan to send things in flat boxes as they were so much easier to conceal than square ones. This one fitted nicely under my mattress. It gave the bed a rather hiked up look in the middle, but making beds was not the long suit of the Greshamites, so I hoped it would pass inspection, knowing that other beds that were innocent were much lumpier than mine. [71]

If you have never been to a sheet and pillow case party, go your first chance, and if no one else gets up one, get it up yourself. Drape a sheet about you in folds as Greek as you can manage, pinning the folds at the shoulders, and then put on a pillow case like a hood. If the case is old, cut holes in it for eyes. If you don't possess an old one, make a cotton mask to tie around your face and pull the hood well over your forehead. The effect is gruesome, indeed, and that night we looked like a veritable Ku Klux Klan.

We wanted to mark ourselves in some way so that we could be told by one another, so we put on each back in black chalk a mystic V, standing for five, our quintette. Dum and Dee and Annie and I were almost of the same height. I was a little shorter, but not enough to make much difference, but Mary was a perfect chunk of a girl and when we got her draped she looked like a snow ball. [72]

The gymnasium, our ball room, was hung with paper pumpkin lanterns and papier-mâché skulls. "And in those holes where eyes did once inhabit" there shone forth lights giving a very weird effect indeed. The light was dim and the ghostly figures moving around would have frightened Mr. Ryan, the old night watchman, to death, I am sure. But he, good man, did not have to keep watch until eleven o'clock.

The girls came in singly and in groups, all bent on disguise. Some of them sat against the wall, afraid that their walks would give them away, and all were silent for the most part except for a few ghostly groans or wails. Some one was at the piano playing the "Goblins will git yer ef yer don't mind out." In a little while couples took the floor and began whirling around.

"Who is that tall girl dancing with the little chunky one?" whispered Dee to me. "I thought for a minute the chunky one was Mary, but I see she has no V on her back." [73]

"I can't think who is that tall here in school. There are two or three pretty tall Seniors, and then you know there is a new Sophomore from Texas who is a perfect bean pole, but she doesn't dance."

"Well, this one dances all right and that little square girl she is dancing with seems lively enough. I believe I'll break in on them. You take the big one and I'll take the chunky one," and so we did.

Dee started off leading, but I noticed they soon changed, as the short girl seemed to prefer guiding. I always let any one guide me who will, so my partner, who was the taller, naturally took the man's part. She was singularly silent, although I did some occasional whispering in what I considered a disguised voice. Annie and Dum were dancing together and I saw Mary's square figure leading out a rather heavy-looking girl who had up to that time been seated against the wall. As part of the committee, we considered it our duty to dig up the wall flowers. This one was not much of a dancer and in a moment my partner and I came a cropper almost on top of them. We picked ourselves up and Mary, recognizing me by my V, whispered: [74]

"Page, this girl can't dance a little bit. I tried to lead her and she has stepped all over me. For the love of Mike, see what you can do with her." So we changed partners and Mary went gaily off with my very good partner, who certainly danced better than any one I had before tried at Gresham, and I tripped off with the heavy-looking cast-off. It wasn't so bad. I let her guide and while she was not so very good, she was not so very bad.

"Are you accustomed to guiding?" I said, forgetting and using my natural voice.

"Ummm um!" came in a kind of grunt from my partner, and then in a high squeak, "Page!" The

music stopped. My partner pressed my hand so affectionately that I wondered who she could be. I thought I could spot any of my intimates.

[75]

"Now you know me, I think you ought to tell me who you are," I pleaded, "and not wait for the unmasking."

"Unmasking!" she said in a strangely hoarse tone. "When?"

"Why, at nine! Didn't you hear Miss Plympton this morning at chapel?"

"Oh—Ah—Yes!" she muttered, and drew me to a seat in the corner.

I chatted away gaily. Since my partner had discovered my identity, I might just as well make myself agreeable and I hoped to discover hers before nine. I ran over in my mind all the big heavy girls in school, and even the teachers. Miss Ball was rather large and Miss Plympton—could it be Miss Plympton? I peered eagerly through the holes at the eyes gazing into mine. Whose eyes were they? They certainly looked very familiar. The music started again, one of the new tunes, and I jumped up to find a partner or even take the one I still had who was not so terribly bad, but she drew me down again in my seat, hoarsely whispering:

[76]

"Please sit it out with me." I seemed to be in a kind of dream. They say that one proof of transmigration of the soul is that we sometimes have a realization of doing the same thing we have done before perhaps æons and æons ago. I certainly held in my consciousness that once before some one with eyes, brown just like the ones I could see through the slits (cut, by the way, in a perfectly new pillow case), had begged me in much the same tone if not so hoarse to "sit it out." I looked at the dancers. Dum and Dee were dancing together; Mary was tearing around with the little chunky person, who seemed to be a mate for her. I looked for the other distinctive black V and saw that Annie was gliding around in the arms of the tall girl with whom I had danced, who had proven such an excellent partner.

Annie's cowl had slipped back and above her mask her pretty hair, the colour of ripe wheat, showed plainly, making no doubt of her identity. I looked back at the mysterious eyes and an almost uncontrollable desire to go off into hysterics seized me. I suddenly remembered the hop at Willoughby and how I had sat out a dance with Wink White the night he proposed. The mystery was solved.

[77]

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Stephen White!" I gasped. "I know you now and I know that that good dancer floating around with Annie Pore is Harvie Price, and that that little square figure with Mary Flannagan is no other than Shorty Hawkins. Don't you know that if Miss Plympton finds out about this that every last one of our crowd will get shipped without a character to stand on?"

I know Wink wanted to giggle when I talked about a character to stand on, but he was too much in awe of my anger to giggle or do anything but plead with me to forgive him.

"You see, dear Page——"

"I am not 'dear Page' and I don't see!" I ejaculated.

"But it was this way. I came over from the University with Harvie Price to see you, and when I got here, found out the old rules were so strict and ridiculous that I could not get near you in any other way——"

[78]

"Well, getting near me was not necessary," I stormed.

"You had better calm yourself or you will give the whole game away," admonished Wink; so I did try to compose myself and speak in a whisper.

"Well, you had better get a move on you and depart as rapidly as possible."

"Page, please don't be mad with me. I thought it would just be a lark and you, of all persons, would think it was a good joke," and the eyes through the holes looked very sad and pleading.

"Well, you don't know me. I like a joke as well as any one in the world, but to get in a mixup at boarding school because of a lot of boys is not in my line. It would be harder on Annie Pore than any of us because her father is so severe. He would never forgive her if she should get in a real scrape."

"But it isn't your fault. You were none of you aware of our intention of coming."

[79]

"That makes not a whit of difference to Miss Plympton. She never believes us, no matter what we say. It is twenty-three minutes to nine and you had better grab Harvie and Shorty and beat it. At nine sharp if you don't take your mask off some one will pull it off."

"Well, I don't care if they do; I am going to get a dance with the Tucker twins if I have to be thrown out. Which is Miss Dee?"

As I had a secret desire to turn Stephen White's supposed affection for me into the proper channel, namely, in the direction of Dee, who was much more suited to him than I was, I could not resist the temptation of telling him, although in doing so I certainly placed myself in a position precarious, to say the least. I was aiding and abetting him in this attempt to hood-wink the school of Gresham. I was also getting the twins into the scrape with me by pointing them out

to this terrible person, a male in a girl's school. I did not think of this until I had told Wink that all of our quintette had big black V's on our backs and he had made for the twirling twins and broken in on them. He got Dee, just by luck, and Dum sank on the bench by me.

[80]

"Dum, do you know who that is that just got Dee?" I asked.

"No, I have been wondering who she is and who that tall girl is with Annie Pore."

"Well, get ready to hear something, but don't faint or scream," and I whispered to her the names of the venturesome boys. She only gasped and then went off into convulsions of laughter. "It is all very funny," I continued, "but tell me, what are we going to do if Miss Plympton finds it out?"

"But she mustn't. We must get them out of here before we unmask. Don't you think Annie knows by this time that that is Harvie she is dancing with, and do you think for an instant that Mary and Dee are not on?"

The music stopped just then and our quintette with the partners collected in our corner. Annie was trembling with fright, but was evidently having a pretty good time in spite of her fears, and Mary was in a gale only equalled to Tom Hawkins's.

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"Don't stop for adieux," I admonished. "Remember if you are caught all the blame will fall on us, and while I like all of you well enough, I have no desire to be expelled for the sake of having danced with you."

This was rather sobering to their gaiety, and after whispered directions of how best to get out of the building, the three ghostly figures glided off. I was awfully afraid that some one had overheard, but no one seemed to be especially interested in us just then and I could but pray that we had been unobserved.

As Wink had pressed my hand in farewell, he had begged for forgiveness and had said he intended to see us again by hook or crook. He was to be at Hill Top until Sunday night.

"It will be in church, then," I had declared, because I was determined that I was not going to get into any more of a scrape than I was already in. I was very much relieved that the boys were gone, and my anger cooled down, although I was certainly disgusted that they had so little considered us in this mad escapade. I don't see why the pastors and masters of the young make it such a crime for boys and girls to have a good time together if they are off at boarding school. How much better it would have been if Miss Plympton had just invited the boys of Hill Top to come to the party and let us dance all we wanted to. There is certainly no harm in it in the summer, and why should there be harm in it then?

[82]

At nine the masks were off and then we had the slight refreshments (very slight), followed by rather tame dancing until the ten o'clock gong warned us that in a few minutes lights would be out.

CHAPTER VII.

[83]

WHEN GHOST MEETS GHOST.

"Gee, but I'm hungry!" exclaimed Dum, as we trailed our sheeted forms up the stairs. "Did you ever see such slim eats in all your life? Why, my cake was cut so thin and my ice cream was so scant, they could not have passed muster even at a church fair!"

"Shh! Don't say a word, but I've got a box under my mattress. You let Annie and Mary know, while I see Jean Rice and Nancy Blair. We'll meet in the Gym at eleven. I believe we will be safe from old Mr. Ryan. He is sure to keep away from there as he knows that the skull lanterns are still up. We had better not try to have the spread in our room as we are so close to teachers. Tell Mary and Annie to get their dummies ready and tell Dee to start on ours. I'll be up just as soon as I put Jean and Nancy on."

[84]

Jean Rice and Nancy Blair were two girls we had been seeing a good deal of. They were full of fun and while they were rather a frivolous pair, they were nice and good tempered and always ready for a lark. You could count on them to join in on any hazardous expedition.

When eleven o'clock struck we were ready to repair to the Gym for our secret repast. We kept on our sheets and masks as part of the fun. We had made our dummies ready and tucked them in their little downies before we ventured forth. The corridors were dark and silent. The Gym was at the far end of the building from us, down two flights of stairs. We judged it prudent to separate and go one by one a few seconds apart as, if we should by chance run against any one in authority, it was easier for one to escape than five. I went first, the box of fried chicken clasped in my arms: Dum followed me with the beaten biscuit; then came Mary with ham sandwiches; and Annie close behind her, carefully hugging the caramel cake, too timid to let the space be too great between her and her friend. Dee valiantly brought up the rear with stuffed eggs and pickles.

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We found three girls instead of two waiting in the gymnasium. I thought Jean and Nancy had brought a friend and went up to make her welcome. They had lighted some of the pumpkin and skull lanterns and were standing with an air of expectancy.

"Hello, girls!" I whispered, "you beat us to it, didn't you? Which of you is which?"

"You tell us who you are first," demanded one of the figures, "and then we will tell you."

"I am Page Allison. I bet you are Nancy Blair."

There was a giggle from the masks. It was another bunch of Juniors on pleasure bent. They were waiting for five more girls and were going to have a spread and a ghost dance.

It turned out that what one might call the cream of the Junior class was gathered there. If we got caught, it meant the whole class in disgrace, as it would be a well-known fact that the members of the class who were missing were so only because they were not asked to be present. It gave us a great feeling of security to be fifteen strong. We were seven and these eight more girls brought the number of law breakers up to fifteen. There were only twenty-five Juniors in the school and that left ten girls who were either too goody-goody to be included or not sufficiently attractive, which is not in itself a crime but is certainly unfortunate.

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The spread was wonderful. The little dabs of ice cream and cake we had been served at the party had only whetted our appetites and in no way diminished them. We ate in silence broken by whispers and giggles. We hoped the teachers and Miss Plympton were safe in their downies and we trusted in Mr. Ryan's superstitious nature to keep him out of the Gym.

The ghost dance began later and was kept up buoyantly, without music except a weird rhythmic whistling that the dancers themselves furnished. This whistling is done by sucking in and never blowing out and the effect is most uncanny. It is very hard on your wind to whistle this way, but when your breath gives out, your partner picks up the tune where you leave off and keeps the ball rolling.

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The last candle burned down to its socket and guttered out, and then the spectres flitted back to their rooms. It was pitch black in the corridors and Annie was afraid to go alone, so we formed a cordon by catching hold of hands and crept along, keeping close to the walls. I was in front and once when we were quite near our rooms I came bang against a human hand groping along the wall towards me. I stopped dead still! It was all I could do to keep from squealing right out, but a sound of scurrying down the hall reassured me. It was just a student as afraid of being caught as I was.

"Who goes there?" I demanded in stern and grown-up tones.

No answer but more scurrying and in a moment the sound of a door cautiously closed.

"Some poor girl scared to death," I thought. We found our rooms in the dark and with the help of an electric search light, the pride of Dee's heart, we snatched our poor dummies out of their warm beds and were soon snuggled down in their places.

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"How do you reckon it happened there were no lights in the halls?" whispered Dum.

"Nancy Blair told me she had turned them out on purpose," said Dee. "She said she knew we would get caught if there was any light."

"Good for Nance!" I murmured, and knew no more until morning. I can't believe we had done anything so very wrong or we could not have slept so soundly.

The rising gong found us dead to the world and only the telephone call, three knocks on the wall, aroused us.

"Trouble ahead!" whispered Mary Flannagan, "there was some one snooping around last night after we were all in bed."

"Well, we can prove an alibi. Who was it?" I chattered through the 'phone. I had jumped out of bed and was huddled in the closet behind Dum's dress. The window was still up and the heat turned off.

[89]

"You sound scared! Do you think they will catch us?"

"Scared! Not a bit of it! I am just cold. Of course, they won't catch us,—thanks to having abolished the honour system," and I hung up the receiver and commenced the Herculean task of getting Tweedles out of bed.

"Get up!" I urged, pulling the cover off of first one then the other. "I don't see what you would have done without a roommate. I'd like to know who would wake you up."

Dee put her head under the pillow like an ostrich trying to evade pursuit and Dum curled up in a little ball like a big caterpillar when you tickle him with a piece of grass.

"Girls! Get up! I tell you Mary says there is some mischief brewing. We had better get up and be down to breakfast in time with smiling morning faces or Miss Plympton will know who was up late feasting. Me for a cold bath!"

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"Me, too!" tweedled the twins, coming to life very rapidly.

A cold plunge and vigorous rubbing took off all traces of the night's dissipations, and as a finishing touch we all of us let our hair hang down our backs in plaits. Since the summer we had with one accord turned up our hair. We felt that it added dignity to our years; but now was no time for dignity but for great simplicity and innocence.

As the breakfast gong sounded, I am sure in all Virginia there could not be found five more demure maidens than tripped punctually into the dining room. Miss Plympton looked sharply up as we came in, but we felt we had disarmed her with the very sweet bows we gave her and the gentle "good mornings."

There was an air of repressed excitement running through the school. We were dying to ask what it was but felt that silence on our part was the only course for us to pursue. Certainly there were fifteen very shiny-eyed Juniors and ten very smug-looking ones. I whispered to Nancy Blair as I passed her table on the way out:

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"What's up?"

"I am not sure, but I do not believe they are on to our frolic."

"There is something else," declared Jean Rice, who sat next to her chum, Nancy. "The servants are in a great state of excitement over something. I have had an oatmeal spoon and a butter knife spilled down my neck already and I see Miss Plympton's private cream pitcher has found its way to our table."

"Well, we will find out what is the matter in Chapel," I sighed, as I hurried up to my room to put it to some kind of rights. I wanted to get our dummies pulled to pieces, leaving no semblance of human beings. We had twenty minutes between breakfast and Chapel to make our beds and do what cleaning to our rooms we considered necessary to pass inspection. I tell you we cleaned that room with what Mammy Susan called "a lick and a promise." Our dummies we pulled to pieces and scattered their members to the four winds, like the Scarecrow in the Wizard of Oz, when the winged monkeys got him. The telephone we concealed even more carefully than usual, draping a sweater over it and smoothing out Dum's dress so no suspicious wrinkle remained.

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"We weren't in our beds very long, so let's spread 'em," said Dee, suiting the action to the word and pulling up her sheets in the most approved unhygienic manner. We swept the dirt under the rugs and with a few slaps of a dust rag on bureau, chairs and tables, and a careful lowering of the shade so the light came in sufficiently softened not to show the dust, we betook ourselves to Chapel as the gong sounded, quaking inwardly but with that "butter won't melt in my mouth" expression we considered suitable for the occasion.

Miss Plympton was on the platform waiting for the teachers and pupils to assemble. She had on a stiff, new, dark gray suit that fitted her like the paper on the wall and she was making chins so fast there was no keeping up with them.

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"Looks like tin armor and I tell you she is ready for a joust, too!" exclaimed Dum.

Without any warning at all, Miss Plympton opened the Bible at the tenth chapter of Nehemiah and began to read:

"Now those that sealed were Nehemiah, the Tirshatha, the son of Hachaliah, and Zidkijah, Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, Pashur, Amariah, Malchijah, Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah: these were the priests."

I heard a sharply intaken breath from Dee. I also noticed the shoulders of a girl a few seats ahead of me shaking ominously.

Miss Plympton proceeded: "And the Levites: both Jeshua, the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; And their brethren Shebaniah, Hodijah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, Micha, Rehob, Hashabiah, Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, Hodijah, Bani, Beninu,'—"

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Other shoulders were shaking and Dee buried her face in her hands. There was an unmistakable snort from a dignified Senior. One of the tiny little girls giggled outright and suddenly without any one knowing how it started, the whole school was in a roar.

Now it is not so difficult to come down on a few offenders, but when a whole school goes to pieces what is the one in command to do? It wasn't that there was anything so very humorous in the tenth chapter of Nehemiah, but the way Miss Plympton read it; the way she rattled off those impossible names with as much ease as she would have shown in calling the roll, the way she looked in her tight new suit,—just the way the whole school felt, anyhow—a kind of tense feeling that something was going to happen, made our risibles get the better of us. Everything in the room rocked with laughter except Miss Plympton. She just made chins.

The teachers on the platform were as bad as the students. Miss Ball was completely overcome and the very dried-up instructor in mathematics had to be led off the platform in the last stages of hysterics. Margaret Sayre told me afterwards that she was very glad to do the leading as she herself was at the bursting point.

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Miss Plympton looked at the giggling and roaring mass of girls and quietly went on reading in her hard even tones, her voice slightly raised, however: "'The chief of the people: Parosh, Pahathmoab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, Bunni; Azgad, Bebai, Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, Ater'—"

The laughter of some of the girls changed to weeping and about half the school had hysterics. Miss Plympton did not understand girls at all, but she understood them well enough to know that when once hysterics gets started in a crowd of girls there is no more stopping it than a stampede of wild cattle.

I hate sacrilege, but for the life of me I can't see why any one should think that any human being could get any good or spiritual strength for the day from listening to the tenth chapter of Nehemiah. I never heard of a school breaking out into hysterics over the twenty-third Psalm or the Sermon on the Mount. Why should not a suitable thing be chosen to read to young people?

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Miss Plympton was furious, but whatever she said to the pupils, she would have to say to the teachers, so she held her peace and after making some hundred or so chins she had prayers and then a mild hymn. The storm had subsided except for an occasional sniff. Some of the most hysterically inclined had been forced to leave the assembly room and these came sneaking back during the singing of the hymn. The Math teacher had to go to bed and we all with one accord blessed Sheribiah, Shebiniah, Hodijah, Bani, and Beninu.

CHAPTER VIII.

[97]

INCRIMINATING EVIDENCE.

"Keep your seats, young—ladies, I suppose I must call you. I have something to say to you." We thought it was coming and were glad to have it over with. "Something has occurred, very grave in its nature."

"Pshaw!" I thought. "Having a feast in the Gym is not so terribly grave." I had for the moment forgot entirely about the boys' escapade.

"Last night, Mr. Ryan, our night watchman, who faithfully keeps watch over the building while you are sleeping, was coming to his duties from the village where he lives when he was startled by an apparition. Three figures, garbed in white, came suddenly upon him out of the darkness. This was just outside the school grounds and about five minutes after nine o'clock—immediately after your unmasking, I take it. Mr. Ryan was very startled, so much so that he turned and ran all the way back to the village and he declares that these figures ran after him. He says that he was able to note that two of them were tall and one quite short. The poor old man is very superstitious and thinks they were ghosts, but we are too enlightened to believe such a thing. In fact, we have reason to believe we know the girls who perpetrated what, no doubt, they consider a joke, but to our minds it is nothing more than a cruel prank that none but unlady-like, ill-bred hoydens could be capable of." Here she paused and grasping firmly the last few superfluous chins that had formed above her collar, she resolutely pushed them back and resumed her discourse. "I need hardly say on whom my suspicions have fallen—the fact of its having been two tall figures and one short one can mean only Mary Flannagan and the Tucker twins."

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We sat electrified! Why Mary and the Tuckers any more than any other three girls in the school? Mary was certainly not the shortest girl in the school and the Tuckers were certainly not the tallest. It was so silly that I would have laughed aloud if I had not been too indignant. Tweedles sat up very straight and sniffed the air like war horses ready for battle, while Mary Flannagan looked for all the world like a little Boston bull dog straining at his leash to get at the throat of some antagonist.

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Now at this juncture a remarkable thing occurred when we consider Annie Pore's timidity. She stood up and with that clear wonderful voice, musical whether in speaking or singing, said:

"Miss Plympton, I am exactly the height of the Tuckers and Mary Flannagan is my intimate friend and roommate! I insist upon being held in exactly the same ridiculous suspicion that you have placed my three friends."

"I am a little shorter but will walk on my tip toes the rest of my life if it is necessary to prove that I was with the Tuckers and Mary Flannagan from the time of unmasking last night until we went to our room at ten!" I blurted out, springing to my feet.

I was very angry with the boys for getting us into this scrape, but since we were there, I was determined to stay with my friends. Of course it was Harvie and Wink and Shorty who had met old Mr. Ryan. They had left the building just before nine, and he, poor old thing, being of a naturally superstitious turn of mind had come to the school earlier than usual, as he knew it was Hallowe'en and feared something might catch him. The boys saw he was scared and, boy-like, had given chase.

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"What have you to say for yourself, Miss Flannagan?" said Miss Plympton, ignoring Annie and me as though we had never existed.

"Nothing but this: 'I deny the allegation and defy the alligator,'" said Mary, quoting Mrs. Malaprop with as much composure as she could muster.

"And you, Miss Caro—ginia Tucker?" she demanded, looking first at Dum and then at Dee and

finally striking a medium course and looking between them.

"I—" tweedled the twins and then both stopped. "I—" still tweedling.

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"One at a time!" snapped our principal.

