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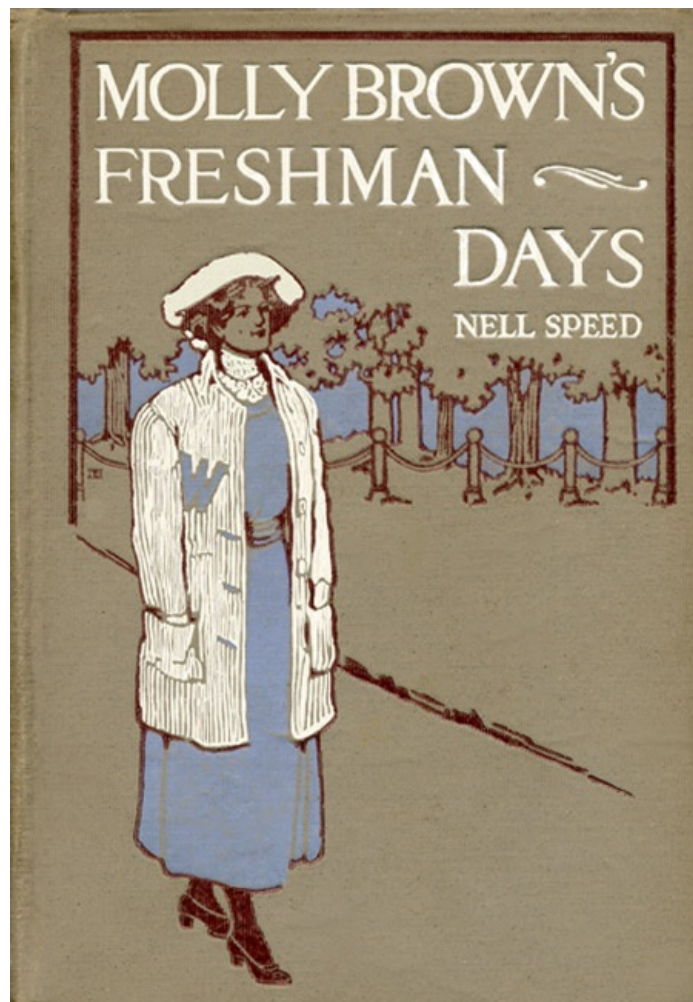
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOLLY BROWN'S FRESHMAN DAYS ***





"I think my trunk is on this train," she said.—[Page 7.](#)

MOLLY BROWN'S FRESHMAN DAYS

**By
NELL SPEED**

***WITH FOUR HALF-TONE ILLUSTRATIONS
BY CHARLES L. WRENN***

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. WELLINGTON	5
II. THEIR NEIGHBOR	19
III. THE PROFESSOR	32
IV. A BUSY DAY	46
V. THE KENTUCKY SPREAD	62
VI. KNOTTY PROBLEMS	75
VII. AN INCIDENT OF THE COFFEE CUPS	86
VIII. CONCERNING CLUBS,—AND A TEA PARTY	99
IX. RUMORS AND MYSTERIES	115
X. JOKES AND CROAKS	130
XI. EXMOOR COLLEGE	140
XII. SUNDAY MORNING BREAKFAST	152
XIII. TRICKERY	164
XIV. AN INSPIRATION	177
XV. PLANNING AND WISHING	188
XVI. THE MCLEAN SUPPER	204
XVII. A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE	216
XVIII. THE FOOTBALL GAME	230
XIX. THREE FRIENDS	241
XX. MISS STEEL	255
XXI. A BACHELOR'S POCKET	266
XXII. CHRISTMAS—MID-YEARS—AND THE WANDERTHIRST	276
XXIII. SOPHOMORES AT LAST	291

ILLUSTRATIONS

"I think my trunk is on this train," she said.	Frontispiece
	PAGE
"I wish you would tell me your receipt for making friends, Molly," exclaimed Nance.	51
"I'm scared to death," she announced. Then she struck a chord and began.	60
It was quite the custom for girls to prepare breakfasts in their rooms.	152

Molly Brown's Freshman Days

CHAPTER I.

WELLINGTON.

"Wellington! Wellington!" called the conductor.

The train drew up at a platform, and as if by magic a stream of girls came pouring out of the pretty stucco station with its sloping red roof and mingled with another stream of girls emptying itself from the coaches. Everywhere appeared girls,—leaping from omnibuses; hurrying down the gravel walk from the village; hastening along the University drive; girls on foot; girls on bicycles; girls running, and girls strolling arm in arm.

Few of them wore hats; many of them wore sweaters and short walking skirts of white duck or serge, and across the front of each sweater was embroidered a large "W" in cadet blue, the mystic color of Wellington University.

In the midst of a shouting, gesticulating mob stood Mr. Murphy, baggage master, smiling good naturedly.

"Now, young ladies, one at a time, please. We've brought down all the baggage left over by the 9.45. If your trunk ain't on this train, it'll come on the next. All in good time, please."

A tall girl with auburn hair and deep blue eyes approached the group. There was a kind of awkward grace about her, the grace which was hers by rights and the awkwardness which comes of growing too fast. She wore a shabby brown homespun suit, a shade darker than her hair, and on her head was an old brown felt which had plainly seen service the year before.

But knotted at her neck was a tie of burnt-orange silk which seemed to draw attention away from the shiny seams and frayed hem and to cry aloud:

"Look at me. I am the color of a winter sunset. Never mind the other old togs."

Surely there was something very brave and jaunty about this young girl who now pushed her way through the crowd of students and endeavored to engage the attention of the baggage-master.

[7]

["I think my trunk was on this train," she said](#) timidly. "I hope it is. It came from Louisville to Philadelphia safely, and when I re-checked it they told me it would be on this train."

Now, Murphy, the baggage master, had his own peculiar method of conducting business, and it was strictly a partial and prejudiced one. If he liked the face of a student, he always waited on her first, regardless of how many other students were ahead of her; and, as he told his wife later, he "took a fancy to that overgrown gal from the fust."

"I beg your pardon, but Mr. Murphy is engaged," put in a haughty looking young woman with black eyes that snapped angrily.

"Now, Miss Judith," said the baggage master, who knew many of the students by name, "don't go fer to git excited. I ain't made no promises to no one. It's plain to see this here young lady is a newcomer, and, as sich, she gits my fust consideration."

"Oh, please excuse me," said the girl in shabby brown. "I'm not used to—I mean I haven't traveled very much."

[8]

Judith turned irritably away.

"I should think you hadn't," she said in a low voice, but loud enough to be overheard. "Freshies have a lot to learn and one is to respect their elders."

The new girl put down her straw suit case and leaned against the wall of the station. She looked tired and there was a streak of soot across her cheek. The trip from Kentucky in this warm September weather was not the pleasantest journey in the world. While she waited for Mr. Murphy to return with news of her trunk, her attention was claimed by two girls standing at her elbow who were talking cheerfully together.

"Yes," said one of them, a plump, brown-eyed girl with brown hair, a slightly turned-up nose and a humorous twitch to her lips, "I have a room at Queen's cottage. It's the best I could do unless I went into one of the expensive suites in the dormitories, and you know I might as well expect to take the royal suite on the Mauretania and sail for Europe as do that."

The other girl laughed.

"You'd be quite up to doing anything with your enterprising ways, Nance Oldham," she exclaimed.

[9]

"Oh, are you going to Queen's cottage?" here broke in the girl in shabby brown. "I'm there, too. My name is Molly Brown. I come from Kentucky. I feel awfully forlorn and homesick arriving at the University station without knowing a soul."

There was a kind of ringing note to Molly Brown's voice which made the other girls listen more closely.

"I wonder if she doesn't sing," thought Nance Oldham, giving her a quick, scrutinizing glance. "Yes, I am at Queen's cottage," she continued aloud, "but that's about all I can tell you. I feel like a greeny, too. We'll soon learn, I suppose. This is Miss Brinton, Miss Brown."

Caroline Brinton was rather a nondescript young person with dreamy eyes and an absent-minded manner. She came from Philadelphia, and she greeted the new acquaintance rather coldly.

"Your trunk ain't here, yet, Miss," called the baggage master. "Like enough it'll come on the 6.50."

Molly looked disturbed, while the black-eyed Judith standing nearby flashed a triumphant smile, as much as to say:

[10]

"It only serves you right for pushing in out of turn."

"What are we to do now?" she asked of her new friends, rather helplessly.

"Take the 'bus up to Wellington," said brisk Nance Oldham. "I know that much. There's one filling up now. We'd better hurry and get seats."

The three girls crowded into the long, narrow side-seated vehicle already half filled with students. Even at this early stage in their acquaintance, the bonds of loneliness and sympathy

had drawn them together.

"I'm a stranger in a strange land," Molly Brown had confided to the listening ear of Nance Oldham. "I had made up my mind not to be homesick. I really didn't know what the feeling was like, because I have never had a chance to learn. But I know now it's a kind of an all-gone sensation. I suppose little orphans have it when they first go into an orphan asylum."

"Oh, you'll soon get over it," answered Nance. "It's because you live so far away. Kentucky, didn't you say?"

Molly nodded and looked the other way. The memory of an old brick house with broad piazzas and many windows blurred her vision for a moment. But she resolutely pressed her lips together and began to watch the passing scenery, as new and strange to her as the scenery in a foreign land. [11]

The road leading to Wellington University skirted a pretty village and then plunged straight into the country between rolling meadow lands tinged a golden brown with the autumn sun. And there in the distance were the gray towers of Wellington, silhouetted against the sky like a mediæval castle.

Molly Brown clasped her hands and smiled a heavenly smile.

"Is that it?" she exclaimed rapturously.

"It must be," answered Nance, who also felt some quiet and reserved flutterings.

"It is," said Miss Brinton. "I came down to engage my room, so I know."

In the meantime, there was a busy conversation going on around them.

"I'm going to cut gym this year. It interferes too much," exclaimed a tiny girl with birdlike motions and intelligent, beady little eyes as bright and alert as the eyes of a little brown bird.

But evidently Molly was not the only person who had noticed this resemblance, for one of the students called out: [12]

"Now, Jennie Wren, you must admit that gym never had any charms for you and it's a great relief to give it up."

"Of course she must," put in another girl. "The only exercise Jennie Wren ever takes is to hop about on the lawn and prune her feathers."

"Never!" cried Jennie Wren. "I never wear them, not even quills. I belong to the S. P. C. A."

"Is there much out-of-door life here?" asked Molly Brown, of a tall, somewhat older girl sitting opposite her.

"This new girl may have timid manners," thought Nance Oldham; "but she is not afraid to talk to strangers. I suppose that's the friendly Southern way. She hasn't been in Wellington a quarter of an hour and she has already made three friends,—Caroline and the station-master and me. And now she's getting on famously with that older girl. What I like about her is that she isn't a bit self-conscious and she takes it for granted everybody's going to be kind."

"Oh, yes, lots of it," the older girl was saying to Molly kindly. "If you have a taste for that kind of thing, you may indulge it to your heart's content. There is a splendid swimming pool attached to the gym, and there are golf links, of course. You know they are quite famous in this part of the world. Then, there are the tennis courts, and we'll still have some canoeing on the lake before the weather gets too cold and later glorious skating. Besides all that, there are perfectly ripping walks for miles around. The college has several Saturday afternoon walking clubs." [13]

"But don't these things interfere with—with lectures?" asked Molly, who was really quite ignorant regarding college life, although she had passed her entrance examinations without any conditions whatever.

The older girl laughed pleasantly. She was not good looking, but she had a fine face and Molly liked her immensely.

"Oh, no, you'll find there's plenty of time for everything you want to get in, because most things have their season, and most girls specialize, anyhow. A golf fiend is seldom a tennis fiend, and there are lots of walking fiends who don't like either."

Molly's liking for this big girl and her grave, fine face increased as the conversation progressed. She had a most reassuring, kindly manner and Molly noticed that the other girls treated her with a kind of deferential respect and called her "Miss Stewart." She learned afterward that Miss Stewart was a senior and a member of the "Octogons," the most coveted society in the University. She led in all the athletic sports, was quite a wonderful musician and had composed an operetta for her class and most of the music for the class songs. It was whispered also that she was very rich, though no one would ever have guessed this secret from Mary Stewart herself, who was careful never to allude to money and dressed very simply and plainly. [14]

The omnibus now turned into the avenue which led to the college campus and there was general excitement of a subdued sort among the new girls and greetings and calls from the older girls as they caught glimpses of friends strolling on the lawn.

"Queen's Cottage," called the driver and Molly stood up promptly, shrinking a little as twenty pairs of eyes turned curiously in her direction.

Then the big girl leaned over and took her hand kindly.

[15]

"Won't you look me up to-morrow?" she said. "My name is Mary Stewart, and I stop at No. 16 on the Quadrangle. Perhaps I can help you get things straightened out a bit and show you the ropes."

"Oh, thank you," said Molly, with that musical ring to her voice which never failed to thrill her hearers. "It's awfully nice of you. What time shall I come?"

"I'll see you in Chapel in the morning, and we'll fix the time then," called Miss Stewart as Molly climbed out, dragging her straw telescope over the knees of the other passengers, followed by Nance Oldham, who had waited for her to take the initiative.

As the two girls stood watching the disappearing vehicle, they became the prey to the most extreme loneliness.

"I feel as if I had just left the tumbrel on the way to my execution," observed Molly, trying to laugh, although the corners of her mouth turned persistently down.

"But, anyway, I'm glad we are together," she continued, slipping her arm through Nance's. "Queen's Cottage does seem so remote and lonesome, doesn't it? Just a thing apart."

[16]

The two girls gazed uncertainly at the rather dismal-looking shingled house, stained brown and covered with a mantle of old vines which appeared to have been prematurely stripped of their foliage. It was somewhat isolated, at least it seemed so at first. The next house was quite half a block on and was a cheerful place, all stucco and red roof like the station.

"Well, here goes," Molly went on. "If it's Queen's, why then, so be it," and she marched up the walk and rang the front door bell, which resounded through the hall with a metallic clang.

"Shure, I'm after bein' wit' you in a moment," called a voice from above. "You're the new young ladies, I'm thinkin', and glad I am to see you."

There was the sound of heavy footsteps down the stairs and the door was opened by Mrs. Murphy, wife of the baggage master and housekeeper for Queen's Cottage. She was a middle-aged Irish woman with a round, good-natured face and she beamed on the girls with motherly interest as she ushered them into the parlor.

"Since ye be the fust comers, ye may be the fust choosers," she said; "and if ye be friends, ye may like to be roommates, surely, and that's a good thing. It's better to room with a friend than a stranger."

[17]

The two girls looked at each other with a new interest. It had not occurred to them that they might be roommates, but had not they already, with the swiftness peculiar to girls, bridged the gulf which separates total strangers, and were now on the very verge of plunging into intimate friendship? Would it not be better to seize this opportunity than to wait for other chances which might not prove so agreeable?

"Shall we not?" asked Molly with that charming, cordial manner which appeared to win her friends wherever she went.

"It would be a great relief," answered Nance, who was yet to learn the value of showing real pleasure when she felt it. Nevertheless, Nance, under her whimsical, rather sarcastic outer shell, had a warm and loyal heart.

Thus Molly Brown and Nance Oldham, quite opposites in looks and temperaments, became roommates during their freshman year at Wellington College and thus, from this small beginning, the seeds of a life-long friendship were sown.

The two girls chose a big sunny room on the third floor looking over a portion of the golf links. Molly liked it because it had blue wallpaper and Nance because it had a really commodious closet.

[18]

CHAPTER II.

[19]

THEIR NEIGHBOR.

Molly Brown was the youngest member of a numerous family of older brothers and sisters. Her father had been dead many years, and in order to rear and educate her children, Mrs. Brown had been obliged to mortgage, acre by acre, the fine old place where Molly and her brothers and sisters had been born and brought up. Every time anybody in the Brown family wanted to do anything that was particularly nice, something had to go, either a cow or a colt or a piece of land,

according to the needs of the moment. A two-acre lot represented Molly's college education—two perfectly good acres of orchard.

"If you don't bring back at least one golden apple in return for all these nice juicy ones that are going for your education, Molly, you are no child of mine," Mrs. Brown had laughingly exclaimed when she kissed her daughter good-bye.

"I'll bring back the three golden apples of the Hesperides, mother, and make the family rich and happy," cried Molly, and from that moment the three golden apples became a secret symbol to her, although she had not decided in her mind exactly what they represented. [20]

"But," as Molly observed to herself, "anybody who has had two acres of winter sweets, pippins and greenings spent on her, must necessarily engage to win a few."

Those two fruitful acres, however, while they provided a fund for an education, did not extend far into the margin and there was little left for clothes. That was perhaps one of the reasons why Molly had felt so disturbed about the delay in receiving her trunk.

"I can stand traveling in this old brown rag for economy's sake," she thought; "but I would like to put on the one decent thing I own for my first day at college. I was a chump not to have brought something in my suit case besides a blouse. However, what's done can't be undone," and she stoically went to work to remove the stains of travel and put on a fresh blue linen shirtwaist; while Nance Oldham, who had been more far-sighted, made herself spic and span in a duck skirt and a white linen blouse. She had little to say during the process of making her toilet, and Molly wondered if, after all, she would like a roommate so peculiarly reserved and whimsical as this new friend. She hoped there would be lots of nice girls in the house of the right sort, girls who meant business, for while Molly meant to enjoy herself immensely, she meant business decidedly, and she didn't want to get into a play set and be torn away from her studies. As these thoughts flitted through her mind she heard voices coming up the stairs. [21]

"Now, Mrs. Murphy, I do hope you've got something really decent. You know, I hadn't expected to come back this year. I thought I would stay in France with grandmamma, but at the last moment I changed my mind, and I've come right here from the ship without engaging a thing at all. I'll take anything that's a single."

The voice had a spoiled, imperious sound, like that of a person in the habit of having her own way.

"I have a single, Miss, but it's a small one, and they do say you've got a deal of belongings."

"Let's see it. Let's see it, quick, Granny Murphy," and from the noise without our two young persons judged that this despotic stranger had placed her hands on Mrs. Murphy's shoulders and was running her along the passage. [22]

"Now, you'll be giving me apoplexy, Miss, surely, with your goings-on," cried the woman breathlessly, as she opened the door next theirs.

"Who's in there? Two freshies?"

"Yes, Miss. They only just arrived an hour ago."

"Greenies from Greenville, Green County," chanted the young woman, who did not seem to mind being overheard by the entire household. "Very well, I'll take this little hole-in-the-wall. I won't move any of my things in, except some books and cushions. And now, off wit' yer. Here's something for your trouble."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Miss."

The two girls seemed to hear the Irish woman being shoved out in the hall. Then the door was banged after her and was locked.

"Dear me, what an obstreperous person," observed Nance. "I wonder if she's going to give us a continuous performance."

"I don't know," answered Molly. "She'll be a noisy neighbor if she does. But she sounds interesting, living in France with her grandmamma and so on." [23]

Nance glanced at her watch.

"Wouldn't you like to go for a stroll before supper? We have an hour yet. I'm dying to see the famous Quadrangle and the Cloisters and a few other celebrated spots I've heard about. Aren't you?"

"And incidentally rub off a little of our greenness," said Molly, recalling the words of the girl next door.

As the two girls closed the door to their room and paused on the landing, the door adjoining burst open and a human whirlwind blew out of the single room and almost knocked them over.

"I beg your pardon," said Nance stiffly, giving the human whirlwind a long, cool, brown glance.

Molly, a little behind her friend, examined the stranger with much curiosity. She could not quite tell why she had imagined her to be a small black-eyed, black-haired person, when here stood a

tall, very beautiful young woman. Her hair was light brown and perfectly straight. She had peculiarly passionate, fiery eyes of very dark gray, of the "smouldering kind," as Nance described them later; her features were regular and her mouth so expressive of her humors that her friends could almost read her thoughts by the curve of her sensitive lips. Even in that flashing glimpse the girls could see that she was beautifully dressed in a white serge suit and a stunning hat of dull blue, trimmed with wings.

[24]

But instead of continuing her mad rush, which seemed to be her usual manner of doing things, the young woman became suddenly a zephyr of mildness and gentleness.

"Excuse my precipitate methods," she said. "I never do things slowly, even when there's no occasion to hurry. It's my way, I suppose. Are you freshmen? Perhaps you'd like for me to show you around college. I'm a soph. I'm fairly familiar."

Nance pressed her lips together. She was not in the habit of making friends off-hand. Molly, in fact, was almost her first experience in this kind of friendship. But Molly Brown, who had never consciously done a rude thing in her life, exclaimed:

"That would be awfully nice. Thanks, we'll come."

They followed her rather timidly down the steps. Across the campus the pile of gray buildings, in the September twilight, more than ever resembled a fine old castle. As they hastened along, the sophomore gave them each a quick, comprehensive glance.

[25]

"My name is Frances Andrews," she began suddenly, and added with a peculiar intonation, "I was called 'Frank' last year. I'm so glad we are to be neighbors. I hope we shall have lots of good times together."

Molly considered this a particular mark of good nature on the part of an older girl to two freshmen, and she promptly made known their names to Frances Andrews. All this time Nance had remained impassive and quiet.

Ten girls, arm in arm, were strolling toward them across the soft green turf of the campus, singing as in one voice to the tune of "Maryland, My Maryland":

"Oh, Wellington, My Wellington,
Oh, how I love my Wellington!"

Suddenly Frances Andrews, who was walking between the two young girls, took them each firmly by the arm and led them straight across the campus, giving the ten girls a wide berth. There was so much fierce determination in her action that Molly and Nance looked at her with amazement.