"I don't know what you accuse us of exactly," said Dum, taking the lead. "If you accuse me of being the same height as my twin and of being much with her, I plead guilty. If you accuse us both of being much taller than our esteemed contemporary, Mary Flannagan, we both will plead guilty. As for running out in the night and scaring poor old Mr. Ryan to death,—why, that is absurd. We can prove as many alibis as necessary. Remember, though, we are merely twins and not triplets, nor yet quartettes. One alibi apiece is all we mean to furnish."

"And I," said Dee, as Dum paused for breath, "I don't mean for one instant to furnish an alibi or anything else. I was not out of the Gym after we unmasked at nine until ten when we went to our rooms. I am accustomed to having my word believed and I do not intend to prove anything one way or the other. A criminal is innocent until he is proven guilty, anyhow, and I will leave the matter entirely in your hands." Dee sat down with a crash and opened a book. Miss Plympton looked somewhat taken aback, but she continued in her hard and even tones:

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"Do you mean to tell me then, Miss Vir—oline Tucker,—I mean the one who has just sat down,—do you mean to tell me you have no idea who the masked figures were who ran after Mr. Ryan?"

"No, I did not mean to tell you that," said Dee, shutting her book very deliberately and rising again. "You did not ask me that question. But since you intimate that you did, rather than befoul my mouth with even the semblance of a lie, I will tell you that I have a very strong idea who the masked figures were, but that I have not the slightest idea of informing you or any one else on whom my suspicions rest."

As Dee bumped down into her seat there was a murmur of admiration and wonder from the assembled school. Even Annie's bravery sank into insignificance by the side of this daring deed of Dee's.

The Juniors who had been implicated in the feast of the night before were greatly astonished and somewhat relieved at the turn of affairs. They had felt that something was in the wind and certainly thought it was their feast at midnight. It seems that old Mr. Ryan had run all the way home and when he reached there was so out of breath that it took him many minutes to tell his wife what was the matter. He had refused to go to the school to keep watch on such a night, when graves give up their dead. The wife had come in the early morning to resign for her timid spouse. The tale had grown greatly in the telling and now the negro servants had it that sparks of fire flew from the eyes of the ghostly trio. No doubt that was Wink's cigarette, for he had threatened to light it before he was well out of the building.

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No wonder we had been able to pull off our midnight party without detection since the school had been minus a night watchman! We were all of us glad we were in trouble over something we had not done instead of something we had done.

When Dee sat down with such a vicious bump, we wondered what next, but Miss Plympton soon put our minds at rest. She made about half a dozen new chins and then spoke, her voice not quite so even as before.

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"It is not my intention to bandy words with mere school girls, but I feel that in justice to myself, I must say that it is not merely the fact of the contrasting heights of these malefactors, but it is also evidence of a very convincing character that has been brought to light." We were all ears, waiting for the disclosure. "It is a well-known fact that the Misses Tucker use large handkerchiefs, gentlemen's handkerchiefs. This has been brought to my attention through mistakes that have occurred in the laundry,—ahem—using a similar kind myself,— Here a smile went over the listening school. "This morning a handkerchief was picked up on exactly the spot where Mr. Ryan began his race with the supposed ghosts." Exhibit No. 1 was then produced and held up for inspection. It was a large and very shady-looking handkerchief with a great red T in the corner. We knew it in a moment for the property of Thomas Hawkins (alias Shorty). "See the initial!" pointing to the red T.

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We had joked Shorty the summer before about his very large and gaudy handkerchiefs. He had a varied assortment of H's and T's in all colours of the rainbow. Now Dum arose in her might. Her attitude was dignified and quiet and she held up her hand for permission to speak.

"What is it, Caro—ginia?"

"I wish to say, Miss Plympton, that up to this juncture I have felt that you have been making a mistake, the kind any one might make in a case of mistaken identity, that you have jumped to a conclusion, feeling as you do that my sister and I and our friends are rather wild,—but now let me say, Miss Plympton, that you have overstepped the possibility of being merely mistaken and I consider your remarks and accusations nothing short of insulting. It is bad enough to think we would go out in the night and deliberately scare a poor superstitious old man, but to think," and here Dum's voice took on that oratorical ring that I have heard Zebedee's take when he was very much in earnest about proving a point, "to think that my sister and I would own such a terribly inartistic looking handkerchief as the one you are holding, a great thick, cotton rag with a red initial on it,—and furthermore openly to accuse either one of us of carrying about our persons

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anything so filthy, so unspeakably dirty,—I wonder you can touch it!" This she said with such a vigorous intonation that Miss Plympton actually dropped the despised handkerchief. "And now, Miss Plympton, my sister and I will with your permission withdraw and will await an apology from you in our room, 117 Carter Hall."

Before the amazed eyes of Miss Plympton and the whole school, those intrepid twins actually got up and with the greatest composure marched out of the assembly hall.

Instead of having to prove their innocence, they had completely turned the tables on Miss Plympton and were demanding an apology from her about something that was entirely foreign to the matter in hand.

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Miss Plympton made some more chins and then quite like a good sport accepted her defeat and dismissed us to our classes, and as far as I know, to this day Mr. Ryan does not know what came so near getting him. He was persuaded to resume his duties, however.

We nearly died laughing at Mary Flannagan, who got quite huffy at Dum for being so scornful of Shorty's cotton handkerchief.

"It was a very appropriate, manly handkerchief and I don't think it was at all nice of Dum Tucker to say such mean things about it," fumed Mary, refusing to be comforted. "I hate a sissy boy who uses fine handkerchiefs. The kind Shorty has are good for so many things. He uses them to dust his shoes with and lots of other things."

"Never mind, Mary, it was a nice handkerchief and if you want it, I'll go sneak it off the stage where old Miss Plumpton dropped it," I said, teasing our funny friend. I did get it and had it nicely laundered and put it on the school Christmas tree for Mary, much to her confusion.

Tweedles told me they had hardly been in their room five minutes when Miss Ball came to see them as an emissary from Miss Plympton. She brought Miss Plympton's apology for the slur put upon them in regard to the handkerchief. It seems that their attitude in that matter had quite won over that strange woman, as she herself never used anything but the finest linen handkerchiefs and she quite appreciated their feelings.

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"Miss Plympton hopes you will accept her apology," continued Miss Ball; "she also hopes you will assist her in every way to find out the offenders so she can bring them to justice."

"Now, Miss Ball, you know us well enough to feel that you are wasting your breath, don't you?" asked Dee.

"Well, yes, but you must remember I am merely an emissary."

"Well, as man to man, Miss Ball, is it up to us to tell all we suspect might possibly go on *outside* of the school grounds?"

"Oh! then it may not have been pupils from our school?"

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"Possibly not! But don't quote me. I merely suggest that you suggest," and Dee shut up like a clam.

Miss Ball was not at all in love with her job as emissary and had no idea of trying to force a confession from Tweedles, so she left them no wiser than she came and the Tuckers resumed their classes as though nothing had occurred to interrupt the peace of the day.

Miss Plympton seemed to have more respect for our crowd than she had before that scene in the assembly hall. The biggest thing that came from that experience, though, was that Dum and Dee Tucker immediately sent to Richmond for ladies' handkerchiefs.

"We'll save the big ones for blowers but we must have some showers!" they tweedled.

CHAPTER IX.

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ECCLESIASTICAL POWER.

"Girls! Girls! Zebedee has gone and done it!" yelled Dee, bursting in the door of 117 and waving a lettergram wildly over her head.

"Done what?" I gasped. Dee was so excited that I could not tell whether she was overcome with joy or grief. I had a terrible feeling way down in my bed-room slippers that maybe Zebedee had gone and got himself married.

It was quite early in the morning, at least ten minutes before breakfast, and we were just getting into our clothes when Dee, the last one coming from the bath, had run against the maid in the hall, bringing up this mysterious message from Zebedee.

"Oh, it is just like him!"

"What's just like him?" and Dum snatched the telegram from her sister, and read: "By wire-

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pulling, leg-pulling and visits to the Bishop and other clergy, have obtained a special dispensation for Tweedles, Page, Annie and Mary to be in Richmond for Thanksgiving game. Am wiring spondulix to Miss Plympton. Pack duds and take first train you can catch. I am treating the crowd. Zebedee."

We performed a Lobster Quadrille then and there in honour of Zebedee and then we gave the mystic rap for Annie and Mary. Of course Annie did not think she should accept the railroad trip from Zebedee and wondered what her father would say, but we simply overrode her objections. All the time we were getting into our clothes as fast as we could, as there was an ominous sound below of breakfast on the way, and in a moment the gong boomed forth and we raced down stairs, I still in my bedroom slippers and Dum with her plait on the inside of her middy, hoping to conceal the fact that she had not combed her hair, only smoothed it over.

Miss Plympton was not very gracious over our going. It was not usual for pupils to leave the school on Thanksgiving. That feast comes so close to Christmas it is quite an interruption to the education of the young; but what was she to do but comply? A special delivery letter from the Bishop, a telegram from two preachers and one from the Board of Directors of Gresham were certainly compelling, and there was nothing for her to do but consent. [112]

It was Wednesday and the next day was Thanksgiving. It seemed to me as though that day would never pass. We had to go to classes as usual and make a show of paying attention and reciting. Our train did not leave until six in the evening, at least, that was the one Miss Plympton decided we were to take, although we had hoped against hope that she would let us get off at noon. She was adamant on that score, however, and we had to be thankful that she would let us take that instead of keeping us over until the next morning, which would have meant arising at dawn and going breakfastless to a six a. m. local. [113]

Miss Plympton had been rather nicer to us since the episode in the last chapter. She had almost mastered the difference between Dum and Dee, and about once out of three times called them by their right names. She had always been rather nicer to me than to my chums and now she was, in a way, quite pleasant to me. This summons from Mr. Tucker had upset her recently acquired politeness and all day she found something to pick on our quintette. She chose as a subject of her history lecture the pernicious effect of arbitrary ecclesiastical power, which drew from me an involuntary smile. I thought she was off on a satisfying hobby and let my thoughts wander to the delights of our proposed trip to Richmond and a real blood and thunder football match between Carolina and Virginia. Suddenly I was awakened from my dream of bliss by Miss Plympton's addressing a remark to me:

"Miss Allison, why were the Estates General convoked but rarely under Charles VI and VII?" [114]

"Estates General?" I gasped for time. What was the woman talking about anyhow? I thought she was off on arbitrary ecclesiastical power and here she was firing Estates General at me and raking up old scandals on Charles VI and VII. I couldn't answer on the spur of the moment, so I just giggled.

"Miss Allison, I have been an instructor of history for many years and I have never yet found a pupil who could giggle her way through it. It is one subject that requires study."

I took the reprimand like a lamb and tried to concentrate, but Mr. Tucker's cheerful countenance kept forcing its way in front of Estates General, and what that history lesson was about I do not know to this day.

Six o'clock came at last and we piled on the train, the envy of all the girls at Gresham who had not had somebody pull wires and legs of the Bishop and other Clergy so they could go spend Thanksgiving in Richmond and see the famous game.

Our train did not puff into the station at Richmond until way into the night and we were tired and very hungry. Our food since a one o'clock dinner had been nothing but stacks of chocolate and crackers and chewing gum and fruit we had purchased from the train butcher, who passed us every five minutes of the journey with a fresh supply of tempting wares. [115]

"Hello, girls!" Zebedee embraced all of us with his kind eyes, but Tweedles with his arms. "Geewhilikins! but I am glad to see you! I was afraid you were never coming. Train an hour late and I know you are starving."

"Starving? Starved!" exclaimed Dum.

"Well, I've had some eats sent up to the apartment and maybe you can make out until morning on what I have there."

We packed ourselves two deep in the faithful Henry. We were tired and hungry but sleep was a million miles from the thought of any of us. When we arrived at the Tuckers' apartment and had satisfied the cravings of our inner men with the very substantial food that our host had provided for us, we decided that we might as well make a night of it, so we sat up to the wee small hours regaling the delighted Zebedee with tales of Gresham and Miss Plympton's chins. [116]

"I declare, you girls tell so many stirring tales of adventure I should think you would write a book about it. If it were possible for a mere man to do such a thing, I'd write a book for girls and put all of you in it."

"Please don't," I begged, "because I am going to do that very thing myself just as soon as I get through with school. 'Bright, clean, juvenile fiction,' as the ads say, that's what I mean to make of it."

"Are you going to put me in?" he pleaded.

"Of course! Aren't you in it? How could I make a book of all of us without you?"

"Well, if I am going to be in the great book of books as a hero of romance, I think I'd best go to bed and get some beauty sleep so I can make a good appearance in fiction. I've had a cot put up for myself in an empty apartment on the floor below so you young ladies can have the freedom of the flat. I'm going to let you sleep until luncheon. We have to get an early start for the ball park so we can get a good place. Speaking of romance,—did I tell you that Miss Mabel Binks is making a visit with your Cousin Park Garnett, Page?"

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"Heavens!" tweedled the twins. "Old Mabel Binks is always around."

"She is looking very handsome, and is quite toned down. She is having a ripping time in society and Mrs. Garnett is doing a lot for her, dinner parties, teas and such."

"I bet you have been to them and are being nice to her!" stormed Dum.

"Well, I have been so-so nice to her but not so terribly attentive. She is not my style exactly." But Dum and Dee would not be satisfied until Zebedee promised he would not be any nicer to Mabel Binks in the future than common politeness demanded, and that they were to be the judge of what common politeness did demand. Zebedee went off laughing to seek his lowly cot in the vacant apartment and we were soon asleep, but the last thing Tweedles said was: "Horrid old Mabel Binks!" And certainly the last thing I thought before slumber held me was the same thing.

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CHAPTER X.

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VIRGINIA VERSUS CAROLINA.

What a day that Thanksgiving was! Could anything be more fun than to be sixteen ('most seventeen); to have devoted friends; good health; to be allowed to sleep until mid-day; to get up to a good breakfast luncheon; and by one o'clock to be on the streets of Richmond en route for the great event of the year: the football match between Virginia and Carolina?

We were in such a gale that Zebedee threatened to lock us up for the day.

"I am afraid you will disgrace me before night," he declared.

The best thing of all that happened was a sharp ringing of the bell while we were having the luncheon Zebedee had brought from the café and served in the apartment, and who should come in but Father? Zebedee had long-distanced him to Bracken and in spite of the sickly condition of the neighbourhood and Sally Winn's having him up in the night, he had caught the train to Richmond and was like a boy off on a holiday.

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Instead of the snug little Henry Ford that we had expected to go to the game in, Zebedee had rented for the day a great seven-seated car that held us all quite comfortably. It was a rusty old thing but was decorated from end to end with blue and yellow, the University of Virginia colours. Our host had ready for us a dozen huge yellow chrysanthemums, two for each girl and one for each man. We looked like a float in a parade and as we chugged out Monument Avenue, every one turned to look at the gay car. Everybody had a horn and everybody blew like Gabriel on the last day.

Of course Zebedee had found out the very best place on the grounds to park the car and of course he got that place. He was a man of great resources and always seemed to know exactly where to apply for what he wanted. For instance, his getting permission for us to leave Gresham for Thanksgiving holidays was simply unprecedented. As he said, he had pulled every wire in sight, and where there wasn't a wire, he found a leg. Anyhow, there we were.

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"How on earth did you get such a grand place for the car?" asked Dee. A policeman seemed to be saving it for us, as the parking privileges were not very extensive at the ball grounds.

"Oh, newspaper men get there somehow. We have what one might call 'press-tige'."

We were wedged in between two cars, one decorated with the Virginia colours and one with the Carolina, white and light blue. Both were filled to overflowing with enthusiastic rooters for their respective states.

The crowd was immense. I never saw so many people together. All of them seemed gay and happy, and good nature was the order of the day. There was much pushing and crowding, but no one seemed to mind in the least. The grandstand was creaking and groaning with people, and every inch of space within six feet of the fence that enclosed the gridiron was packed and jammed with one solid mass of enthusiasm.

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Zebedee seemed to know about half of the people who passed us. He had his hat off more than he had it on and usually called out some greeting to his acquaintances, who one and all addressed him as: "Jeff."

Father saw many old cronies, schoolmates of by-gone years, members of his fraternity and learned doctors and surgeons, who, I noticed, greeted him with great respect and affection. Our car was the center of attraction seemingly. Young men and old stopped to speak to Father and Zebedee, were introduced to us and stayed to chat. Our old car gave several ominous squeaks as the visitors climbed on the steps or perched on the sides. It took it out in squeaking and did not go to pieces as I for a moment feared it would, but settled down into submission.

"If there isn't old Judge Grayson!" shouted Dee. "I wish he would look this way." There he was, our friend of Willoughby Beach. His old pink face was beaming with enthusiasm as he wedged his way through the crowd. [123]

"Grayson! Grayson! Rah, rah, rah!" and then Zebedee blew such a blast from his beribboned horn that the crowd trembled and turned as one man, and Judge Grayson, of course, turning with them, saw us. He waved his large soft felt hat and in a moment was up in the car greeting us with his old-fashioned courtesy.

"Ah! happy years! Once more, who would not be a boy?" Of course the dear old man had to greet us with a quotation. "Gad, Tucker, it is good to see you and your young ladies once more! Are you sure I won't crowd you, getting up in your car this way?"

"Crowd us, indeed! We've got room for a dozen friends if they were as welcome as you, eh, girls?" We agreed, but the rented car gave another groan.

Then the teams came trotting in, twenty-two stalwart giants.

"I can't tell one from the other," I said.

"There's George Massie, there, standing by himself to the left! Sleepy! Sleepy! Massie! Massie!" yelled Zebedee like a Comanche Indian. We all took it up until the object of our excitement heard his name above the roar of the crowd and looked our way. We were not so very far from him and he saw us and he said afterwards that the sun shone on Annie's hair so that he just knew who we were. [124]

"Hello, peoples!" Who but Wink White and Harvie Price should come clambering in our car from the back? Some good-natured passerby had given them a leg-up over the lowered top. The car gave another moan of agony. She was built to seat seven not to stand twenty, but stand at least twenty she had to.

I was still dignified with Wink and Harvie for the position they had put us in at Gresham, but they were so contrite and so jolly that I had to cave in and be pleasant. It was too bright a day to have a grouch with any one, and besides, they had not really got us into trouble after all. Zebedee thought as I did, that they were certainly selfish and thoughtless to place us where sure expulsion would have been the outcome had the authorities discovered that boys had come to the dance, and we had been in a measure party to the crime. [125]

Harvie and Wink had not heard of how the escapade had turned out, as we had had no opportunity of informing them. We had been very careful in speaking of the matter at all and had only divulged our part in the affair to a chosen few who had sworn never to tell a soul. It was too good a story to keep indefinitely, however, and now Dum and Dee together told the whole thing while the teams were trotting around, making senseless looking passes (senseless to the uninitiated, at least). The automobile rocked with laughter at their description of Wink's tan shoes, No. 8, that were much in evidence under the drapery, and Harvie's falsetto giggle that at one time turned into a baritone guffaw.

"What's the joke? What's the joke?" A strident voice broke into our gaiety. It could belong to only one person of my acquaintance. Sure enough, there stood Mabel Binks with all the glory of a grown-up society beau in her wake and all the manner of a month of debuting could give her. "Let me introduce Mr. Parker, girls. You just adore girls, don't you, Mr. Parker?" [126]

Mr. Parker, who was in a measure the Beau Brummel of Richmond, assured us he did and immediately took stock of our charms, at least that was his air, as Mabel, with many flourishes, presented us. She was quite impressive in her manner of introducing Tweedles and Annie Pore, and I heard her whisper behind her hand that Annie was a "descendant of nobilities." She almost ignored me altogether, but finally brought me in as "little Miss Allison from the country," and pretended to have entirely forgotten Mary's name.

Mr. Parker was a type I had never met before. He was good looking and clever in a way, always knowing the latest joke and the last bit of gossip and retailing his knowledge to his greatest advantage, that is, never getting it off to one person but saving himself for an audience worthy of his wit. He was older than Zebedee, in his forties I should say, but his countenance was as rosy as a boy's. Dee declared she knew for a fact that he had his face massaged every day. His attire was as carefully thought out as any belle's: socks and tie to match, shoes and gloves also to match, and scarf pin and jewelled wrist watch in harmony with his general get-up. [127]

He was a man, I was told, not of the F.F.V.'s, but from his earliest youth Society with a big S had been his object and he had made good. He was invited everywhere but went only to those

places that he felt would help him in his great object, that of being Dictator, as it were, to Society. He controlled the vote as to whether or not a débutante was a success. If he said she was to be the rage, she was the rage, and if her charms did not appeal to him, it was a very wonderful thing for her to get by with them. He was a man of no wealth, having held for many years the same position in a bank at a comfortable salary. It was no more than enough to enable him to belong to all clubs, to live in bachelor apartments, to support thirty pairs of trousers and a suitable number of coats and various grades of waistcoats, fancy and otherwise, and shoes and shoe-trees that mighty forests must have been denuded to obtain.

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Mr. Parker had smiled on the effulgent beauty of Mabel Binks, and her social fortune was made. Any girl with social ambition would rather be seen at the ball game with Hiram G. Parker than any other man in Richmond, although he was never known to have seats in the grandstand or to take a girl in an automobile. The honour of being with him was sufficient, and the prestige gained by his favour was greater than all the boxes in the grandstand could give or the delight of riding in a year-after-next model of the finest car built.

Mr. Parker made no excuses, they say he never did, but just handed his lady fair up into our car and stepped in after her as though they had received written invitations. The car was already full to overflowing and so overflow it did. Father and Wink spilled out and were soon walking arm-and-arm, evidently striking up quite a friendship. Mabel made her usual set at Zebedee, who was willy-nilly engrossed by her favour.

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Mr. Parker eyed all of us with the air of an appraiser and Dum said afterwards she felt as a little puppy in a large litter must feel when the hard-hearted owner is trying to decide which ones must be drowned. Before he could decide which ones of us, if any, would make successful débutantes, the game was in full swing and even Mr. Parker had to let the social game give way to that of football.

My, how we yelled! We yelled when Virginia came near making a point, and we yelled when she came near losing one. When we could yell no longer we blew our horns until throats were rested enough to take up the burden of yelling once more. Zebedee, standing out on the engine to make room for his many guests, invited and otherwise, behaved like a windmill in a cyclone. He waved his arms and legs and shouted encouragement to our side until they could not have had the heart to be beaten.

Father's behaviour was really not much more dignified than Zebedee's. Love for his Alma Mater was as strong as ever and he rooted with as much fervor as any one on the grounds.

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Sleepy's playing was wonderful. I could hardly believe he was the same man we had known at Willoughby. There was nothing sleepy about him now; on the contrary, he was about as wide awake a young man as one could find. He seemed to have the faculty of being in many places at one time, and if he once got the ball in those mighty hands, it took eleven men to stop him. When he would drop, great would be the fall thereof. Sorry, indeed, did I feel for the one who was under him when he fell. He must have weighed a good two hundred pounds and over. He certainly did the best playing on the Virginia team, so we thought, and when he made a touch-down that Zebedee said should go down in history, we were very proud of being friends with the great Massie.

We won! Everybody in our car was wild with delight, but I must say my pleasure was somewhat dampened when I saw the people in the car next to us, the one decorated in light blue and white, in such deep dejection. A middle-aged man was openly weeping and his nice, pleasant-looking wife was trying to console him and at the same time wiping her own eyes. Their son was on the Carolina team. It seems strange for non-combatants to take defeat so much to heart, but it is just this kind of enthusiasm that makes the annual game between Virginia and Carolina what it is: something to live for from year to year in the minds of a great many persons. If Father, with no son to root for, could have tears of joy in his eyes because Virginia won, why should not the father of the Carolina player weep copiously when his state lost?

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The victorious team were picked up bodaciously by the shouting crowd and borne on their shoulders to the waiting cars. The great Massie, begrimed almost beyond recognition, passed us in a broad grin. Zebedee leaped over the fence and shook the young giant's dirty hand.

"Come to dinner with us! Got a table reserved at the Jefferson! Dinner at six! Dance after!" Of course Sleepy was pleased to come, having espied the sun glinting on Annie's hair.

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"Of all sights the rarest
And surely the fairest
Was the shine of her yellow hair;
In the sunlight gleaming,
Each gold curl seeming
A thing beyond compare.

Oh, were it the fashion
For love to be passion,
And knights still to joust for the fair,
There'd be tender glances
And couching of lances
At the shine of her golden hair."

I know Sleepy felt like a knight of old, way down in his shy heart, as he grabbed that football and turned over all his doughty opponents making for the goal. In his heart he wore Annie's colours and in his mind he kissed her little hand. Annie had been receiving Harvie's devotion with much politeness, but now that Sleepy was the hero of the hour, she turned from her more dapper admirer and waved her hand to the delighted and blushing George. Girls all love a football player. They are simply made that way. I think perhaps it is some old medieval spirit stirring within us, and we, too, fancy ourselves to be the ladies faire and idealize the tumbling, rolling, sweating, swearing boys into our own true knights.

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After the Virginia team, borne by in triumph, came the poor Carolina men. They had put up a splendid fight and there had been moments when their success seemed possible. They took their defeat like the gentlemen they were, but I saw their mouths were trembling and one enormous blond with a shock of hair resembling our big yellow chrysanthemums, had his great hands up before his mud-caked face and his mighty shoulders were shaking with sobs, sobs that came from a real broken heart. I hope a hot bath and a cold shower and a good Thanksgiving dinner helped to mend that heart, but it was certainly broken for the time being if ever heart was.

Now we all of us yelled for Carolina, yelled even harder than we had for our own team, and they gave us a sickly smile of gratitude.

During the game Mr. Parker had been very busy in his polite attentions to all of us, and from his generally agreeable manner it looked as though he thought we were all worth saving and none of the litter was to be drowned. Mabel had renewed her attack on Zebedee and had crawled out on the engine by him, where she stood clutching his arm for support and generally behaving as though he were her own private property.

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"She makes me sick!" declared Dum. "And Zebedee acting just as though he liked it!"

"Well, what must he do? Let her fall off?" I asked.

"Yes, let her fall off and stay off!"

All was over at last and the automobiles were busy backing out of their places. Mr. Parker gathered in the pushing Mabel, who had done everything in her power to be asked to dinner with us at the Jefferson, but Zebedee had had so many quiet digs from Tweedles that even had he considered her an addition to the party, he would have been afraid to include her.

Our car was the last one out of the grounds because Mabel took so long to make up her mind to get off the engine and accept an invitation from some acquaintances who passed and asked her to let them take her home.

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"See you to-night!" she called affectionately to Tweedles as she finally took advantage of the offer.

"Not if we see you first!" they tweedled, in an aside.

CHAPTER XI.

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THANKSGIVING DINNER.

"Just an hour for you girls to rest up and beautify yourselves and it will be time to break our fast at the Jefferson!" exclaimed Mr. Tucker as we swung up in our rocking old car to the door of the apartment house. "We will be eleven strong, counting White, Price and Massie. The Judge is to join us in the lobby of the hotel. I'll see if I can find some one to make it twelve."

"All right, but not Mabel Binks!" warned Dee.

"Why not? She isn't so bad. I find her quite agreeable," teased Zebedee. "I think she would be quite an addition to the party—"

"Well, you just get her if you want to, but I'll let you know I will smear cranberry sauce on her if she sits near me," stormed Dum.

I thought Tweedles made a great mistake in nagging so about Mabel. I had known very few men in my life, not near as many as the twins, but I had learned with the few I did know that a bad way to manage them was to let them know you were trying to. I, myself, felt rather blue about the way Mabel was monopolizing Zebedee, but I would have bitten out my tongue by the roots before I would have let him know it. Of course fathers are different from just friends. I don't know what I should have done if some flashy, designing person had made a dead set at Father. There weren't any flashy, designing females in our part of the county, and if there had been, I fancy they would not have aspired to the quiet, simple life that being the wife of a country doctor insured. For my part I should have liked a stepmother since I could not have my own mother. I often thought how nice it would have been if Father could have had a sweet wife to be with him while I was off at school. I trusted Father's good taste and judgment enough to know he would choose the right kind of woman if he chose at all. He never chose at all, however, although the many relatives who visited us during the summer made many matches for him in their minds. I

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hoped if he did make up his mind to go "a-courting" that the stepmother would wear my size shoes and gloves, and maybe her hats would be becoming to me. Even Mammy Susan tried to play Cupid and get Docallison to marry; but he used to say:

"No, no! Matrimony is too much of a lottery and the chances are against a man's drawing two prizes in one lifetime."

Tweedles fought the idea of a stepmother with all their might and main. I think one reason that it was ever uppermost in their minds was that so many well meaning friends were constantly suggesting to them the possibility and suitability of Zebedee's taking unto himself another wife.

"Well, we'll make it hot for her all right, whoever she may be," they would declare. I never had a doubt that they would, too.

I felt it was really an insult to Mr. Tucker to think he could become infatuated with such a person as Mabel Binks, but then, on the other hand, I knew how easy it is to flatter men; and while Zebedee did not like to be run after, Mabel's evident admiration and appreciation of him would, as a matter of course, soften his heart. [139]

Mabel was, however, not asked to make the twelfth at that Thanksgiving feast. Whether it was the dread of the battle royal that Dum was prepared to fight with cranberry sauce or just simply that Zebedee did not want her himself I did not know, but I was certainly relieved to find that our host had decided to leave the seat vacant.

"We can let Mr. Manners sit in it," he said, squaring his chin at Dum. The Tuckers had played a game, when they were younger, called "Mr. Manners." That fictitious gentleman was always invited in when any rudeness was in evidence. Dum certainly had been rude about the cranberry sauce.

"Yes, do!" snapped Dum, "and let him sit next to you—you started it—"

"All right, honey, we'll put him between us and both of us will try to learn from him." So peace was restored.

We had entered the Jefferson Hotel while Dum and her father were having the little sparring match, and as we came into the enclosure where the fountain plays and the baby alligators and turtles splash among the ferns and the beautiful statue of Thomas Jefferson stands in all its quiet peace and dignity, it seemed to me that quarreling was entirely unnecessary and I said as much. [140]

"You are right, Page," said Mr. Tucker. "There is always something singularly soothing and peaceful about this spot and it seems kind of an insult to Thomas Jefferson to be anything but well-bred in his presence."

Our table was laid in the large dining-room and we were hungry enough to go right in to dinner, but the lobby was so full of excited and boisterous people rushing back and forth and greeting each other, hunting lost friends, finding old acquaintances, etc., that we hung over the balcony looking at the gay throng and forgetting that we were short one meal for the day, having crowded breakfast and luncheon into one.

"Service is mighty slow on a crowded day like this, so you had better come eat," and Zebedee led the way to our table, where Stephen White, Harvie Price and George Massie immediately joined us. We had picked up Judge Grayson in the lobby. [141]

Of course George, alias Sleepy, was the toast of the occasion, and he blushed so furiously that he looked as though Dum had carried out her threat against Mabel and smeared poor, inoffensive and modest Sleepy with cranberry juice. We asked him so many questions and paid him so much attention that Zebedee finally interfered and made us let him alone.

"You won't let the boy eat and I know he is starving," and so he was,—and so were all of us. We ate right through a long table d'hôte dinner, ordering every thing in sight from blue points to café noir. Wherever there was a choice of dainties we took both, much to the amusement of the very swell waiter, whose black face shone with delight in anticipation of the handsome tip he knew by experience was forthcoming when Jeffry Tucker gave his girls a party. [142]

"Pink ice cream for me!" exclaimed Father, when the question of dessert arose.

"And me! And me!" from Mary and Annie and me.

"Don't stop with that," begged Dee. "Dum and I always get everything on the menu for dessert except pumpkin pie. We can't go that."

"Now pumpkin pie is all I want," put in the dear old Judge. "I feel sure you do not know the delights of pumpkin pie or you would not speak so slightly of it. Do you happen to know this piece of poetry?"

"Ah! on Thanksgiving Day
When from East and from West,
From North and from South
Come the pilgrim and guest;
When the care-wearied man
Seeks his mother once more;
And the worn matron smiles

Where the girl smiled before:
What moistens the lip,
And what brightens the eye,
What brings back the past
Like the rich pumpkin pie?"

"Brava! Brava! Bring me some pumpkin pie along with the pink ice cream," cried Father. [143]

"And me!"

"And me!"

"And me!"

The cry echoed from first one and then the other, all down the line. The waiter came in bearing great stacks of quarters of pies, since every one of the eleven guests had demanded it.

"Th'ain't no mo'!" he said solemnly, as he put down the last slice in front of Zebedee. And that sent us off into such a gale of merriment that all the dining-room turned to see what was the matter. But the Richmond public seemed to think that what Jeffery Tucker and his twins did was all right, and if they chose to have a party and laugh so loud that one could not hear the band play, it was a privilege they were entitled to and no one must mind.

I know we sat at that table two hours, as the service was slow with so many guests in the hotel. The food was good and we had plenty of time and when our ravenous appetites were somewhat appeased by the first courses, we cared not how long it took. We were having a jolly time with a congenial crowd, and a table in the big dining-room at the Jefferson was just as good a place to have it as any. [144]

The ball was not to begin until ten, so when we had devoured the last crumb of the bountiful repast we adjourned to a motion picture show to fill in the time.

Wink White seemed rather anxious to have a talk with me, evidently desirous of making peace in regard to the masquerade on Allhalloween, but just as he was with some formality offering me his escort to the movies, Zebedee came up and without further ado or "by your leave," tucked my arm in his and led off the procession with me.

"I haven't seen a thing of you, little friend, on this mad trip and I want to talk to you," and talk to me he did, about everything under the sun, but principally about whether I thought Gresham was helping Tweedles and bringing out the best that was in them.

"They seem to me to be slangier than ever," which amused me very much as Mr. Tucker himself was the slangiest grown-up person I had ever known, and why he should have expected anything else of his girls I could not see. [145]

"All of us are slangy, but I can't see that it is taught to us at Gresham. In fact, I believe that Tweedles introduce all the newest slang and we sit at their feet to learn. I don't know where they get it, but every now and then they come out with a choice bit that is immediately gobbled up and incorporated into our lexicon of slang."

"I'm afraid they get it from me," and Zebedee looked so solemn and sad that I could not help laughing. I knew they got it from him, and while I thought Gresham was not the place it had been under Miss Peyton's management, I did not think it should be blamed for the things that it was not responsible for.

"Sometimes I think it would have been better for them if I had married again. Some real good settled stepmother would have taught them how to behave but, somehow, I have never had a leaning myself towards real good settled persons who might have been good for Tweedles. When the possibility of marrying again has ever come into my head, and I must confess that sometimes it does when I am lonesome, I can only think of some bright young girl as the one for me, some one near the age of Tweedles; and then I know that Tweedles would raise Cain. And no matter how fond they might have been of the girl beforehand, the moment they should get a suspicion that I am interested in her they would—well, they might smear her with cranberry sauce." [146]

"But Tweedles never did like Mabel Binks!"

"Of course not! I was not thinking about Mabel Binks," and Zebedee went off into a roar of laughter. "I just meant that that form of revenge might be handed out to any luckless lady who met with my approval. I think Miss Binks could do as much damage with cranberry sauce as the twins combined. She seems to me a person singularly fitted to look out for Number One." [147]

"I think she is, but in a battle royal I bet on Tweedles," and so I did.

I was greatly relieved to hear Zebedee say that he was not talking about Mabel in connection with a nice settled stepmother for his girls, but I wondered who it could be. Maybe she would be at the ball that night and I could have an opportunity of judging whether or not she might get on with my dear friends. I felt sorry for them, terribly sorry, and I felt sorry for Zebedee's little Virginia, the poor little wife who had lived such a very short time. How did she feel about having a successor? "How faithless men are!" I thought, forgetting entirely that I had rather wanted my own father to marry again.

Anyhow, it was not Mabel Binks!

CHAPTER XII.

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THE BALL.

I can't fancy that the time will ever come when I shall be too jaded to be thrilled at the mere mention of a ball. On that Thanksgiving evening it seems to me I had every thrill that can come to a girl. I had been to but few dances—the one at the Country Club the winter before and the hop at Willoughby were the only real ones, and this grown-up ball with the lights and music and the handsomely gowned women and dapper men made me right dizzy with excitement. The twins took a ball as rather a matter of course, having been dancing around with their young father ever since they could toddle, but Annie's eyes were sparkling with joy and Mary Flannagan, who was very bunchy in "starch paper blue" taffeta, the very stiff kind with many gathers around her waist, was jumping up and down, keeping time to the music.

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Mary, with all her bunchiness, was an excellent dancer and as light on her feet as a gas balloon, (if a gas balloon could have feet). Sometimes her voluminous skirts had quite the appearance of a balloon and seemed to buoy her up. Mary was so frank and honest and gay that every one had to like her, and, strange to say, boys, who as a rule are quite snobbish about appearances and insist on a certain amount of beauty or style in the girls they go with, all liked Mary and she never lacked for a partner at a dance. She was so amusing and witty that they lost sight of her freckled face and scrambled red hair. Mary had good hard common sense, too, and such a level head that we were very apt to ask her advice on every subject in spite of the fact that she was many months younger than any of us.

A cross-eyed cow would have had a good time at that Thanksgiving ball. There were so many stags and all of them seemed so eager to dance that the girls were really overworked. Wink and Harvie introduced many University of Virginia men to us and we had the honour of dancing with every member of the football team who was able to hobble. George Massie, poor Sleepy, who had been so wide awake on the gridiron and so unconscious of himself, in the ball room was overcome with shyness. He was a very good dancer if he did break through a crowd with somewhat the manner of a centre rush. He danced with Annie Pore wherever he could get to her and when some eager swain tried to break in he would seize her in his mighty grasp and bear her away with about the same ease he would a football. If opponents went down under and before him, why then next time they would know better than get in his way.

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Annie looked very lovely. The faithful white *crêpe de chine* had been cleaned and was still doing its duty. I heard many persons ask who she was and especially eager did the public seem to establish her identity when the great and only Hiram G. Parker singled her out for his attentions.

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"Does she belong in Richmond?"

"She is sure to be a next year's belle with this start she is getting with Hiram G."

"I can't see what he sees in her. She has no style to speak of and that dress is plainly last year's model," this from a lady whose daughter was what put in my mind the remark I just made about cross-eyed cows. You felt she was led out to dance only because of the superfluity of males. "Now that Miss Binks from Newport News," continued the mystified lady, "that girl has some style and you can see why Hiram G. took a fancy to her. Of course those Binkses are common as pig tracks but the mother is well connected and they do say that old Binks has made money hand over fist. Mrs. Garnett met her at Willoughby and asked her up to visit her. You may be sure she is rich because we know she has no claim to being an aristocrat. Park Garnett demands either blood or money."

All of this I overheard between dances. I was standing on the edge of the crowd with Wink White with whom I had been laboriously dancing. I never could dance with Wink; we never seemed to be able to get in step. I knew it was his fault and he thought it was mine. He would persist, however, in asking me to dance. The conversation of the chaperones was rather embarrassing to both of us as Mabel was Wink's cousin, his family being the good connection that Mrs. Binks could boast of, and Mrs. Garnett was my cousin. We were forced, though, to hear more as we were wedged in near them for a few moments.

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"They do say that Jeffry Tucker is paying Miss Binks a lot of attention. I saw her in his car at the game to-day and my daughter tells me that the girl is begigged about him. She actually broke a partial engagement with Hiram G. Parker to go somewhere with Mr. Tucker last week."

"Well, well! She looks fit to cope with those Heavenly Twins!"

"Oh! They aren't so bad now. They do say they are toned down a lot. School has been good for them."

"They never were to say bad—just wild and harum-scarum. I'd hate to think Jeffry Tucker would give his girls such a young stepmother. They need some middle-aged person."

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"Yes, but poor Jeffry! Can't you see him tied to some middle-aged person? He is too young a man to marry for his children's sake."

"Well, he's too old a man to marry a girl right out of school and expect his daughters to respect her."

I was certainly glad to start dancing again even with the four-footed Wink. It is a strange thing what makes a good dancer. Some of the most awkward-looking persons dance beautifully and, vice versa, some very graceful ones are as stiff as pokers on the ballroom floor. Now Wink was a very well set up young man, tall, broad shouldered, with an erect carriage, almost soldierly in his bearing. It is all right to walk like a soldier but to dance the way a soldier walks is not so exemplary. Wink always had a kind of "Present arms! March!" manner and a girl does not like to be held and carried around like a musket.

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Dee declared she thought Wink was a good dancer and she could make out finely with him, and thank goodness, Wink had found this out and broke in on Dee more than he did on me. I liked to talk to him; he was a very bright, agreeable young man with original ideas and lots of ambition. If only his ambition had not directed his attentions to me! I could not get over a certain embarrassment with him occasioned by the ridiculous proposal he had made me while we were at Willoughby. He had said to me then that he did not know how much he loved me until he saw me with my hair done up like a grown-up, and I had joked and told him that I could not judge of my feelings for him until he grew a moustache. He had immediately left off shaving his upper lip and now, to my confusion, every time I looked at him there bristled a very formidable moustache.

Wink was very good looking, with nice blue eyes and a straight nose. I don't know why it seemed such a huge jest for him to be trying to make love to me. Lots of girls my age had devoted lovers, at least according to their accounts they did. I was almost seventeen and it would be rather fun, I thought, to encourage him and even have a ring to put very conspicuously on my left hand on the engagement finger, but when I thought of his "lollapalussing" ways that night on the piazza at Willoughby I just knew I could not stand it.

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"Lollapalussing" was a Tweedles word and meant sentimental spooning and a hand-holding tendency. We used that word at Gresham to describe the girls who have a leaning, clinging-vine way of flopping on you. Our quintette was very much opposed to lollapalussers, male or female. I fancy when you are very much in love that lollapalussing is not so bad, but then I wasn't at all in love, certainly not with Wink.

Father had taken a great fancy to Wink and the attraction seemed mutual. They talked together a great deal, and even at the ball when the young man was not dancing with either Dee or me, he would seek out Father, who was looking on at the dancing with great interest, and the two evidently found much to converse about.

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"Page," said Father, coming up to me as I was standing for a moment with Mr. Tucker, after a most glorious dance in which not once had we missed step or bumped into any one, "I have asked Mr. White down to Bracken for a visit during the Christmas holidays. I want him to see the country," putting his hand affectionately on Wink's shoulder. "He is thinking of settling in the country after he gets his M.D., and has some hospital practice, and I am looking out for some one to throw my mantle on, as it were."

"Oh—ye—that would be fine," I stammered, and I hate myself yet for blushing like a fool rose. Zebedee saw it and he looked so sad, just exactly as he had the winter before when Mr. Reginald Kent asked Dum for a lock of her hair. I did wish I could make him understand that it made not a whip stitch of difference to me where Wink White settled. That I was nothing but a little girl and did not care a bit for beaux, except, of course, for dancing partners, and maybe a candy beau or two. Every girl wants that kind. But as for serious, young, would-be doctors growing moustaches and coming to settle in our end of the county—it made me tired. I did not know how to let my kind friend know it did, though, and as just then the chrysanthemum-headed giant from Carolina, the one I had seen weeping on the field after the game, came up to claim a dance, I had to leave. A moment afterwards I had the doubtful pleasure of seeing Zebedee engaged in the gyrations of some new fangled dance with the beaming Mabel Binks in his arms.

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Mabel was certainly looking handsome. "I'll give it to her," as Mammy Susan says when she admits something pleasant about any one for whom she has no regard. She was dressed in a flame-coloured chiffon that set off her fiery beauty which was accentuated by the many diamonds, rather too many for a young girl, but I think it is usually the tendency of those who have no diamonds to wear to think that the ones who do have them wear too many. Needless to say that I have no diamonds to wear.

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"Isn't she the limit?" hissed Dum, as we stopped dancing near each other and Zebedee and his partner kept on for a moment after the music had stopped. "I call it lollapalussy to dance after the band quits."

"She is looking mighty handsome, don't you think?"

"Handsome! She looks oochy koochy to me! Too like the Midway to suit my taste."

Well, we had certainly had a wonderful time and I was not going to let anything ruin it for me. Stephen White could grow a moustache as big as a hedge and come and settle all over the county if he wanted to, and Mr. Jeffrey Tucker could dance with a loud-mouthed girl in flame-coloured chiffon until he scorched himself if he wanted to. I had been to a ball and been something of a belle and now I was tired and sleepy and wanted to get to bed and talk over things with the girls,—I did wish though that I had not blushed like a fool rose just at the wrong time and that

CHAPTER XIII.

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NODS AND BECKS.

"Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful jollity,
Quips and Cranks, and wanton Wiles,
Nods and Becks, and Wreathèd Smiles,
Such as hang on Hebe's cheek,
And love to live in dimple sleek."

quoted Mary Flannagan. "There is a name for our magazine, right there in sober-sided old Milton."

"Why, that's as hackneyed as can be," objected Dum. "It seems to me that every school magazine I ever read was called 'Quips and Cranks.' Let's get something real original and different and try to make the mag the same way."

"Of course I didn't mean 'Quips and Cranks.' I mean 'Nods and Becks.' I think that would be a bully name."

And so did all of us, and "Nods and Becks" was unanimously elected as the name for the school paper that we were striving to get out before Christmas.

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I was chosen editor-in-chief, much to my astonishment. It seemed to me that one of the Tuckers should have had that job, with their father a real live editor. They must have inherited some of his ability; but the Lit. Society would have me and I had to turn in and do the best I could. I didn't mind the writing end of it so much as the part I had in turning down some of the effusions that were handed in by members of the society. Our object in the publishing of this magazine was to make it as light and gay as possible.

We had chosen Christmas as our season for publication and that meant getting very busy after our Thanksgiving jaunt. We really had intended to use the little holiday we were to have at that time to get our magazine in shape. We called it a magazine for dignity, but it was really more of a newspaper.

I am going to publish the whole thing just to show what girls can do at school. Every one thought it was very creditable. We had lots of ads from the tradespeople at Gresham and a few from Richmond firms, enough to pay for the printing.

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CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF *NODS AND BECKS.*

GRESHAM, VA.

SONNET TO SANTA CLAUS.
BY PAGE ALLISON.

Pan may be dead, but Santa Claus remains,
And once a year he riseth in his might.
Oft have I heard, in silences of night,
Tinkling of bells and clink of reindeer chains
As o'er the roof he sped through his domains,
When youthful eyes had given up the fight
To glimpse for once the rotund, jolly wight,
Who in a trusting world unchallenged reigns.
Last and the greatest of all Gods is he,
Who suffereth little children and is kind;
And when I've rounded out my earthly span
And face at last the Ancient Mystery,
I hope somewhere in Heaven I shall find
Rest on the bosom of that good old man.

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BEAUTY HINTS AND ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.
By MARY FLANNAGAN.