[26]

"Are those seniors?" asked Nance, thinking perhaps it was not college etiquette to break through a line of established and dignified characters like seniors.

"No; they are sophomores singing their class song," answered Frances.

"Aren't you a sophomore?" demanded Nance quickly.

"Yes."

"Curious she doesn't want to meet her friends," thought Molly.

But there were more interesting sights to occupy her attention just then.

They had reached the great gray stone archway which formed the entrance to the Quadrangle, a grassy courtyard enclosed on all sides by the walls of the building. Heavy oak doors of an antique design opened straight onto the court from the various corridors and lecture rooms and at one end was the library, a beautiful room with a groined roof and stained glass windows, like a chapel. Low stone benches were ranged along the arcade of the court, whereon sat numerous girls laughing and talking together.

Although she considered that undue honors were being paid them by having as guide this dashing sophomore, somehow Molly still felt the icy grip of homesickness on her heart. Nance seemed so unsympathetic and reserved and there was a kind of hardness about this Frances Andrews that made the warm-hearted, affectionate Molly a bit uncomfortable. Suddenly Nance spied her old friend, Caroline Brinton, in the distance, and rushed over to join her. As she left, three girls came toward them, talking animatedly.

[27]

"Hello, Jennie Wren!" called Frances gayly. It was the same little bird-like person who had been in the bus. "Howdy, Rosamond. How are you, Lotta? It's awfully nice to be back at the old stand again. Let me introduce you to my new almost-roommate, Miss Brown," went on Frances hurriedly, as if to fill up the gaps of silence which greeted them.

"How do you do, Miss Andrews," said Jennie Wren, stiffly.

Rosamond Chase, who had a plump figure and a round, good-natured face, was slightly warmer in her greeting.

"How are you, Frankie? I thought you were going to France this winter."

The other girl who had a turned-up nose and blonde hair, and was called "Peggy Parsons," sniffed slightly and put her hands behind her back as if she wished to avoid shaking hands.

[28]

Molly was so shocked that she felt the tears rising to her eyes. "I wish I had never come to college," she thought, "if this is the way old friends treat each other."

She slipped her arm through Frances Andrews' and gave it a sympathetic squeeze.

"Won't you show me the Cloisters?" she said. "I'm pining to see what they are like."

"Come along," said Frances, quite cheerfully, in spite of the fact that she had just been snubbed by three of her own classmates.

Lifting the latch of a small oak door fitted under a pointed arch, she led the way through a passage to another oak door which opened directly on the Cloisters. Molly gave an exclamation of pleasure.

"Oh," she cried, "are we really allowed to walk in this wonderful place?"

"As much as you like before six P. M.," answered Frances. "How do you do, Miss Pembroke?"

A tall woman with a grave, handsome face was waiting under the arched arcade to go through the door.

[29]

"So you decided to come back to us, Miss Andrews. I'm very glad of it. Come into my office a moment. I want a few words with you before supper."

"You can find your way back to Queen's by yourself, can't you, Miss Brown?" asked Frances. "I'll see you later."

And in another moment, Molly Brown was quite alone in the Cloisters. She was glad to be alone. She wanted to think. She paced slowly along the cloistered walk, each stone arch of which framed a picture of the grassy court with an Italian fountain in the center.

"It's exactly like an old monastery," she said to herself. "I wonder anybody could ever be frivolous or flippant in such an old world spot as this. I could easily imagine myself a monk, telling my beads."

She sat down on a stone bench and folded her hands meditatively.

"So far, I've really only made one friend at college," she thought to herself, for Nance Oldham was too reserved to be called a friend yet, "and that friend is Frances Andrews. Who is she? What is she? Why do her classmates snub her and why did Miss Pembroke, who belonged to the faculty, wish to speak with her in her private office?" It was all queer, very queer. Somehow, it seemed to Molly now that what she had taken for whirlwind manners was really a tremendous excitement under which Frances Andrews was laboring. She was trying to brazen out something.

[30]

"Just the same, I'm sorry for her," she said out loud.

At that moment, a musical, deep-throated bell boomed out six times in the stillness of the cloisters. There was the sound of a door opening, a pause and the door closed with a clicking noise. Molly started from her reverie. It was six o'clock. She rushed to the door of antique design through which she had entered just fifteen minutes before. It was closed and locked securely. She knocked loudly and called:

"Let me out! Let me out! I'm locked in!"

Then she waited, but no one answered. In the stillness of the twilight courtyard she could hear the sounds of laughter and talking from the Quadrangle. They grew fainter and fainter. A gray chill settled down over the place and Molly looked about her with a feeling of utter desolation. She had been locked in the Cloisters for the night.

[31]

CHAPTER III.

[32]

THE PROFESSOR.

Molly beat and kicked on the door wildly. Then she called again and again but her voice came back to her in a ghostly echo through the dim aisles of the cloistered walk. She sat down on a bench and burst into tears.

How tired and hungry and homesick she was! How she wished she had never heard of college, cold, unfriendly place where people insulted old friends and they locked doors at six o'clock. The chill of the evening had fallen and the stars were beginning to show themselves in the square of blue over the Cloisters. Molly shivered and folded her arms. She had not worn her coat and her blue linen blouse was damp with dew.

"Can this be the only door into the Cloisters?" she thought after the first attack of homesick weeping had passed.

She rose and began to search along the arcade which was now almost black. There were doors at intervals but all of them locked. She knocked on each one and waited patiently.

[33]

"Oh, heavens, let me get out of this place to-night," she prayed, lifting her eyes to the stars with an agonized expression. Suddenly, the high mullioned window under which she was standing, glowed with a light just struck. Then, someone opened a casement and a man's voice called:

"Is anyone there? I thought I heard a cry."

"I am," said Molly, trying to stifle the sobs that would rise in her throat. "I've been locked in, or rather out."

"Why, you poor child," exclaimed the voice again. "Wait a moment and I'll open the door."

There were sounds of steps along the passage; a heavy bolt was thrust back and a door held open while Molly rushed into the passage like a frightened bird out of the dark.

"It's lucky I happened to be in my study this evening," said the man, leading the way toward a square of light in the dark corridor. "Of course the night watchman would have made his rounds at eight, but an hour's suspense out there in the cold and dark would have been very disagreeable. How in the world did it happen?"

[34]

By this time they had reached the study and Molly found herself in a cozy little room lined from ceiling to floor with books. On the desk was a tray of supper. The owner of the study was a studious looking young man with kindly, quizzical brown eyes under shaggy eyebrows, a firm mouth and a cleft in his chin, which Molly had always heard was a mark of beauty in a woman.

"You must be a freshman?" he said looking at her with a shade of amusement in his eyes.

"I am," replied Molly, bravely trying to keep her voice from shaking. "I only arrived an hour or so ago. I—I didn't know they would lock—" She broke down altogether and slipping into a big wicker chair sobbed bitterly. "Oh, I wish—I wish I'd stayed at home."

"Why, you poor little girl," exclaimed the man. "You have had a beastly time for your first day at college, but you'll come to like it better and better all the time. Come, dry your eyes and I'll start you on your way to your lodgings. Where are you stopping?"

"Queen's."

"Suppose you drink some hot soup before you go. It will warm you up," he added kindly, taking a cup of hot bouillon from the tray and placing it on the arm of her chair.

[35]

"But it's your supper," stammered Molly.

"Nonsense, there's plenty more. Do as I tell you," he ordered. "I'm a professor, you know, so you'll have to obey me or I'll scold."

Molly drank the soup without a word. It did comfort her considerably and presently she looked up at the professor and said:

"I'm all right now. I hope you'll excuse me for being so silly and weak. You see I felt so far away and lonesome and it's an awful feeling to be locked out in the cold about a thousand miles from home. I never was before."

"I'm sure I should have felt the same in your place," answered the professor. "I should probably have imagined I saw the ghosts of monks dead and gone, who might have walked there if the Cloisters had been several hundreds of years older, and I would certainly have made the echoes ring with my calls for help. The Cloisters are all right for 'concentration' and 'meditation,' which I believe is what they are intended to be used for on a warm, sunny day; but they are cold comfort after sunset."

"Is this your study?" asked Molly, rising and looking about her with interest, as she started toward the door.

[36]

"I should say that this was my play room," he replied, smiling.

"Play room?"

"Yes, this is where I hide from work and begin to play." He glanced at a pile of manuscript on his desk.

"I reckon work is play and play is work to you," observed Molly, regarding the papers with much interest. She had never before seen a manuscript.

"If you knew what an heretical document that was, you would not make such rash statements," said the professor.

"I'm sure it's a learned treatise on some scientific subject," laughed Molly, who had entirely regained her composure now, and felt not the least bit afraid of this learned man, with the kind, brown eyes. He seemed quite old to her.

"If I tell you what it is, will you promise to keep it a secret?"

"I promise," she cried eagerly.

"It's the libretto of a light opera," he said solemnly, enjoying her amazement.

"Did you write it?" she asked breathlessly.

"Not the music, but the words and the lyrics. Now, I've told you my only secret," he said. "You must never give me away, or the bottom would fall out of the chair of English literature at Wellington College."

"I shall never, never tell," exclaimed Molly; "and thank you ever so much for your kindness to-night."

They clasped hands and the professor opened the door for her and stood back to let her pass.

Then he followed her down the passage to another door, which he also opened, and in the dim light she still noticed that quizzical look in his eyes, which made her wonder whether he was laughing at her in particular, or at things in general.

"Can you find your way to Queen's Cottage?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," she assured him. "It's the last house on the left of the campus."

The next moment she found herself running along the deserted Quadrangle walk. Under the archway she flew, and straight across the campus—home.

It was not yet seven o'clock, and the Queen's Cottage girls were still at supper. A number of students had arrived during the afternoon and the table was full. There were several freshmen; Molly identified them by their silence and looks of unaccustomedness, and some older girls, who were chattering together like magpies.

"Where have you been?" demanded Nance Oldham, who had saved a seat for her roommate next to her own.

All conversation ceased, and every eye in the room was turned on blushing Molly.

"I—I've been locked up," she answered faintly.

"Locked up?" repeated several voices at once. "Where?"

"In the Cloisters. I didn't realize it was six o'clock, and some one locked the door."

Molly had been prepared for a good deal of amusement at her expense, and she felt very grateful when, instead of hoots of derision, a nice junior named Sallie Marks, with an interesting face and good dark eyes, exclaimed:

"Why, you poor little freshie! What a mediæval adventure for your first day. And how did you finally get out?"

"One of the professors heard me call and let me out."

"Which one?" demanded several voices at once.

"I don't know his name," replied Molly guardedly, remembering that she had a secret to keep.

"What did he look like?" demanded Frances Andrews, who had been unusually silent for her until now.

"He had brown eyes and a smooth face and reddish hair, and he was middle aged and quite nice," said Molly glibly.

"What, you don't mean to say it was Epiménides Antinous Green?"

"Who?" demanded Molly.

"Never mind, don't let them gyp you," said Sallie Marks. "It was evidently Professor Edwin Green who let you in. He is professor of English literature, and I'll tell you for your enlightenment that he was nicknamed in a song 'Epiménides' after a Greek philosopher, who went to sleep when he was a boy and woke up middle-aged and very wise, and 'Antinous' after a very handsome Greek youth. Don't you think him good-looking?"

"Rather, for an older person," said Molly thoughtfully.

"He's not thirty yet, my child," said Frances Andrews. "At least, so they say, and he's so clever that two other colleges are after him."

"And he's written two books," went on Sally. "Haven't you heard of them—'Philosophical Essays' and 'Lyric Poetry.'"

Molly was obliged to confess her ignorance regarding Professor Edwin Green's outbursts into literature, but she indulged in an inward mental smile, remembering the lyrics in the comic opera libretto.

"He's been to Harvard and Oxford, and studied in France. He's a perfect infant prodigy," went on

[37]

[38]

[39]

[40]

another girl.

"It's a ripping thing for the 'Squib,'" Molly heard another girl whisper to her neighbor.

She knew she would be the subject of an everlasting joke, but she hoped to live it down by learning immediately everything there was to know about Wellington, and becoming so wise that nobody would ever accuse her again of being a green freshman.

Mrs. Maynard, the matron, came in to see if she was all right. She was a motherly little woman, with a gentle manner, and Molly felt a leaning toward her at once.

"I hope you'll feel comfortable in your new quarters," said Mrs. Maynard. "You'll have plenty of sunshine and a good deal more space when you get your trunks unpacked, although the things inside a trunk do sometimes look bigger than the trunk." [41]

Molly smiled. There was not much in her trunk to take up space, most certainly. She had nicknamed herself when she packed it "Molly Few Clothes," and she was beginning to wonder if even those few would pass muster in that crowd of well-dressed girls.

"Oh, have the trunks really come, Miss Oldham?" she asked her roommate.

"Yes, just before supper. I've started unpacking mine."

"Thank goodness. I've got an old ham and a hickory nut cake and some beaten biscuits and pickles and blackberry jam in mine, and I can hardly wait to see if anything has broken loose on my clothes, such as they are."

Nance Oldham opened her eyes wide.

"I've always heard that Southern people were pretty strong on food," she said, "and this proves it."

"Wait until you try the hickory nut cake, and you won't be so scornful," answered Molly, somehow not liking this accusation regarding the appetites of her people. [42]

"Did I hear the words 'hickory nut cake' spoken?" demanded Frances Andrews, who apparently talked to no one at the table except freshmen.

"Yes, I brought some. Come up and try it to-night," said Molly hospitably.

"That would be very jolly, but I can't to-night, thanks," said Frances, flushing.

And then Molly and Nance noticed that the other sophomores and juniors at the table were all perfectly silent and looking at her curiously.

"I hope you'll all come," she added lamely, wondering if they were accusing her of inhospitality.

"Not to-night, my child," said Sally Marks, rising from the table. "Thank you, very much."

As the two freshmen climbed the stairs to their room a little later, they passed by an open door on the landing.

"Come in," called the voice of Sally. "I was waiting for you to pass. This is my home. How do you like it?"

"Very much," answered the two girls, really not seeing anything particularly remarkable about the apartment, except perhaps the sign on the door which read "Pax Vobiscum," and would seem to indicate that the owner of the room had a Christian spirit. [43]

"Your name is 'Molly Brown,' and you come from Kentucky, isn't that so?" asked Sally Marks, taking Molly's chin in her hand and looking into her eyes.

"And yours?" went on the inquisitive Sally, turning to Molly's roommate.

"Is Nance Oldham, and I come from Vermont," finished Nance promptly.

"You're both dears. And I am ever so glad you are in Queens. You won't think I'm patronizing if I give you a little advice, will you?"

"Oh, no," said the two girls.

"You know Wellington's full of nice girls. I don't think there is a small college in this country that has such a fine showing for class and brains. But among three hundred there are bound to be some black sheep, and new girls should always be careful with whom they take up."

"But how can we tell?" asked Nance.

"Oh, there are ways. Suppose, for instance, you should meet a girl who was good-looking, clever, rich, with lots of pretty clothes, and all that, and she seemed to have no friends. What would you think?" [44]

"Why, I might think there was something the matter with her, unless she was too shy to make friends."

"But suppose she wasn't?" persisted Sally.

"Then, there would surely be something the matter," said Nance.

"Well, then, children, if you should meet a girl like that in college, don't get too intimate with her."

Sally Marks led them up to their own room, just to see how they were fixed, she said.

Later, when the two girls had crawled wearily into bed, after finishing the unpacking, Molly called out sleepily:

"Nance"—she had forgotten already to say Miss Oldham—"do you suppose that nice junior could have meant Miss Andrews?"

"I haven't a doubt of it," said Nance.

"Just the same, I'm sorry for the poor thing," continued Molly. "I'm sorry for anybody who's walking under a cloud, and I don't think it would do any harm to be nice to her."

"It wouldn't do her any harm," said Nance.

"Epiménides Antinous Green," whispered Molly to herself, as she snuggled under the covers. The name seemed to stick in her memory like a rhyme. "Funny I didn't notice how young and handsome he was. I only noticed that he had good manners, if he did treat me like a child."

[45]

CHAPTER IV.

A BUSY DAY.

[46]

The next day was always a chaotic one in Molly's memory—a jumble of new faces and strange events. At breakfast she made the acquaintance of the freshmen who were staying at Queen's Cottage—four in all. One of these was Julia Kean, "a nice girl in neutral tints," as Molly wrote home to her sister, "with gray eyes and brown hair and a sense of humor." She came to be known as "Judy," and formed an intimate friendship with Molly and Nance, which lasted throughout the four years of their college course.

"How do you feel after your night's rest?" she called across the table to Molly in the most friendly manner, just as if they had known each other always. "You look like the 'Lady of the Sea' in that blue linen that just matches your eyes." She began looking Molly over with a kind of critical admiration, narrowing her eyes as an artist does when he's at work on a picture. "I'd like to make a poster of you in blue-and-white chalk. I'd put you on a yellow, sandy beach, against a bright blue sky, in a high wind, with your dress and hair blowing——" And with eyes still narrowed, she traced an imaginary picture with one hand and shaped her ideas with the other.

[47]

Molly laughed.

"You must be an artist," she said, "with such notions about posing."

"A would-be one, that's all. 'Not yet, but soon,' is my motto."

"That's a bad motto," here put in Nance Oldham. "It's like the Spanish saying of '*Hasta mañana*.' You are very apt to put off doing things until next day."

Julia Kean looked at her reproachfully.

"You've read my character in two words," she said.

"Why don't you introduce me to your friends, Judy?" asked a handsome girl next to her, who had quantities of light-brown hair piled on top of her head.

"I haven't been introduced myself," replied Judy; "but I never could see why people should stop for introductions at teas and times like this. We all know we're all right, or else we wouldn't be here."

[48]

"Of course," said Frances Andrews, who had just come in, "why all this formality, when we are to be a family party for the next eight months? Why not become friends at once, without any preliminaries?"

Sally Marks, who had given them the vague yet meaningful warning the night before, appeared to be absorbed in her coffee cup, and the other two sophomores at the table were engaged in a whispered conversation.

"Nevertheless, I will perform the introductions," announced Judy Kean. "This is Miss Margaret Wakefield, of Washington, D. C.; Miss Edith Coles, of Rhode Island; Miss Jessie Lynch, of Wisconsin, and Miss Mabel Hinton, of Illinois. As for me, my name is Julia Kean, and I come from—nowhere in particular."

"You must have had a birthplace," insisted that accurate young person, Nance Oldham.

"If you could call a ship a birthplace, I did," replied Judy. "I was born in mid-ocean on a stormy night. Hence my stormy, restless nature."

[49]

"But how did it happen?" asked Molly.

"Oh, it was all simple enough. Papa and mamma were on their way back from Japan, and I arrived a bit prematurely on board ship. I began life traveling, and I've been traveling ever since."

"You'll have to stay put here; awhile, at least," said Sally Marks.

"I hope so. I need to gather a little moss before I become an habitual tramp."

"Hadn't we better be chasing along?" said Frances Andrews. "It's almost time for chapel."

No one answered and Molly began to wonder how long this strange girl would endure the part of a monologist at college. For that was what her attempts at conversation seemed to amount to. She admired Frances's pluck, at any rate. Whatever she had done to offend, it was courageous of her to come back and face the music.

Chapel was an impressive sight to the new girls. The entire body of students was there, and the faculty, including Professor Edwin Green, who gave each girl the impression he was looking at her when he was really only gazing into the imaginary bull's-eye of an imaginary camera, and saw not one of them. Molly decided his comeliness was more charm than looks. "The unknown charm," she wrote her sister. "His ears are a little pointed at the top, and he has brown eyes like a collie dog. But it was nice of him to have given me his soup," she added irrelevantly, "and I shall always appreciate it."

[50]

After chapel, when Molly was following in the trail of her new friends, feeling a bit strange and unaccustomed, some one plucked her by the sleeve. It was Mary Stewart, the nice senior with the plain, but fine face.

"I'll expect you this evening after supper," she said. "I'm having a little party. There will be music, too. I thought perhaps you might like to bring a friend along. It's rather lonesome, breaking into a new crowd by one's self."

It never occurred to Molly that she was being paid undue honors. For a freshman, who had arrived only the afternoon before, without a friend in college, to be asked to a small intimate party by the most prominent girl in the senior class, was really quite remarkable, so Nance Oldham thought; and she was pleased to be the one Molly chose to take along.

The two girls had had a busy, exciting day. They had not been placed in the same divisions, B and O being so widely separated in the alphabet, and were now meeting again for the first time since lunch. Molly had stretched her length on her couch and kicked off her pumps, described later by Judy Kean as being a yard long and an inch broad.

[51]



"I wish you would tell me your receipt for making friends, Molly," exclaimed Nance.—Page 51.

"I wish you would tell me your receipt for making friends, Molly," exclaimed Nance. "You are really a perfect wonder. Don't you find it troublesome to be so nice to so many people?"

"I'd find it lots harder not to be nice," answered Molly. "Besides, it's a rule that works both ways. The nicer you are to people, the nicer they are to you."

"But don't you think lots of people aren't worth the effort and if you treat them like sisters, they are apt to take advantage of it and bore you afterwards?"

Molly smiled.

"I've never been troubled that way," she said.

"Now, don't tell me," cried Nance, warming to the argument, "that that universally cordial manner of yours doesn't bring a lot of rag-tags around to monopolize you. If it hasn't before, it will now. You'll see."

"You make me feel like the leader of Coxe's Army," laughed Molly; "because, you see, I'm a kind of a rag-tag myself."