Dear Editor:

I have cut two sleeves for the wrong arm in trying to make my new velour coat out of half a yard less goods than the pattern called for. I can't match the goods now. What must I do?

(signed) AGITATED KATE.

Dear Kate:

Put one sleeve in hind part before and then get a Teddy Bear or a plush monkey matching your coat as near as possible or in pleasing contrast to it if you can't get it to match, and tack it under your arm. It will hide the discrepancy and at the same time give a chic, stylish punch to your costume. It would be better to sew it as you would find it something of a strain on bargain days to have to hold it and you might forget.

(signed) EDITOR OF BEAUTY HINTS.

Dear Editor:

I am losing my good figure. What can I do to keep it?

(signed) SYLVIA.

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Dear Sylvia:

Pin it on tighter. Try black safety pins, they seem to be stronger than white.

(signed) EDITOR OF BEAUTY HINTS.

FACTS ABOUT FATIMA.

It is the style to be tall and slender. Assume a virtue if you have it not and you who are short and fat, don't grow any shorter and fatter.

The following obesity rules will prove very helpful to my correspondent who signs herself, Miss Rosy Round:

Stand up for twenty minutes after meals (if you must have meals).

Eat no potatoes.

Eat no bread.

Avoid all starchy food.

Avoid meats of all kinds.

Fish is fattening.

Never touch sweets or pastry.

Eat no fruit for fear of uric acid.

Never drink water with your meals, but between meals do nothing but drink water, all the time that you can spare from the gymnastics that must be kept up to keep down the disfiguring fat.

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Always leave the table hungry, but take a pickle with you, a large dill pickle is the best for your purpose. Eat a great deal of pickle; it may ruin your complexion but a good complexion is only skin deep while fatness goes straight through.

Sleep in your stays if you can, but if you can't just don't sleep. Sleep is a fattening habit at best. Keep a pickle under your pillow and take a bite when you think of it.

Lose your temper on all occasions, as nothing is more conducive to stoutness than placidity.

Stop speaking of yourself as a Fatty, and begin to speak of yourself as slender. Remember the power of Mind over Matter. Lead a lean life and think thin thoughts; dress in diaphanous gauze; make hair-splitting distinctions; talk and think much of your slender purse; walk the narrow way and have ever in your mind the eye of the needle through which you shall finally have to pass.— Before you know it you will lose pounds and pounds of flesh.

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RECIPES TRIED IN MY OWN KITCHEN (NIT).

BY CAROLINE TUCKER.

A GRESHAM CLUB SANDWICH.

Take two tender new pupils (Freshmen preferred, Juniors out of the question), stick them together in a corner, with a thin slice of reserve between them, season to taste with some spicy gossip and a little lollapalusser. After a year in a cool place they will be fit to eat.

* * * * *

BROWN BETTY À LA FACULTY.

Take two crusty members of the faculty and let them grate against each other until both are reduced to crumbs. Place in baking dish a layer of crumbs and a layer of tart apples of discord well chopped. Sweeten well with high-toned politeness, veiled with sarcasm. Serve piping hot with the same kind of sauce you give to the gander.

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* * * * *

FRENCH DRESSING AS SERVED AT GRESHAM.

Let the ingredients stay in bed until ten minutes before breakfast, then in a wild scramble cover with a thin layer of clothes without the formality of bathing or even taking off nightgown when breakfasting *en famille*. Do hair with a lick and a promise and beat all the other girls to the table.

* * * * *

FASHION NOTES.
By VIRGINIA TUCKER.

The newest fad among the women who know and know they know, is to have their perfume harmonize with their costumes. An up-to-date society woman would no more wear a blue dress and smell of lavender sachet than she would wear a lavender hat with said blue dress. Vera Violet must go with a purple dress; Attar of Roses with a pink; New Mown Hay with green,—and so on.

One very smart grande dame at a fine function, given lately at Gresham, gowned in a biscuit-coloured broadcloth, had a faint, delicious odour of hot rolls.

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Hats are still worn hind part before and veils are put on to stay with no visible opening. One wonders sometimes "how the apple got in the dumpling."

Some of the newest veils have a sliding dot, to be worn over or near the mouth. This can be opened by one knowing the combination and then a small aperture is discovered that will admit of a straw. The soft drink drugstore man need not despair.

* * * * *

It is not considered good taste to wear more than three shades of false hair at one time, and a similarity in the texture of the material used should be aimed at. The puffs must be of one shade and material although it would be too much to expect of a woman to have them match absolutely with the switch, rat, pompadour and bun.

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Rats are no longer in vogue but traps are now considered the sanitary and proper things. This steel construction lowers the fire rates, which is much in its favour. If we keep on with this false hair craze what will we come to? Perhaps to the fate of:

"This old man with a very long beard,
Who said: 'Tis just as I feared,
A lark and a wren,
Two owls and a hen
Have builded a nest in my beard."

If you have not hair enough of your own to cover the springs, there are plenty of kinds, colours and materials resembling human hair to be bought for a song. Goat hair is used a great deal as it is very durable and strong,—too strong in one sense, as:—

"You may break, you may shatter
The vase as you will,
But the scent of the roses
Will cling 'round it still."

* * * * *

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JOKES AND NEAR JOKES.
NANCY BLAIR, EDITOR.

The son of an eminent preacher was greatly interested in the story of Adam and Eve. One night the child seemed very restless, tossing and turning in his crib. The father leaned over him, asking: "My child, what is the matter? Why don't you go to sleep?"

"Oh, Father, I can't! I've got such a pain in my ribs. I'm awful 'fraid God is sending me a wife."

* * * * *

Little Anne, aged five, was asked what she was fasting on during Lent. She answered, "Washing my hands."

* * * * *

A little girl who had never been to a wedding was greatly excited when one was going on across the street. She was especially interested in the little flower girls as they tripped out of the carriage in their dainty white frocks.

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"Mother!" she exclaimed. "If Daddy dies, will you marry again?"

"No, my dear! Never! Why do you ask?"

"Cause, Mother, I do so hope you will and let me be your little flower girl."

* * * * *

Customer—That was the driest, flattest sandwich I ever tried to chew into!

Waiter—Why, here is your sandwich! You ate your check.

* * * * *

One of the Sophomores wants to take Psychology because she says she understands that a course in it teaches you to do your hair up in a lovely Psyche knot—A Psychic Phenomenon!

* * * * *

Jean Rice has burst into poetry, viz.:

"Come to my arms,
You bundle of charms!
With the greatest enthusiasm
I will clasp you to my bosiasm."

Lines written to Miss Polly Kent:

There was a young lady named Kent,
Who declared she had not a cent,
She remembered a quarter
She had hid in her garter,
But on looking found that, too, had went.

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* * * * *

A touching poem addressed to Miss Grace Greer, of Chicago, Ill.

Miss Greer is the champion gum-chewer of Gresham.

There was a young maid from the West,
Who chewed gum with such marvelous zest,
That they named a committee,
Both tactful and witty
Who suggested she let her jaws rest.

* * * * *

THE CORRESPONDENCE CURE.
By PAGE ALLISON.

CHAPTER I.

"That's just what I'll do for you, Hal. I'll write to this Uncle Sam person and get him to give you one of his letter treatments," said Mr. Allen, Hal's daddy.

Jo Allen was so young that his incorrigible young son called him by his first name and regarded him as "one of the fellers" instead of a father; consequently he thought his own judgment as reliable as his Dad's and paid as much heed to his orders and requests as he would to one of the "fellers."

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"Thunder! I ain't sick. What I gotter have a treatment for?"

"I didn't mean anything like paregoric, or milk and eggs and a teaspoonful of this in half a glass of water after meals. It seems to be something like this: an old man, calling himself 'Uncle Sam,' advertises in the *Times* that he will write fatherly letters to difficult boys for \$50.00 a course."

"Aw, Jo! I swear, I bet it's a lot of stuff about 'do unto others.'" Hal always objected to other people's suggestions.

"Well, we'll take a chance on it. You don't like my methods, if you can call 'em that. You are my first and only offspring and I don't seem to have much maternal instinct and no judgment where you are concerned. Son, it is as hard for you not to have your mother as it is for me not to have

"It's all right, Jo, you know more 'bout being a father than I do 'bout being a son. But bring on your Uncle Sam and we can see what will happen. I don't have to read the letters if he writes a lot of rot."

"Nine o'clock! I ought to be at the office and and you ought to be at school. Don't play hookey again to-day," Jo Allen said as he reached for his hat.

Jo was a corporation lawyer and when he told the other members of his firm about his latest plans for bringing up his son, they all laughed.

"What next, Jo? 'Sons put on the right path by mail.' It's a joke all right and so are you and Hal. You can't do a thing with that kid! When he stole the preacher's white horse and painted 'Hell' on it you just laughed. Why don't you beat him up a little?" inquired Jones good-naturedly.

"But he is not downright bad, he is just mischievous and full of life. I can't do anything to him because it is all just what I used to do when I was a kid,—behold the monument!" [174]

"He looks so much like you that I always think something has happened to the clock and it is twenty years ago whenever I see him. He's got your snappy grey eyes and black hair and Sally's Greek instead of our honored partner's 'Roaming.'"

Jo was always pleased when it was said that his son looked like him, for he knew that they were both of them extremely goodlooking. And, too, he was secretly proud of his slightly Roman nose, which did add a certain air of distinction to such a young man.

He dictated a letter to Uncle Sam and two days later Hal got the first installment.

"Dear Hal:

"When I was a boy of twelve, just your age, I had just about the reputation you have. But my father had a family of seven children, of which I was the youngest, so when I cut up he knew just what to do with me. He realized that I had a great deal of surplus energy and having no good way of working it off, I always got into mischief and sometimes into rather serious trouble. [175]

"Your Dad told me about your stealing the minister's horse and putting a large red 'Hell' on one of his sides. When I was a boy I remember that I made a bomb out of a little powder and an old sock and put it under the porch of a Negro church (Hal, as man to man, I trust you not to try this stunt). Of course I stayed to watch the fun. I thought the fuse was longer than it was and came closer to adjust it—Bang! and I was left with no eyebrows. I was too scared to run and the darkeys began to pour out, threatening darkly as to the future welfare of my soul. They caught me and took me to the county lockup. That evening my brother came and bailed me out. My father asked me where my eyebrows were, and I said, 'I reckon part of them are by the Nigger church.' Of course he gradually got the details and a very thick silence followed. Then he told me just what I am going to tell you. But first,—Hal, don't you think it's funny what a passion all boys have to torment the parsons of both the white and black race? I do. [176]

"Dad said that I needed to be kept busy and with something that gave me pleasure. He was never strong on punishment and he suggested something that pleased me mightily. He said that if I would build a canoe and a pair of paddles by the last of May he would give me and three of my friends a camp for two weeks by the river. I was glad my eyebrows were gone, for who doesn't like to camp?

"Now, Son, you ask your dad if he won't make this same agreement. You have a month to do it in and I reckon you can have a dandy canoe made by that time.

"Let me know what Mr. Allen says.

"Sincerely,
"UNCLE SAM."

Hal looked over the letter at his daddy and thought a minute. Then he said: "Jo, this here Uncle Sam ain't so worse. Here's a pretty decent thought that rattled out of his head." Mr. Allen took the letter and read it and then he, too, thought a minute. [177]

"I'm on, Son," he said, "and you can have your friends to help you."

"All right! Then shall I write and tell our darling Unkil that it's a go?"

And this was the letter Uncle Sam got from the "wayward youth he was trying to straighten out":

"Mr. Uncle Sam,
— Building,
New York.

"Dear Uncle S.:

"Yours of the inst. rec'd., first. Jo—that's my dad and He's a peach too let me tell you—says your idea suits him fine and anyway he always goes to New York the first two weeks in June on business and then I have to stay with Aunt Maria at Sunny Glen and I hate it because she is so clean. I hate to milk too and she is so afraid I'll get drowned when I swim in the icepond. She is a terrible nut because I can swim fine. I've got a monogram for my sweater for swimming at the Y. M. C. A. pool and that's bigger and deeper than old spit-in-the-fire Aunt Maria's dinky little icepond. Daddy took me in the roadster over to the next town to order the stuff for the canoe. What do you think would be a good name for her after we finish it? We've put up part of the skeleton already. Sometimes on a straight road Jo lets me run the roadster—it's a Mercer. Do you like Mercers? I like them the best and so does Jo. I can't change gear very good yet and I am too young to get a license but I am strong enough to crank it. I've got right much muscle. Did you like to fight when you were a boy? I love my black eyes on other people. Jo says it is tough to fight, so he boxes with me. He can box fine, too. He can beat me swimming and diving all to pieces, too. I've got to stop now because Pete is whistling for me to come catch with him.

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"Rept. HAL ALLEN."

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CHAPTER II.

"Jo, I wish you would bring me a Remington rifle from New York. I'm old enough to have a good one now, and tell my reformer I named the canoe 'Uncle Sam'. I like that old man so much I wish he'd come down here to live."

"So long, Son! I hope you will have a peach of a time at your camp. Oh, yes! Aunt Maria told me to be sure and tell you not to go swimming but once a day, but I always lived in my bathing suit—at least we will say I had a bathing suit—and you can do the same."

It was only an hour's trip to New York and Jo was busy thinking about the change in Hal and wondering if Uncle Sam would consider it strange for him to invite him to go home on a visit. He decided he would go by Uncle Sam's office and speak to him and make an engagement for the theatre that night.

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Jo Allen stopped a minute in front of Uncle Sam's office door to get out a card and then he rang the bell. A very handsome, auburn-haired, green-eyed girl answered his ring and he gave her his card with a rather bewildered smile, for he wondered why such an old man as Uncle Sam kept such a darned good-looking female to tickle the keys.

"May I see Uncle Sam?" he asked.

"Why, certainly!" she said. "Please come in."

Her "Certainly" sounded Southern to Jo. He might have thought some more but he was interrupted by the girl.

"You will sit down, won't you?" she smiled at him from her swivel chair.

"Thank you! Will Uncle Sam be along soon do you think?" he queried.

"Oh! I thought you understood. Why, Mr. Allen, I am Uncle Sam."

"Ohgoodlord!" Jo said it very loud and as though it were all one word. Then after a minute, "What the devil will Hal say when he finds his Uncle Sam is a woman?"

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"I see no reason why he should know." Uncle Sam was very calm and unconcerned.

"But you see I swore I'd bring Uncle Sam back on a visit. I had it all planned out that Uncle Sam and I would take in a show to-night...."

"I don't reckon Uncle Sam would mind going to the theatre, Mr. Allen. You might ask him," said the girl very frankly.

"Good for you, Uncle Sam,—you are a peach, after all. Hal may be disappointed, but, believe me, I am not. I wish you would tell me your name."

Jo was looking much happier now. He had forgotten what Hal would say when he got home Uncle Samless,—but really her hair and eyes were enough to make him forget and her voice was very musical with its Southern accent.

"Page Carter," she told him, "and I suppose you want to know the whys and wherefores of Uncle Sam's business. Well, you can probably tell from my name that I am a Virginian and from my occupation that I am poor, and if you could see my brain at work or my poor attempts at sewing, you would see why I had to choose this way of making a living. Yes, I had to do it. You see, my mother and father are dead and I could not accept my friends' kind invitations to come and be their barnacles."

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"Miss Carter, you need not worry about the workings of your brain. That was a dandy bluff you put up. I could see you with white hair, seated at a desk, writing Hal about your boyhood scrapes.

Let's make it a supper before the theatre. Are you game?"

"Sure," she said.

Jo noticed she did not have to look in a mirror to make her hat becoming.

"Mr. Allen, your son has written me so much about you that I feel as though I knew you. That is very bromidic, but it is so."

Jo never knew what they had for dinner and Page Carter did not get many of the lines of the play. She had always been strong for black hair and grey eyes. She knew, too, that he was successful from his clothes and Hal's remarks about the Mercer, and he surely was an amusing companion. Hal interested her. New York wasn't much when you were in it by yourself and it was very evident that Jo liked her and his grey eyes were beginning to look....

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The play was over; and she had promised to meet him for lunch and afterwards to pick out a rifle for Hal.

A week later Hal jumped out of the canoe and rushed up to the boys in camp and waved a yellow slip of paper before them. "Listen," he yelled, "'Be home to-morrow. Got rifle. Uncle Sam with me. Dad.'"

CHAPTER XIV.

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HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

Nods and Becks met with great favour and we felt after our labours that we had earned the good times we meant to have during the holidays. The Tuckers had decided to come to Bracken for Christmas, so we were in the seventh heaven of bliss. Annie and Mary could not accept the invitation that Father had told me to give them as they had to go to their respective homes, Annie to be with her dignified paternal relative, and Mary with what she assured us was a far from dignified maternal one.

We had never met any of Mary's people but hoped to some day, as all she told us of them sounded pretty nice. She had no father but was unique among us as she actually could boast a mother. She had one little tiny sister and a big brother who was a mining engineer. The Flannagans lived in the valley of Virginia. They were of rugged Scotch-Irish stock, very different from the softer, aristocratic types to be seen in the tide-water section. Their home was in Harrisonburg and we knew afterwards that they were well off but no word from Mary ever gave us to understand it. She always was quick to pay her share and more than her share in any jaunt we went on together, but I believe I never heard Mary mention money. Tweedles and I used to wonder if they were not fabulously wealthy because of all the material that was wasted in Mary's voluminous skirts. It seems that Mary's mother always wore full skirts and she just had Mary's made the same way.

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The last night before the holidays we broke about all the rules we could remember. Some may have escaped us, but I doubt it. We cooked in our rooms; visited in other girls' rooms; laughed and made a racket in the halls; slid down the bannisters; and were generally obstreperous,—so much so that Miss Plympton said we would have to work off our demerits when we got back from the holidays. This pleasing bit of news she imparted to us at the very early breakfast we had on the morning of our departure. But we were going home, and threatened demerits after the holidays had no more effect on our spirits than a sermon on hell fire would have had on the ardour of a new-born babe.

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On the way to the station we passed our dear old friend, Captain Pat Leahy, who was faithfully keeping the gate at the railroad crossing. He stumped out on his peg leg to give us the "top o' the morning."

"An' phwat do ye hear of that poorrr sick angel, Miss Peyton? Bless her heart!"

"We believe she is recovering, Captain Leahy. We miss her terribly."

"Miss her! I should say ye would, with her winnin' ways and the kind smile of her. And phwat does the managemint mene by hoistin' a lady on ye poorr lambs with the manners of a Tammany boss? Whin I saw her schtriding off of the ttrain last Siptimber in her men's clothes, all but the pants, and a voice like a ttrain butcherr, I said to meself: 'Pat Leahy, ther'll be trooble oop at Gresham this sission!' I knew it more than iver whin she pushed me cats away with her oombrella that she carried like a shillalah. A lady, whin she has no use for cats, is either a very timid lady and surely no fit person to look arfter a girls' school, or ilse she is that hard-hearted that she ought to have the job of dhriving a team of mules to a rock waggon."

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"How are the cats, Captain?" asked Dee.

"Foine, missy, foine! And here is Oliverr, grown to sich a great schize ye woud scarcely know him. He got over his runtiness jist as soon as you young ladies took oop with him."

Oliver came running out of the little gate house at sound of his name. He had indeed grown to be a handsome cat. Dee, of course, had to stop and take him in her arms for a moment. Oliver was the kitten, grown into a great cat, that Dee had taken to her room the winter before. We would never forget the night he spent with us nor our efforts to feed him milk, heated over a candle.

"I wonder what Miss Plympton would have said if we had gone to her and confessed about the kitten, as we did to Miss Peyton," said Dum. [188]

"Said!" exclaimed Captain Leahy. "Why, phwat she would have said would not be fit to print!" and he gave a great laugh which rang pleasantly in our ears as we ran to catch the train that was coming around the curve.

The train was full of girls going home for the holidays and a very gay crowd we were in spite of its being so very early in the morning. We had come off with so little breakfast that it was not worthy of the name. Crackers and jam and weak coffee, heated over from last night's brewing, but not much heated over, just warmed up to the tepid temperature of a baby's bath, is not very satisfying to the growing girl.

I can't see why the food at boarding school for both boys and girls seems to be the last thing considered. Their minds and morals are looked after with great care but their inner men are simply ignored. All the catalogues say: "Food wholesome and plentiful," but to my mind that at Gresham was neither. When it was poor it was plentiful and when it was plentiful it was poor, but if something was served very good and palatable, it usually gave out. Under Miss Plympton's régime it was much worse than when Miss Peyton wielded the scepter. Miss Peyton insisted on a certain balance of diet at least and had many a talk with the dull old housekeeper, who, I am sure, was the only person in the world who preferred Miss Plympton to Miss Peyton. Miss Plympton did not at all object to three kinds of beans being served at one meal, or sweet potatoes and Irish potatoes with no touch of green food. On the other hand when the housekeeper chose to have turnip salad and cabbage on the same day, so that we felt like Nebuchadnezzar when he ate grass like an ox, our principal said nothing. Girls' insides must be disciplined, too. If skim milk was served with their cereal that was more than they deserved. [189]

During that first half of my second term at Gresham I had to remember very often what Margaret Sayre had said to me about looking at the mountains when things did not go just exactly to suit me. I looked at them a great deal that first half. I had a good appetite as a rule but had been spoiled by Mammy Susan, whose one idea seemed to be to give me what I wanted, and the consequence was that unless food was well cooked and seasoned, I simply did not eat. Tweedles ate anyhow, but long stretches of cafés or boarding houses had inured them to cooking that I simply could not stomach. [190]

"You are a regular princess, Page," said Dee to me on that morning when we were leaving for the holidays. "Of course the food is bum but it is better than going empty."

"Maybe it is, but I can't swallow bad coffee."

"But you are looking as pale as a little ghost and you are so thin you can't keep on your skirts."

This I could not deny as at that minute I had my skirt lapped over two inches and pinned with a large safety pin to keep it from dropping off altogether.

"I'll buck up when I get home. Two weeks of feeding will fill out my belt again," I laughed. [191]

I left the Tuckers at Richmond and went on that day to Milton where Father met me and drove me over to Bracken. My, it was good to be home! Mammy Susan almost ate me up for joy, and the dogs actually threw me down in their efforts to get first lick.

"Why, honey, chile, you is sho thin and peaked lookin'," declared my dear old friend. "You ain't no bigger'n a minute. What all them teacher's been a doin' to you?"

"She is thin, Mammy Susan," broke in Father, "and I am going to put her on an iron tonic right away. She tells me she has no appetite."

"Well, now, that's too bad! I done made a mess er chicken gumbo fer dinner and some er them lil bits er thin biscuit. I done knocked up a blackberry roll, too, with hard sauce that is as soft and fluffy as a cloud in Spring. It's too bad my baby ain't got no appletite."

It was too bad surely, but if I had had one I don't know what I would have done, as without one I ate like a field hand.

"Looks lak she is able to worry down somethin'," said Mammy Susan with a sly twinkle in her eye as she brought in another plate of hot biscuit. "Don't forgit, honey chile, to save a little spot on you innards fer the blackberry roll. It sho do smell toothsome. I is moughty glad them twinses is comin' down fer Christmas an' they paw, too. Did Docallison tell you that Blanche is goin' to be here enduring of the holidays?" Blanche was Mammy Susan's relative who had cooked for the Tuckers during the memorable house-party at Willoughby. [192]

The Tuckers were to come to Bracken on Christmas Eve. We were expecting Stephen White, also, and Mammy Susan said Blanche was to arrive on that day, too. I busied myself helping Mammy Susan prepare for the guests. There was much to be done in the way of fresh curtains in the bed rooms, rubbing silver and furniture, and dusting books. Mammy Susan had plum

pudding, fruit cake and pies to make, and I helped with all of them.

The kitchen at Bracken was a wonderful place. I believe I loved it more than any spot on earth. It was not under the same roof as the house but connected with it by a covered porch, enclosed in glass. This passage way had been my nursery as a child. Mammy Susan always had it filled with flowers in winter, gay geraniums in old tomato cans, begonias, heliotrope, ferns and a citronella, that furnished slips for half the county. The more slips that were taken from it, the more vigorous it would become.

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"That there limon verbeny 'minds me of Docallison," said Mammy. "The mo' it do give er itself, the mo' it do seem to have ter give. It looks lak as soon as yo' paw done finished wearing hisself out fer somebody, another pusson is a callin' on him; an' jes lak the limon verbeny, he branches out mo' the mo' he does."

"He is thinking of having some one to help him, Mammy Susan. Don't you think it would be a good plan?"

"Well, 'twill an' 'twon't! Ef'n he gits a man young enough ter take the bossin' that a helper's boun' ter git, he'll be too young ter suit the dead an' dyin'. Whin folks is sick they don't want no chilluns a feelin' of they pulps."

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"But he has in mind a young man who might take the bossing and make a good impression on the patients, too. He is coming on Christmas Eve for a visit and you must tell me what you think of him."

"Is he yo' beau, honey?"

"Why, Mammy Susan, how absurd!"

"'Tain't so terruble absurd. Beaux is lak measles an' mumps. If you don't have 'em young, you mought go through life 'thout ever havin' 'em, but you is always kinder spectin' tew catch 'em. Ef you take 'em young, you don't take 'em quite so hard."

Mammy Susan's philosophy always delighted me and I encouraged her to go on. I was sitting in the doorway of the kitchen where I could smell the heliotrope and citronella while I chopped apples and meat for the mince pies. Mammy was seeding raisins. She never would let the seeded raisins come in the house, scorning them as some kind of new-fangled invention that would ruin her pies and puddings.

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"Them unseedless raisins make lazy folks pies 'thout no virtue or suption in 'em."

The kitchen was a low ceilinged room about twenty feet square. A range and great wood box occupied one side, with a copper sink and a pump. There was no plumbing in Bracken and this primitive pump connected with the well was all we could boast in the way of conveniences. In the broad window sills were more tomato cans of geraniums and various slips that Mammy was starting for neighbours. Skillets and pots and pans of various sizes were inverted on the many shelves, which were covered with newspapers with fancy scalloped borders and beautiful open-work patterns that it had always been my duty and pleasure as a child to cut out for Mammy Susan. Festooned from the rafters were long strings of bright red peppers, dried okra, onions and bunches of thyme and bay. Pots of parsley and chives occupied one of the sunny windows. Mammy Susan held that: "Seasonin' is the maindest thing in cookin', that an' 'lowin' victuals to simper and not bile too hard."

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"Mammy, is this going to be enough mince meat?"

"Sho, chile! That's the quantity fer six full pies, none of yo' skimpy kin' wif the top pastry sticking to the bottom, lookin' lak some folks what don't boast no insides ter speak of,—but the full fleshed kind—them's what I call pies. I'm goin' ter make that there Blanche stir up a Lady Balmoral cake soon's she gits here. The Twinses and they paw kin git on the ou'side of a passel er victuals, and the saftest thing is ter have a plenty of them cooked up fer 'mergencies. Kin this new beau, Mr. White, eat as much as Mr. Tucker?"

"Why, I don't know. I never noticed."

"Well, then you ain't considerin' of him very serious lak. Whin a gal is studyin' 'bout a man, the very fust thing she takes notice on is his appletite. She'll know that whin she ain't quite sho what colour his eyes is, an' she'll want ter dish up his fav'rite victuals ev'y chanct she gits."

I laughed and went on chopping apples. How peaceful and happy everything was at Bracken! The wind was blowing up cold and it looked like snow but the kitchen was warm, so warm that it easily spared heat for the glass porch and all the growing plants. The delicious smell of Mammy's fruit cake, baking in the range, mingled with the citronella and the wine sap apples I was chopping. Mammy reached up and broke off a pod of red pepper to drop in the bean soup that was bubbling in a great iron pot.

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"Put a little bay in, too, Mammy, I love it." Instead of needing iron tonic as Father had thought, I really needed a restraining hand. I felt as though I could never get enough to eat. Bean soup, so despised at Gresham, was being made at my request,—but then, there is bean soup and bean soup. "Please, Mammy Susan, have batter bread at least twice a day while Mr. Tucker is here. He is just crazy about it."

"All right, honey chile!" I wondered what made Mammy Susan look at me so long and searchingly.

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"Is there anything more I can do for you, Mammy?"

"No, chile, the cookery is about 'complished. All I've got ter do now is straighten up my shelbs with clean papers."

"Oh, please let me cut the papers!"

"'Deed you kin!" exclaimed the old woman delightedly. "I was afeerd you done got so growd-up with beaux an' things that you done los' yo' tase fer makin' pretty patterns fer the shelbs."

So she got out some big shears and a pile of newspapers and I outdid myself in wonderful lacy patterns and scallops that made the old kitchen beautiful for Christmas.

CHAPTER XV.

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CHRISTMAS GUESTS.

It began to snow before dawn on Christmas Eve and kept it up steadily all morning. It was a fine dry snow that gave promise of good sleighing, and Father and I were delighted. He loved snow like a boy, provided it was the kind of snow that meant good sleighing. The colt was hitched to a little red cutter and they whizzed off to the sick folks with such a merry ringing of the bells that just the sound of them must have made the sufferers feel better.

The Tuckers were to arrive on the three train, also Stephen White and perhaps Blanche. The roads were in a bad fix between Milton and Richmond and we feared to trust Henry Ford, so our friends were forced to travel by rail. The big wood sled was put into commission, with an old wagon bed screwed on top of it, and when this was filled with hay, I am sure no limousine in the world could offer more luxurious transportation.

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It had stopped snowing and the sun was trying to shine when I clambered into my equipage with Peg and one of the younger plow horses hitched to it. I stood up to drive, knee-deep in hay. Peg and the plow horse acted like two-year-olds and did the six miles to Milton almost as easily as Father and the colt. When the train came puffing up, they actually had the impertinence to shy and prance, much to the delight of our guests who came tumbling out of the last coach so laden with bundles that you could not tell which was which.

Such excitement on the little station of Milton, usually so quiet and sedate! First came Dee carrying Brindle, wrapped in a plaid shawl, looking, as Zebedee said, like an emigrant baby, then Zebedee and Wink, with suit cases and great boxes and paper parcels; then Dum with more valises and more boxes and parcels.

I was astonished to see Mr. Reginald Kent bringing up the rear. He, too, was almost completely concealed with baggage and bundles, but I could see his smiling, ruddy countenance above his load.

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"Why, Mr. Kent, I saw Jo yesterday and he did not tell me you were coming!" I exclaimed as he dropped some of his packages so he could shake my hand.

"I did not let him know. I find when Cousin Sally expects me she makes herself sick cooking for me, so I thought I would surprise them."

I certainly liked his spirit of unselfishness. Not many young men would have thought of sparing a middle-aged, complaining cousin whose one attraction was her cooking. Just then Jo Winn came gliding up in his little cutter, ostensibly for the mail but in reality to catch a glimpse of Dee who was the one female I have ever seen the shy man at his ease with. Of course he was at his ease with me, having known me since I was a baby, but I somehow never think of myself as a female to make the males tremble.

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Our hilarious greetings were under way and the train had begun to move when an agonizing screech came from the coloured coach, the one nearest the engine. There was a great ringing of the bell and then there emerged the portly form of "poor dear Blanche," as Zebedee always called the girl who had cooked for us at Willoughby the summer before,—not to her face, of course.

Her great black-plumed hat was all awry, and from the huge basket, that she always carried in lieu of a valise, there dragged long green stockings and some much belaced lingerie. She was greatly excited, having come within an ace of passing the station.

"I was in the embrace of Morphine, as it were, Miss Page, and had no recognizance of having derived at our predestination, whin I was sudden like brought to my sensibleness by hearing the dulsom tones of Miss Dum a greeting you. I jumped up and called loud and long for the inductor to come to my resistance. The train had begun to prognosticate! I was in respiration whin a dark complected gentleman in the seat opposing mine, very kindly impeded the bell by reducing the rope."

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"What did the conductor say?" I knew that it was a terrible offense for a non-official to pull the bell rope.

"Say! Why, Miss Page, 'twould bring the blush of remortification to my maiden meditations to repetition that white man's langige."

It was cheering indeed to hear Blanche's inimitable conversation once more. Thank goodness, there were enough other things to laugh at for her not to know we were overcome by her remarks. We bundled her into the far back corner of the sled, where she sat like a Zulu queen on a throne. Good-byes were called to Jo Winn and his cousin, who said they would come over to Bracken after supper to help decorate the house. I had promised Tweedles not to decorate until they came, but I had had some great boughs of holly cut ready for the rite. I had gathered quantities of running cedar myself and, at the risk of my foolish neck, had climbed up a great walnut tree and sawed off a stumpy branch literally loaded with mistletoe.

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"I bid to drive," cried Zebedee as soon as the crowd was packed in the sled. "Do you stand up to it?"

"Yes, you always stand in a wood sled." I should have said: "Be careful!" as the art of driving standing is not one acquired in a moment, but I was so accustomed to Mr. Tucker's doing things well that I never even thought of it.

"Gee up!" he called, cracking the whip.

The plow horse and Peg geed all right and Zebedee, accustomed to running a small automobile or driving a light buggy, had no idea of the skill necessary to stand up on a large wood sled and safely turn it around without turning over. We twisted around on one runner and nothing but the fact that Blanche's great weight was on the upper side saved us from a very neat turnover. Zebedee lost his balance and, still clutching wildly at the reins, shot over our heads into the soft and comfortable snow. Pegasus and the plow horse fortunately took it all as a matter of course in their day's work, and although Zebedee's flying leap jerked them back on their haunches in a very rude and unmannerly way, they never budged, but waited for their crestfallen Jehu to pick himself up out of the snow bank and climb back into place.

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"Why didn't you tell me?" he reproached me as we roared with laughter.

"Tell you what?"

"Tell me to use the knowledge I have obtained as a strap hanger on trolley cars to keep my balance in a wood sled!"

"This is the way to stand: put your feet far apart, so," said I, suiting the action to the word; and taking the reins in my hands, clucked to my team and we started gaily off, the sleigh bells jingling merrily.

Everybody had to have a turn at driving standing up, and in the six miles we had to go to reach Bracken, they had more or less mastered the art.

I love Bracken and am always proud of it, but there are times when it seems more beautiful and lovable than at others, and on that Christmas Eve it never had been more attractive. Fires glowed in every grate. Indeed, Bill, the yard boy, whose duty it was to keep the wood chopped and the fires going, said he had "done got lop-sided a totin' wood." The house shone with cleanliness and smelt of all kinds of delicious things: Christmas greens, mince pies, spiced beef, and dried lavender. Lavender was always kept between the sheets in the linen press and when many beds had just been freshly made the whole place would smell of it.

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My Mammy Susan was a rather unique specimen of her race. As a rule, darkeys need a boss to be kept up to a certain standard. They are far from orderly, and wastefulness is their watchword. Now Mammy did to a letter everything that my mother, with all the enthusiasm of a young housekeeper, had thought necessary and that, combined with the solid training she had received at the hands of my paternal grandmother, to whose family she had belonged before the war, meant a very well kept house. Father and I were so accustomed to her wonderful management that we would not have known how wonderful it was if it had not been for the many summer visiting cousins who sang Mammy's praises while telling of their own vicissitudes with domestics.

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Mammy's one fault was that she could not abide having an assistant in the house, and the consequence was we were in daily and hourly dread of her giving out and being ill. She had tried girl after girl, but they had always been found wanting. She preferred having a boy to help her, so the yard boy was called on whenever she needed him. She bossed Bill and Bill "sassed" her, but they were on the whole very fond of each other. Bill was about twenty, very black and bow-legged, and so good-natured that it was impossible to anger him. Bill was fitted out with white coats and Mammy and I had been endeavouring to train him to wait on the table, with most ludicrous results. He had once been on a steamboat and so aped the airs of the steamboat waiters. He would balance a tray on his five fingers and, holding it above his head, would actually cake walk into the dining room.

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"This here ain't no side show Docallison is a runnin'," Mammy would say. "What the reason you feel lak you got ter walk lak a champinzee? All you needs is a monkey tail stickin' out from that ere new coat ter make you look jis' lak a keriller I done seed onct at a succus. Come on here, nigger, and take in dese victuals I done dished up befo' dey is stone cold."

And Bill would grin and reply, "You come on and put dis ice I done dug out de ice house in de frigidrater befo' it gits hot;" and so waged the merry war between the old woman and the boy.

Blanche was quite a favourite of Mammy's and she looked forward to her visit with enthusiasm. The girl, being on the footing of a guest, did not come in for her share of abuse that the old woman usually felt bound to administer to the young coloured girls who came her way.

She came out to the driveway to meet us on that Christmas Eve, her dear old head bound up in the gayest of bandannas and her purple calico starched to a stiffness that would easily have permitted it to stand alone. [209]

The Tuckers greeted her with the greatest affection. I introduced Stephen White, who showed himself to be the gentleman I knew he was by his very kind and cordial manner in speaking to the old woman. Nothing is a greater test of breeding than a person's manner on such an occasion.

The old woman looked at him keenly and kindly. Wink was very good looking with his clear brown eyes and the rather stubborn mouth that the carefully tended moustache was doing its best to hide. Wink's moustache was really getting huge and it gave him very much the air of a boy masquerading as a man with a false moustache. Every time I looked at it I had an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh. If he would only trim it down a little!

"My little miss is done named you to me befo'," said Mammy with great cordiality.

"Oh, has she really? That certainly was kind of her."

"Well, it warn't much trouble fer her to do it," explained Mammy, fearful that she might be giving the young man too much encouragement. "What she done said was that she ain't never noticed whether you is much of a hand fer victuals or not." [210]

"Well, I can tell you he is," laughed Dee. "He is almost as good a hand as the Tuckers."

CHAPTER XVI. [211]

CHRISTMAS EVE AT BRACKEN.

"Do all of you want to go to-morrow morning with Page and me to play Santa Claus to our poor neighbours?" asked Father at supper.

"Yes! Yes!" they chorused.

"I feel bad about all these little nigs who know I bring them the things and so they don't believe in Santa Claus at all. I always think that belief in Santa Claus is one of the perquisites of childhood. Sometimes I have been tempted to dress up and play Santy for them, but I believe they would know me. Docallison is seen too often to have any mystery about him."

"I have it! I have it!" and Dum clapped her hands in glee at the idea that had come to her. "Let's dress Zebedee up and let him go and give the kiddies their things." [212]

"Good!" exclaimed Father. "Will you do it, Tucker?"

"Sure I will, if Page will do something I ask her."

"What?"

"I want you to recite your sonnet that Tweedles tell me you published in *Nods and Becks*. They have not been able to find their copies in the maelstrom of their trunks. I think from what they say of it, it might inspire me to act Santa Claus with great spirit."

"Sonnet! What sonnet?" asked Father.

"You don't mean you have not shown it to your father!" tweedled the twins.

"Well, Father is so particular about poetry—somehow—I—I—"

"Why, daughter!"

"You know you are! You can't abide mediocre verse."

"Well, that's so," he confessed, "but you might let me be the judge."

And so I recited my sonnet, which I will repeat to save the reader the trouble of turning back so many pages to refresh her memory. [213]

Pan may be dead, but Santa Claus remains,
And once a year, he riseth in his might.
Oft have I heard, in silences of night,
Tinkling of bells and clink of reindeer chains
As o'er the roofs he sped through his domains,
When youthful eyes had given up the fight

To glimpse for once the rotund, jolly wight,
Who in a trusting world unchallenged reigns.
Last and the greatest of all Gods is he,
Who suffereth little children and is kind;
And when I've rounded out my earthly span
And face at last the Ancient Mystery,
I hope somewhere in Heaven I shall find
Rest on the bosom of that good old man."

When I finished, Father sat so still that I just knew he thought it was trash. I could hardly raise my eyes to see, I was so afraid he was laughing at me. Father, while being the kindest and most lenient man in the world, was very strict about literature and demanded the best. I finally did get my eyes to behave and look up at him and to my amazement I found his were full of tears. He held out his arms to me and I flew to them, thereby upsetting a plate of Sally Lunn muffins that bow-legged Bill was just bringing into the dining room. Zebedee caught them, however, before they touched the ground, so no harm was done.

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"Page! You monkey!" was all Father could say, but I knew he liked my sonnet and I was very happy. He told me afterwards when we were alone that he liked it a lot and how I must work to do more and more verse. If I felt like writing, to write, no matter what was to pay.

"I have got so lazy about it myself," he sighed. "When I was a boy I wanted to write all the time and did 'lisp in numbers' to some extent, but I got more and more out of it, did not put my thoughts down, and now I can only think poetry and don't believe I could write a line. Don't let it slip from you, honey."

I had done my part, and now Zebedee was to be diked out as Santa Claus and give the little darkeys a treat that they would remember all their lives. Some of the bulky bundles the guests had brought from Richmond contained presents for our coloured neighbours. I had told Dum and Dee of the way Father and I always spent Christmas morning, and they had remembered when they did their Christmas shopping. They had gone to the five and ten cent store and, with what they declared was a very small outlay, had bought enough toys to gladden the hearts of all the nigs in the county.

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"Wouldn't it be more realistic if Mr. Tucker should go to-night?" suggested Wink.

"No, no! 'Twould never do at all!" objected Father violently. "If Tucker goes to-night, I won't have a minute's peace all day to-morrow—What's more, young man," shaking his finger at Wink, "neither will you—I'll force you into service. Why, those little pickaninnies will stuff candy and nuts all night and lick the paint off the jumping-jacks and Noah's arks, and by morning they will be having forty million stomachaches. No, indeed, wait until morning. Let them eat the trash standing and they have a better chance to digest it." So wait we did.

Jo Winn and his cousin, Reginald Kent, came to call after supper, and we all of us turned in to beautify Bracken. The great bunch of mistletoe we hung from the chandelier in the library, and holly and cedar was banked on bookcases and mantel. Dum deftly fashioned wreaths of running cedar and swamp berries, and Mr. Reginald Kent seemed to think he had to assist her to tie every knot. Bunches of holly and swamp berries were in every available vase, and Mammy Susan proudly bore in some blooming narcissus that she had set to sprout just six weeks before so that they would bloom on Christmas day. She had kept them hid from me so I could be surprised.

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I wondered how Father would take this interruption of his "ancient and solitary reign," and if he would regret the peaceful, orderly Christmas Eves he and I had always spent together. His quiet library was now pandemonium, and if it was turned up on the day before Christmas, what would it be on Christmas Day? He was sitting by the fire very contentedly, smoking his pipe and talking to Mr. Tucker, who had refused to help us decorate, and as was his way when he, Zebedee, did not want to enter into any of our frolics, he called us: "You young people" and pretended to be quite middle-aged.

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"Look at Zebedee!" said Dee to Wink. "Look at him Mr. Tuckering and trying to make out he's grown-up!" Wink, who looked upon Mr. Tucker as quite grown-up, even middle-aged, was rather mystified. I was very glad to see Wink and Dee renewing the friendship that had started between them at Willoughby. They were much more congenial than Wink and I were. If Wink would only stop looking at me like a dying calf and realize that Dee was a thousand times nicer and brighter and prettier than I was! It seemed to me that if it had been nothing more than a matter of noses, he was a goose not to prefer Dee. All the Tuckers had such good noses, straight and aristocratic with lots of character, and my little freckled *nez retroussé* was so very ordinary.

My nose has always been a source of great annoyance to me, but I felt then that I would be glad to bear my burden if Wink would just see the difference between Dee's nose and mine. I remember what Gwendolen's mother, in "Daniel Deronda," said to her when Gwendolen said what a pretty nose her mother had and how she envied her: "Oh, my dear, any nose will do to be miserable with in this world!" Well, I did not feel that way exactly, but I did feel that any nose would do to be happy with in this world if Wink would just stop "pestering" me. I was always afraid somebody would know he was whispering the silly things to me that he seemed to think I was very cruel not to respond to. I almost knew Zebedee understood, but I had kept very dark about it to all the girls. What irritated me was that I knew all the time what a very intelligent, nice fellow Wink was, and would have liked so much to have the good talks with him that our

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friendship had begun with at Willoughby; but now sane conversation was out of the question. Tender nothings were the order of the day whenever I found myself alone with Mr. Stephen White. The outcome was that I saw to it that I was alone with him as little as possible. Tender nothings are all right, I fancy, when it is a two-sided affair, but when it is all on one side—deliver me!

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Jo Winn followed Dee around with the "faithful dog Tray" expression in his eyes and was pleased as Punch when Dee gave him some difficult task to perform, such as festooning running cedar on the family portraits, hung high against the ceiling as was the way of hanging pictures in antebellum days. Father and I were determined to change their hanging just as soon as we could afford to have the walls done over, but they had to stay where they were until that time as they had hung so long in the same spots that the paper all around them was several shades lighter than behind them.

The decorations finished, we drew up around the fire to tell tales and pop corn and chestnuts until a late hour, when Jo Winn and Reginald Kent made a reluctant departure with assurances that they would see us again the next morning. They had asked to be allowed to make themselves useful in the Santa Claus scheme we had on foot, and we readily agreed to their company.

CHAPTER XVII.

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SANTA CLAUS.

"Well, what on earth are you schemers going to dress me in?" demanded Zebedee at breakfast the next morning. "I have no idea of playing Santa Claus unless I am properly attired."

"Oh, we stayed awake half the night planning a costume for you. You are going to be beautiful, you vain, conceited piece!" exclaimed Dee. "Dr. Allison has a red dressing gown—"

"I knew I would be the goat," said Father ruefully. "My red dressing gown is only ten years old, Tucker, so do be easy on it."

"Oh, we won't hurt it, Doctor," insisted Dum. "We are going to sew imitation ermine all around the bottom and front and sleeves,—and his whiskers—"

"Yes, do tell me about my whiskers! That is the most important factor in a Santa Claus costume."

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"They are to be the flap off of an old white muff I had when I was a kid. Mammy Susan is digging it out of the old chest in the attic now."

"And your embonpoint is to be a down cushion out of the library," put in Dee.

"And your hat—my red silk toboggan cap with some of Page's tippet, that matches the muff, sewed in for hair!" from Dum.

"Your boots—Father's duck-hunting rubber ones!"

"Well, among you I reckon I'll be dressed in great shape. I fancy I had better get ready."

"Just as soon as we sew on the ermine."

We got to work, all hands at once, and sewed on the imitation ermine, made of bands of canton flannel with artistically arranged smuts at irregular intervals spotted around it, giving it very much the appearance of ermine.