[52]

Her eyes filled with tears. She was thinking of her meagre wardrobe. Nance was silent. She was slow of speech, but when she once began, she always said more than she intended simply to prove her point; and now she was afraid she had hurt Molly's feelings. She was provoked with herself for her carelessness, and when she was on bad terms with herself she appeared to be on bad terms with everybody else. Of course, in her heart of hearts, she had been thinking of Frances Andrews, whom she felt certain Molly would never snub sufficiently to keep her at a distance.

The two girls went about their dressing without saying another word. Nance was coiling her smooth brown braids around her head, while Molly was looking sorrowfully at her only two available dresses for that evening's party. One was a blue muslin of a heavenly color but considerably darned, and the other was a marquisette, also the worse for wear. Suddenly Nance gave a reckless toss of her hair brush in one direction and her comb in another, and rushed over to Molly, who was gazing absently into the closet.

[53]

"Oh, Molly," she cried impetuously, seizing her friend's hand, "I'm a brute. Will you forgive me? I'm afraid I hurt your feelings. It's just my unfortunate way of getting excited and saying too much. I never met any one I admired as much as you in such a short time. I wish I did know how to be charming to everybody, like you. It's been ground into me since I was a child not to make friends with people unless it was to my advantage, and I found out they were entirely worthy. And it's a slow process, I can tell you. You are the very first chance acquaintance I ever made in

my life, and I like you better than any girl I ever met. So there, will you say you have forgiven me?"

"Of course, I will," exclaimed Molly, flushing with pleasure. "There is nothing to forgive. I know I'm too indiscriminate about making friends. Mother often complained because I would bring such queer children out to dinner when I was a child. Indeed, I wasn't hurt a bit. It was the word 'rag-tag,' that seemed to be such an excellent description of the clothes I must wear this winter, unless some should drop down from heaven, like manna in the desert for the Children of Israel."

[54]

Without a word, Nance pulled a box out from under her couch and lifted the lid. It disclosed a little hand sewing machine.

"Can you sew?" she asked.

"After a fashion."

"Well, I can. It's pastime with me. I'd rather make clothes than do lots of other things. Now, suppose we set to work and make some dresses. How would you like a blue serge, with turn-over collar and cuffs, like that one Miss Marks is wearing, that fastens down the side with black satin buttons?"

"Oh, Nance, I couldn't let you do all that for me," protested Molly. "Besides, I haven't the material or anything."

"Why don't you earn some money, Molly?" suggested Nance. "There are lots of different ways. Mrs. Murphy, the housekeeper, was telling me about them. One of the girls here last year actually blacked boots—but, of course, you wouldn't do anything so menial as that."

"Wouldn't I?" interrupted Molly. "Just watch me. That's a splendid idea, Nance. It's a fine, honorable labor, as Colonel Robert Wakefield said, when his wife had to take in boarders."

[55]

Molly slipped on the blue muslin.

"It really doesn't make any difference what she wears," thought Nance, looking at her friend with covert admiration. "She'd be a star in a crazy quilt."

The two girls hurried down to supper. Molly was thoughtful all through that conversational meal. Her mind was busy with a scheme by which she intended to remove that unceasing pressure for funds which bade fair to be an ever-increasing bugbear to her.

No. 16 on the Quadrangle turned out to be a very luxurious and comfortable suite of rooms, consisting of quite a large parlor, a little den or study and a bedroom. Mary Stewart met them at the door in such a plain dress that at first Molly was deceived into thinking it was just an ordinary frock until she noticed the lines. And in a few moments Nance took occasion to inform her that simplicity was one of the most expensive things in the world, which few people could afford, and furthermore that Mary Stewart's gray, cottony-looking dress was a dream of beauty and must have come from Paris.

[56]

There were six or seven other girls in the crowd, including that little bird-like, bright-eyed creature they called "Jennie Wren," whose real name was Jane Wickham. The only other girl they knew was Judith Blount, who had been so snubby to Molly the day before about the luggage.

All these girls were musical, as the freshmen were soon to learn, and belonged to the College Glee Club.

"What a pretty room!" exclaimed Molly to her hostess, after she had been properly introduced and enthroned in a big tapestry chair, in which she unconsciously made a most delightful and colorful picture.

"I'm glad you like it. I have some trouble keeping it from getting cluttered up with 'truck,' as we call it. It's about like Hercules trying to clean the Augean Stables, I think, but I try and use the den for an overflow, and only put the things I'm really fond of in here. That helps some."

"They are certainly lovely," said the young freshman, looking wistfully at the head of "The Unknown Woman," between two brass candlesticks on the mantel shelf. On the bookshelves stood "The Winged Victory," and hanging over the shelves on the opposite side of the room was an immense photograph of Botticelli's "Primavera." The only other pictures were two Japanese prints and the only other furniture was a baby grand piano and some chairs. It was really a delightfully empty and beautiful place, and Molly felt suddenly strangely crude and ignorant when she recalled the things she had intended to do to her part of the room at Queen's Cottage toward beautifying it. She was engaged in mentally clearing them all out, when a voice at her elbow said:

[57]

"Are you thinking of taking the vows, Miss Brown?"

It was Judith Blount, who had drawn up a chair beside her's. There was something very patronizing and superior in Miss Blount's manner, but Molly was determined to ignore it, and smiled sweetly into the black eyes of the haughty sophomore.

"Taking what vows?" she asked.

"Why, I understood you had become a cloistered nun."

Molly flushed. So the story was out. It didn't take long for news to travel through a girl's college.

[58]

"I wasn't cloistered very long," she answered. "And the only vow I took was never to be caught there again after six o'clock."

"How did you like Epiménides? I hear he's made a great joke of it," she continued, without waiting for Molly to answer. "He's rather humorous, you know. Even in his most serious work, it will come out."

"I don't think there was much to joke about," put in Molly, feeling a little indignant. "I was awfully forlorn and miserable."

"The real joke was that he called you 'little Miss Smith,'" said Judith.

Molly's moods reflected themselves in her eyes just as the passing clouds are mirrored in two blue pools of water. A shadow passed over her face now and her eyes grew darker, but she kept very quiet, which was her way when her feelings were hurt. Then Mary Stewart began to play on the piano, and Molly forgot all about the sharp-tongued sophomore, who, she strongly suspected, was trying to be disagreeable, but for what reason for the life of her Molly could not see.

[59]

Never before had she heard any really good playing on the piano, and it seemed to her now that the music actually flowed from Mary's long, strong fingers, in a melodious and liquid stream. Other music followed. Judith sang a gypsy song, in a rich contralto voice, that Molly thought was a little coarse. Jennie Wren, who could sing exactly like a child, gave a solo in the highest little piping soprano. Two girls played on mandolins, and Mary Stewart, who appeared to do most things, accompanied them on a guitar. Then came supper, which was rather plain, Molly thought, and consisted simply of tea and cookies. "I suppose it's artistic not to have much to eat," her thoughts continued, but she made up her mind to invite Mary Stewart to supper before the old ham and the hickory nut cake were consumed by hungry freshmen.

"It seems to me that with such a voice as yours you must sing, Miss Brown," here broke in Mary Stewart. "Will you please oblige the company?"

"I wouldn't like to sing after all this fine music," protested Molly. "Besides, I don't know anything but darky songs."

"The very girl we want for our Hallowe'en Vaudeville," cried Jennie Wren. "What do you use, a guitar or a piano?"

[60]

"Either, a little," answered Molly, blushing crimson; "but I haven't any more voice than a rabbit."

"Fire away," cried Jennie Wren, thrusting a guitar into her hands.

Molly was actually trembling with fright when she found herself the center of interest in this musical company.



"I'm scared to death," she announced. Then she struck a chord and began.—Page 60.

"I'm scared to death," she announced, as she faintly tuned the guitar. Then she struck a chord and began:

"Ma baby loves shortnin',
Ma baby loves shortnin' bread;
Ma baby loves shortnin',
Mammy's gwine make him some shortnin' bread."

Before she had finished, everybody in the room had joined in. Then she sang:

"Ole Uncle Rat has come to town,
To buy his niece a weddin' gown,
OO-hoo!"

"A quarter to ten," announced some one, and the next moment they had all said good-night and were running as fast as their feet could carry them across the campus, "scuttling in every direction like a lot of rats," as Judith remarked. [61]

"Lights out at ten o'clock," whispered Nance breathlessly, as they crept into their room and undressed in the dark. It was very exciting. They felt like a pair of happy criminals who had just escaped the iron grasp of the law.

When Molly Brown dropped into a deep and restful sleep that night, she never dreamed that she had already become a noted person in college, though how it happened, it would be impossible to say. It might have been the Cloister story, but, nevertheless, Molly—overgrown child that she may have seemed to Professor Green—had a personality that attracted attention wherever she was.

CHAPTER V.

 [62]

THE KENTUCKY SPREAD.

"Molly, you look a little worried," observed Nance Oldham, two days before the famous spread was to take place, it having been set for Friday evening.

Molly was seated on her bed, in the midst of a conglomerate mass of books and clothes, chewing the end of a pencil while she knitted her brows over a list of names.

"Not exactly worried," she replied. "But, you know, Nance, giving a party is exactly like some kind of strong stimulant with me. It goes to my head, and I seem to get intoxicated on invitations. Once I get started to inviting, I can't seem to stop."

"Molly Brown," put in Nance severely, "I believe you've just about invited the whole of Wellington College to come here Friday night. And because you are already such a famous person, everybody has accepted." [63]

"I think I can about remember how many I asked," she replied penitently. "There are all the girls in the house, of course."

"Frances Andrews?"

Molly nodded.

"And all the girls who were at Miss Stewart's the other night."

"What, even that girl who makes catty speeches. That black-eyed Blount person?"

"Yes, even so," continued Molly sadly. "I really hadn't intended to ask her, Nance, but I do love to heap coals of fire on people's heads, and besides, I just told you, when I get started, I can't seem to stop. When I was younger, I've been known to bring home as many as six strange little girls to dinner at once."

"The next time you give a party," put in Nance, "we'd better make out the list beforehand, and then you must give me your word of honor not to add one name to it."

"I'll try to," replied Molly with contrition, "but it's awfully hard to take the pledge when it comes to asking people to meals, even spreads."

The two girls examined the list together, and Molly racked her brains to try and remember any left-outs, as she called them.

[64]

"I'm certain that's all," she said at last. "That makes twenty, doesn't it? Oh, Nance, I tremble for the old ham and the hickory nut cake. Do you think they'll go round? Aunty, she's my godmother, is sending me another box of beaten biscuits. She has promised to keep me supplied. You know, I have never eaten cold light bread in my life at breakfast, and I'd just as soon choke down cold potatoes as the soggy bread they give us here. But beaten biscuit and ham and home-made pickles won't be enough, even with hickory nut cake," she continued doubtfully.

"I have a chafing dish. We can make fudge; then there's tea, you know. We can borrow cups and saucers from the others. But we'll have to do something else for their amusement besides feed them. Have you thought of anything?"

"Lillie and Millie," these were two sophomores at Queen's, "have a stunt they have promised to give. It's to be a surprise. And Jennie Wren has promised to bring her guitar and oblige us with a few selections, but, oh, Nance, except for the eatin', I'm afraid it won't be near such a fine party as Mary Stewart's was."

"Eatin's the main thing, child. Don't let that worry you," replied Nance consolingly. "I think I have an idea of something which would interest the company, but I'm not going to tell even you what it is."

[65]

Nance had a provoking way of keeping choice secrets and then springing them when she was entirely ready, and wild horses could not drag them out of her before that propitious moment.

On Friday evening the girls began to arrive early, for, as has been said, Molly was already an object of interest at Wellington College, and the fame of her beaten biscuits and old ham had spread abroad. Some of the guests, like Mary Stewart, came because they were greatly attracted toward the young freshman; and others, like Judith Blount, felt only an amused curiosity in accepting the invitation. As a general thing, Judith was a very exclusive person, but she felt she could safely show her face where Mary Stewart was.

"This looks pretty fine to me," observed that nice, unaffected young woman herself, shaking hands with Molly and Nance.

"It's good of you to say so," replied Molly. "Your premises would make two of our's, I'm thinking."

"But, look at your grand buffet. How clever of you! One of you two children must have a genius for arrangement."

[66]

The study tables had been placed at one end of the room close together, their crudities covered with a white cloth borrowed from Mrs. Murphy, and on these were piled the viands in a manner to give the illusion of great profusion and plenty.

"It's Molly," laughed Nance; "she's a natural entertainer."

"Not at all," put in Molly. "I come of a family of cooks."

"And did your cook relatives marry butlers?" asked Judith.

Molly stifled a laugh. Somehow Judith couldn't say things like other girls. There was always a tinge of spite in her speeches.

"Where I come from," she said gravely, "the cooks and butlers are colored people, and the old ones are almost like relatives, they are so loyal and devoted. But there are not many of those left now."

The room was gradually filling, and presently every guest had arrived, except Frances Andrews.

"We won't wait for her," said Molly to Lillie and Millie, the two inseparable sophomores, who now quietly slipped out. Presently, Nance, major domo for the evening, shoved all the guests back onto the divans and into the corners until a circle was formed in the centre of the room. She then hung a placard on the knob of the door which read:

[67]

MAHOMET, THE COCK OF THE EAST,
vs.
CHANTECLER, THE COCK OF THE WEST.

There was a sound of giggling and scuffling, the door opened and two enormous, man-sized cocks entered the room. Both fowls had white bodies made by putting the feet through the sleeves of a nightgown, which was drawn up around the neck and over the arms, the fullness gathered into the back and tied into a rakish tail. A Persian kimono was draped over Mahomet to represent wings and a tightly fitting white cap with a point over the forehead covered his head. His face was powdered to a ghastly pallor with talcum and his mouth had been painted with red finger-nail salve into a cruel red slash across his countenance. Chantecler was of a more engaging countenance. A small red felt bedroom slipper formed his comb and a red silk handkerchief covered his back hair. The two cocks crowed and flapped their wings and the fight began, amid much laughter and cheering. Twice Chantecler was almost spurred to death, but it was

[68]

Mahomet's lot to die that evening, and presently he expired with a terrible groan, while the Cock of the West placed his foot on Mahomet's chest and crowed a mighty crow, for the West had conquered the East.

That was really the great stunt of the evening, and it occupied a good deal of time. Molly began carving the ham, which she had refused to do earlier, because a ham, properly served, should appear first in all its splendid shapely wholeness before being sliced into nothingness. Therefore she now proceeded to cut off thin portions, which crumbled into bits under the edge of the carving knife borrowed from Mrs. Murphy. But the young hostess composedly heaped it upon the plates with pickle and biscuit, and it was eaten so quickly that she had scarcely finished the last serving before the plates were back again for a second allowance.

[69]

During the hot fudge and hickory nut cake course, the door opened and a Scotch laddie, kilted and belted in the most approved manner entered the room. His knees were bare, he wore a little Scotch cap, a black velvet jacket and a plaidie thrown over one shoulder. But the most perfect part of his get-up was his miniature bagpipe, which he blew on vigorously, and presently he paused and sang a Scotch song.

"Nance!" cried several of the Queen's Cottage girls, for it was difficult to recognize the quiet young girl from Vermont in this rakish disguise.

In the midst of the uproar there was a loud knock on the door.

"Come in," called Molly, a little frightened, thinking, perhaps, the kindly matron had for once rebelled at the noise they were making.

Slowly the door opened and an old hag stepped into the room. She was really a terrible object, and some of the girls shrieked and fell back as she advanced toward the jolly circle. Her nose was of enormous length, and almost rested on her chin, like a staff, like the nose of "The Last Leaf on the Tree." Also, she had a crooked back and leaned heavily on a stick. On her head was a high pointed witch's cap. She wore black goggles, and had only two front teeth. The witch produced a pack of cards which she dexterously shuffled with her black gloved hands. Then she sat down on the floor, beckoning to the girls to come nearer.

[70]

"Half-a-minute fortune for each one," she observed in a muffled, disguised voice, but it was a very fulsome minute, as Judy remarked afterward, for what little she said was strictly to the point.

To Judith Blount she said:

"English literature is your weak point. Look out for danger ahead."

This seemed simple enough advice, but Judith flushed darkly, and several of the girls exchanged glances. Molly, for some reason, recalled what Judith had said about Professor Edwin Green.

Many of the other girls came in for knocks, but they were very skillful ones, deftly hidden under the guise of advice. To Jennie Wren the witch said:

"Be careful of your friends. Don't ever cultivate unprofitable people."

To Nance Oldham she said:

"You will always be very popular—if you stick to popular people."

[71]

It was all soon over. Molly's fortune had been left to the last. The strange witch had gone so quickly from one girl to another that they had scarcely time to take a breath between each fortune.

"As for you," she said at last, turning to Molly, "I can only say that 'kind hearts are more than coronets, and simple faith than Norman blood,' and by the end of your freshman year you will be the most popular girl in college."

"Who are you?" cried Molly, suddenly coming out of her dream.

"Yes, who are you?" cried Judith, breaking through the circle and seizing the witch by the arm.

With a swift movement the witch pushed her back and she fell in a heap on some girls who were still sitting on the floor.

"I will know who you are," cried Jennie Wren, with a determined note in her high voice, as she grasped the witch by the arm, and it did look for a moment as if the Kentucky spread were going to end in a free-for-all fight, when suddenly, in the midst of the scramble and cries, came three raps on the door, and the voice of the matron called:

[72]

"Young ladies, ten o'clock. Lights out!"

The girls always declared that it was the witch who had got near the door and pushed the button which put out every light in the room. At any rate, the place was in total darkness for half a minute, and when Molly switched the lights on again for the girls to find their wraps the witch had disappeared.

In another instant the guests had vanished into thin air and across the moonlit campus ghostly figures could be seen flitting like shadows over the turf toward the dormitories, for there was no

time to lose. At a quarter past ten the gates into the Quadrangle would be securely locked.

Nance lit a flat, thick candle, known in the village as "burglar's terror," and in this flickering dim light the two girls undressed hastily.

Suddenly Molly exclaimed in a whisper:

"Nance, I believe it was Frances Andrews who dressed up as that witch, and I'm going to find out, rules or no rules."

She slipped on her kimono and crept into the hall. The house was very still, but she tapped softly on Frances' door. There was no answer, and opening the door she tiptoed into the room. A long ray of moonlight, filtering in through the muslin curtains, made the room quite light. There was a smell of lavender salts in the air, and Mollie could plainly see Frances in her bed. A white handkerchief was tied around her head, as if she had a headache, but she seemed to be asleep.

[73]

"Frances," called Molly softly.

Frances gave a stifled sob that was half a groan and turned over on her side.

"Frances," called Molly again.

Frances opened her eyes and sat up.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked.

Molly went up to the bedside. Even in the moonlight she could see that Frances' eyes were swollen with crying.

"I was afraid you were ill," whispered Molly. "Why didn't you come to the spread?"

"I had a bad headache. It's better now. Good night." Molly crept off to her room.

Was it Frances, after all, who had broken up her party?

[74]

Molly was inclined to think it was not, and yet——

"At any rate, we'll give her the benefit of the doubt, Nance," she whispered.

But there were no doubts in Nance's mind.

CHAPTER VI.

[75]

KNOTTY PROBLEMS.

"I tell you things do hum in this college!" exclaimed Judy Kean, closing a book she had been reading and tossing it onto the couch with a sigh of deep content.

"I don't see how you can tell anything about it, Judy," said Nance severely. "You've been so absorbed in 'The Broad Highway' every spare moment you've had for the last two days that you might as well have been in Kalamazoo as in college."

"Nance, you do surely tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth," said Judy good naturedly. "I know I have the novel habit badly. It's because I had no restraint put upon me in my youth, and if I get a really good book like this one, I just let duty slide."

"Why don't you put your talents to some use and write, then?" demanded Nance, who enjoyed preaching to her friends.

"Art is more to my taste," answered Judy.

[76]

"Well, art is long and time is fleeting. Why don't you get busy and do something?" exclaimed the other vehemently. "What do you intend to be?"

Judy had a trick of raising her eyebrows and frowning at the same time, which gave her a serio-comic expression and invested her most earnest speeches with a touch of humor. But she did not reply to Nance's question, having spent most of her life indulging her very excellent taste without much thought for the future.

"What do you intend to be?" she asked presently of Nance, who had her whole future mapped out in blocks: four years at college, two years studying languages in Europe, four years as teacher in a good school, then as principal, perhaps, and next as owner of a school of her own.

"Why, I expect to teach languages," said Nance without a moment's hesitation.

"Of course, a teacher. I might have known!" cried Judy. "You've commenced already on me—your earliest pupil!"

“Teacher, teacher, why am I so happy, happy, happy,
In my Sunday school?”

She broke off with her song suddenly and seized Nance’s hand.

[77]

“Please don’t scold me, Nance, dear. I know life isn’t all play, and that college is a serious business if one expects to take the whole four years’ course. I’ve already had a warning. It came this morning. It’s because I’ve been cutting classes. And I have been entirely miserable. That’s the reason I’ve been so immersed in ‘The Broad Highway.’ I’ve been trying to drown my sorrows in romance. I know I’m not clever——”

“Nonsense,” interrupted the other impatiently. “You are too clever, you silly child. That’s what is the matter with you, but you don’t know how to work. You have no system. What you really need is a good tutor. You must learn to concentrate——”

“Concentrate,” laughed Judy. “That’s something I never could do. As soon as I try my thoughts go skylarking.”

“How do you do it?”

“Well, I sit very still and dig my toes into the soles of my shoes and my finger nails into the palms of my hands and say over and over the thing I’m trying to concentrate on.”

The girls were still laughing joyously when Molly came in. Her face wore an expression of unwonted seriousness, and she was frowning slightly. Three things had happened that morning which worried her considerably.

[78]

The first shock came before breakfast when she had looked in her handkerchief box where she kept her funds promiscuously mixed up with handkerchiefs and orris root sachet bags and found one crumpled dollar bill and not a cent more. There was a kind of blind spot in Molly’s brain where money was concerned, little of it as she had possessed in her life. She never could remember exactly how much she had on hand, and change was a meaningless thing to her. And now it was something of a blow to her to find that one dollar must bridge over the month’s expenses, or she must write home for more, a thing she did not wish to do, remembering the two acres of apple orchard which had been sunk in her education.

“And it’s all gone in silk attire and riotous living,” she said to herself, for she had bought herself ten yards of a heavenly sky blue crêpey material which she and Nance proposed to make into a grand costume, also she had entertained numbers of friends at various times to sundaes in the village. One of the other of her triple worries was a note she had received that morning from Judith Blount, and the third was another note, about both of which she intended to ask the advice of her two most intimate friends.

[79]

“What’s bothering you, child?” demanded Judy, quick to notice any change in her adored Molly’s face.

“Oh, several things. These two notes for one.” She drew two envelopes from her pocket and opening the first one, began to read aloud:

“DEAR MISS BROWN:

“Since you come of a family of cooks and are expert on the subject, I am going to ask you to take charge of a little dinner I am giving to-morrow night in my rooms to my brother and some friends. I shall expect you to be chief cook, but not bottle-washer. You’ll have an assistant for that; but I’d like you to wait on the table, seeing you are so good at those things. Don’t bother about cap and apron. I have them.

“Yours with thanks in advance,
“JUDITH BLOUNT.”

The note was written on heavy cream-colored paper with two Greek letters embossed at the top in dark blue. Judith lived in the Beta Phi House, which was divided into apartments, and occupied by eight decidedly well-to-do girls, the richest girls in college, as a matter of fact. It was called “The Millionaire’s Club,” and was known to be the abode of snobbishness, although Molly, who had been there once to a tea, had been entirely unconscious of this spirit.

[80]

Judy and Nance were speechless with indignation after Molly had finished reading the note.

“What do you think of that?” she exclaimed, breaking the silence.

“It’s a rank insult,” cried Nance.

“If you were a man, you could challenge her to a duel,” cried Judy; “but being a girl, you’ll have to take it out in ignoring her.”

“It’s written in such a matter-of-fact way,” continued Molly, “that I can’t believe it’s entirely unusual. After sober, second thought, I believe I’ll ask Sallie before I answer it.”

“Speaking of angels—there is Sallie!” cried Judy, as that young woman herself hurried past the door on her way to a class.

“What is it? Make it quick. I’m late now!” ejaculated Sallie, popping her head in at the door with

a smile on her face to counteract her abrupt manner. "Who's in trouble now?"

The three freshmen stood silently about her while she perused Judith's note.

[81]

"Did you ever hear of such a thing?" burst out Judy with hot indignation.

"Oh, yes, lots of times, little one. It's quite customary for freshmen to act as waitresses when girls in the older classes entertain in their rooms. The freshies like to do it because they get such good food. I do think this note is expressed, well—rather unfortunately. It has a sort of between-the-lines superiority. But Judith is always like that. You just have to take her as you find her and ignore her faults. You'd better accept, Molly, with good grace. You'll enjoy the food, too. Tomorrow—let me see, that's New England boiled dinner night, isn't it? You'll probably have beefsteak and mushrooms and grape fruit and ice cream and all the delicacies of the season."

"Very well, if you advise it, I'll accept, like a lady," said Molly resignedly.

"It's customary," answered Sallie, smiling cheerfully and waving her hand as she hurried down the hall.

"Well, that's settled," continued Molly sighing. Somehow, Judith Blount did get on her nerves. "Now, the other note is even more serious in a way. Listen to this."

[82]

Before reading it, she carefully closed the door, drew the other girls into the far end of the room and began in a low voice:

"DEAR MISS BROWN:

"May I have the pleasure of being your escort to the sophomore-freshman ball? Let me know whether you intend to wear one of your cerulean shades. The carriage will stop for us at eight o'clock. You might leave the answer at my door to-night.

"Yours faithfully,
"FRANCES ANDREWS."

The girls looked at each other in consternation.

"What's to be done?"

"Say you have another engagement," advised Judy, who was not averse at times to telling polite fibs in order to extricate herself from a difficulty. But Molly was the very soul of truth, and even small fibs were not in her line.

"Hasn't any one else asked you yet?" asked Nance.

"No; you see, it's a week off, and I suppose they are just beginning to think of partners now."

"All I can say is that if you do go with her you are done for," announced Nance solemnly.

Molly sat down in the Morris chair and wrinkled her brows.

[83]

"I do wish she hadn't," she said.

"She just regards you as a sort of life preserver," exclaimed Judy. "She's trying to keep above the surface by holding on to you. If I were you, I wouldn't be bothered with her."

"Of course, I know," said Molly, "that Frances Andrews did something last year that put her in the black books with her class. She's trying to live it down, and they are trying to freeze her out. Nobody has anything to do with her, and she's not invited to anything except the big entertainments like this. I can't help feeling sorry for her, and I don't see how it would do me any harm to go with her. But I just don't want to go, that's all. I'd rather take a beating than go."

"Well, then you are a chump for considering it!" exclaimed Judy, whose self-indulgent nature had little sympathy for people who would do uncomfortable things.

"Then, on the other hand," continued Molly, "suppose my going would help her a little, don't you think it would be mean to turn her down? Oh, say you think I ought to do it, because I'm going to, hard as it seems."

Nance went over and put her arms around her friend, quite an unusual demonstration with her, while Judy seized her hand and patted it tenderly.

[84]

"Really, Molly, you are quite the nicest person in the world," she exclaimed. Then she added: "By the way, Molly, can you spare the time to tutor me for a month or so? I don't know what the rates are, but we can settle about that later. Nance tells me I must get busy or else take my walking papers. I'd be afraid of a strange tutor. I'm a timid creature. But I think I might manage to learn a few things from you, Molly, dear."

Did Judy understand the look of immense relief which instantly appeared on Molly's sensitive face? If she did she made no sign.

"Now, don't say no," she went on. "I know you are awfully busy, and all that, but it would be just an act of common charity."

"Say no?" cried Molly, laughing lightly. "I can hardly wait to say yes," and she cheerfully got out

six pairs of muddy boots from the closet, enveloped herself in a large apron, slipped on a pair of old gloves and went to work to clean and black them. Molly had become official bootblack at Queen's Cottage at ten cents a pair when they were not muddy, and fifteen cents when they were.

[85]

When she had completed her lowly job she sat down at her desk and wrote two notes.

One was to Judith Blount, in which she accepted her invitation to wait at table in the most polite and correct terms, and signed her name "Mary Carmichael Washington Brown."

The second letter, which was to Frances Andrews, was also a note of acceptance.

Then Molly removed her collar, rolled up her sleeves, kicked off her pumps—a signal that she was going to begin work—and sat down to cram mathematics,—the very hardest thing in life to her and the subject which was to be a stumbling block in her progress always.

CHAPTER VII.

[86]

AN INCIDENT OF THE COFFEE CUPS.

Molly turned up at the Beta Phi House about five o'clock the next evening. She wore a blue linen so that if any grease sputtered it would fall harmlessly on wash goods, and in other ways attired herself as much like a maid as possible with white collar and cuffs and a very plain tight arrangement of the hair.

"If I'm to be a servant, I might as well look like one," she thought, as she marched upstairs and rapped on Judith's door.

"Come in," called the voice of Jennie Wren. "Judith's gone walking with her guests," she explained; "but she left her orders with me, and I'll transmit them to you," she added rather grandly. "You are to do the cooking. Here are all the things in the ice box, and there's the gas stove on the trunk. Miss Brinton and I will set the table."

Molly gathered that Caroline Brinton, the unbending young woman from Philadelphia, had been chosen as her assistant.

[87]

The tiny ice box was stuffed full of provisions. There was the inevitable beefsteak, as Sallie had predicted; also canned soup; a head of celery, olives, grape fruits, olive oil, mushrooms, cheese—really, a bewildering display of food stuffs.

"Did Miss Blount decide on the courses?" Molly asked Jennie Wren.

"No; she got the raw material and left the rest entirely with you. 'Tell her to get up a good dinner for six people,' she said. 'I don't care how she does it, only she must have it promptly at six-fifteen.'"

There were only two holes to the gas stove and likewise only two saucepans to fit over them, so that it behooved Molly to look alive if she were to prepare dinner for six in an hour and a quarter.

"Where's the can opener?" she called.

A calm, experienced cook with the patience of a saint might have felt some slight irritability if she had been placed in Molly's shoes that evening. Nothing could be found. There was no can opener, no ice pick, the coffeepot had a limited capacity of four cups, and there was no broiler for the steak. It had to be cooked in a pan. It must be confessed also that it was the first time in her life Molly had ever cooked an entire meal. She had only made what her grandmother would have called "covered dishes," or surprise dishes, and she now found preparing a dinner of four courses for six people rather a bewildering task.

[88]

At last there came the sound of voices in the next room. She put on the beefsteak. Her cheeks were flaming from the heat of the little stove. Her back ached from leaning over, and her head ached with responsibility and excitement.

"Is everything all right?" demanded Judith, blowing into the room with an air of "if it isn't it will be the worse for you."

"I believe so," answered Molly.

"Why did you put the anchovies on crackers?" demanded the older girl irritably. "They should have been on toast."

"Because there wasn't enough bread for one thing, and because there was no way to toast it if there had been," answered Molly shortly.

No cook likes to be interfered with at that crucial moment just before dinner.

[89]

"Here are your cap and apron," went on Judith. "You know how to wait, don't you? Always hand things at the left side."

"Water happens to be poured from the right," answered Molly, pinning on the little muslin cap. She was in no mood to be dictated to by Judith Blount or any other black-eyed vixen.

Judith made no answer. She seemed excited and absent-minded.

Caroline placed the anchovies while Molly poured the soup into cups, there being no plates. The voices of the company floated in to her. Jennie Wren had joined them, making the sixth.

She heard a man's voice exclaim:

"I say, Ju-ju, I call this very luxurious. We never had anything so fine as this at Harvard. You always could hold up the parent and get what you wanted. Now, I never had the nerve. And, by the way, have you got a cook, too?"

"Only for to-night," answered Judith. "We usually eat downstairs with the others."

"You're working some poor little freshman, ten to one," answered Judith's brother, for that was evidently who it was. Then Molly heard some one run up a brilliant scale and strike a chord and a good baritone voice began singing:

"Oh, I'm a cook and a captain bold,
And a mate of the Nancy brig,
And a bo'sun tight and a midshipmatemite,
And the crew of the captain's gig."

"Why don't you join in, Eddie? But I forgot. It would never do for a Professor of English Literature at a girls' college to lift his voice in ribald song."

Some one laughed. Molly recognized the voice instantly. She knew that Professor Edwin Green was dining at Judith's that night, and her inquiring mind reached out even further into the realms of conjecture, and she guessed who was the author of his light opera.

"Cousin Edwin, will you sit there, next to me?" said Judith's voice.

"Cousin?" repeated Molly. "So that's it, is it?"

Then other voices joined in—Mary Stewart, Jennie Wren and Martha Schaeffer, a rich girl from Chicago, who roomed in that house.

They gobbled down the first course as people usually dispatch relishes, and as Caroline removed the dishes, Molly appeared with the soup. None of the girls recognized her, of course, which was perfectly good college etiquette, although Mary Stewart smiled when Molly placed her cup of soup and whispered:

"Good work."

Molly gave her a grateful look, and Professor Edwin Green, looking up, caught a glimpse of Molly's flushed face, and smiled, too.

"I say, Ju-ju, who's your head waitress?" Molly could not help overhearing Richard Blount ask when she had left the room.

"Oh, just a little Southern girl named Smith, or something," answered Judith carelessly.

"That young lady," said Professor Edwin Green, "is Miss Molly Brown, of Kentucky."

The young freshman's face was crimson when she brought in the steak and placed it in front of Mr. Blount.

Then she took her stand correctly behind his chair, with a plate in her hand, waiting for him to carve.

Sometimes two members of the same family are so unlike that it is almost impossible to believe that blood from the same stock runs in their veins. So it was with Richard Blount and his sister, Judith. She was tall and dark and arrogant, and he was short and blond and full of good-humored gayety. He rallied all the girls at the table. He teased his Cousin Edwin. He teased his sister, and then he ended by highly praising the food, looking all the time from one corner of his mild blue eyes at Molly's flushed face.

"Really," he exclaimed, "a French chef must have broiled this steak. Not even Delmonico, nor Oscar himself at the Waldorf, could have done it better. Isn't it the top-notch, Eddie? What's this? Mushroom sauce? By Jupiter, it's wonderful to come out here in the wilds and get such food."

Mary Stewart began to laugh. After all, it was just good-natured raillery.

"Why, Mr. Blount," she said, "there is something to be found here that is lots better than porter-house steak."

"What is it? Name it, please!" cried Richard. "If I must miss the train, I must have some,

[90]

[91]

[92]

whatever it is—cream puffs or chocolate fudge?”

“It’s Kentucky ham of the finest, what do you call it—breed? Three years old. You’ve never eaten ham until you’ve tasted it.”

She smiled charmingly at Molly, who pretended to look unconscious while she passed the vegetables. Judith endeavored to change the subject. [93]

She was angry with Mary for thus bringing her freshman waitress into prominence. But Molly was destined to be the heroine of the evening in spite of all efforts against it.

“Old Kentucky ham!” cried Richard Blount, starting from his chair with mock seriousness, “Where is it? I implore you to tell me. My soul cries out for old ham from the dark and bloody battleground of Kentucky!”

Everybody began to laugh, and Judith exclaimed:

“Do hush, Richard. You are so absurd! Did he behave this way at Harvard all the time, Cousin Edwin?”

“Oh, yes; only more so. But tell me more of this wonderful ham, Miss Stewart.”

Molly wondered if Professor Green really understood that it was all a joke on her when he asked that question.

Suddenly she formed a resolution. Following her assistant into the next room, she whispered:

“Which would you rather do, Miss Brinton? Go over to Queen’s and ask Nance to give you the rest of my ham or wait on the table while I go?”

“I’d rather get the ham,” replied Miss Brinton, whose proud spirit was crushed by the menial service she had been obliged to undertake that evening. [94]

The dinner progressed. In a little while Molly had cleared the table and was preparing to bring on the grape-fruit salad when Caroline appeared with the remnants of the ham. Molly removed it from its wrappings and, placing it on a dish, bore it triumphantly into the next room.

“What’s this?” cried Richard Blount. “Do my eyes deceive me? Am I dreaming? Is it possible——”

“The old ham, or, rather, the attenuated ghost of the old ham!” ejaculated Mary Stewart.

Even Judith joined in the burst of merriment, and Professor Green’s laugh was the gayest of all.

Molly returned with the carving knife and fork, and Richard Blount began to snip off small pieces.

“Ham bone am very sweet,” he sang, one eye on Molly.

“It is certainly wonderful,” exclaimed Professor Green, as he tasted the delicate meat; “but it seems like robbery to deprive the owner of it.”

“Now, Edwin, you keep quiet, please,” interrupted Richard. “I’ve heard that some owners of old hams are just as fond of things sweeter than ham bones. A five-pound box ought to be the equivalent of this, eh?” [95]

“Really, Richard, you go too far,” put in Judith, frowning at her brother.

But Richard took not the slightest notice of her, nor did he pause until he had cleaned the ham bone of every scrap of meat left on it.

“Aren’t you going to catch your train?” asked Judith.

“I think not to-night, Ju-ju,” he answered, smiling amiably. “Edwin, can you put me up? If not, I’ll stop at the inn in the village.”

“No, indeed, you won’t, Dick. You must stop with me. I have an extra bed, solely in hopes you might stay in it some night. And later this evening we might run over—er—a few notes.”

He looked consciously at Richard, then he gave Molly a swift, quizzical glance, remembering probably that he had confided to her and her alone that he was the author of the words of a comic opera.

Having cleared the table, Molly now returned with the coffee. The cups jaggled as she handed them. She was very weary, and her arms ached. When she had reached Professor Edwin Green, Richard Blount, with his nervous, quick manner, suddenly started from his chair and exclaimed: [96]

“Now, I know whom you remind me of—Ellen Terry at sixteen.”

Nobody but Molly realized for a moment that he was talking to her, and she was so startled that her wrist gave a twist and over went the tray and three full coffee cups straight on to the knees of the august Professor of English Literature.

There was a great deal of noise, Molly remembered. She herself was so horrified and stunned that she stood immovable, clutching the tray wildly, as a drowning person clings to a life preserver. She heard Judith cry:

“How stupid! How could you have been so unpardonably awkward!”

At the same moment Mary Stewart said: "It was entirely your fault, Mr. Blount. You frightened the poor child with your wild behavior."

And Professor Green said:

"Don't scold, Judith. I'm to blame. I joggled the tray with my elbow. There's no harm done, at any rate. These gray trousers will be much improved by being dyed *cafe au lait*."

[97]

Then Richard Blount rose from the table and marched straight over to where Molly was standing transfixed, still miserably holding to the tray.

"Miss Brown," he said humbly, "I want to apologize. All this must have been very trying for you, and you have behaved beautifully. I hope you will forgive me. My only excuse is that I am always forgetting my little sister and her friends are not still children. Will you forgive me?"

He looked so manly and good-natured standing there before her with his hand held out, that Molly felt what slight indignation there was in her heart melting away at once. She put her hand in his.

"There is nothing to forgive, Mr. Blount," she said, and the young man who was a musician pricked up his ears when he heard that soft, musical voice.

"And I've robbed you of your ham," he continued.

"It was a pleasure to know you enjoyed it," she said.

Presently Molly began clearing the table. Richard sat down at the piano. It was evident that he never wandered far from his beloved instrument, and the girls gathered around him while he ran over the first act of his new opera.

[98]

Professor Edwin Green said good night and took himself and his coffee-soaked trousers home to his rooms.

"You can follow later, Dickie," he called.

As he passed Molly, standing by the door, he smiled at her again, and Molly smiled back, though she was quite ready to cry.

"The ham was delicious," he said. "Thank you very much."

That night, when Molly had wearily climbed the stairs to her room and flung herself on her couch, Nance, writing at her desk, called over:

"Well, how was the beefsteak?"

"I didn't get any," said Molly. "Even if there had been any left, I was too tired to eat anything. I'm afraid I wasn't born to be anybody's cook, Nance, or waitress, either."

And Molly turned her face to the wall and wept silently.

Lest we forget, we will say now that two days after this episode of the coffee cups, there came, by express for Miss Molly Brown, a five-pound box of candy without a card, and the girls at Queen's Cottage feasted right royally for almost two evenings.

CHAPTER VIII.

[99]

CONCERNING CLUBS,—AND A TEA PARTY.

At the first meeting of the freshman class of 19—, Margaret Wakefield of Washington, D. C., had been elected President.

Just how this came about no one could exactly say. She could not have been accused of electioneering for herself, and yet she made an impression somehow and had won the election by a large majority.

"Anybody who can talk like that ought to be President of something," Molly had observed good naturedly. "She could make a real inauguration speech, I believe, and she knows all about Parliamentary Law, whatever that is."

"She dashed off the class constitution just as easily as if she were writing a letter home," said Judy.

"That's not so easy, either," added Nance mournfully.

The girls were silent. It had gradually leaked out as their friendship progressed that Nance's home was not an abode of happiness by any means. And yet Nance had written a theme on "Home," which was so well done that she had been highly complimented by Miss Pomeroy, who

[100]

had read it aloud to the class. Molly often wondered just what manner of woman Nance's mother was, and she soon had an opportunity of finding out for herself.

But the conversation about the new class president continued.

"President Wakefield wants us to have bi-monthly meetings," continued Judy. "She wishes to divide the class into committees and have a chairman for each committee—"

"Committees for what?" demanded Molly.

"Dear knows," laughed Judy, "but her father's a Congressman, and she has inherited his passion for law and order, I suppose. She wants to conduct a debate on Woman's Suffrage to meet Saturdays. It's to be called 'The Woman's Franchise Club,' and she wishes to establish by-laws and resolutions and a number of other things that are Greek to me, for 'the political body corporate.' She says it's a crying shame that women know so little about the constitution of their own country, and in establishing a debating society, she hopes to do some missionary work in that line."

[101]

Judy had risen and was waving her arms dramatically while her voice rose and fell like an old-time orator's.

"I suppose we ought," said Molly; "but I'd rather put it off a year or so. There are so many other things to enjoy first. Besides, it will be four years before I reach the voting age, and by that time I hope my 'intellects' will have developed sufficiently to take in the constitution of the country."

"Anyhow," exclaimed Judy, "I'm proud to have a class president who's such a first-class public speaker, because it takes it all off our shoulders. Whenever there's a speech to be made or anything public and embarrassing to be done, we'll just vote for her to do it, because she will enjoy it so much."

"But are you going to join the debating club?" asked Nance.

"I suppose it's our duty to," replied Molly; "but I do hate to pin myself down. Suppose we say we'll go to one and listen?"

"Well, you'd better settle it now, because here comes the President sailing up the walk. She's going the rounds now, I suppose, and in another two minutes she'll be springing the question on us."

[102]

Judy, who was sitting at the front window of her own room, nodded down into the yard and smiled politely, and the girls had just time to settle among themselves what they were going to say when there was a smart rap on the door and President Wakefield entered.

She wore rather masculine-looking clothes, and carried a business-like small-sized suit case in one hand and a notebook in the other.