We adjourned to the library so Mammy Susan could begin on the dining room for Christmas dinner, which was the one great function of the year with Mammy. The table must be set with great precision with all the silver and cut glass that Bracken boasted, which was not any great amount. The best table cloth made its appearance on this occasion, a wonderful heavy damask that had been sent to my mother from England, with napkins to match that would easily have served for table cloths on ordinary occasions. Mammy always kept this linen wrapped in blue tissue paper, and after almost twenty years of use on grand occasions, it was still as beautiful as the day my mother received it as a bridal present.

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The library had been one great swirl of tissue paper and red ribbon and Christmas seals, something new for Bracken, as Father and I never thought of doing up our presents to each other at all. But the Tuckers spent almost as much on the things to wrap up the presents with, as they did on the presents, so Zebedee said. With the help of Blanche, who carefully saved every inch of ribbon or string, every piece of paper, no matter how rumpled or torn, and all the Christmas seals, I got the place cleared out enough for us to get to work on Santa Claus' costume.

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Father was oblivious to everything as he could not get his nose out of the wonderful book Mr. Tucker and the twins had given him. It was about 4,000 pages of poetry, every well known poem that ever was written almost, with every form of index. He was feverishly looking for half remembered poems of long ago and would hail with delight every now and then something entirely forgotten.

"Listen to this, Tucker! By Jove, I haven't seen this since I used to recite it at school:

"I am dying, Egypt, dying!
Ebbs the crimson life-tide fast
And the dark Plutonian shadows
Gather on the evening blast;
Let thine arms, O Queen, enfold me,
Hush thy sobs and bow thine ear,
Listen to the great heart-secrets
Thou, and thou alone, must hear.
* * * * *

"And for thee, star-eyed Egyptian—
Glorious sorceress of the Nile!—
Light the path to Stygian horrors,
With the splendor of thy smile;
Give the Cæsar crowns and arches,
Let his brow the laurel twine:
I can scorn the Senate's triumphs,
Triumphing in love like thine.

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"I am dying, Egypt, dying!
Hark! the insulting foeman's cry;
They are coming—quick, my falchion!
Let me front them ere I die.
Ah, no more amid the battle
Shall my heart exulting swell;
Isis and Osiris guard thee
Cleopatra—Rome—Farewell!"

Father had arisen from his chaise longue and was declaiming like a school boy. We applauded him violently. I loved to see him so happy and so carefree. He usually had so many sick and poor people to bother him, but on this day, thanks in part to his foresight in saving up the Santa Claus act for Christmas morning, he had not been sent for, and he hoped the day would pass in idleness.

It took two down cushions to give Zebedee's embonpoint the proper "bowl full of jelly" contour. The red dressing gown was snugly belted in around it, and, having been considerably turned up before we sewed on the imitation ermine, it reached in graceful folds to the top of the hunting boots. The beard was a masterpiece and was kept in place by a bit of elastic fastened in the back. We made a moustache out of the little tails on the old tippet and he was forced to submit to surgeon's plaster to hold that on.

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"But s'pose I give a Tucker sneeze! This contraption certainly does tickle my nose;" and forthwith Santa Claus did explode into a regular Tucker sneeze, thereby bursting his belt and unpinning his tum-tum so that much of the work had to be done over.

"Now, Zebedee, stop!" commanded Dum. "You know perfectly well you do not have to sneeze so loud."

"All right, Miss Plympton," teased the offender, and gave another sneeze.

"We might just as well wait until he gets through," sighed Dee. "It always takes at least three to satisfy a Tucker."

So we waited until the third and last explosion shook the house and then pinned on the down pillows again and put his belt back in place. The toboggan cap with the tippet sewed in for hair gave the proper finishing touch, and Zebedee stood forth as lovable and charming a Santy as one could find.

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"Well, we can 'glimpse for once the rotund, jolly wight,'" quoted Wink. "I almost wish I were a little nig so I could experience the sensations they will have when they see you driving up to the cabin, Mr. Tucker."

"Now for the 'bundle of toys he had flung on his back'," and Dum hung over his shoulder a laundry bag stuffed full of lumpy, bumpy stockings.

Putting the things in a stocking was a plan Zebedee had suggested,—one they use in the cities for Christmas. A mate to the stocking must be put in the toe and that means that each child gets a pair of stockings as well as its share of candy, nuts, toys, etc.

"I bet Aunt Keziah will be pleased with this thing of bringing stockings, too. It will save the old woman lots of darning," said Father, who looked up from his poetry book to admire our handiwork.

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Dum was putting the finishing touches to Zebedee's countenance. I did not think he needed paint as his cheeks were rosy enough, but Dum loved to fix up people's faces and black their eyebrows, and Zebedee liked nothing better than being fixed up.

"It gives you the feeling that you can make as big a monkey of yourself as you want to, if you just are disguised a little," and our Santa Claus bristled his great white moustache and patted his

down pillows approvingly.

Mammy Susan and Blanche and bow-legged Bill were called in to see old Santy, and great was their delight and joy.

"Lord!" said Bill. "If'n he don' look jis' lak a picture er Santy I seed one time whin I was on de steamboat on de Mississip."

"Aw, you allus got ter tell 'bout dat time you went a trabblin' on a boat. I low you wa'nt nothin' but a low lived roustabout at best," said Mammy Susan, anxious to keep Bill in his place, which, in her estimation, was way in the back. [228]

"You is sho mo' natural than life, Mr. Tucker. The infantry of the area of this vicinity should elevate theyselves and denounce you as blessed. 'As much as you have done the least of my little ones you have kep' my remandments."

Mammy accepted the effusions of Blanche with perfect composure. Bill looked at her with admiration in his rolling stewed-prune eyes. I would have been glad of Santa Claus' beard to laugh behind. Zebedee took advantage of it, but the rest of us had to keep straight faces until the coloured contingent took their departure.

"Hitch Peg to the cutter!" called Father to Bill. "I am afraid there will be too much hilarity for the colt, Tucker, otherwise I'd give you the pleasure of driving him this brisk morning."

"Drive! Do you think I could drive anything around this protuberance?" he laughed, patting his make-up. "Why, I can't reach the buttons on my own waistcoat. Page will have to drive me." [229]

"But then they'll all of them know you are not Santa Claus if they see me."

"Nonsense, daughter! They'll think he is Santa Claus if you are along. The only Christmas they have ever had has come through us, and they will just think we have invited Santy here to amuse them. I think we can trust Mr. Tucker to act the part. I am going to beg off and stay home with my book," and the dear man sank back in his chaise longue and buried his nose once more in his four thousand pages of poetry.

So I drove Zebedee, and the girls and Wink went with Jo Winn and the New York cousin in a great old double sleigh that must have been in the Winn family as long as our family coach had been in ours.

Father put down his beloved book long enough to see us off, and then with a great sigh of content, mixed with relief, sank back on his cushions and resumed his search for old favourites.

What a merry crowd we were! Zebedee cracked his whip and [230]

"Whistled and shouted and called them by name.
On, Dasher and Dancer! On, Prancer and Vixen!
On, Comet and Cupid! On, Dunder and Blitzen!"

Old Peg did not know exactly what to make of all her new names, but like the intelligent beast she was, she divined that it meant to go as fast as she could, so she snow-dusted Jo Winn's team until they had to drop back a few yards. If it had not been for me, I think Zebedee's turn out would have fooled any one inclined to believe in St. Nick. Of course Peg did not look much like eight tiny reindeer, but then, he might have left his reindeer team in the Antarctic Circle and picked up a mere horse for the rest of the journey, which would have been a most thoughtful thing for our beloved Saint to have done.

The little pickaninnies were on the lookout for Docallison, and as we neared Aunt Keziah's cabin a shout went up from the bushes where some of the little boys were hiding, watching the bend in the road. The window was black with expectant faces and Zebedee said he thought their smiles were more beautiful than any Christmas wreaths he had ever seen. You remember that Aunt Keziah was the neighbourhood "Tender," that is, she looked after all the children whose mothers were away in service. She was quite an institution and Father said did much to lower the death rate of her race. She raised a healthy crowd of children and as a rule they turned out to be a mannerly lot as well. [231]

"Perliteness is cheap an' a smile don' cos' no mo'n a frown," she would say, "an' you kin sho' buy mo' wif it if you is a tradin' wif white fo'ks."

Certainly there were smiles to spare that Christmas morning and politeness to burn. The children, fourteen in all, came tumbling out of the cabin when the boys in the bushes gave warning of our approach. They thought it was Docallison until we were upon them, and then such a shouting and scrambling as was never seen. One of the strangest things that ever happened was that Aunt Keziah herself believed in Santa Claus and no power on earth could shake her faith in him. [232]

"'Cose I b'lieves in him! If'n I ain't nebber seed him befo' what dat got to do wif it? I ain't nebber yit laid eyes on Gawd an' de blessed Sabior but I b'lieves; an' now I done seed Santy Claus wif my own eyes. What's mo', he done brung me gif's wif his own han'. De preacher ub a Sunday done said dat Gawd would gib me honey an' de honey com', an' I will git gold, yea, fin' gold,—but I ain't nebber foun' none yit, an' all de honey dis here ole nigger done tas'ed fer yars an' yars is some bum'le bee honey what de chillun foun' in de woods. Cose I ain't a blamin' uf de Almighty,—

I reckon he'll do fer me someday whin he gits to it, but so fer I done ebby thing fer myse'.—But Santy here he done foun' me and is a doin' fer me now," and the old woman munched her chocolate marshmallows, that seemed designed especially for her toothless state, and pulled around her lean old shoulders the nice warm shawl that Santa Claus had drawn from his bursting pack.

The cabin, boasting only two rooms and a low attic where the male "boders" slept, was full to overflowing when all of us piled in, but we were anxious to see how the little darkeys took Santa Claus and if they really believed in him. They did, every last one of them. There was not a doubting Thomas among them. With no incredulity to overcome, Zebedee's task was a simple one. He told his cheerful and kindly lies with much gusto, to the delight of all his listeners, black and white.

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"Well, children, I thought I would never get here! I had so many places to go. I was coming last night down your chimney, which is the proper way to come after you are all asleep at night, but my reindeer got so tired I had to put them in a stable way up at Richmond and get down here just the best I could, and then borrow a horse from Docallison and get Miss Page to drive me over here. By the way, Docallison sent his kindest regards to all of you,—” Here some of the little nigs made bobbing curtseys and the ones who did not get soundly smacked by Aunt Keziah. "He couldn't come this morning but he thought you wouldn't mind since I was coming."

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At that, Little Minnie, who was one of the charity orphans Aunt Keziah was raising, began to blubber:

"I ain't gwine take no castor ile from Santy. Docallison done tell me he gwine gib me a pinny if I tak castor ile."

"Why, if I didn't almost forget!" exclaimed the ever-ready Zebedee. "I have a whole dime here for a little girl who was to take castor oil," and he began a frantic search for his pockets but the down pillows and dressing gown were too much for him and Wink came to his relief with the necessary coin. "Now you must promise to take your medicine right away."

"But I ain't sick now!" wailed the little girl, clutching her dime. "I means whin I do git sick."

"Now listen to that there lil' orphant Minnie!" exclaimed Aunt Keziah. "What cause she got to worrit about ile whin she ain't got ache or pain?"

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"But I'se thinkin' 'bout what I'se gonter git whin I done gits through a stuffin'," wailed Minnie. "I lows thin I gotter take ile."

"Well, you've got your dime now and if you get sick you must take the oil," laughed Zebedee.

"But Docallison gibs me a pinny. I ain't got no use fer a dime. Aunt Keziah won't let chilluns spen' nothin' but pinnies!"

So Wink had to go through his pockets for the desired penny before little Orphan Minnie would be comforted. Aunt Keziah stood by with a tolerant smile on her wrinkled old face. It was a well known fact that the old woman spoiled all the little charity children, the ones she took for nothing, while she made the "bo'ders" toe the line and walk chalk.

The twins she was raising, Milly Jourdan's twins, whom she had so euphoniously named Postle Peter and Pistle Paul, emboldened by the success of Minnie, now set up a whine for pennies, too, but Aunt Keziah knocked their heads together without ceremony.

"You Postle Peter! You Pistle Paul! I'll learn you some manners, you lim's er Satan. Ain't you got sinse ernuf to know Santy Claus didn't come way down here from North 'Merica jis' ter listen ter yo' gabble? As fer gittin' pinnies fer a takin' castor ile,—you know jis' as well as I do that you lick de spoon ev'y chanc't you git, you is dat fon' of ile. De ve'y las' time Docallison was here he done sayed you mak him sick to his stomach a guzzlin' ile de way you done."

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The old woman's tirade caused a general laugh, and Tweedles and I were really uneasy for fear Santy would shake off his bowl full of jelly he roared so loud. Wink found some more pennies which he surreptitiously handed to the crestfallen twins.

"Here, Pistle Peter and Postle Paul! Here's some pennies for you, to make up for your names," he whispered to the grinning little nigs.

CHAPTER XVIII.

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CHRISTMAS FOR SALLY WINN.

There were other cabins to visit and we had to tear ourselves away from Aunt Keziah's. Mr. Kent took many photographs of Santa Claus with the little darkeys crowding around him.

"This will be a gold mine to me," he averred. "I can see myself filling pages of advertising matter with illustrations from this morning."

Everywhere we went, Santa Claus was hailed with delight. We left many packages at many cabins and finally ended up at Sally Winn's. This was at Dee's instigation. Indeed it was a kindly thought that took us there. Poor Sally had been exercising unwonted self-control in not sending for Father at midnight on Christmas Eve. Jo said she had felt all kinds of flutterations but had submitted to a dose of the "pink medicine," and that, with the comfort she had derived from a hot water bottle, had tided her through the night. Then she had felt it incumbent upon her to get up and make waffles for breakfast because of the guest from New York.

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We had some gifts for Sally tied up in the Tucker's best style, with sheets on sheets of tissue paper, yards and yards of red and green ribbon, and dozens and dozens of Christmas seals. Mammy Susan had been growing a citronella slip for her and it had reached quite a pretentious size and begun to branch out like the parent plant.

Sally's delight was really pathetic to see. She, poor woman, had very little of interest in her life, so little that she had to make a real pleasure and excitement over her "spells." A visit from Santa Claus was almost as much fun to her as a visit from the Angel Gabriel would have been, and the sleigh bells were only next in cheer to the last trump. Sally, you will remember, was our neighbour at Milton who spent her life trying to die.

Our coming was a great surprise to her. Any pleasure that happened to come her way always took her unawares. She was certainly one of the Mrs. Gummidges of this world and was "a poor lone lorn critter" if I ever saw one. She was a grateful soul and was profuse in her thanks for the gifts. I had never seen her more enthusiastic although Father and I had never missed a Christmas in giving her some nice present. I verily believe it was the festive wrappings that appealed to her.

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Of course Mr. Tucker took her by storm. He acted Santa Claus just as he had at Aunt Keziah's and Sally, I know, regretted that her education kept her from joining ranks with the believers.

"Did you ever see anybody look so like himself? I have never seen a Santa Claus before that did not have on an ugly false face—hideous painted things that wouldn't fool a chicken," Sally began with her accustomed volubility. "I can't quite make up my mind that you are not Santy—"

"Well, don't make up your mind to any such treason. I am Santy!"

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"Well, Santy or not, I am mighty glad to see all of you. Now you must try some of my eggnog and fruit cake. Dr. Allison says my fruit cake is the best he ever tasted and that it is so well mixed that it is as digestible as sponge cake. My eggnog, too, can't be beat,—made of pure cream and eggs that are so fresh they were warm when I broke them. I waited for those finest Dominickers to get off their nests before I made it. 'Tain't strong of liquor and won't hurt a baby. Jo, bring my best Bohemian glasses. You'll find them on the tray in the dining room all set out on the sideboard. Here's my cake and I am proud to cut it for such company.

"Dr. Allison says he likes the looks of my cake. He says it looks like chewing tobacco, it is so nice and black and fruity, and that it tastes better than it looks. You can't trust all cooks with their fruit cake because it is so dark-like that dirt don't show in it and sometimes things that don't belong there get in it. I remember one time over at Mrs. Purdy's (of course I don't mean to be gossiping about her now that she is dead and gone)—but she cut a cake with all the airs and graces of a good cake-maker, which she never was, and what should I find in my piece—just one piece, mind you—but a shoe button and a bent pin. I just thought to myself: 'Well, if that's what I found, God in Heaven knows what I didn't find.' Now there ain't a thing in my cake but the best ingredients, and I'll wager nobody will ever find anything in my cooking foreign to the human digestion."

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We were certain of it, but Sally did not give us time to express our confidence. She plunged into a stream of eloquence concerning her Dominickers and their superior brand of eggs, as she ladled out the eggnog as smooth as a baby's cheek and as fluffy as a summer cloud.

"There are some that hold that a white Leghorn's eggs are more delicate than any other kind, but I say there is a richness about an old-fashioned Dominicker's eggs that nothing can come up to. What do you want with an egg being too delicate, anyhow? Of course, for Angel's Food they might be best, but I have never seen anything that an egg laid by a Leghorn will do that a Dominicker's won't do just as well. Of course nobody wants a duck egg or a goose egg for anything short of ginger bread,—they are coarse! Now a hard boiled guinea egg is my favourite of all eggs. I think a nice hot guinea egg, boiled until it is mealy—it takes a good half hour—and then mashed up with good batter bread made of the fresh meal, ground over at Macy's mill, provided the batter bread is made the right way,—none of your batter bread raised with baking powders, but my kind, raised with eggs and plenty of them, well beaten and baked quickly,—I do say that there is no breakfast better."

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The strangest thing about Sally Winn was that she longed for company, not for the good she might get out of it but just so she could pour forth her soul in conversation. We might just as well have been dumb for all she got from us, but all the time we were eating her truly wonderful cake and drinking her eggnog that even she could not praise according to its deserts, she regaled us with a stream of conversation that made our heads swim.

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"I understand poor Jo better now," whispered Dee to me. "How can he ever talk? No wonder! He gets out of the habit at home and can't get in it when he goes away."

"Tell Mammy Susan I have got a good starting of rose geranium for her. I would have sent it

over by Jo this morning but I was so afraid it might be too cold for it. It looks like Mammy Susan has all the luck with citronella and I have luck with rose geranium. My bush is so big it looks like I'll have to get Jo's watering tub from the barn to plant it in. It has long out-grown its pot. I certainly do like to have plenty of healthy rose geranium on hand when I make apple jelly. Nothing gives it the flavour that a leaf of rose geranium will,—just pour the boiling jelly over a leaf—one to each glass."

"That sounds fine!" exclaimed Santa Claus. "I don't think I ever tasted it."

"Wait a minute! I am going to fix one up for you to take back to Richmond and next summer when I make my jelly, I'll make some for you. It comes in mighty handy for sudden company." Sally bustled off and came back bearing a tumbler of jelly that would have taken a prize at any fair in the world, I feel sure. [244]

"Here it is!" she panted. "Jo is that fond of it that I sometimes hate to think of leaving him because I don't know who will ever make it to suit him."

"But are you thinking of leaving him?" questioned Mr. Tucker.

"Dying! I mean dying!"

"Oh, but you look so well!"

"I think so, too, Sally," I ventured. "You are getting to be right fat."

"Ah, my dear, that has nothing to do with health. The fatter I get the more of me there is to feel bad. I won't be long for this world, I am thankful to say. Fat! Why, I have seen many a fat corpse—more fat ones than lean ones." We could not gainsay such gruesome statistics, but I told her that Father had sent her a prescription that she must take immediately without fail. [245]

"And give up the pink medicine?"

"He says you won't need that for to-day, that is, if you take the other. Father says you are to bundle up and come over to Bracken for dinner. Jo and Mr. Kent are to come, too, of course, and that will mean that you will have no household cares. He says you must come. It is the doctor's orders."

"Well, if I must, I must!" she sighed. "I have great faith in Dr. Allison and am sure he would not prescribe something that would hurt me," and so Sally, with many layers of wraps enveloping her already portly person, and, clasping in her arms the rose geranium for Mammy Susan, was bundled into Jo's already overflowing sleigh and we merrily started off for Bracken.

A very funny thing happened on the way, at least it turned out to be funny although it might have been very serious. Dee, who was on the front seat between Wink and Jo, insisted upon driving. Sally, on the back seat with Dum and Mr. Kent, was so wrapped up that she was oblivious to the speed that the two spirited horses were making. Of course Peg was ready for a race and so were all of us and race we did for most of the trip home. Jo's horses were young and good trotters and Dee, with blazing eyes and glowing cheeks, let them go as fast as they wanted to. My old Peg had seen better days as a racer but had the advantage of a cutter and a small load and so made the best of it. I hugged the road and kept it, while Zebedee hurled defiance at our pursuers. [246]

About an eighth of a mile before the public road turned into the avenue at Bracken, Dee saw a chance to catch up with us and pass us. There was a smooth, unbroken stretch of snow that she thought was part of the road and she swerved her team to cut through it and get in the lead—but snow, like Charity, covers a multitude of sins. This pure mantle covered a great gully. The snow had drifted to that side of the road and the gully was filled and then neatly smoothed over. There was nothing to warn a person unacquainted with the road. Jo was evidently so taken up with Dee's glowing countenance that he was paying no attention to where she was taking them, when over they went as quietly and peacefully as turning over in bed. [247]

The horses were wonderful. They stopped stock-still. The near one was dragged over by the weight of the sleigh but he lay quite still. Peg behaved like the almost thoroughbred she is and not only stood quietly but gave a ringing neigh of encouragement to the other horses.

Zebedee and I were out in a jiffy and running to the assistance of the turnover. I deemed it wiser for me to attend to the horses. If they had struggled, it might have been quite serious. I loosened the traces on the one who had been able to keep his feet, and then the fallen one, and as soon as I had accomplished that, I caught hold of the bridle and got him up in no time. He was not hurt at all. Zebedee was digging out the crowd, who had, one and all, taken headers. A waving sea of legs presented itself to our astonished gaze. One by one they scrambled out, all looking more or less sheepish but all rosy and ready to laugh if they could just be reassured that no one was hurt. [248]

"Jo! Jo! Pull me out! The grey legs are mine!" came in muffled tones from the deepest part of the drift where two fat legs encased in homemade grey woolen stockings were wildly beating the air.

"Sally!" we cried, and in a moment we had her out.

"Oh, Lord!" I groaned. "Poor Father and more pink medicine!" but not a bit of it! Sally was as

game as the rest of them, and came up smiling and happy when she, too, found no one was hurt. The snow was as dry as powder and shook off them like so much flour. The sleigh was righted in short order and they all clambered back. Dee penitently handed the reins to Jo.

"I am not to be trusted. You had better drive."

"Not at all! No one could have told that was not perfectly good road. I should have been looking at the road instead of—ahem—ahem—instead of—instead—of—that buzzard, sailing down there," pointing to one of the denizens of the air who had made his appearance in the sky almost as though he had expected some pickings from our turnover.

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"Humph! Buzzard, indeed!" grunted Sally. "If I was Miss Dee I shouldn't thank you to be a calling me a buzzard." Which went to show that Sally was not so much wrapped up that she could not see what was right in front of her.

What a dinner we did have! Tweedles and I often spoke of it when we were back at school, especially on the veal pot-pie days. The table was resplendent with its fine old damask and silver and with its load of good things.

"That there gobbler," said Mammy Susan, pointing with pride at the king of the feast sitting on his parsley throne, "don't weigh a ounce less 'n twenty pounds. He was the greediest one of the whole flock an' now see what he done come to! He was always the struttinest fowl and looks lak he is still some pompous with his bosom chuck full of chestnuts."