"Hello, girls!" she began; "I'm so glad I caught you together. It saves telling over the same thing three times. I want to know first exactly how you stand on the woman's suffrage question. Now, don't be afraid to be frank about it, and speak your minds. Of course, I'm sure that, being women who are seeking the higher education, you are all of you on the right side—the side of the thinking woman of to-day—"

Here Judy sneezed so violently that she almost upset the little three-legged clover-leaf tea table at her elbow.

[103]

"How do you feel on the subject, Molly?"

Molly smiled broadly, while Nance cleared her throat and Judy blew her nose and exclaimed:

"I think I must be taking cold. Excuse me while I get a sweater," and disappeared in the closet.

"I—I'm afraid I don't know very much about the subject, Margaret. You see, I was brought up in the country, and I haven't had a chance to go into woman's suffrage very deeply."

"There is no time like the present for beginning, then," said Margaret promptly, opening the business-like little suit case. "Read these two pamphlets and you'll get the gist of the entire subject clearly and concisely expressed. I will call on you for an opinion next week after you've had time to study the question a bit."

Molly took the pamphlets and began hastily turning the leaves. She wanted to laugh, but she felt certain it would offend Margaret deeply not to be taken seriously, and she controlled her facial muscles with an effort while she waited for attack No. Two.

"Nance, have you taken any interest in this question?" continued Margaret, who seemed to have the patience of a fanatic spreading his belief.

[104]

"I know something about it," replied Nance quietly. "You see, my mother is President of a Woman's Suffrage Association, and she spends most of her time going about the country making speeches for the National Association."

"What, is your mother Mrs. Anna Oldham, the famous clubwoman?" cried Margaret.

Nance nodded her head silently.

"Why, she is one of the greatest authorities on women's suffrage in the country!" exclaimed Margaret with great enthusiasm. "It says so here. Look, it gives a little sketch of her life and titles. She is president of two big societies and an officer in five others. It's all in this little book called 'Famous Club Women in America and England.' Dear me," continued Margaret modestly, "I think I'd better resign and give the chair to you, Nance. I'm nobody to be preaching to you when you must know the subject from beginning to end."

Nance smiled in her curious, whimsical way.

"Have you ever eaten too much of something, Margaret," she said, "and then hated it ever afterward?"

[105]

"Why, yes," replied the President, "that has happened to every one, I suppose. Mince pie and I have been strangers to each other for many years on that account."

"Well," continued Nance, "I've been fed on clubs until I feel like a Strausberg goose. I've had them crammed down my throat since I was five years old. When I was twelve, I was my mother's secretary, and I've sent off thousands of just such pamphlets as you are distributing now. I learned to write on the typewriter so I could copy my mother's speeches. I've been usher at club conventions and page at committee meetings. I've distributed hundreds of badges with 'Votes for Women' printed on them. I had to make a hundred copies of mother's speech on 'The Constitution and By-Laws of the United States,' and send them to a hundred different women's clubs. So, you see," she added, simply, frowning to keep back her tears, "I think I'll take a rest from clubs while I'm at college and begin to enjoy life a little with Molly and Judy."

Margaret Wakefield, who was really a very nice girl and exceedingly well-bred, leaned over and placed a firm, rather large hand on Nance's.

"I should think you had had enough," she exclaimed, giving the hand a warm squeeze. Seeing teardrops glistening in Nance's eyes, she rose and started to the door. "If ever you do want to come to any of the meetings, you will be very welcome, girls," she said; "but you don't want to overdo anything in life, you know, and if there are things that interest you more than Woman's Suffrage you oughtn't to sacrifice yourselves. People should follow their own bent, I think. Good-bye," she went on, smiling brightly, "and don't bother to read the pamphlets, Molly, dear, if you don't want to. It's a poor way to carry a point to make a bugbear of the subject."

[106]

She went out quietly and closed the door.

"I call her a perfect lady," exclaimed Molly, trying not to look at Nance, but wishing at the same time that her friend would give way just once and have a good cry.

"Let's cut study this afternoon and take a walk," exclaimed Judy. "Trot along and get on your sweaters. It's much too glorious to stay indoors. Nance, can't you do your theme after supper? Molly, you look a little peaked. It will do you good to breathe the fresh, untainted air of the pine woods."

[107]

Judy, it must be confessed, was always glad of a good excuse to get away from her books.

"Splendid!" cried Molly with enthusiasm.

"And I'll bring my English tea basket," went on Judy. "Who's got any cookies?"

"I have," said Nance, now fully recovered.

In five minutes the three girls had started across the campus to the road and presently were making for the pine woods that bordered the pretty lake. Everybody seemed to be out roaming the country that beautiful autumn afternoon. Parties of girls came swinging past, who had been on long tramps through the woods and over to the distant hills which formed a blue and misty background to the lovely rolling country. The lake was dotted with canoes and rowboats, and from far down the road that wound its way through the valley there came the sound of singing. Presently a wagon-load of girls emerged into view, followed by another wagon filled with autumn leaves and evergreens.

"It's the sophomore committee on decoration," Judy explained. Apparently she knew everything that happened at college. "They are getting the decorations for the gym. for the ball to-morrow night."

[108]

Molly quickly changed the subject. She had had two invitations to go to the Sophomore-Freshman Ball since she had accepted Frances Andrews' offer, and several of the sophomores had been to see her to ask her to change her mind, but, having given her word, Molly intended to keep it, no matter what was to pay.

"Let's go to the upper end of the lake," she suggested. "It's wilder and much prettier," and she led the way briskly along the path through the pine woods.

In a little while they came out at the other end of the small body of water where the woods abruptly ended at the foot of a hill called "Round Head," which the girls proceeded to climb. From this eminence could be seen a widespreading panorama of hills and valleys, little streams and bits of forests, and beyond the pine woods the college itself, its campus spread at its feet like a mat of emerald green.

The girls paused breathlessly and Judy put down her tea basket.

"Here's where a little refreshment might be very welcome," she said, opening her basket of which she was justly proud, for not many girls at Wellington could boast of such a possession. She filled the little kettle from the bottle of water she had taken the precaution to bring along, and they sat down in a circle on the turf. The autumn had been a dry one, and the ground was not damp. Nibbling cookies and sweet chocolate, they waited for the water to boil.

[109]

"Look, here comes some one," whispered Judy, indicating the figure of a man appearing around the side of the hill.

"I do hope it's not a tramp," exclaimed Nance uneasily.

Molly Brown hoped so, too, although she said nothing. But she felt nervous, as who wouldn't in that lonely place? As the man came nearer, it became plain that he was making straight for them, and he did most assuredly look like a wanderer of some kind. He was dressed in an old suit of rough gray, wore an old felt hat and carried a staff like a pilgrim. The girls sat quite still and said nothing. There had been a silent understanding among them that it was better not to run. As the man drew nearer, Molly became suddenly conscious of the fact that across the gray trousers just above the knees was a deep coffee-colored stain.

The next moment the man stood before them, leaning on his staff, his hat under his arm. It was "Epiménides Antinous Green."

[110]

"Confess now," he said, smiling at all of them and looking at Molly, whom he knew best of the three, "you took me for a tramp?"

"Not exactly for a tramp," answered Molly; "but for one who tramps."

"What's the difference, Miss Brown?" he asked laughing.

"Oh, everything. Clothes——" she paused, blushing deeply. Her eyes had fallen on the coffee stain. "Why doesn't he have it cleaned off?" she thought, frowning slightly. "And—and looks," she continued out loud.

"Even in the walk," Judy finished. "Perhaps we can give you a cup of tea, Professor," she added politely.

The Professor was only too glad for a cup of tea. He had been roaming the hills all day, he said, and he was tired and thirsty. While he sipped the fragrant beverage, he glanced at his watch.

"The truth is, I had an appointment at this spot at four-thirty," he announced. "I was to meet my young brother George, familiarly known as 'Dodo.' He's at Exmoor College, ten miles over, and was to walk across the valley to the rendezvous, and I was to conduct him safely to my rooms for supper. He was afraid to enter the college by the front gate for fear of meeting several hundreds of young women. He runs like a scared rabbit if he sees a girl a block off."

[111]

"Won't it give him an awful shock when he catches a glimpse of us waiting here on the hilltop?" asked Molly.

"It's a shock that won't hurt him," replied the professor. "We'll see what happens, at any rate."

He put his cup and saucer on the ground, while his quizzical eyes, which seemed to laugh even when his face was serious, turned toward Molly. And Molly was well worth looking at that afternoon, although she herself was much dissatisfied with her appearance. Her auburn hair had almost slipped down her back. Her blue linen shirtwaist was decidedly blousey at the waist line. "It's because I haven't enough shape to keep it down," she was wont to complain. Her cheeks were glowing and her eyes as calmly blue as the summer skies.

"Perhaps we'd better start on," said Nance uneasily. She always felt an inexplicable shyness in the presence of men, and her friends had been known to nickname her "old maid."

[112]

But before Professor Green could protest that he was only too glad to have his bashful brother make the acquaintance of three charming college girls, Judy, ever on the alert, exclaimed, "Look, there he comes around the side of the hill."

The Professor rose and signaled with his hat, chuckling to himself, as he watched his youthful brother pause irresolutely on the hillside.

"Come on, Dodo," he shouted, making a trumpet of his hands.

"I believe not this afternoon, thank you," Dodo trumpeted back. "I have an important engagement at six."

The girls could not keep from laughing.

"It's a shame to frighten the poor soul like that," exclaimed Molly. "We'll start back, Professor, and leave him in peace."

But the Professor was a man of determination, and had made up his mind to bring his shy brother into the presence of ladies that afternoon, very attractive ladies at that, of George's own age, with simple, unaffected manners, calculated to make a shy young man forget for the moment that he had an afflicted of agonizing diffidence.

[113]

"George," called the professor, running a little way down the hillside, "come back and don't be a

fool.”

The wretched lad turned his scarlet face in their direction and began to climb the hill. He was a tall, overgrown youth, with large hands and feet, and when he stood in their midst, holding his cap nervously in both hands, while the Professor performed the introductions, he looked like a soldier facing the battle.

It remained for Molly and Judy to put him at his ease, however, with tea and cookies and questions about Exmoor College, while the Professor conversed with Nance about life at Wellington, and which study she liked best. At last the spirit of George emerged from its shy retreat, and he forgot to feel self-conscious or afraid. They rose, packed the tea things and started back. And it was the Professor who carried Judy’s tea basket, while George, glancing from Molly’s blue eyes to Judy’s soft gray ones, strolled between them and related a thrilling tale of college hazing.

“That was a swift remedy, was it not, Miss Oldham?” observed the Professor, laughing under his breath. [114]

But undoubtedly the cure was complete, for that very evening Molly received a note, written in a crabbed boyish hand, and signed “George Green,” inviting the three girls to ride over to Exmoor on the trolley the following Saturday and spend the day. Miss Green, an older sister, would act as chaperone.

And not a few thrills did these young ladies experience at the prospect.

CHAPTER IX.

 [115]

RUMORS AND MYSTERIES.

How many warm-hearted, impetuous people get themselves into holes because of those two qualities which are very closely allied indeed; and Molly Brown was one of those people. Carried away by emotions of generosity, she found herself constantly going farther than she realized at the moment. Why, for instance, could she not have put Frances Andrews off with an excuse for a day or so? Some one would surely have asked her to the Sophomore-Freshman ball.

And if she had only liked Frances, matters would have been different. If it had been an act of friendship, of deep devotion. But in spite of herself, she could not bring herself to trust that strange girl, beautiful and clever as she undoubtedly was, and sorry as Molly was for her. After all, it was rather selfish of Frances to have obtained the promise from Molly. Did she think it would reinstate her in the affections of her class to be seen in the company of the popular young freshman? [116]

All this time, Molly said nothing to her friends, but on the morning of the ball she could not conceal from Judy and Nance her apprehension and general depression. And seeing their friend’s lack-lustre eye and drooping countenance, they held a counsel of war in Judy’s small bedroom.

At the end of this whispered conference, Judy was heard to remark:

“I’m afraid of the girl, to tell you the truth. Her fiery eyes and her two-pronged tongue seem to take all the spirit out of me.”

“I’m not afraid of her,” said Nance, who had a two-pronged tongue of her own, once she was stirred into action. “You wait here for me, and when I come back, you can go and notify the sophomores of what’s happened. Of course, Molly will get to the ball all right. The thing is to extricate her from the situation by the most tactful and surest means.”

Judy laughed.

“No,” she answered, “the thing is not to let Molly know we have saved her life.”

“If Frances hadn’t done that witch’s stunt and said all those malicious things at Molly’s Kentucky spread, I don’t think I should have minded so much. And do you know, Judy, that the report has spread abroad that she and Molly had prepared the whole thing beforehand, speeches and all and were in league together? You see, Molly was the only one who wasn’t hit.” [117]

“You don’t mean it,” cried Judy. “Then, more than ever, I want to spare the child the humiliation she might have to suffer if she went with Frances to-night. Go forth to battle, Nance, and may the saints preserve you.”

Nance girded her sweater about her like a coat of mail, stiffened her backbone, pressed her lips together and marched out to the fray. She never told even Judy exactly what took place between Frances and her in that small room, with its bewildering array of fine trappings, silver combs and brushes, yellow silk curtains at the window, Turkish rugs, books and pictures. No one had ever seen the room except Molly the night of the spread, when it was too dark to make out what was

in it.

There was no loud talking. Whatever was said was of the tense quiet kind, and presently Nance emerged unscathed from the encounter.

[118]

"She made me give my word of honor not to tell what was said," she announced to the palpitating Judy, "but she's writing the note to Molly now; so go quickly and inform someone that Molly has no escort for the ball."

Judy departed much mystified and Nance remained discreetly away from her own room until she perceived Frances steal down the hall, push a note under their door and then hurry back, bang her own door and lock it.

Then, after a moment's grace, Nance marched boldly to their chamber. Molly was reading the note.

"What do you think, Nance?" she exclaimed with a tone of evident relief in her voice, "Frances Andrews can't go to-night."

"Indeed, and what reason does she give?" asked Nance, feeling very much like a conspirator now that she was obliged to face Molly.

"None. She simply says 'I'm sorry I can't go to-night. Hope you'll enjoy it. F. A.' How does she expect me to get there, I wonder, at the eleventh hour?"

Nance examined her finger nails attentively.

"Perhaps she's seen to that," she replied after a pause.

[119]

"Nance," said Molly, presently, "I'm so relieved that I think I'll have to 'fess up. It's mean of me, I know, and I feel awfully ungenerous to be so glad. You see, nobody can ever tell what strange, freakish thing she's going to do. Of course she was the witch. I knew it from the conscious look that came into her face when I told her about it afterwards."

"The mistake she has made is being defiant instead of repentant," said Nance. "Instead of trying to brazen it out, she ought to 'walk softly,' as the Bible says, and keep quiet. She is the most embittered soul I ever met in all my life. If hatred counted for much, her hatred for her own class would burn it to a cinder."

There was a sound of hurrying footsteps on the stairs and Judy burst into the room. Her face was aflame and she flung herself into a chair panting for breath.

"What's your hurry?" asked Molly, slipping on her jacket. "Excuse me, I must be chasing along to French. Tell her the news, Nance."

No need to tell Judy news, who had news of her own.

"I tell you, Nance," she exclaimed, "there are times when I think the position of a freshman is one of the lowliest things in life. The first sophomore I met was Judith Blount. I did feel a little timid, but I told her what had happened. 'You can tell your friend,' she said, 'that we sophomores are not so gullible as all that, and if her nerve has failed her at the last moment, it's her fault, not ours.'"

[120]

"Why, Judy," exclaimed Nance, "you didn't know you were jumping from the frying pan right into the fire when you told that to Judith Blount, who has never liked Molly from the beginning. It's jealousy, pure and simple, I think; although there almost seems to be something more behind it sometimes. She takes such pains to be disagreeable. Was anyone else there to hear you?"

"Oh, yes. She was surrounded by her satellites, Jennie Wren and a few others."

The two girls sat in gloomy silence for a few minutes. After that rebuff, they hardly cared to circulate the bit of news any further in the sophomore class, which, it must be confessed, had the reputation of being run by a clique of the most arrogant and snobbish set of girls Wellington College had ever known.

"Let's go and tell our woes to nice old Sally Marks," suggested Judy, and off they marched in search of the good-natured funny Sally, whose room was on the floor below.

[121]

"Come in," she called at their tap on the door, and noticing at once their serious faces, she exclaimed:

"I declare, I am beginning to feel like the Oracle at Delphi. What's the trouble, now, my children?"

"You ought never to have gone to Judith Blount," she continued after they had unburdened their secrets. But having gone to her, "it would be well," so spake the Oracle, "to sit back and hold tight. The news is certain to spread, and of course only Judith and her ring would believe that Molly sent you out to find her an escort. There is one thing sure: Molly is obliged to go to the dance, not only because she has so many friends, but because she figures, I am told, so largely in 'Jokes & Croaks,' and it would be sport spoiled if she wasn't there when the things are read out. Now, trot along, children, I'm cramming for an exam., and I'm busier than the busiest person in Wellington to-day."

The afternoon dragged itself slowly along. Nance took her best dress out of its wrappings, heated a little iron and smoothed out its wrinkles. She lifted Molly's blue crepe from its hanger and laid it on the couch.

[122]

"It was made in the simplest possible way out of the least possible goods in the least possible time," she informed Judy, who had wickedly cut a class and sat moping in her friend's room. "Isn't it pretty? We made it together, and I'm really quite puffed up about the result. It's Empire, you know," she added proudly.

The dress did indeed show the short Empire waist. The round neck was cut out and finished with a frill of creamy lace which Molly happened to have, and there had not been much of a struggle with the sleeves, which came only to the elbow and were to all intents and purposes shapeless. But the color was the thing, as Molly had said.

"I'd be willing to drown in a color like that," Judy observed. Judy was quite a *poseuse* about colors and assured her friends that she could never wear red because it inflamed her temper and made her cross; that violet quieted her nerves; green stirred her ambitions, and blue aroused her sympathies. While they were looking at the dress, Margaret Wakefield and Jessie Lynch, her roommate and boon companion, after rapping on the door, sailed into the room.

[123]

"We came to consult about clothes," they announced. "Is this to be an evening dress affair, or what's proper to wear?"

"The best you have," replied Judy, "at least that's what I was told by the oracular Sally below stairs."

"For the love of heaven, don't tell that to Jessie," cried Margaret. "If you give her so much rope, she'll be wearing purple velvet and cloth of gold."

Jessie laughed good-naturedly. She was already considered the best dressed and prettiest girl in the freshman class, and it was a joke at Queen's Cottage that she had been obliged to apply to the matron for more closet room, because the large one she shared with Margaret Wakefield was not nearly adequate for her numerous frocks. It had been a constant wonder to the other girls in the house that these two opposite types could have become such intimate friends; but friends they were, and continued to be throughout their college course, although Jessie never could rake up an interest in the U. S. Constitution or woman's suffrage, either.

[124]

The two girls really formed a sort of combination of brains and beauty, and it became generally known that Jessie would hardly have pulled through the four years, except for the indefatigable efforts of her faithful friend, Margaret.

Mabel Hinton, a Queen's Cottage freshman, now popped her head in at the door, which was half open. She was a very odd character, but she was popular with her friends, who called her "The Martian," probably because she had a phenomenal intellect and wore enormous glasses in tortoise shell frames which made her eyes look like a pair of full moons.

"I thought I heard a racket," she said in her crisp, catchy voice. "I suppose you are all discussing the news."

"News? What news?" they demanded.

She closed the door carefully and came farther into the room.

"Gather around me, girls," she said mysteriously, enjoying their curiosity.

"But what is it, Mabel? Don't keep us in suspense," cried Judy, always impatient.

"Well, there is evidence that someone was going to set fire to the gym. to-night," she began, in a whisper. "This morning a bundle of oil-soaked rags was discovered in a closet, and then they began to search and found several other bundles like the first. There was a lot of excitement, and the Prex came over. They tried to keep it quiet, but the story leaked out, of course, and is still leaking——" she smiled.

[125]

The girls exchanged horrified glances. What terrible disaster might not have befallen them if the rags had not been discovered?

"Of course it was the work of an insane person," said Margaret Wakefield.

"Of course, but who? Is she one of the students or some outside person?"

With a common instinct, Judy and Nance looked up at the same moment. Their glances met. Without making a sound, Judy's lips formed the word "Frances."

"Is the dance to take place, then?" asked Jessie.

"Oh, yes. It's all been hushed up and things will go on just as usual. I'm going to look on from the balcony. I shan't mingle with the dancers, because they knock off my spectacles and generally upset my equilibrium."

The door opened and Molly appeared in their midst like a gracefully angular wraith, for her face looked white, her shoulders drooped and her long slim arms hung down at her sides dejectedly.

[126]

"Why, Molly, dear, has anything happened to you?" cried Nance.

"No, I won't say that nothing has happened," answered Molly, sinking into a chair and resting her chin on her hand. "I have been put through an ordeal this day, why, I can never tell you, but I am glad you are all here so that I can tell you about it."

They pressed about her, full of sympathy and friendliness, while Judy, who loved comfort and recognized the needs of the flesh under the most trying circumstances, lit Nance's alcohol lamp and put on the kettle to make tea.

"But what is it?" they all demanded, seeing that Molly had fallen into a silence.

"I've been with the President for the last hour," she said, "though for what reason I can't explain. I can't imagine why I was sent for and brought to her private office. She was very nice and kind. She asked me a lot of questions about myself and all of Queen's girls. I was glad enough to answer them, because we have nothing to be ashamed of, have we, girls?" Molly rose and stood before them, spreading out her hands with a kind of deprecating gesture. The circle of faces before her almost seemed abashed under the steady gaze of her clear blue eyes. "It was a pleasure to tell her what nice girls were stopping at Queen's Cottage."

[127]

"Did she mention?" began Judy and pointed to the dividing wall of the next room.

"Oh, yes, I was coming to that. But what do I know about—" Mollie stopped short and caught her breath. Her eyes turned towards the door, which was opened softly. There stood Frances Andrews.

She had evidently just come in, for she still wore her sweater and tam o' shanter, and brought with her the smell of the fresh piney air.

"It's all right about your escort for to-night, Miss Brown. You are to go with Miss Stewart, who has got special privilege from the sophomore president to take you. Good-bye. I hope you'll have a ripping time. I shan't see you at supper. I'm going off on the 6.15 train and won't be back until Sunday night."

There was such a tense feeling in the circle of freshmen as Frances stood there, that, as Judy remarked afterwards, they almost crackled with electricity.

It was quite late, and as most of the girls intended to dress for the party before supper, they took their departure immediately without any comment.

[128]

"Is anything special the matter?" asked Molly, after they had gone and she was left alone with her friends.

They told her the strange story which Mabel Hinton had reported to them a little while before.

"But that is the work of a lunatic," exclaimed Molly, horrified.

"And I suppose," went on Nance, "that the reason Prexy sent for you was that she suspected a certain person, who shall be nameless, and she was told that you were the only person who had ever been nice to her, and furthermore that you were going to the dance with her."

"Of course that must be the reason," said Molly, "and of course it's absurd, I mean suspecting Frances Andrews. She might be accused of many things, but she is certainly in her right mind. She's much cleverer than lots of the girls in her class."

"Clever, yes. But should you call her balanced?"

Molly did not answer. She felt anxious and frightened, and a rap on the door at that moment made her jump with nervousness. It proved to be one of the maids of the house with two boxes of flowers, both for Molly. One was pink roses and contained the card of Mary Stewart, and the other was violets, and contained no card whatever.

[129]

She divided the violets in half and made her two friends wear them that night to the dance.

CHAPTER X.

[130]

JOKES AND CROAKS.

"I'm beginning to feel that we shall issue happily out of all our troubles," cried Judy Kean, bursting into her friends' room without knocking, "and the reason why I feel that way is because when I am clothed in silk attire my soul is clothed in joy. Especially when there's dancing to follow. Button me up, someone, please, so that I may take a good look at my resplendent form in your mirror. I can't see more than a square inch of neck in my own two by four."

The girls stood back to admire their friend, who indulged her artistic fancy in rather theatrical clothes much too old for her, but who usually succeeded in gaining the effect she sought.

"Dear me, 'she walks in beauty like the night,'" said Molly laughing. "You look like a charming

and very youthful widow-lady, Judy, but how comes it you are wearing black?"

"Black is for certain types," replied Judy sagely, "and I am one of them. Next to black my bilious skin takes on a dazzling, creamy tint and my mouse-colored hair assumes a yellow glint that is not its own."

[131]

The girls laughed at their erratic friend, who was, indeed, dressed in black chiffon, from the fluffy folds of which her vivacious young face glowed like a flower.

"If you object to me, wait until you see Jessie," cried Judy. "She might be going to the opera, she is so fine. She is wearing pink satin that glistens all over like a Christmas tree with little shiny things."

As a matter of fact, Nance, whose well balanced and correct tastes in most things rarely failed her, was the most suitably dressed of our girls, in her pretty white lingerie frock.

At eight o'clock that evening Molly rolled away luxuriously in a village hack with Mary Stewart, holding her roses tenderly and carefully under her gray eiderdown cape, so as not to crush them.

"I'm awfully glad I was so lucky as to draw you this evening, Molly," the older girl was saying.

"I'm the lucky one," answered Molly, her thoughts reverting to the strange discovery of the morning. "Oh, Miss Stewart, what did Frances Andrews do last year to get herself into such a mess and be frozen out by all her class this year?"

[132]

"I'll tell you perhaps some day, but not to-night. We want to enjoy ourselves to-night. Can you guide, Molly?"

"Like a streak. I always guided at home at the school dances, because I was the tallest girl in my class."

"I'm a guider, too," laughed Mary, "and when two guiders come together, I imagine it's a good deal like a tug of war."

During the ride over to the gymnasium, neither of the girls mentioned the thing uppermost in their minds: the attempt to set the gymnasium on fire that night. Nor was the rumor referred to by anyone at the dance later. It was a strictly forbidden topic, the President herself having issued orders.

The great room was a mass of foliage and bunting, Japanese lanterns and incandescent lights in many colors, and it was really quite a brilliant affair according to Molly's notions, who had never seen anything but small country dances usually given at the schoolhouse several miles from her home. Lovely music floated from behind a screen of palms and lovely girls floated on the floor in couples, to the strains of the latest waltz.

[133]

"I'm afraid I'm going to be an awful wallflower," thought Molly, feeling suddenly overgrown and awkward in the midst of this swirling mass of grace and beauty. "I can't help feeling queer and I don't seem to recognize anybody."

But Molly had plenty of partners that evening, and after that first delightful waltz, it was nearly an hour before she caught a glimpse of Mary Stewart again in the crowd of dancers.

"Isn't it jolly?" called Judy, as they dashed past each other in a romping barn dance.

"I never thought I could have such a good time at a manless party," Jessie Lynch confided to Molly while they rested against the wall later. "But, really, it's quite as good fun."

"Isn't it?" replied Molly. "I think I never had a better time in my life. But I'm afraid our roommates and friends are not enjoying it very much," she added ruefully, pointing to the gallery, where seated in a silent bored row were Margaret Wakefield, Nance Oldham and Mabel Hinton.

[134]

"Of course," said Jessie, "you would never expect Mabel to join this mad throng, but I'm surprised at Nance and Margaret."

"Margaret prefers conversation parties, I suppose, and Nance is not fond of dancing, either. She would always rather look on, she says."

The two girls were standing near the musicians and from the other side of the screen of palms they now heard a voice say:

"Have you danced with the fantastic Empress Josephine as yet?"

"Not as yet," came the answer with a laugh. "But be careful, she is near——"

Molly moved away hastily, her face crimson.

Jessie had heard the question also and recognized the voice of Judith Blount.

"Why, Molly," she exclaimed, glancing at her face, "you don't think they meant——"

"Yes," said Molly, trying to smile naturally, "I do."

She glanced down at her home-made dress. Perhaps it did look amateurish. She and Nance had worked very hard over it, but, after all, they were not experienced dressmakers.

"Why, you look perfectly charming," went on Jessie generously. "The color is exactly right for you —"

[135]

"Yes, color," answered Molly, "but there ought to be something besides color to a dress, you know. Never mind, I shouldn't be such a sensitive plant, Jessie. One ought not to mind being called fantastic. It's not nearly so bad as being called—well, malicious—cruel. I'd rather be fantastic than any of those things. But I did think the dress was pretty when we made it."

"Come along, and let's get some lemonade, Molly. Your dress is sweet and suits you exactly, so there."

Then someone came up and claimed Jessie for the next dance, but Molly was grateful to the pretty butterfly creature for her assurances and she resolved to forget all about her dress. As she lingered in the corner, uncertain whether to stay where she was or join her friends in the gallery, Mary Stewart made her way through the crowd and called:

"Oh, here you are. Some of the seniors are just outside and want to meet you. Will you come?"

"I should think I would," replied Molly, joyfully. Fantastic, or not, she had one good friend among the older girls.

[136]

"This is Miss Molly Brown of Kentucky," announced Mary Stewart presently to a dozen august seniors who shook her hand and began asking her questions.

"We had two reasons for wanting to meet you, Miss Brown," here put in a very handsome big girl, who spoke in an authoritative tone, which made everybody stop and listen. (She was, in fact, the President of the senior class.) "One of course was just to make your acquaintance, and the other was to ask if you would do us a favor. We are going to have a living picture show Friday week for the benefit of the Students' Fund, and we wondered if you would pose in one of the pictures, maybe several, we haven't decided on them yet. But that dress must be in one of them, don't you think so, Mary? One of Romney's Lady Hamilton pictures for instance, with a white gauze fichu; or a Sir Thomas Lawrence portrait——"

"You don't think it's too fantastic?" asked Molly.

"What, that lovely blue thing? Heavens, no! it's charming——"

[137]

Molly had barely time to thank her and accept the invitation, when she and Mary were dragged off to make up the big circle of "right and left all around," which wound up the dance. After this whirling romp, three loud raps were heard and gradually the noise of talking and laughter subsided into absolute silence. A girl had mounted the platform. She carried a megaphone in one hand and a book in the other. She was the official reader of her class, and now proceeded to recite through the megaphone all the best and most amusing material from "Jokes & Croaks." According to time honored custom, the jokes were greeted with applause and laughter, and the croaks with groans and laughter, and anybody who groaned at a joke or applauded a croak, if she happened to be caught, was publicly humiliated by being made to stand up and face the jeers of the multitude. The girls finally decided, after many ludicrous mistakes, that the jokes were on the sophomores and the croaks were on the freshmen. For instance, here was a croak:

"A lady of notable luck,
Who cared not for turkey or duck,
Cried, 'Give me old ham
And I don't give a slam,
If it comes from Vermont or Kaintuck.'"

[138]

This was greeted with laughing groans, and Molly for the first time realized the significance of her roommate's name.

Margaret Wakefield figured in several croaks, as "the Suffragette of Queen's." In fact Queen's girls came in for a good many croaks and began to wait fearfully for what was to come next. But the witticisms were all quite good-natured, even the last, which called forth so many merry groans that they soon ceased to be groans at all and became uproarious laughter, and Molly, very red and laughing, too, was the centre of all eyes. This was the croak:

"They have locked me in the Cloisters,
They have fastened up the gate!
Oh, let me out; Oh, let me out.
It's getting very late.

'Tis said the ghosts of classes gone
Do wander here at night.
Oh, let me out; Oh, let me out,
Before I die of fright!

[139]

And then there rang a clarion voice.
It's tone was loud and clear.
'Oh, dry your eyes and cease your cries,
For help, I ween, is near.

But promise me one little thing
Before I ope the gate:
Oh, never pass the coffee tray,
If I am sitting nigh;
Or, if you pass the coffee tray,
Oh, then, just pass me by!"

It was all very jolly and delightful, and for the first time the girls felt that they were really a part of the college life.

Mary Stewart was very sweet to Molly when she took her home that night, and the young freshman never realized until long afterwards, when she was a senior herself, what a nice thing her friend had done; for sophomore-freshman receptions were an old story to Mary Stewart.

CHAPTER XI.

[140]

EXMOOR COLLEGE.

Busy days followed the sophomore-freshman ball. The girls were "getting into line," as Judy variously expressed it; "showing their mettle; and putting on steam for the winter's work." The story of the incendiary had been reported exaggerated and had gradually died out altogether. Frances Andrews had returned to college, more brazenly facetious than ever, breaking into conversations, loudly interrupting, making jokes which no one laughed at except Molly and Judy out of charity. She was a strange girl and led a lonely life, but she was too much like the crater of a sleeping volcano, which might shoot off unexpectedly at any moment, and most of the girls gave her a wide berth.

The weather grew cold and crisp. There was a smell of smoke in the air from burning leaves and from the chimneys of the faculty homes wherein wood fires glowed cheerfully.

[141]

At last Saturday arrived. It was the day of the excursion to Exmoor, and it was with more or less anxiety regarding the weather that the three girls scanned the skies that morning for signs of rain. But the heavens were a deep and cloudless blue and the air mildly caressing, neither too cold nor too warm.

"It is like the Indian summers we have at home," exclaimed Molly, when, an hour later, they turned their faces toward the village through which the trolley passed.

Mabel Hinton, passing them as they started, had called out:

"Art off on a picnic?"

And they had answered:

"We art."

Some other girls had cried:

"Whither away so early, Oh?"

And they had cried:

"To Exmoor! To Exmoor, for now the day has come at last!" paraphrasing a song Judy was in the habit of singing.

Indeed the day seemed so perfect and joyous that they could hardly keep from singing aloud instead of just humming when they boarded the trolley car.

[142]

Through the country they sped swiftly. The valley unfolded itself before them in all its beauty and the misty blue hills in the distance seemed to draw nearer. Over everything there was a sense of autumn peace which comes when the world is drowsing off into his deep sleep.

"Exmoor!" called the conductor at last, and the three girls stepped off at a charming rustic station. With a clang of the bell which rang out harshly in the still air, the car flew on.

The three girls looked at the empty station. Then they looked at each other with a kind of mock consternation, for nothing really mattered.

"Where is Dodo?" asked Judy, with the smile of the victor, since she had predicted only a few moments before that Dodo might by this time have become so frightened at his boldness that he would suddenly become extinct like his namesake, the dodo-bird.

"Well, if Dodo is really extinct," said Molly, "we'll just take a little walk back through the fields. Epiménides thought nothing of it. He expects to walk to-day and meet us at lunch."

But Dodo was not extinct that morning, and they beheld him now running down the steep road as fast as his heavy boots could carry him.

[143]

"Behold, his spirit has risen from its fossil remains and he now walks among us in the guise of a man," chanted Judy.

"Don't make us laugh, Judy, just as the poor soul arrives without enough breath to apologize," said Nance, and the next instant the embarrassed young man stood before them blushing and stammering as if he had been caught in the act of picking a pocket or committing some other slight crime which required explanation.

"I'm terribly sorry—have you waited long?—the schedule was changed—I didn't know—you should have come half an hour later—I don't mean that—I mean I wasn't ready—" he broke off in an agony of embarrassment and the girls burst out laughing.

"Don't you be caring," said Judy. "We're here and nothing else really matters."

"I shouldn't have thought the station of a man's college could be so deserted," observed Molly, looking about the empty place.

Dodo assured her that plenty of people would be there in half an hour, when the train arrived; just then everybody was either in the village on the other side of the buildings, or down on the football grounds watching the morning practice game. There was to be a real game that afternoon.

[144]

"You see, it's only a small college," he went on. "There are only two hundred and fifty in all. The standards are so high it's rather hard to get in, but we are heavily endowed and can afford to keep up the standards," he added proudly.

They climbed the road to the college almost in silence and in ten minutes emerged on a level elevation or table land which commanded a view of the entire countryside. Here stood the college buildings, built of red brick, seasoned and mellowed with time. They were a beautiful and dignified group of buildings, and there was a decidedly old world atmosphere about the place and the campus with splendid elm trees. Molly had once heard Judith Blount refer to Exmoor as that "one-horse, old-fashioned little college," and she was not prepared for anything so fine and impressive as this.

Nor was she prepared for the surprise of Miss Green, sister of Professor Edwin and Dodo. The girls had pictured her a middle-aged spinster, having heard she was older than the Professor himself, who seemed a thousand to them. And here, waiting for them, in the living room of the Chapter House, was a very charming and girlish young woman with Edwin's brown eyes and cleft chin and George's blonde hair; the ease and graciousness of one brother and the youthful fairness of the other. She had come down from New York the night before especially to meet them, she said.

[145]

Rather an expensive trip, they thought, for one day's pleasure, since it took about seven hours and meant usually one meal and of course at night a berth on the sleeper.

"At first I thought I couldn't manage it for this week," she continued, "but Edwin was so insistent and no one has ever been known to refuse him anything he really wanted."

Edwin! But why Edwin? Why not the youthful and blushing Dodo? So Molly wondered, while they were conducted over the entire college; the beautiful little Gothic chapel with its stained glass windows; through the splendid old library which was much smaller than the one at Wellington, but much more "atmospheric" as Judy had remarked; then through the dormitories where they remained discreetly in the corridors, and finally back to the Chapter House, in which George lodged with some thirty schoolmates.

[146]

There on the piazza was Professor Edwin Green waiting for them. He had made an early start, he said, and walked the whole distance in less than three hours. Some other young men came up and were introduced, and the entire gay party, Nance shyly sticking closely beside Miss Green, went off to view the village, which was a quaint old place well worth visiting, they were told.

The train had evidently come in, and crowds of people were hurrying up the road. There was a sound of a horn and a coach dashed in sight filled with students wearing crimson streamers in their buttonholes.

"It's a crowd of Repton fellows come over to see their team licked," George explained, "but look, Edwin, here comes Dickie Blount. I thought he was in Chicago."

"Evidently he isn't," said the Professor, his eyes smiling, his mouth serious. It was Richard Blount, the hero of the ham bone, and he straightway attached himself to Molly and declined to leave her side for the rest of the day.

"Don't tell me that that delightful, joking, jolly person is brother to Judith," whispered Judy in Molly's ear.

[147]

Molly nodded.

"There's no family resemblance, but it's true, nevertheless."

Motor cars and carriages of all varieties now began to arrive. The whole countryside had turned

out to see the great game between the two local college teams, and the Wellington girls pinned green rosettes in their buttonholes to signify that their sympathies were all for Exmoor.

"It's the most exciting, jolliest time I ever had in all my life," cried Molly to Professor Green, who walked on her other side. "And to think I have never seen a football game before in all my life."

"I must draw a diagram for you and show you what some of the plays are, or you will be in a muddle," said the Professor, looking at her gravely, almost, as Molly thought, as if she were one of his English Literature pupils.

At lunch, according to the etiquette of the place, George and his guests were placed at the senior table. There was no smoking nor loud talking and the students behaved themselves most decorously, although George confided to Judy that ordinarily pandemonium prevailed.

After lunch they started for the grounds in a triumphal procession; for our Wellington freshmen and their chaperone had an escort of at least four or five young men apiece. Nance looked bewildered and shy and happy; Judy was never more sparkling nor prettier, and Molly was in her gayest, brightest humor. [148]

They had hardly left the Chapter House behind them and proceeded in a snake-like procession across the campus, when a black and prancing, though rather bony, steed dashed up bearing a young lady in a faultlessly fitting riding habit. It was Judith Blount.

Nobody looked particularly thrilled at Judith's appearance, not even Judith's brother, and Judy almost exclaimed out loud:

"Bother! Why couldn't she stay at home just once?"

"How do you do, Cousin Grace?" called Judith from her perch. "I heard you were going to be down and I couldn't resist riding over to see you."

"How are you, Judith? I'm so glad to see you," answered Cousin Grace in a tone without much heart to it. "Why didn't you come sooner? We've just finished lunch."

"Thanks, I had a sandwich early. I suppose you are off for the grounds. Go ahead. I'll get Cousin Edwin to help me tie up this old animal somewhere. We'll follow right behind." [149]

Molly was almost certain that Cousin Edwin was about to place this office on the shoulders of his younger brother, but glancing again at the flushed and happy face of Dodo at the side of Judy, the Professor relented and dropped behind to look after his relation.

Never had Molly been so wildly excited as she was over the football game that afternoon. It was a wonderful picture, the two teams lined up against each other; crowds of people yelling themselves hoarse; the battle cry of the Repton team mingling with the warlike cry of the Exmoor students. The cheer leaders at the heads of the cheer sections made the welkin ring continuously. At last a young man, who seemed to be a giant in size and strength, dashed like a wild horse across the Russian steppes straight up the field with the ball under his arm, and from the insane behavior of the green men, including Professor Edwin Green and his fair sister, Molly became suddenly aware that the game was over and Exmoor had won.

The cheering section could yell no more, because to a man it had lost its voice; but, oh, the glad burst of song from the Exmoor students as they leaped into the field and bore the conquering giant around on their shoulders. And, oh! the dejection of the men of crimson as they stalked sadly from the scene of their humiliation. [150]

At last the whole glorious day was over and the girls found themselves on the way to the trolley station. Richard Blount and his cousin, Miss Green, had hastened on ahead. They were to take the six o'clock train back to New York.

"Cousin Edwin, why can't you hire a horse in the village and ride back to Wellington with me?" asked Judith, when they paused at the Chapter House for her to mount her black steed.

"Because I'm engaged to take these young ladies home by trolley, Judith," answered the Professor firmly.

Judith leaped on her horse without assistance, gave the poor animal a savage lash with her whip and dashed across the campus without another word.

The ride back at sunset was even more perfect than the morning trip. The Professor of English Literature appeared to have been temporarily changed into a boy. He told them funny stories and bits of his own college experiences, and made them talk, too. Almost before they knew it, the conductor was calling: "Wellington!" [151]

SUNDAY MORNING BREAKFAST.

It was quite the custom at Wellington for girls to prepare breakfasts on Sunday morning in their rooms. There was always the useful boneless chicken to be creamed in one's chafing dish; and in another, eggs to be scrambled with a lick and a promise, at these impromptu affairs; and it was a change from the usual codfish balls of the Sunday house breakfast.



It was quite the custom for girls to prepare breakfast in their rooms.—Page 152.

On this particular Sunday morning, Judy was very busy; for the breakfast party was of her giving, in Molly's and Nance's room; her own "singleton" being too small. She was also very angry in her tempestuous and unrestrained way, and having emptied the vials of her wrath on Molly's head, she was angrier with herself for giving away to temper.

Although it was Judy's party, Molly, as usual kind-hearted and grandly hospitable, had invited Frances Andrews. Then she had gone and confessed her sins to Judy, who flared up and said things she hadn't intended, and Molly had wept a little and owned that she was entirely at fault. But what could be done? Frances was invited and had accepted. To atone for her sins, poor Molly had made popovers as a surprise and arranged to bake them in Mrs. Murphy's oven. But the hostess being gloomy, the company was gloomy, since the one is apt to reflect the humor of the other. However, as the coffee began to send forth its cheerful aroma from Judy's Russian samovar, discord took wings and harmony reigned. It was a very comfortable and sociable party. Most of the girls wore their kimonos, it being a time for rest and relaxation; but when Frances Andrews swept into the room in a long lavender silk *peignoir* trimmed with frills of lace, all cotton crepe Japanese dressing gowns faded into insignificance.