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Blanche and Bill were to wait on the table, but Mammy Susan had to come into the dining room to see that everything went off in proper style. She stood back like a head waiter in some fine restaurant and directed her minions with the airs of a despot.

"Pass that ther macaroni to Miss Dum!" would come in a sibilant whisper. And then as Bill would prance by the old woman with all of the style he had learned on the Mississippi steamboat, she would say in stern undertones: "Don't wait fer folks to lick they plates befo' you gib um a sicond help."

"Blanche, gib Miss Sally Winn some 'scaloped oyschters, and there is Mr. Tucker 'thout a livin' thing on his plate."

Eating was not the only thing we did at that feast. We talked and laughed and cracked jokes until poor Sally Winn forgot all about dying and I think realized there was something in life, after all. What we had for that Christmas dinner was no doubt what every family in the United States who could have it was having, but it seemed to us to be better, and I believe it was. Mammy Susan had a witch's wand to stir things with and whatever she touched was perfect. Her cranberry sauce always jelled; her candied sweet potatoes were only equalled by marrons glacé, so Zebedee said. The cheese on her macaroni always browned just right; and her mashed potatoes always looked like banks of snowy clouds. She seemed to have the power of glorifying egg plant and salsify so that persons often asked what the delicious thing was they were eating.

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"Whew!" ejaculated Zebedee, "I am certainly glad I did not have to eat in my embonpoint. I would have touched the table long ago and would have had to stop. As it is, I can still eat about three inches without having a collision."

Our day passed in feasting and merry making. The walls of Bracken rang with merriment. Even Father came out of his book and got quite gay. Sally Winn forgot to hold her heart and laughed like a girl at the jests.

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"It will be fatal to sit down after such a dinner," declared Dee. "We had better go out and coast and jolt it down."

There was only one small sled, left from my childhood, but the attic was full of broken chairs, and in a few minutes the eager males had fashioned make-shift coasters out of old rockers and chair backs.

"They are not very elegant but they will slide down the hill, which is the main thing," said Wink, as he lay flat on his stomach and whizzed down the long hill to the spring.

We had a chair back apiece and so did not have to wait turns nor did we have to go double. I must say I like to coast by myself and guide my own sled. The impromptu sleds were not so very strong and it was much safer not to overload. We coasted until the long hill was as slick as glass and, with the exception of an occasional turnover, there were no casualties.

Father and Sally Winn watched us from the library window but after a while they came out, Sally bundled up to within an inch of her life, and what should they do but mount some chair backs and get in the game. Jo Winn fell off his sled when he saw his invalid sister, who only the night before had been on the point of shuffling off this mortal coil, actually straddling a chair back and taking the hill like a native of Switzerland.

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"This is a new prescription I have given Sally," whispered Father to Jo. "She is to coast every day as long as the snow lasts, and after it melts we are to think of some other form of exercise for her."

"How about horse-back riding?" I suggested. "Jo's old Bess is just like a comfortable rocker."

"The very thing!" exclaimed Father. "Let her ride around the yard for a few days until she

gains confidence, and then she can go on a regular ride. Go to Milton for the mail and even come over here after a little."

"Must we still keep up the pink medicine?" asked Jo.

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"Oh, well! Give it to her in emergencies, but not too freely."

Jo had a twinkle in his eye. He knew that the pink medicine was made of perfectly good pump water with a little colouring matter and enough bromide to quiet the nerves of an oyster.

"This Christmas has done something for Sally if for no one else," said Father. "It has taught her that she can go heels over head in the snow without affecting her heart; that she can eat as good a dinner as the next without feeling bad; and that she can coast down a hill without turning a hair."

I looked at Sally settling herself on a chair back that Wink had kindly pulled up the hill for her. Sticking out her fat, woolly, grey legs on each side, she took the hill in great shape. I hoped she was cured of her imaginary ailments and would let my dear Father get many a good night's rest by not sending for him every time she felt her heart beat.

CHAPTER XIX.

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BACK IN THE TREAD-MILL.

That is the way we looked on going back to school. It was not really a tread-mill, nothing nearly so dreadful, but we considered ourselves very much put upon that the holidays could not last forever, that books had to be studied, and rules either obeyed or punishments meted out if they were broken.

We had gone home knowing that demerits were going to have to be worked off after the holidays, but as I have said before, it had had no more effect on our spirits than a threat of hell fire would have on a new-born babe. But babies must grow up and time will pass and holidays come to an end, and here we were paying up for our foolishness on our last night at school before Christmas.

Almost all the Junior class was in bad, and misery loves company, so we lightened our labours all we could with sly jests and notes written to each other instead of the pages of dictionary we were supposed to be copying.

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Of all punishments, copying dictionary seems to me to be the most futile. It was disagreeable enough, but of course punishments should be that, but it was not only disagreeable but such a terrible waste of time. I did not mind learning hymns, especially if I already knew them, but the pages of dictionary almost persuaded me to behave myself,—not quite, though.

"When we get out of this, let's be either very good or very careful," said Dum, as we finished up our first day in durance vile while the rest of the school, all the good girls, had gone for a nice walk in the woods. "I am liable to do something desperate if I get in bad again."

"I am going to try," declared Mary, very penitent after having to memorize a very long and very lugubrious hymn. "It may not pay to be good, but you've certainly got to pay to be bad."

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All of us tried to be good. We studied like Trojans (not that Trojans ever did study as far as I know). I learned my history by heart and actually won a smile of approval from Miss Plympton. I knuckled down to geometry and if the figure was drawn exactly as it was in the book and the same letters were used to designate the angles, I got on swimmingly. A slight change of letter upset me considerably, however. I never could understand as I had under Miss Cox's reign. I was doing algebra as well, although the Juniors were supposed to be through with that delectable study; but I had started out so far behind that I had to keep on with it if I ever hoped to get my degree.

English under Miss Ball continued to be delightful and all of us did good work with her. She had a power of making knowledge desirable by making it interesting, and she made literature delightful because she loved it herself and was never bored. The parallel reading she gave us to do was well chosen and broadening. One thing that especially pleased me about Miss Ball was her cheerful outlook. She did not believe that all good writing was through with,—that literature had died with Tennyson and Thackeray. She read modern poets with as much pleasure as Father himself and actually gave some of the modern novels for parallel reading. Nor did she scorn the five cent magazines.

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She encouraged us to do original work. It was a great relief to have a teacher say: "Write what suits you," rather than to give out one of the time-honoured hackneyed themes,—such as: My Afternoon Walk, or A Quiet Sunday Morning, or Thoughts on a Sunset.

My head was so full of plots I could hardly concentrate on one. The trouble was I so often found my plot not to be so very original after all. Miss Ball would say a story was very good but point out its similarity to noted productions, and I would realize that I had been unconsciously

influenced. She endeavoured to make us be ourselves at no matter what cost. "A poor thing but mine own" was to be our motto.

"If you want to be successful be modern at least," she would say. "If you must imitate any one, imitate O. Henry or Ferber, even Montagu Glass. Don't try to write like Edgar Allan Poe. If you are going to write like him, you will do it, anyhow, and a poor imitation of him is terrible. If any of you want to make a living with writing find out what the public likes and what the magazine editors want and do that just as well as you can do it. You need not feel that you are hitching Pegasus to a plough and even if you do, ploughing is a very worthy occupation and there is poetry in it if taken properly." Then she read us some from Masefield's "Everlasting Mercy":

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"The past was faded like a dream,
There came the jingling of a team,
A ploughman's voice, a clink of chain,
Slow hoofs, and harness under strain.
Up the slow slope a team came bowing,
Old Callow at his autumn ploughing,
Old Callow, stooped above the hales,
Ploughing the stubble into wales.
His grave eyes looking straight ahead,
Shearing a long straight furrow red;
His plough-foot high to give it earth
To bring new food for men to birth.
O wet red swathe of earth laid bare,
O truth, O strength, O gleaming share,
O patient eyes that watch the goal,
O ploughman of the sinner's soul.
O Jesus, drive the coulter deep
To plough my living man from sleep."

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"If you can hitch your Pegasus to a plough and 'bring new food for men to birth' you have done a better deed than if you had soared in the skies all the time in the wake of some great men. I consider O. Henry an unconscious philanthropist. He has opened our eyes to the charm of the usual."

Such lessons as these gave us strength to bear with the extreme boresomeness of other classes.

We worked off the demerits against us, and by being both good and careful we got no more to sadden our days. Our dummies were neatly folded up and seldom brought out. Just to show that we were still human beings, we did have an occasional spread, and once Miss Plympton let Tweedles and me go under the chaperonage of Miss Ball down to tea with dear old Captain Pat Leahy, the one-legged gate keeper at the crossing. He was so glad to see us he almost wept. He had sent us a formal invitation but doubted Miss Plympton's giving her consent.

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"An' the poosies have been a lickin' uv their furr all morning to get rready for the coompany an' I got me neighbourr, Mrs. Rooney, to bake me a poond cake for tay."

"Why, Captain, we did not dream you would go to any trouble for us. But we certainly do adore pound cake, and isn't that a beauty?" enthused Dee.

The little table was set ready for tea. You remember how the Captain's gate house looked. It was very tiny, so tiny that you did not see how any one could live in it, but he declared he had more room than he needed. The lower berth from a wrecked Pullman served him as seat by day and bed by night. A doll-baby-sized cooking stove, very shiny and black, was at one side, while a shelf over it was covered with all the china and cooking utensils he needed. A little table, just like the one on sleepers, was hooked in between the seats and a very dainty repast was spread thereon. There were at least a dozen cats but all of them were handsome and healthy and very polite. There had been eight the winter before, counting Oliver, the one we took back to Captain Leahy.

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"They will mooltiply an' I have a harrrd time findin' good homes for thim. Bett here behind the stove, has presinted Oliverr wid some schtip brothers and sisters. The good Lorrd knows what I am to do wid 'em."

"Please, please let me hold some of them!" and Dee was down on her knees in the corner near Bett's bed. "Look! Look! Their eyes are open! Four of them! Oh, I do want all of them so bad."

Bett seemed perfectly willing to trust Dee with an armful of kittens, indeed I think she was rather relieved to be rid of the care of them for a while, as she sidled out of the door and went trotting up the road, her large handsome tail waving joyously.

"Now she's gone to the cloob or maybe to a suffragette meetin'. Poor Bett has a schtoopid life, confined as she is to rraisin' sooch larrge families," and the old man gave one of his rich vibrant laughs that warmed the cockles of your heart.

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We talked of Miss Peyton and how much we liked her, but since Miss Ball was a member of the faculty, we refrained from our criticisms of Miss Plympton, although we knew that Captain Leahy was dying to hear all about our latest scrapes and how we got out of them and what we had to

say of our stern principal. She really was not nearly so stern as we gave her credit for, but we were nothing but girls and young people are always extreme in their opinions. Everybody is either perfectly lovely or perfectly horrid in their eyes. When I look back on my days at Gresham I realize that Miss Plympton's chief fault was that she had no humour, and surely lacking that God-given attribute was not her fault.

We enjoyed that tea greatly. Captain Leahy certainly had his share and more of humour and his keen comments were a never failing source of delight. Miss Ball was young and full of spirits and good stories, and the little gate house actually rocked with laughter. [264]

We devoured every crumb of Mrs. Rooney's pound cake and the host had to fill his little blue tea pot three times before our thirst was quenched. Of course Dee had to save a little milk for the kittens and Captain Leahy seemed to think it was perfectly *au fait* for her to let them lap from her saucer, although Dum and I are of one mind about eating at the table with cats. Now I don't mind a dog at the table at all, provided it is a polite dog who does not help himself until he is told to; but cats! Ugh! They are entirely too promiscuous, as Mammy Susan says.

CHAPTER XX.

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THE FIRE DRILL.

"Young ladies," said Miss Plympton one morning in March, "I fear that in a measure I have been lax in certain duties imposed upon the pupils of Gresham."

A groan from somewhere in chapel, no one knew just where, was the eloquent response to this statement. We had actually passed January and February and plunged into the middle of March without getting into any very bad messes. The philosophical among us could look forward to the first of June and release from the stringent rules that bound us. I, for one, was not philosophical at all but had a feeling that I was to spend the rest of my life doing things by the clock and knowing a year ahead just what I was to have to eat for every meal.

I know I do a lot of talking about food but it seems to me that something you have to contemplate three times a day is a rather important factor in life. I used to feel if they would only get mixed up and give us on Tuesday what they usually gave on Wednesday that I could bear it better. [266]

"The duty of which I speak," continued Miss Plympton, ignoring the groan, "is the fire drill that should be regularly practiced and, I regret to say, has not been. The building is as nearly as possible a fire-proof one. Nevertheless, I deem it prudent that we engage in this drill."

"What a bore!" growled some of the girls.

Others welcomed the news with pleasure, "Anything for a change!"

"The fire alarm, as all of you perhaps know, is six short taps of the gong—a pause—and six more. When the alarm rings, which of course it will do without warning, I expect every pupil in the school to get out of the building with as little noise and confusion as possible. Indeed I demand no noise at all and no confusion. No one is to go to her room for any purpose whatsoever if the fire alarm should ring while she is in class or otherwise employed. If she should be in her room, she is to leave it as expeditiously as possible and not return to it until permission is given." [267]

"And let my deer skin and pictures burn up?" exclaimed Dum under her breath. "Nit!"

"'Tain't a real fire, goosey!" said Dee.

"Yes, but it might be."

"Silence!" tapped Miss Plympton. "Now I have warned you of an alarm in the near future and I want to see who is to show the most presence of mind. I want to see who will be out of the building first but with no noise or confusion."

"You notice she didn't say how she required us to get out of the building, by what route, I mean, and you watch me! I am going to get out my own way," Dum whispered to me as we were dismissed to our class rooms.

"Well, I'm game. I'll go any way you do."

"Good! I bet you will, and of course Dee will, too."

We feverishly awaited the threatened alarm and the fire drill that was to follow. Gresham was a big building and the 125 girls in it should be able to get out without any great confusion. [268]

"If they only ring it while we are in our rooms we can work our scheme and beat all the girls to the open," said Dum.

We had decided not to let Mary and Annie in on our plan as Annie was trying very hard not to get any demerits. Mr. Pore treated bad marks on a report very seriously, while our dear fathers did not look upon a bad mark as something that could not be lived down.

"DONG! DONG! DONG! DONG! DONG! DONG!" a pause and then six more dong.

It was a few minutes before supper, so close to it, in fact, that for a moment we thought it was the gong for that frugal repast. We were just trying to doll up a bit after a very strenuous game of tennis, the first of the season as the courts had not been fit to use because of the many rains we had been deluged with. We had had some sheets tied together for days, ever since Miss Plympton had given warning about the fire drill. We had determined to astonish and delight her by the quiet and orderly way we would get out of the building. Dum began rapidly taking down pictures and wrapping them up in her beloved deer skin, the one she had shot and Zebedee had tanned and made into a rug for her. Dee tied the sheets tightly to the radiator while I gathered up the bits of jewelry and knotted them in a handkerchief. This we had rehearsed and knew how to do it in a moment. When Dee got the sheets tied, we were ready for the descent. Dum was to go first, as it was her scheme. With her bundle flung over her back by a strap, she grasped the improvised life line and slid safely to the ground. I followed, giggling so I came very near losing my grip. When I got to the end of the last sheet, I must say I hated to let go. I looked down and the ground seemed miles away. It was really only about six feet. Dee had taken up more in the knot she had tied around the radiator than we had allowed for in our calculations.

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"Drop," came hoarsely from Dum. So drop I did, wrenching my ankle painfully in the fall.

Dee came down like a movie actress and then we scurried around the house in time to beat all the whole school out on the lawn. My ankle hurt like fury but I grinned and bore it. While Miss Plympton had not designated the manner of our exit from the building, we well knew that if she got on to our mode of egress we would hear from her and that not in endearing terms.

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She was standing near the great front door on the gallery, but it was dusk and we were able to sidle close to the wall and have all the appearance of coming out of the building.

"Why, young ladies, you are very prompt," she said approvingly. "Are the inmates on your floor out of their rooms?"

"We—we—we don't know."

"We reckon they are."

"We did not stop to see."

The girls by this time came trooping out, some of them half dressed, getting ready for supper as they were when the gong sounded. They were very gay until they saw Miss Plympton; then they sobered down.

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Several of the more excitable ones were weeping, certain it was a real fire.

Mary and Annie were the very last to appear. They, it seemed, had lost much time trying to find us. They were sure we would not have gone without warning them and so would not desert us.

"We looked everywhere for you!" cried Mary when she spied us. "Where on earth have you been?"

"Shhh! We'll tell you later!" I whispered.

Annie was much flushed and excited and looked as though she, too, had feared it was a real fire.

"I hated to leave my box," she said to me in a low tone. "You see, those are all the clothes I have and all I'll be likely to have for many a day. I was afraid it was a real fire and was very much frightened about you, my friends." The poor little thing burst out crying and we all turned in and comforted her till she began to laugh.

All this time my ankle was killing me. I stood on one foot but the throbbing was intense, and then I knew the time was coming when Miss Plympton would order us back into the building, and how I was to walk I did not see. It had been all I could do to get from around the corner of the school after my fatal drop, and now that the excitement that had buoyed me up had subsided and I knew I was going to have to walk on cold facts, I did not see how it could be done. I was game, game enough for anything. What I dreaded most of all was giving Tweedles away. Miss Plympton had seen us arrive together and if I had a sprained ankle, whatever I had done to get it they must have done, too.

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"As soon as Lady Plympton gives the command, fly up to 117 and pull in the sheets," I whispered to Dum. "I've hurt my ankle and shall have to take things easy. Dee will help me get in, and please whisper to Mary Flannagan to get on my other side." I thought it better to have Dee stay behind where some sort of ready finesse might be needed.

They got me in—I don't know just how. I have never imagined greater agony than I went through. I never uttered a single groan, however, although I felt like shrieking. Before we made our painful way to the stairs, Miss Plympton disappeared into the office, and then Mary and Dee picked me up bodaciously, making a chair with their hands, and they got me up to 117 in short order. The girls who were on our corridor just thought it was part of our monkey shines and did not question the reason.

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When I got to 117, of course I fainted. That was what I had been expecting to do all the time. It

was a mercy I had not done it before. I had felt the cold sweat breaking out on my upper lip, which is a sure forerunner of a faint. I had never really fainted before. I had been knocked silly several times, once on the ice when Mabel Binks had bumped into me and knocked me down, but this faint was one that was simply the outcome of pain.

It was a blessed relief from the agony I had been in and I did not thank whoever it was that put household ammonia under my nose and doused my head with cold water. I felt as though I should like to stay faint forever.

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"Did you get the sheets in out of the window?" I stammered when I struggled back to life.

"Yes! Yes!" and a relieved giggle from Dum.

Dee was busy turning over the leaves in her "First Aid to the Injured."

"Let her lie down, put a pillow under her heart! There! Now which foot is it?"

"Never mind which foot it is now! There goes the supper gong! Annie, you and Mary had better skidoo out of this room or you'll get so many demerits you won't be out of bounds to go home in June. Dee, you just unlace my left shoe and let me keep it upon the bed. Dum, please get out my nightie for me and then all of you go down to supper and tell the powers that be that poor little Page Allison was so excited over the fire drill that she had hysterics and had to go to bed without her supper." The long speech was too much for me and I came near going off again. "Go on! If you don't, we'll all get found out and then what?"

Tweedles said they had never sat through such an interminable meal as that one.

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"Nothing but soda biscuit and stewed prunes and corn beef hash! But you would have thought it was the finest course dinner it took so long!" gasped Dee. "Let me see your poor foot. Gee, it's swollen!"

"Isn't it a blessing it's Saturday night and no study hour? Now Dee and I can wait on you and get you comfy."

"But, Dum, I don't want to keep you from dancing in the Gym. It is lots of fun and you know it."

"Fun much! How could I enjoy myself when I know you are up here suffering?"

"Well!" said Dee, consulting her book again, "the first thing is to soak it in very hot water, as hot as you can stand it. Go on, Dum, and fill our pitcher before the once-a-weekers get started on their tub night orgy." We always called the girls who took baths only on Saturday night the "once-a-weekers."

My injured member was put to soak in such hot water that I trembled for my toe nails. Dee stood by with a pitcher ready to pour more in and "hot" it up as soon as it got to the bearing point. After a good half hour of soaking, Dee poured cold water over it and then put on as neat a bandage as any surgeon could have done I feel sure. It seemed too tight to me, but Dee insisted that it would loosen up and I must bear it tight.

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"You know if a doctor had hold of you he would put it in plaster. I am afraid maybe we ought to 'fess up and call in a doctor. It might be a very serious thing to neglect it."

"Nonsense! I trust your bandaging more than I would old Dr. Stick-in-the-mud's, here at Gresham. You know he would not do anything quite so modern as put it in plaster."

Dee carried the bandage well up on my leg to keep it from puffing out over the top and then I was put tenderly to bed.

"I can't see that because I've got a sore foot it is any reason I should have to go hungry," I whined. "I am so empty I could easily eat up my bandage."

"Don't you dare!"

"Oh, honey, I am so sorry! I don't know why we did not think to sneak you something. You looked so pale and wan when we left you to go to supper that somehow I never connected you with the thought of food. To think of your being hungry!" and Dum's hazel eyes got moist.

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"But then's then and now's now! I reckon I can hold out 'til morning, however."

One of the peculiarities of boarding school is that if you are sick at all you are supposed to be too sick to eat. If you are really very bad off, so far gone you have to be put in the hospital, then you are fed up. If a girl skips a meal from indisposition, nothing is done about her food by the housekeeper, but if her roommate chooses to sneak some of her own supply up to the sufferer, although it is supposed to be against the rules to take any food from the table, at a time like that the infringement is winked at.

The girls were afraid to get out the alcohol lamp and make me a cup of instantaneous chocolate as we were almost sure one of the teachers would come to see how I was before they turned in for the night. As it was, they had hardly got the bowl of hot water out of the way and the room to rights before Miss Ball knocked on the door. She had a dainty tray of food for me.

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"I didn't think hysterics would last so long you would not want something to eat, Page," she said archly, laying a little stress on hysterics. "I cooked this for you on my chafing dish."

The teachers, of course, used alcohol lamps all they chose. It was a nice cup of chocolate, with a marshmallow on top in lieu of whipped cream, two shirred eggs and a stack of buttered crackers.

"Oh, Miss Ball, you are so good!"

We felt sneaky indeed not to tell Miss Ball the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth concerning our escapade, but we knew it would be her duty to report us and the chances were she would do her duty. So we kept mum while I devoured the very good supper.

I was pretty certain that Miss Ball did not give very much credence to the hysterics dodge. She knew me too well. I was not the hysterical type. She was too much of a lady, however, to question me and understood girls well enough to know when to let them alone. [279]

"Isn't she a peach, though?" was Dee's comment after the kind young teacher had gone off bearing the empty tray. I had devoured the last crumb, feeling much better in consequence.

"Page," whispered Dum, after lights were out, "do you think you will be able to bear your foot to the ground by to-morrow?"

"I can't tell. I am feeling lots better now and there is no telling what a night's rest will do for me. We shall just have to take no thought of to-morrow. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'"

"Yes, just let to-morrow look after itself," yawned Dee. "We got out of the window and beat all the girls out of the building, and if one of us got a sprained ankle in consequence, we still have the glory of being out first and the thrill is still with me of sliding down that sheet. I'd like to do it again. That reminds me, I have not had time to untie the sheets. I'll do it in the morning to destroy all traces. Good ni—" [280]

But all of us were asleep before she got out the ght.

CHAPTER XXI.

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THE REALITY.

We all slept heavily. It had been an exciting evening and weariness was the result. I dreamed a terrible dream: that I was trying to get out of a fire and one leg was tied to the bed. In my struggles to pull myself loose, I awakened and found the matter was that my whole leg had gone to sleep by reason of the very tight bandage. I rubbed it back to consciousness and then determined to see if I could bear my weight on that foot. All of our machinations would be as naught if I should be laid up indefinitely, as investigations would be sure to follow.

It was one of those hot, windy March nights. The wind had been blowing so that the ground had dried up until it was dusty. My throat felt parched and uncomfortable. I simply had to have a drink of water. [282]

Should I call one of the girls? I knew they would be angry with me for not doing it, but they were both sleeping so peacefully. I have always hated to arouse any one from sleep. It seems such a shame to break up the beatific state you are usually in when asleep. It fell to my lot to awaken Tweedles every morning at school until I should think they would have hated me. I put my bandaged foot to the floor and found I could stand it. I reached for my bed-room slippers but they were, of course, not in their accustomed place as I had not used them the night before, so I slipped on my shoes. It was difficult to get the left one on, by reason of the bandage plus the swelling, but I squeezed into it and laced it up for support. Donning my kimono, I made a rather painful way to the bath rooms. I wondered if I could walk without limping. Certainly not to church. I began to plan a headache for next day that would excuse me from everything. It seemed to me as I wandered down the dark hall that I did have a little headache, a kind of heaviness that I might call a headache without telling a very big fib. The water tasted mighty good and I drank and drank. [283]

What was that strange odour? It was burnt varnish! There was a faint light in the bath room and another far off down the hall. By that light I was sure I saw thin waves of smoke. I forgot my lame ankle and ran to the top of the steps. I could smell the burnt varnish more plainly.

What should I do? Ring the fire alarm of course! I slid down the bannisters, not only to expedite matters but to save my ankle that had begun to remind me of its existence. The gong was just outside the dining-room door.

"DONG! DONG! DONG! DONG! DONG! DONG!—DONG! DONG! DONG! DONG! DONG! DONG!"

I rang it loud and clear; and then I thought maybe I had better repeat it, so I did. From a perfectly still house a moment before, now pandemonium reigned. The smoke was getting thicker. The smell of burnt varnish was making a tightening in my throat. The wind had increased and was blowing a perfect hurricane, as though it were in partnership with the fire. [284]

I ran upstairs thankful for the laced-up shoe. Our corridor was alive with excited girls who seemed to have no idea what to do.

"Is it another fire drill?" asked one dazed freshman.

"Oh, yes! It's a fire drill with realistic smoke to make you hurry," I called. "Get on your shoes and kimonos and coats just as fast as you can and go out of the building!"

My words of command rather quieted the girls and some of them ran to do what I had said, but some of them just went on squealing.

I found Tweedles sleeping sweetly. They were so in the habit of trusting me to awaken them when the gong sounded in the morning that its ringing in the middle of the night meant nothing to them.

"Fire! Fire!" I shouted as I tore the covers off of them. "Get up and help! The hall is full of girls who need some one to lead them! The whole school is full of smoke!"

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They were awake in a moment and out of bed. There was no drowsy yawning or stretching with Tweedles. They were either fast asleep or wide awake.

"Here, put on your shoes and wraps, something warm. You might as well be burnt up as die of pneumonia." Dum's pack with her pictures and deer skin had never been unrolled, so she strapped it on her back. "Don't stop for clothes, I am afraid there isn't time. We can come back for them if things are not as bad as I think." Dee had begun to empty bureau drawers into a sheet and to take things out of the wardrobe.

"Well, I might as well throw this out the window for luck," she said, tying the sheet up into what looked like a tramp's great bundle.

The hall was emptying as the girls raced down stairs, but an agonizing shriek arose from the lower hall, which was now dense with smoke. The front door could not be opened. It had been locked for the night and, according to a rule Miss Plympton had made, the key had been hung in her office. Of course no one knew this. There were many ways to get out of Gresham, so many that it was perfectly silly not to be able to get out, but that pack of silly, frightened girls came racing upstairs again. The lower hall was now too full of smoke to venture down in it again, and a lurid light was appearing, giving a decidedly sinister aspect to things.

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Tweedles and I, with Mary and Annie, met the panic-stricken girls at the top of the steps. "Why didn't you go out through the dining room?" I asked sternly. I found that some one would have to be stern.

"Flames were there!" sobbed a great tall girl, the one from Texas.

Teachers in a fire are no more good than school girls. There were two on our corridor in Carter Hall, but I saw one of them go frantically back into her room and throw the bowl and pitcher out of her window and come out carefully holding a down cushion.

Dee was quite collected and cool.

"Come into our room, 117," she commanded all the screaming crowd. "There is no smoke there. You can get out of our window."

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She immediately began tying the still-knotted sheets to our radiator and with a sly look at me she pulled another sheet off of her bed, muttering as she attached it to the others, "So it will be sure to reach the ground."

"I can't go down there! I can't! I can't!" screamed the girl from Texas.

"Nonsense! Then let some one else go first! You go, Page!"

"I think I had better see if all the girls are out of their rooms first. But I am not a bit afraid. See, twist the sheet around your arm this way and then catch hold with the other hand and there you go!" and I sent a spunky little freshman spinning to terra firma.

Dum and Dee got all the girls out in a few minutes, while I limped through all the rooms to see that no one was left. The rooms were in the greatest confusion imaginable as the inmates had endeavoured to save their clothes and had tied them up in bundles and thrown them out of the windows. I wondered if the other parts of the building had been emptied, but felt that I had better get out myself as the smoke was so thick you could cut it. Fortunately the moon was shining brightly for the electric light fuses were burnt out, and but for the moon and a few flash lights we would have been in total darkness.

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All the girls were out but Tweedles and me.

"You next, Page! Be careful about your ankle, honey," and Dee tenderly assisted me out the window.

I slid down, and thanks to the extra sheet, did not have to drop the six feet that had been my undoing the evening before. When I got to the ground I stood waiting for Tweedles to come down, but they had disappeared from the window; and though I shouted and called them they did not appear for several minutes. And then when they did come, what did they let down from the window but Annie's precious trunk!

It gave me quite a shock. I was looking up, straining my eyes to see one of my precious friends begin the descent, when the end of the trunk appeared in the window and was gradually lowered by trunk straps they had fastened together. The glowing faces of the girls looked down on me. They were evidently having the time of their lives.

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"Drag the trunk away from the building!" shouted Dum above the noise made by 125 squealing, screaming girls and a raft of distracted servants, together with the rather tardy arrival of the village fire engine.

The building was now doomed. Nothing ever burns so brightly as a fireproof building when once it starts. It is like the fury of a patient man.

"Is every one out of the building?" called Dee.

"Where is Miss Plympton?" quavered the teacher who had thrown her bowl and pitcher out of the window and was still hugging her down cushion.

Where? Where indeed? The thing had happened so quickly and everything was in such an uproar that no one had thought of the principal. Could she have slept through the gong and the subsequent noise?

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"Miss Plympton! Where is Miss Plympton?" went up in a shout from the crowd.

Her room was in a wing of the building that had not yet been touched by flames, although the blinding smoke was everywhere. I went through an agony of suspense that I hope never to have to experience again when my dear Tuckers disappeared from the window of 117, evidently to go in search of Miss Plympton.

They found her in her room sleeping sweetly. Fortunately her door was not locked and they were able to get in. Dee told me she was lying on her back sawing gourds to beat the band. Of course, any one accustomed to sleeping in a noise such as she was making, could sleep through a bombardment.

"Fire!" called Dum in her ear.

"Get up or you'll be burnt up!" roared Dee.

She turned over on her side and began that soft purring whistle that snorers give when their tune is interrupted. They had finally to drag her up and then they said she assumed some dignity, evidently thinking it was one of those Tucker jokes that she never could see through. When she realized the importance of hurry, she hurried so fast that she neglected the formalities of a kimono. The smoke was very dense in the hall as Tweedles half carried, half dragged her to their room, thinking it was best to trust to the old reliable sheets to get them out of the window rather than to attempt to descend from Miss Plympton's with the delay that would be necessary to knot more sheets.

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When they appeared at the window, a deafening shout went up from the expectant crowd. This shout of praise was turned into hysterical laughter when the figure of Miss Plympton was distinguished on the window sill. She was clad and clad only in pink pajamas and red Romeo slippers. Dum showed her how to twist the sheet around her right arm and clasp it below tightly with her left and let herself down. She came down like a game sport. If I had had a movie camera, I should have been assured of a fortune right there. I have seen many a film, but never one that equalled that scene of Miss Plympton coming down the sheets in her pink pajamas and red Romeo slippers.

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She was in a dazed state but quickly got her nerve. I gave her my coat as I had on a warm kimono, and I felt that the dignity of my sex demanded that Miss Plympton's pajamas should be quickly covered up. She thanked me, evidently grateful for the attention, and then she arose to the occasion and took command. Tweedles came down next in a great sister act. They were still enjoying themselves to the utmost.

The firemen had got their engine going and were painfully pumping a thin stream of water on the building. Miss Plympton suggested that they put up their hook and ladders and try to go into the part of the building where the flames had not reached and save some of the girls' clothes if possible. This they did, and bundles similar to the one we had hurled out of our window began to be pitched from the rooms. Now began the fight with sneak thieves who had come up from the village. I saw one big negro woman making off with a bundle as big as she was. My ankle put me out of the running, but I put Mary Flannagan on to it and she darted after the thief. With her powers of a ventriloquist that so often she had used for our amusement, she threw her voice so that it seemed to come from the inside of the great bundle.

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"Who's carrying off my bones?" she cried in a deep sepulchral tone, and the scared darkey dropped her loot and ran like a rabbit.

We formed a police squad among the Juniors and many a thief was made to bring back some prize he hoped to make away with.

The building burned merrily on. It could not have been more than an hour before it was completely gutted, in spite of the gallant fight the village firemen put up with their rather pitiful excuse for an engine. The wind was high and blew every spark into flame. It got so hot we were forced to take a stand far from the school. The girls did their best to identify their bundles, and

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when once identified, they sat on them to make sure of them.

Miss Plympton ordered us to form into classes out on the campus, and then she carefully went through each class to see that we were all there and all right. Then she put us in charge of teachers. This was very amusing, as I am sure the teachers had done little to deserve the honour of commissioned officers. I believe Margaret Sayre and Miss Ball were the only ones who had shown any presence of mind at all.

No one seemed to know how the fire had started. All we knew was it was in the cellar. Mr. Ryan finally reported that he had not perceived it until after I had rung the alarm. He insisted he had made all the rounds, but I could not help having my doubts in the matter as I had covered a good deal of the building in my wild flights and had not once seen a gleam of his lantern.

I told Miss Plympton how I had been forced to get up for a drink of water and how I had smelt burning varnish and how full the lower hall was of smoke. [295]

"Why didn't you call me?"

"I thought the fire alarm would call everybody."

"Ahem! Quite right," she said rather sheepishly. "The fact is I heard the gong in my sleep but was dreaming of the fire drill."

"That seems to have been the case with almost every one. I fancy if I had not been thirsty all of us might still be sweetly dreaming."

"I want to thank you for your behaviour and congratulate you on your presence of mind." This from Miss Plympton. "I wish you would tell the Misses Tucker to come to me. I have not yet thanked them for saving my life."

I was amused at this, but did not think it at all funny that I was sent on an errand, as my foot felt like coals of fire and hot ploughshares and all kinds of terrible ordeals. I limped off but the first groan of the night slipped from me.

"Why, child! What is the matter?" Her voice was actually soft and sympathetic. [296]

"Nothing!" I stammered, thinking to myself that I was in for an investigation now. "I ricked my ankle."

"How?"

"Getting out the window." I was a little sullen in tone now, but I was in so much pain by this time that nothing made very much difference to me.

"Why, you poor little heroine! I am going to have you sent over to the hotel immediately and have a doctor look at it."

Maybe you think I didn't feel foolish and sneaky! Miss Plympton thought I meant I had just sprained it that night instead of the evening before in the fire drill. I was not accustomed to subterfuge and my face burned with the effort to keep the secret. I was not at liberty to involve Tweedles in my confession, and it was impossible to make one without doing it.

Just at this juncture old Captain Leahy came stumping up.

"Well, phat is all this? The beautiful schcool all burnt oop! I am grievin' at phwat our sweet lady will say; boot praise be, she was not herre to go down wid the ship!" [297]

"Oh, Captain, I am glad to see you. I have sprained my ankle and I have just got to get somewhere and lie down." I had visions of keeling over again in a faint and thought it the better part of valour to save my friends that anxiety.

"Ye poorr lamb! I'll fetch a wheelbarrow and get ye over to my mansion in a jiffy."

Tweedles came just then and highly approved of the plan.

"I tell you what, Captain Leahy, if you won't mind, let us stay in your house until the early train and then we can get to Richmond in time for lunch."

"Moind! It would make me that prood! And the poosies would be overjyed."

So Tweedles hustled around and found Annie and Mary and they all scratched in the débris for their belongings and mine, and soon we started off in a procession to Captain Leahy's. I was perched in a wheelbarrow that the good old man had found in a tool house by the garden and each girl had a sheet full of clothes slung over her back. [298]

When we got to the crossing, the Captain asked us to wait outside a moment while he put his house to rights. All he had to do was to convert his berth into seats again, and in a jiffy he was out to usher us into a ship-shape apartment. He was a singularly orderly old man to be so charming. I do not think as a rule that very orderly persons are apt to be charming.

"Dum and I have to go to the station a minute," said Dee, just as though it were not three o'clock in the morning.

"The station! What on earth for?" I demanded in amazement.

"Well, you see the train dispatcher is there and we can get Zebedee on the 'phone."

"What on earth is the use in waking him up this time of night and scaring him to death? I think to-morrow will do just as well."

"To-morrow, indeed! By to-morrow 'twill be no scoop. Don't you know that if we get this to Zebedee now he will scoop all the papers in Richmond?" [299]

And so he did. Tweedles had not been brought up in a newspaper family for nothing. The ruling passion for news scoops was strong in death.

CHAPTER XXII.

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IN MOTLEY RAIMENT.

That was a strange trip we took to Richmond, catching that early train. No one had had any sleep, but we meant to have some naps on the train. Dear old Captain Leahy was as good as gold to us. He left us to keep house for him, as he put it, while he went back to the school with the wheelbarrow to get Annie's trunk. Annie was the only one who had a trunk now and grateful indeed she was to the Tuckers for saving it for her. She kept her clothes in her trunk as a rule, all of the best ones, at least, so she really had suffered almost no loss from the fire.

The rest of us had to do some twisting and turning to get sufficiently clothed to travel. There were no hats at all in the company. Annie had a summer hat packed in her trunk, but no hat at all was better than a summer hat the middle of March. At that date the style of wearing your summer hat in winter and beginning on your winter hat in early fall had not yet penetrated to Gresham. [301]

Mary had fared worse than any of us and all her voluminous skirts had perished in the flames. At least, we thought they had at the time but we heard later that some of the Gresham darkeys were seen dressed in them. Thomas Hawkins reported this to us. He said he knew Mary's clothes and could not be mistaken.

Mary's home lay in a different direction from Richmond and Mary thought she must leave us and go immediately to her mother, but we persuaded her to call up her mother on long distance and put it up to her that since she was burnt out and had no clothes she had better go to Richmond with us and purchase more.

Mrs. Flannagan thought so, too, and was not a bit grouchy over being called up at five o'clock in the morning to decide. She even said she might come to Richmond herself and superintend the purchasing. We wanted to meet Mary's mother, but we were itching to have charge of the selection of Mary's clothes, certain, in the arrogance of youth, that we could do much better than Mrs. Flannagan. [302]

I am pretty sure that that was the first time school girls had ever left Gresham on that early train with a proper breakfast. Captain Leahy hustled and bustled, and with the assistance of the girls had a delightful little repast cooked on his doll baby stove. The coffee was not of the finest grade, but it was of the finest make. The toast was piping hot and the fried eggs were beyond reproach. The girls who had been taken to the hotel did not fare so well as we.

Before train time Miss Plympton came to bid us good-bye. She was looking terribly harassed, having so many girls to attend to. I was glad to see she had changed her pink pajamas for a more suitable attire, also glad that she had remembered to bring my coat back to me.

I had had a little talk with Tweedles while Mary and Annie were 'phoning Mrs. Flannagan, and we had come to the conclusion that we would 'fess up to Miss Plympton about how I got the sprained ankle. [303]

"I'll write to her, if you girls don't mind," I said. "I never felt sneakier in my life than when she bit so easily. I would have told her then but I did not want to get you into a scrape, too."

"Oh, forget it! Forget it!" they tweedled.

We had not expected the honour of a visit from her, as we had got her permission to take the first train home and thought that would be the last of it.

She would not sit down at first, but stood a few minutes in the tiny house, looking curiously around at the Captain's arrangements. We had finished breakfast and Dum and Annie were clearing off the table preparatory to washing the dishes, although the host insisted on their leaving them.

"We've half an hour to train time and might just as well put it in usefully," insisted Dum.

"You look that turred, lady," said the Captain, "if ye will excuse an ould man, I think if ye take a coop of coffee 'twill be the savin' of ye." [304]

She did take one and very grateful she was. I began to feel that Miss Plympton was much more

human than I had ever deemed her. It wasn't easy to begin my confession, however, as there were so many present and Miss Plympton tired and broken was still Miss Plympton.

"I have something to tell you," I faltered, after she had inquired almost tenderly after my ankle. "I—I—sprained my ankle in the fire drill, not in the fire. Tweedles—I mean Caroline and Virginia—and I, you remember, beat all the girls out of the building. We did not come out the regular way, but slid down the sheets out of our window. There were not enough sheets in our rope then to touch the ground and I had to jump about six feet—and my ankle turned. I did not mean to let you think it was in the fire I had hurt it, but you just took it for granted."

I waited in great anxiety to see how this confession would strike our august principal. She looked at me curiously and then choked on her coffee and laughed and laughed until the little kittens in Bett's basket came out to see what was the matter. No one had ever seen Miss Plympton really laugh before. Finally she was able to speak. [305]

"After all, I did not say in my instructions to the school what route they were to take to get out of the building when the alarm rang, and if you chose to come by the window perhaps it was none of my business. At any rate, I don't see what is to be done about it now. Certainly demerits would be a farce."

"Well, I never thought of that!" exclaimed Dum. "Somehow I've been having a feeling that demerits could never be a farce."

"They are a farce now. There is something I want to say to you girls—all five of you. I might as well get it over with. I have not understood you and feel that there have been times when I have been unjust. I want you to accept my apology."

Miss Plympton stood up and held out her hand like a perfect gentleman. We were so amazed we could hardly muster sense enough to shake it. Had the fire gone to her head? "When I realize that but for your bravery I might have lost my life—" [306]

"Why, not at all, Miss Plympton," put in Dee, "there was really plenty of time, as it turned out. The firemen could have got you out just as well. There was no hurry, but of course we thought there was or we would not have hustled you so."

"If you don't mind, I like to think you saved my life. I must tell all of you good-bye now as I have a great many things to attend to and telegrams to send to the parents of the pupils. I am sending all home that I can to-day," and the poor woman gave another hand shake all around and even stooped down and gave Bett a pat, much to the astonishment of the Captain who thought our principal scorned cats.

She thanked our host for his kindness, and started out the door and then came back and kissed me. Her face was crimson. Evidently she was not an adept in osculatory exercises. "I hope your ankle will be all right, my dear," she whispered. "Be sure and see a surgeon as soon as you get to Richmond." [307]

"Well, I'll be ding swittled!" gasped Dum, as the door closed on our one time *bête noir*. She expressed the sentiments of all of us.

"The firre has milted herr icy hearrrt. And did ye see herr pat poorr Bett?"

"I am glad she is melted, but I must say I am also glad she didn't slush on me but that Page got it," said naughty Dee. "I can't believe that Miss Plympton has actually taken to lollapalussing."

A motley crowd we were on that train to Richmond. Some girls had saved jackets and no skirts and some skirts and no jackets. Some of them had on bedroom slippers, and one girl, who was too fat to borrow, went home in her gymnasium suit and a long coat. Hats were a rarity and gloves unheard of. I am certain more clothes were saved than the girls ever saw, as the ghouls were very busy. We looked like a tacky party as almost every one had on something borrowed or incongruous.

The excitement had kept up our spirits and, while we were one and all sorry about Gresham, we were one and all glad to be going home. I say all were glad, but that is not quite accurate. Annie Pore was not glad. Home was not a very entrancing place for her, poor girl. A country store in a small settlement on the river bank is not such a very cheerful place for a beautiful young girl with a voice she hopes to make something of. Annie's voice was deepening in tone and becoming very round and full. She really should be having it cultivated by a good master, but Mr. Pore was so parsimonious there was no telling whether or not he would let her have the necessary advantages. [308]

We talked of many things on that trip to Richmond. Sleep was out of the question, although we had planned naps to make up for the many hours we had been awake. Dee re-bandaged my ankle and I was much more comfortable.

"I, for one, mean to go to New York to study Art," said Dum.

"Well, if you go, I'm going, too," declared Dee. "I don't know just what I'll study, but I'm going to be either a trained nurse or a veterinary surgeon." [309]

"I mean to take a course in journalism at Columbia," I put in.

"I do want to study singing in good, hard earnest," sighed Annie.

"I mean to be a movie actress," said funny Mary Flannagan. "You needn't laugh. There is great demand for character work in the movies. Everybody can't be beautifully formed. I bet you John Bunny draws a bigger crowd than Annette Kellermann."

"Well, I'll pay my dime to see you on the screen every day in the week!" I exclaimed.

"I am really seriously considering the stage for a profession," declared Mary. "I could do vaudeville stunts in between my movie engagements."

"Of course you could!" tweedled the twins.

"I believe you could make a big hit in vaudeville. I never yet have seen or heard of a female ventriloquist on the stage," continued Dum.

"Whatever we are going to do next winter," said Annie, "we are at least going to be together some this summer. Harvie Price has written me that his grandfather, General Price, has told him he can have a house party on his beautiful old plantation at Price's Landing any time this summer that suits him, and he is to have all of us." [310]

"Oh, what fun! Zebedee says Riverlands is one of the show places of Virginia and I know it will be just splendid to visit there," said Dee.

"But speaking of visiting places," I exclaimed, "wouldn't I love to spend this unexpected spring holiday in travel!—not to far away places, you know,—"

"I know," interrupted Dee eagerly, "just short trips—at a moment's notice—anywhere."

"The kind Zebedee takes," added Dum.

Oh, how I wished we might—but I knew we couldn't.

And yet we did! I'll tell you some day what fun it was "Tripping with the Tucker Twins."

THE END.



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Transcriber's Note:

Obvious punctuation errors were corrected.

Varied hyphenation was retained. This includes words such as bed-room and bedroom; fire-proof and fireproof.

[Page 184](#), chapter title was changed to all capital letters to match rest of chapter titles. Original print was in small capitals.

The remaining corrections made are indicated by dotted lines under the corrections. Scroll the mouse over the word and the original text will appear.

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