[153]

"There is no doubt that college girls are a hungry lot," remarked Margaret Wakefield, settling herself comfortably to dispose of food and conversation and arouse argument, a thing she deeply enjoyed.

"So much brain work requires nourishment," observed Mabel Hinton.

[154]

"There is not much brain nourishment at Queen's," put in Frances Andrews. "I've been living on raw eggs and sweet chocolate for the last week. The table has run down frightfully."

Sallie Marks was a loyal Queen's girl, and resented this slur on the table of the establishment which was sheltering her now for the third year.

"The food here is quite as good as it is at any of the other houses," she said coldly to the unfortunate Frances, who really had not intended to give offence.

"Pardon me, but I don't agree with you," replied Frances, "and I have a right to my own opinion, I

suppose.”

Judy gave Molly a triumphant glance, as much as to say, “You see what you have done.”

Everybody looked a little uncomfortable, and Margaret Wakefield, equal to every occasion, launched into a learned discussion on how many ounces of food the normal person requires a day.

Once more the talk flowed on smoothly. But where Frances was, it would seem there were always hidden reefs which wrecked every subject, no matter how innocent, the moment it was launched.

“Molly, I can trade compliments with you,” put in Jessie Lynch, taking not the slightest notice of her roommate’s discourse. “It’s one of those very indirect, three-times-removed compliments, but you’ll be amused by it.” [155]

“Really,” said Molly, “do tell me what it is before I burst with curiosity.”

“I said ‘trade,’” laughed Jessie, who liked a compliment herself extremely.

“Oh, of course,” replied Molly. “I have any number I can give you in exchange. How do you care for this one? Mary Stewart thinks you are very attractive.”

“Does she, really? That’s nice of her,” exclaimed Jessie, blushing with pleasure as if she hadn’t been told the same thing dozens of times before. “I think she’s fine; not exactly pretty, you know, but fine.”

“I suppose you don’t know how her father made his money?” broke in Frances.

There was a silence, and Molly, feeling that she was about to be mortified again by something disagreeable, cried hastily:

“Oh, dear, I forgot the surprise. Do wait a moment,” and dashed from the room.

While she was gone, Nance and Judy began filling up the intervals with odd bits of conversation, helped out by the other girls, and Frances Andrews did not have another opportunity to put in her oar. Suddenly she rose and swept to the door. [156]

“You would none of you feel interested to know, I suppose, that Mary Stewart’s father started life as a bootblack—”

“That’s what I’m starting life as,” cried Molly, who now appeared carrying a large tray covered with a napkin. “I am the official bootblack of Queen’s, and I make sometimes one-fifty a week at it. I hope I’ll do as well as Mr. Stewart in the business. Have a popover?”

She unfolded the napkin and behold a pile of golden muffins steaming hot. There were wild cries of joy from the kimonoed company.

“And now, Jessie, I’ll take my second-hand, roundabout compliment—” she began, when Judy interrupted her.

“Won’t you have a popover, Miss Andrews?” she asked in a cold, exasperated tone.

“Thanks; I eat the European breakfast usually—coffee and roll—”

“Yes, I’ve been there,” answered Judy.

“I’ll say good morning. I’ve enjoyed your little party immensely,” and Frances marched out of the room and banged the door. [157]

“I should think you would have learned a lesson by this time, Molly Brown,” cried Judy hotly. “There is always a row whenever that girl is around. She can’t be nice, and there is no use trying to make her over.”

“I’m sorry,” said Molly penitently. “I wish I could understand why she behaves that way when she knows it’s going to take away what few friends she has.”

“I think I can tell you,” put in Mabel Hinton. “Nobody likes her, and nobody expects any good of her. If you are constantly on the lookout for bad traits, they are sure to appear. It’s almost a natural law. Everybody was expecting this to-day, and so it happened, of course. If we had been cordial and sweet to her, she never would have said that about Mary Stewart or the food at Queen’s, either.”

“Dear me, are we listening to a sermon,” broke in Judy flippantly.

But, in spite of Judy’s interruption, Mabel’s speech made an impression on the girls, some of whom felt a little ashamed of their attitude toward Frances Andrews. [158]

“Did you ever see a dog that had been kicked all its life?” went on Mabel; “how it snarls and bites and snaps at anybody who tries to pet it? Well, Frances is just a poor kicked dog. She’s done something she ought not to have done, and she’s been kicked out for it, and she’s so sore and unhappy, she snarls at everybody who comes near her.”

“Mabel, you’re a brick!” exclaimed Sallie Marks. “I started the fight this morning and I’m ashamed of it. I’m going to make a resolution to be nice to that poor girl hereafter, no matter how horrid she is. It will be an interesting experiment, if for no other reason.”

"Let's form a society," put in Molly, "to reinstate Frances Andrews, and the way to do it will be to be as nice as we can to her and to say nice things about her to the other girls."

"Good work!" cried Margaret Wakefield, scenting another opportunity to draw up a constitution, by-laws and resolutions. "We will call a first meeting right now, and elect officers. I move that Molly be made chairman of the meeting."

"I second the motion," said Sallie heartily. "All in favor say 'aye.'"

[159]

There was a chorus of laughing "ayes" and a society was actually established that morning, Molly, as founder, being elected President. It consisted of eight members, all freshmen, except the good-natured Sallie Marks, who condescended, although a junior, to join.

"Suppose we vote on a name now," continued Margaret who wished to leave nothing undone in creating the club. "Each member has a right to suggest two names, votes to be taken afterward."

It was all very business-like, owing to Margaret's experienced methods, but the girls enjoyed it and felt quite important. As a matter of fact, it was the first society to be established that year in the freshman class, and it developed afterward into a very important organization.

Among the various names suggested were "The Optimists," "The Bluebirds," "The Glad Hands," mentioned by Sallie Marks, and "The Happy Hearts."

"They are all too sentimental," said the astute Margaret, looking them over. "There'll be so many croaks about us if we choose one of these names that we'll be crushed with ridicule. How about these initials—'G.F.' What do they stand for?"

[160]

"Gold Fishes," replied Mabel Hinton promptly. The others laughed, but the name pleased them, nevertheless. "You see," went on Mabel, "a gold fish always radiates a cheerful glow no matter where he is. He is the most amiable, contented little optimist in the animal kingdom, and he swims just as happily in a finger bowl as he does in a fish pond. He was evidently created to cheer up the fish tribe and I'm sure he must succeed in doing it."

The explanation was received with applause, and when the votes were taken, "G.F." was chosen without a dissenting voice.

It was decided that the club was to meet once a week, its object, to be, in a way, the promotion of kindness, especially toward such people as Frances Andrews, who were friendless.

"We'll be something like the Misericordia Society in Italy," observed Judy, "only, instead of looking after wounded and hurt people, we'll look after wounded and hurt feelings."

It was further moved, seconded and the motion carried that the society should be a secret one; that reports should be read each week by members who had anything to report; and, by way of infusing a little sociability into the society, it was to give an entertainment, something unique in the annals of Wellington; subject to be thought of later.

[161]

It was noon by the time the first meeting of the G. F. Society was ready to disband. But the girls had really enjoyed it. In the first place, there was an important feeling about being an initial member of a club which had such a beneficial object, and was to be so delightfully secretive. There was, in fact, a good deal of knight errantry in the purpose of the G. F.'s, who felt not a little like Amazonian cavaliers looking for adventure on the highway.

"Really, you know," observed Jessie, "we should be called 'The Friends of the Wallflowers,' like some men at home, who made up their minds one New Year's night at a ball to give a poor cross-eyed, ugly girl who never had partners the time of her life, just once."

"Did they do it?" asked Nance, who imagined that she was a wallflower, and was always conscious when the name was mentioned.

"They certainly did," answered Jessie, "and when I saw the girl afterward in the dressing room, she said to me, 'Oh, Jessie, wasn't it heaven?' She cried a little. I was ashamed."

[162]

"By the way, Jessie, I never got my compliment," said Molly. "Pay it to me this instant, or I shall be thinking I haven't had a 'square deal.'"

"Well, here it is," answered Jessie. "It has been passed along considerably, but it's all the more valuable for taking such a roundabout route to get to you. I'll warn you beforehand that you will probably have an electric shock when you hear it. You know I have some cousins who live up in New York. One of them writes to me——"

"Girl or man?" demanded Judy.

"Man," answered Jessie, blushing.

There was a laugh at this, because Jessie's beaux were numerous.

"His best friend," she continued, "has a sister, and that sister—do you follow—is an intimate friend——"

"An intimate friend of an intimate friend," one of the girls interrupted.

"Yes," said Jessie, "it's obscure, but perfectly logical. My cousin's intimate friend's sister has an

"Oh, ho!" cried Judy. "Now we are getting down to rock bottom."

"And Miss Green told her intimate friend who told my cousin's intimate friend's sister—it's a little involved, but I think I have it straight—who told her brother who told my cousin who wrote it to me."

"But what did he write," they demanded in a chorus.

"That one of Miss Green's brothers was crushed on a charming red-headed girl from Kentucky."

Molly's face turned crimson.

"But Dodo is crushed on Judy," she laughed.

"It may be," said Jessie. "Rumors are most generally twisted."

The first meeting of the G. F.'s now disbanded and the members scattered to dress for the early Sunday dinner. They all attended Vespers that afternoon, and in the quiet hour of the impressive service more than one pondered seriously upon the conversation of the morning and the purpose of the new club.

CHAPTER XIII.

[164]

TRICKERY.

It was several days before the G. F.'s had an opportunity to practise any of their new resolutions on Frances Andrews. The eccentric girl was in the habit of skipping meals and eating at off hours at a little restaurant in the village, or taking ice cream sundaes in the drug store.

At last, however, she did appear at supper in a beautiful dinner dress of lavender crêpe de chine with an immense bunch of violets pinned at her belt. She looked very handsome and the girls could not refrain from giving her covert glances of admiration as she took her seat stonily at the table.

It was the impetuous, precipitate Judy who took the lead in the promotion of kindness and her premature act came near to cutting down the new club in its budding infancy.

"You must be going to a party," she began, flashing one of her ingratiating smiles at Frances.

[165]

Frances looked at her with an icy stare.

"I—I mean," stammered Judy, "you are wearing such an exquisite dress. It's too fine for ordinary occasions like this."

Frances rose.

"Mrs. Markham," she said to the matron of Queen's, "if I can't eat here without having my clothes sneered at, I shall be obliged to have my meals carried to my room hereafter."

Then she marched out of the dining room.

Mrs. Markham looked greatly embarrassed and nobody spoke for some time.

"Good heavens!" said Judy at last in a low voice to Molly, "what's to be done now?"

"Why don't you write her a little note," replied Molly, "and tell her that you hadn't meant to hurt her feelings and had honestly admired her dress."

"Apologize!" exclaimed Judy, her proud spirit recoiling at the ignoble thought. "I simply couldn't."

But since her attack on Molly, Judy had been very much ashamed of herself, and she was now taking what she called "self-control in broken doses," like the calomel treatment; that night she actually wrote a note to Frances and shoved it under the door. In answer to this abject missive she received one line, written with purple ink on highly scented heavy note paper:

[166]

"Dear Miss Kean," it ran, "I accept your apology.

"Yours sincerely,
"FRANCES LE GRAND ANDREWS."

"Le Grand, that's a good name for her," laughed Judy, sniffing at the perfumed paper with some disgust.

But she wrote an elaborate report regarding the incident and read it aloud to the assembled

G. F.'s at their second meeting.

In the meantime, Sallie Marks had her innings with the redoubtable Frances, and retreated, wearing the sad and martyred smile of one who is determined not to resent an insult. One by one the G.F.'s took occasion to be polite and kind to the scornful, suspicious Frances. Her malicious speeches were ignored and her vulgarities—and she had many of them—passed lightly over. Little by little she arrived at the conclusion that refinement did not mean priggishness and that vulgarity was not humor. Of course the change came very gradually. Not infrequently after a sophomore snub, the whipped dog snarled savagely; or she would brazenly try to shock the supper table with a coarse, slangy speech. But with the persistent friendliness of the Queen's girls, the fires in her nature began to die down and the intervals between flare-ups grew longer each day.

[167]

Frances Andrews was the first "subject" of the G.F.'s, and they were as interested in her regeneration as a group of learned doctors in the recovery of a dangerously ill patient.

In the meantime, the busy college life hummed on and Molly felt her head swimming sometimes with its variety and fullness. What with coaching Judy, blacking boots, making certain delicious sweetmeats called "cloudbursts,"—the recipe of which was her own secret,—which sold like hot cakes; keeping up the social end and the study end, Molly was beginning to feel tired. A wanness began to show in the dark shadows under her eyes and the pinched look about her lips even as early as the eventful evening when she posed for the senior living picture show.

"This child needs some make-up," the august senior president had exclaimed. "Where's the rouge and who's got my rabbit's foot? No, burned cork makes too broad a line. Give me one of the lighter colored eyebrow pencils. You mustn't lose your color, little girl," she said, dabbing a spot of red on each of Molly's pale cheeks. "Your roses are one of your chief attractions."

[168]

A great many students and some of the faculty had bought tickets for this notable occasion, and the gymnasium was well filled before the curtain was drawn back from a gigantic gold frame disclosing Mary Stewart as Joan of Arc in the picture by Bastien Le Page, which hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. There was no attempt to reproduce the atmospheric visions of the angel and the knight in armor, only the poor peasant girl standing in the cabbage patch, her face transfigured with inspiration. When Molly saw Mary Stewart pose in this picture at the dress rehearsal, she could not help recalling the story of the bootblack father.

"She has a wonderful face, and I call it beautiful, if other people don't," she said to herself.

As for our little freshman, so dazed and heavy was she with fatigue, the night of the entertainment, that she never knew she had created a sensation, first as Botticelli's "Flora," barefooted and wearing a Greek dress constructed of cheesecloth, and then as "Mrs. Hamilton," in the blue crepe with a gauzy fichu around her neck.

[169]

After the exhibition, when all the actors were endeavoring to collect their belongings in the confusion of the green room, Sallie Marks came running behind the scenes.

"Prexy has specially requested you to repeat the Flora picture," she announced, breathlessly.

"Is Prexy here?" they demanded, with much excitement.

"She is so," answered Sallie. "She's up in the balcony with Professor Green and Miss Pomeroy."

"Well, what do you think, we've been performing before 'Queen Victoria and other members of the royal family,' like P. T. Barnum, and never knew a thing about it," said a funny snub-nosed senior. "'Daily demonstrations by the delighted multitude almost taking the form of ovations,'" she proceeded.

"Don't talk so much, Lulu, and help us, for Heaven's sake! Where's Molly Brown of Kentucky?" called the distracted President.

[170]

Molly came forth at the summons. Overcome by an extreme fatigue, she had been sitting on a bench in a remote corner of the room behind some stage property.

"Here, little one, take off your shoes and stockings, and get into your Flora costume, quick, by order of Prexy."

In a few minutes, Molly stood poised on the tips of her toes in the gold frame. The lights went down, the bell rang, and the curtains were parted by two freshmen appointed for this duty. For one brief fleeting glance the audience saw the immortal Flora floating on thin air apparently, and then the entire gymnasium was in total darkness.

A wave of conversation and giggling filled the void of blackness, while on the stage the seniors were rushing around, falling over each other and calling for matches.

"Who's light manager?"

"Where's Lulu?"

"Lulu! Lulu!"

"Where's the switch?"

"Lulu's asleep at the switch," sang a chorus of juniors from the audience.

[171]

"I'm not," called Lulu. "I'm here on the job, but the switch doesn't work."

"Telephone to the engineer."

"Light the gas somebody."

But there were no matches, and the only man in the house was in the balcony. However, he managed to grope his way to the steps leading to the platform, where he suddenly struck a match, to the wild joy of the audience. Choruses from various quarters had been calling:

"Don't blow out the gas!"

"Keep it dark!"

And one girl created a laugh by announcing:

"The present picture represents a 'Nocturne' by Whistler."

Then the janitor began lighting gas jets along the wall and finally a lonesome gas jet on the stage faintly illumined the scene of confusion.

The gigantic gilt frame outlined a dark picture of hurrying forms, and huddled in the foreground lay a limp white object, for Botticelli's "Flora" had fainted away.

The confusion increased. The President joined the excited seniors and presently the doctor appeared, fetched by the Professor of English Literature. "Flora" was lifted onto a couch; her own gray cape thrown over her, and opening her eyes in a few minutes, she became Molly Brown of Kentucky. She gazed confusedly at the faces hovering over her in the half light; the doctor at one side, the President at the other; Mary Stewart and Professor Green standing at the foot and a crowd of seniors like a mob in the background.

[172]

Suddenly Molly sat up. She brushed her auburn hair from her face and pointed vaguely toward the hall:

"I saw her when she——" she began. Her eye caught Professor Green's, and she fell back on the couch.

"You saw what, my child?" asked the President kindly.

"I reckon I was just dreaming," answered Molly, her Southern accent more marked than ever before.

The President of the senior class now hurried up to the President of Wellington University.

"Miss Walker," she exclaimed, her voice trembling with indignation, "we have just found out, or, rather, the engineer has discovered, that some one has cut the electric wires. It was a clean cut, right through. I do think it was an outrage." She was almost sobbing in her righteous anger.

[173]

The President's face looked very grave.

"Are you sure of this?" she asked.

"It's true, ma'am," put in the engineer, who had followed close on the heels of the senior.

Without a word, President Walker rose and walked to the centre of the platform. With much subdued merriment the students were leaving the gymnasium in a body. Lifting a small chair standing near, she rapped with it on the floor for order. Instantly, every student faced the platform, and those who had not reached the aisles sat down.

"Young ladies," began the President in her calm, cultivated tones that could strike terror to the heart of any erring student, "I wish to speak a word with you before you leave the gymnasium to-night. Probably most of you are aware by this time that the accident to the electric lighting was really not an accident at all, but the result of a deliberate act by some one in this room. Of course, I realize, that in so large a body of students as we have at Wellington University there must, of necessity, be some black sheep. These we endeavor, by every effort, to regenerate and by mid-years it is usually not a difficult matter to discover those who are in earnest and those who consider Wellington College merely a place of amusement. Those who do consider it as such, naturally, do not—er—remain with us after mid-years."

[174]

To Molly, sitting on the platform, and to other trembling freshmen in the audience, the President seemed for the moment like a great and stern judge, who had appointed mid-years as the time for a general execution of criminals.

"I consider," went on the speaker in slow and even tones, "idleness a most unfortunate quality, and I am prepared to combat it and to convince any of my girls who show that tendency that good hard work and only good hard work will bring success. A great many girls come here preferring idleness and learn to repent it—before mid-years."

A wave of subdued laughter swept over the audience.

"But," said the President, her voice growing louder and sterner, "young ladies, I am not prepared to combat chicanery and trickery by anything except the most severe measures, and if there is one among you who thinks and believes she can commit such despicable follies as that which has been done to-night, and escape—I would say to her that she is mistaken. I shall not endure such

[175]

treachery. It shall be rooted out. For the honor and the illustrious name of this institution, I now ask each one of you to help me, and if there is one among you who knows the culprit and does not report it to me at once, I shall hold that girl as responsible as the real culprit. You may go now, and think well over what I have said."

The President retired and the students filed soberly and quietly from the gymnasium.

"How do you feel now, dear?" asked President Walker, leaning over Molly and taking her hand.

"Much better, thank you," answered Molly, timidly.

"Could you hear what I was saying to the girls?" continued the President, looking at her closely.

"Yes," faltered Molly.

"Think over it, then. And you had better stay in bed a few days until you feel better. Have you prescribed for her, doctor?"

The doctor nodded. He was a bluff, kindly Scotchman.

"A little anæmic and tired out. A good tonic and more sleep will put her to rights."

Mary Stewart had telephoned for a carriage to take Molly home, and Judy, filled with passionate devotion when anything was the matter, hurried ahead to turn down the bed, lay out gown and wrapper and make a cup of bouillon out of hot water and a beef juice capsule; and finally assist her beloved friend—whom she occasionally chastened—to remove her clothes and get into bed.

"I may not have many chances to wait on you, Molly, darling," she exclaimed, when Molly protested at so much devotion. "I may not have a chance after mid-years."

If she had mentioned death itself, she could not have used a more tragic tone.

"Judy," cried Molly, slipping her arms around her friend's neck, "I'm not going to let you go at mid-years if I have to study for two."

[176]

CHAPTER XIV.

[177]

AN INSPIRATION.

"This is like having a bedroom *salon*," exclaimed Molly with a hospitable smile to some dozen guests who adorned the divans and easy chairs, the floor and window sills of her room.

Surely there was nothing Molly liked better than to entertain, and when she had callers, she always entertained them with refreshments of some kind. Often it had to be crackers and sweet chocolate, and she had even been reduced to tea. But usually her family kept her supplied with good things and her larder was generally well stocked.

She lay in bed, propped up with pillows, and scattered about the bed were text-books and papers.

"You've been studying again, you naughty child," exclaimed Mary Stewart, shaking her finger. "Didn't Dr. McLean tell you to go easy for the next week?"

[178]

"Go easy, indeed," laughed Molly. "You might as well tell a trapeze actor to do the giant-swing and hold on tight at the same time. But it's worth losing a few days to find out what loving friends I have. Your pink roses are the loveliest of all," she added, squeezing her friend's hand.

"Tell us exactly who sent you each bunch?" demanded Jessie, passing a box of ginger-snaps, while Judy performed miracles with a tea ball, a small kettle and a varied assortment of cups and saucers. "I have a right to ask you," continued Jessica, "because you asked the same question of me last Tuesday when two boxes came."

"No suitor sent me any of these, Mistress Jessica," answered Molly, "because I haven't any. Miss Stewart sent the pink ones, and the President of the senior class sent the red ones. Judy brought me the double violets and Nance the lilies of the valley, bless them both, and another senior the pot of pansies. The seniors have certainly been sweet and lovely."

"There's one you haven't accounted for," interrupted Jessie.

"The violets?" asked Molly, blushing slightly.

[179]

"Oh, ho!" cried Jessie in her high, musical voice, "trying to crawl, were you? You can't deceive old Grandmamma Sharp-eyes. Honor bright, who sent the violets?"

"To tell you the truth, I don't know. I suspected Frances Andrews, but when I thanked her for them, she looked horribly embarrassed and said she hadn't sent them. I was afraid she would go down and get some after my break, but thank goodness, she had the good taste not to."

"You mean to say they were anonymous?" demanded Jessie.

"I mean to say that thing, but I suppose some of the seniors who preferred to remain unknown sent them."

"It's just possible," put in Mary, and the subject was dropped.

"Let's talk about the only thing worth talking about just now," broke in Judy. "The Flopping of Flora; or, Who Cut the Wires?"

"Why talk about it?" said Molly. "You could never reach any conclusion, and guessing doesn't help."

"Oh, just as a matter of interest," replied Judy. "For instance, if we were detectives and put on the case, how would we go about finding the criminal?"

[180]

"I should look for a silly mischief-maker," said Mary Stewart. "Some foolish girl who wanted to do a clever thing. Freshmen at boys' colleges are often like that."

"You don't think it was a freshman, do you, Miss Stewart?" cried Mabel Hinton, turning her round spectacles on Mary like a large, serious owl.

"Oh, no, indeed. I was only joking. I haven't the remotest notion who it is."

"If I were a detective on the case," said Mabel Hinton, "I should look for a junior who was jealous of the seniors. Some one who had a grudge, perhaps."

"If I were a detective," announced Margaret Wakefield, in her most judicial manner, "I should look for some one who had a grudge against Molly."

"Of course; I never thought of that. It did happen just as Molly was about to give the encore, didn't it?"

"It did," answered Margaret.

The girls had all stopped chattering in duets and trios to listen.

[181]

"Has any one in the world the heart to have a grudge against you, you sweet child?" exclaimed Mary Stewart, placing her rather large, strong hand over Molly's.

The young freshman looked uncomfortable.

"I hope not," she said, smiling faintly. "I never meant to give offence to any one."

Pretty soon the company dispersed and Molly was left alone with her two best friends.

"Judy," she said, "will you please settle down to work this instant? You know you have to write your theme and get it in by to-morrow noon, and you haven't touched it so far."

Nance was already deep in her English. Molly turned her face to the wall and sighed.

"I can't do it," she whispered to herself; "I simply cannot do it." But what she referred to only she herself knew.

In the meantime Judy chewed the end of her pencil and looked absently at her friend's back. Presently she gave the pad on her lap an impatient toss in one direction and the pencil in another, and flung herself on the foot of Molly's couch.

"Don't scold me, Molly. I never compose, except under inspiration, and inspiration doesn't seem to be on very good terms with me just now. She hasn't visited me in an age."

[182]

"Nonsense! You know perfectly well you can write that theme if you set your mind to it, Judy Kean. You are just too lazy. You haven't even chosen a subject, I'll wager anything."

"No," said Judy sadly.

"Why don't you write a short story? You have plenty of material with all your travel——"

"I know what I'll write," Judy interrupted her excitedly, "The Motives of Crime."

"How absurd," objected Molly. "Besides, don't you think that's a little personal just now, when the whole school is talking about the wire-cutter?"

"Not at all. We are all trying to run down the criminal, anyhow. I shall take the five great motives which lead to crime: anger, jealousy, hatred, envy and greed. It will make an interesting discourse. You'll see if it doesn't."

"The idea of your writing on such a subject," laughed Molly. "You're not a criminal lawyer or a prosecuting attorney."

"I admit it," answered Judy, "and I suppose Lawyer Margaret Wakefield ought to be the one to handle the subject. But, nevertheless, I am fired with inspiration, and I intend to write it myself. I shall not see you again until the deed is done, if it takes all night. By the way, lend me some coffee, will you? I'm all out, and I always make some on the samovar for keeping-awake purposes when I'm going to work at night."

[183]

"I don't know what I'm going to do with you, Judy," sighed Molly, as the incorrigible girl sailed out of the room, a jar of coffee under one arm and her writing pad under the other.

At first she wrote intermittently, rumpling up her hair with both hands and chewing her pencil savagely; but gradually her thoughts took form and the pencil moved steadily along, almost like "spirit-writing" it seemed to her, until the essay was done. It was half-past three o'clock and rain and hail beat a dismal tattoo on her window pane. She had not even noticed the storm, having hung a bed quilt over her window and tacked a dressing gown across the transom to conceal the light of the student's lamp from the watchful matron. Putting out her light and removing all signs of disobedience, she now cheerfully went to bed.

[184]

"Motives for crime," she chuckled to herself. "I suppose I'm committing a small crime for disobeying the ten-o'clock rule, and my motive is to hand in a theme on time to-morrow."

The next morning when Judy read over her night's work, she enjoyed it very much. "It's really quite interesting," she said to herself. "I really don't see how I ever did it."

She delivered the essay at Miss Pomeroy's office and felt vastly proud when she laid it on the table near the desk. Her own cleverness told her that she had done a good thing.

"I don't believe Wordsworth ever enjoyed his own works more than I do mine," she observed, as she strolled across the campus. "And because I've been *bon enfant*, I shall now take a rest and go forth in search of amusement." She turned her face toward the village, where a kind of Oriental bazaar was being held by some Syrians. It would be fun, she thought, to look over their bangles and slippers and bead necklaces.

In the meantime, Miss Pomeroy was engaged in reading over Judy's theme, which, having been handed in last, had come to her notice first. Such is the luck of the procrastinator.

[185]

She smiled when she saw the title, but the theme interested her greatly, and presently she tucked it into her long reticule, familiar to every Wellington girl, and hastened over to the President's house.

"Emma," she said (the two women were old college mates, and were Emma and Louise in private), "I think this might interest you. It's a theme by one of my freshman girls. A strange subject for a girl of seventeen, but she's quite a remarkable person, if she would only apply herself. Somehow, it seems, whether consciously or unconsciously, to bear on what has been occupying us all so much since last Friday."

The President put on her glasses and began to read Judy's theme. Every now and then she gave a low, amused chuckle.

"The child writes like Marie Corelli," she exclaimed, laughing. "And yet it is clever and it does suggest—" she paused and frowned. "I wonder if she could and doesn't dare tell?" she added slowly.

"I wonder," echoed Miss Pomeroy.

"Is she one of the Queen's Cottage girls? They appear to be rather a remarkable lot this year."

[186]

"Some of them are very bright," said Miss Pomeroy.

"Louise," said the President suddenly, "Frances Andrews is one of the girls at that house, is she not?"

"Yes," nodded the other, with a queer look on her face.

"She's clever," said the President. "She's deep, Emma. It is impossible to make any definite statement about her. One must go very slowly in these things. But after what happened last year, you know—"

She paused. Even with her most intimate friend she disliked to discuss certain secrets of the institution openly.

"Yes," said Miss Pomeroy, "she is either very deep or entirely innocent."

"Some one is guilty," sighed the President. "I do wish I knew who it was."

Judy's theme not only received especial mention by Miss Pomeroy, but it was read aloud to the entire class and was later published in the college paper, *The Commune*, to Judy's everlasting joy and glory. She was congratulated about it on all sides and her heart was swollen with pride.

"I think I'll take to writing in dead earnest," she said to Molly, "because I have the happy faculty of writing on subjects I don't know anything about, and no one knows the difference."

[187]

"I wish you'd take to doing anything in dead earnest," Molly replied, giving her friend a little impatient shake.

CHAPTER XV.

PLANNING AND WISHING.

"Mrs. Anna Oldham, the famous suffragette, will speak in the gymnasium on Saturday afternoon, at four o'clock, on 'Woman's Suffrage.' All those interested in this subject are invited to be present."

Molly and Judy, with a crowd of friends, on the way from one classroom to another one busy Friday had paused in front of the bulletin board in the main corridor.

"Mrs. Anna Oldham?" they repeated, trying to remember where they had heard the name before.

"Why, Judy," whispered Molly, "that must be Nance's mother. Do you—do you suppose Nance knows?"

"If she does, she has never mentioned it. You know she never tells anything. She's a perfect clam. But this, somehow, is different."

Both girls thought of their own mothers immediately. Surely they would have shouted aloud such news as Nance had. [189]

"Shall we mention it to her, or do you think we'd better wait and let her introduce the subject?" asked Molly.

"Surely she corresponds with her own mother," exclaimed Judy without answering Molly's question.

"Her father writes to her about once a week, I know; but I don't think she hears very often from Mrs. Oldham. You see, her mother's away most of the time lecturing."

"Lecturing—fiddlesticks!" cried Judy indignantly. "What kind of a mother is she, I'd like to know? I'll bet you anything Nance doesn't know at all she's going to be here. I think we ought to tell her, Molly."

"Poor Nance," answered Molly. "I don't know which would mortify her most: to know or not to know. Suppose we find out in some tactful roundabout way whether she knows, and then I'll offer to go in with you Saturday night and give her mother my bed."

Judy cordially consented to this arrangement, having a three-quarter bed in her small room, although secretly she was not fond of sharing it and preferred both her bed and her room to herself. [190]

It was not until much later in the day that they saw Nance, who appeared to be radiantly and buoyantly happy. Her usually quiet face was aglow with a soft light, and as she passed her two friends she waved a letter at them gayly.

"You see, she knows and she is delighted," exclaimed Judy. "Just as we would be. Oh, Molly, wait until you see my mother, if you want to meet a thing of beauty and a joy forever. You'd think I was her mother instead of her being mine, she is so little and sweet and dainty."

Molly laughed.

"Isn't she coming up soon? I'd dearly love to meet her."

"I'm afraid not. You know papa is always flying off on trips and mamma goes with him everywhere. I used to, too, before I decided to be educated. It was awfully exciting. We often got ready on a day's notice to go thousands of miles, to San Francisco or Alaska or Mexico, anywhere. Papa is exactly like me, or, rather, I am exactly like him, only he is a hundred times better looking and more fascinating and charming than I can ever hope to be." [191]

"You funny child," exclaimed Molly; "how do you know you are not all those things right now?"

"I know I'm not," sighed Judy. "Papa is brilliant, and not a bit lazy. He works all the time."

"So would you if you only wanted to. You only choose to be lazy. If I had your mind and opportunities there is no end to what I would do."

Judy looked at her in surprise.

"Why, Molly, do you think I have any mind?" she asked.

"One of the best in the freshman class," answered her friend. "But look, here are some letters!"

She paused in the hall of Queen's Cottage to look over a pile of mail which had been brought that afternoon.

There were several letters for the girls; Judy's bi-weeklies from both her parents, who wrote to her assiduously, and Molly's numerous home epistles from her sisters and mother. But there were two, one for each of the girls, with the Exmoor postmark on them. [192]

Molly opened hers first.

"Oh, Judy," she exclaimed, "do you remember that nice Exmoor Sophomore named 'Upton?' He

wants to come over Saturday afternoon to call and go walking. Dodo has probably written the same thing to you. I see you have an Exmoor letter."

"He has," answered Judy, perusing her note. "He wishes the honor of my company for a short walk. Evidently they don't think we have many engagements since they don't give us time to answer their notes."

"Judy!"

"Molly!"

The two girls looked at each other for a brief moment and then broke into a laugh.

"Nance's letter must have been from one of the others, Andy McLean, perhaps, that was why she was so——"

Judy paused. Somehow, it didn't seem very kind to imply that poor Nance was elated over her first beau.

"Dear, sweet old Nance!" cried Molly, her heart warming to her friend. "She will probably have them by the dozens some of these days." [193]

"I'm sure I should camp on her trail if I were a man," said Judy loyally. "But, Molly," she added, laughing again, "what are we to do about old Mrs. Oldham?"

"Oh, dear! I hadn't thought of that. And poor Nance would have enjoyed the walk so much more than a learned discourse on woman's rights."

Just before supper time Nance burst into the room. She was humming a waltz tune; her cheeks looked flushed, and she went briskly over to the mirror and glanced at her image quickly, while she took off her tam and sweater.

The girls had never seen her looking so pretty. They waited for her to mention the note, but she talked of other things until Judy, always impatient to force events, exclaimed:

"What was that note you were waving at us this afternoon, Nance?"

"Oh, that was from——"

A tap on the door interrupted her and Margaret Wakefield entered.

"Oh, Nance," she cried, "I am so excited over your mother's coming to speak at college to-morrow afternoon. Isn't it fine of her? It's Miss Bowles, Professor in Advanced Math., who is bringing her, you know, of course?" [194]

Except that her face turned perfectly white, Nance showed no sign whatever that she had received a staggering blow, but her two friends felt for her deeply and Molly came to her rescue.

"By the way, Nance, dearest," she said, "I thought you might want to have your mother with you to-morrow night, and I was going to offer you my bed and turn in with Judy."

"Thanks, Molly," answered Nance, huskily; "that would be nice."

Very little ever escaped the alert eyes of Margaret Wakefield; but if she noticed anything strange in Nance's manner, she made no comment whatever. She was a fine girl, full of sympathy and understanding, with a certain well-bred dignity of manner that is seldom seen in a young girl.

"It will be quite a gala event at Queen's if Mrs. Oldham eats supper here," she said gently; "but no doubt she will be claimed by some of the faculty." Then she slipped quietly out of the room, just in time, for quiet, self-contained Nance burst suddenly into a storm of weeping and flung herself on the bed. [195]

"And she never even took the trouble to tell me," she sobbed brokenly. "She has probably forgotten that I am even going to Wellington."

It was a difficult moment for Molly and Judy. Would it be more tactful to slip out of the room or to try and comfort Nance? After all, she had had very little sympathy in her life, and sympathy was what she craved and love, too, Molly felt sure of this, and with an instinct stronger than reason, she slipped down beside her friend on the couch and put her arms around her.

"Darling, sweetest Nance," she cried, "I am sure the message will come. Perhaps she'll telegraph, and they will telephone from the village. Judy and I love you so dearly, it breaks our hearts to see you cry like this. Doesn't it, Judy?"

"Indeed, it does," answered Judy, who was kneeling at the side of the couch with her cheek against Nance's hand.

It was a comfort to Nance to realize that she had gained the friendship and affection of these two loving, warm-hearted girls. Never in her life had she met any girls like them, and presently the bitterness in her heart began to melt away. [196]

"Perhaps she will telegraph," she said, drying her eyes. "It was silly of me to take on so, but, you see, I had a little shock—I'm all right now. You're dears, both of you."

Judy went into her own room and returned in a moment with a large bottle of German cologne.

Filling the stationary wash basin with cold water she poured in a liberal quantity of the cologne.

"Now, dearest Nance," she said, "bathe your face in that, and then powder with Molly's pink rice powder, and all will be as if it never had been," she added, smiling.

The others smiled, too. Somehow, Nance's outburst had done her more good than harm. For the first time in her life she had been coddled and sympathized with and petted. It was almost worth while to have suffered to have gained such rewards. After all, there were some pleasant things in life. For instance, the note which had come to her that afternoon from young Andy McLean, son of Dr. McLean, the college physician. To think that she, "the little gray mouse," as her father had often called her, had inspired any one with a desire to see her again. It was almost impossible to believe, but there was the young Scotchman's note to refute all contrary arguments.

[197]

"DEAR MISS OLDHAM," it said, in a good, round handwriting, "I have been wanting so much to see you again since our jolly day at Exmoor. I am bringing some fellows over on Saturday to supper at my father's. If you should happen to be in about four o'clock, may I call? How about a walk before supper? I can't tell you how disappointed I'll be if you have another engagement.

"Yours sincerely,
"ANDREW MCLEAN, 2D."

Of course, she would have to give up the walk now, but it was pleasant to have been remembered and perhaps he would come again.

That night at supper Nance was unusually bright and talkative. She answered all the many questions concerning her famous mother so easily and pleasantly that even Margaret Wakefield must have been deceived.

The two sophomores at Queen's were giving a dance that evening, and while the girls sat in the long sitting room waiting for the guests to arrive, Judy took occasion to whisper to Molly:

"Why should she have to appear at the lecture, anyhow?"

[198]

"Because it would be disrespectful not to," answered Molly. "She must be there, of course. Would you go gallivanting off with a young man if your mother was going to give a lecture here?"

"I should say not; but that's different."

"No, no," persisted Molly; "it's never different when it's your mother, even when she doesn't behave like one. Can't you see that Nance would rather die than have people know that her mother isn't exactly like other mothers?"

The next day was one of the busiest in the week for Molly. Two of her morning hours she spent coaching Judy in Latin. Then there were her lace collars to be done up, her stockings to be darned; a trip to be made to the library, where she stood in line for more than twenty minutes waiting for a certain volume of the Encyclopædia Britannica, and spent more than an hour extracting notes on "Norse Mythology." It was well on toward lunch time when she finally hastened across the campus to Queen's to fill some orders for "cloud-bursts," which were intended to be part of the refreshments for certain Saturday evening suppers.

So weary was she and so intent on getting through in what she called "schedule time," that she almost ran into Professor Edwin Green before she even recognized him.

[199]

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she exclaimed, a wave of color sweeping over her pale face.

"Why are you hurrying so fast on Saturday?" he asked pleasantly. "Don't you ever give yourself a holiday?"

"Oh, yes; lots of them," she answered; "but I'm a little rushed to-day with some extra duties."

She thought of the "cloud-bursts," which must be made and packed in boxes by the afternoon.

"You are overdoing it, Miss Brown. You are not obeying the doctor's orders. When I see you there to-night I shall confront you in his presence with the charge of disobedience."

"There to-night?" repeated Molly.

"Certainly. Have you forgotten about the supper to-night?"

"But I'm not invited."

"Oh, yes, you are," answered the Professor, with a knowing smile. "You'll probably find the note waiting for you. And you must be sure and come, because the McLean's are real characters. They will interest you, I am sure."

"Poor Nance," was Molly's first thought. And her second thought was: "If her mother is invited out to dine, she can accept." Her face brightened at this, and without knowing it, she smiled.

[200]

Molly led such a busy, concentrated life, that when she did relax for a few moments, she sometimes seemed absent-minded and inattentive. The Professor was looking at her closely.

"You are pleased at being asked to the McLean's?" he said.

"I was thinking of something else," she said. "I was wondering if, after all, Nance couldn't

arrange to go. Of course, she'll be invited, too; but, you see, her mother is to be here."

"Is Mrs. Oldham, the Suffragette, her mother?" he asked in surprise.

"Yes."

"Mrs. Oldham is to dine at the President's to-night. I know, because I was asked to meet her, but"—he looked at her very hard indeed—"I had another engagement."

"Then Nance can go. Isn't it beautiful? I am so glad!" Molly clasped her hands joyously.

Professor Green gave her such a beautiful, beaming smile that it fairly transfigured his face.

"You are a very good friend, Miss Brown," he said gently; "but would not Miss Oldham rather be with her mother, that is, in case the President should invite her, too, which is highly probable?"

[201]

"Oh, I hope she won't. You see, Nance has never had much pleasure with young people, and"—it was difficult to explain—"and her mother——" she hesitated.

"Her mother, being the most famous clubwoman in America, hasn't spent much time at home? Is that it?"

"Well, yes," admitted Molly. "In fact, she hardly remembers she has a daughter," she added indignantly, and then bit her lip, feeling that she was bordering on disloyalty.

The Professor cleared his throat and thrust his hands into his pockets. He was really very boyish-looking to be so old.

"So you have set your heart on Miss Oldham's going to the supper to-night?" he said gravely.

"If there is any fun going, Judy and I would be sorry to have her miss it," she answered. "And I don't suppose it would be thrilling to dine at the President's with a lot of learned older people."

"I'm just on my way to President Walker's now," pursued the Professor thoughtfully. "In fact, I was just about to deliver my regrets in person regarding dinner to-night, and having some business to attend to with Miss Walker, I thought I would call. While I am there, it is possible—well, in fact, Miss Brown, there should be a good fairy provided by Providence to grant all unselfish wishes. She would not be a busy fairy by any means, I am afraid, except when she hovered around you. Good morning," and lifting his hat, the Professor hastened away, leaving Molly in a state of half-pleased perplexity.

[202]

On the table in her room she found a note from Mrs. McLean, inviting her to supper that evening. Two other invitations from the same lady were handed to Nance and Judy, but Nance was at that moment seated at her desk accepting an invitation from Miss Walker to dine there with her mother at seven. She was writing the answer very carefully and slowly, in her best handwriting, and on her best monogram note paper.

"Do you think that's good enough?" she demanded, handing the note to Molly to read.

"Why, yes," answered Molly, looking it over hastily while she prepared to write her own answer to Mrs. McLean, and then she threw herself into the business of "cloud-bursts."

[203]

Just as the lunch gong sounded, Bridget, the Irish waitress at President Walker's house, appeared at their half-open door.

"A note for Miss Oldham," she said; "and the President says no answer is necessary. Good afternoon, ma'am; they'll be waitin' lunch if I don't make haste."

"MY DEAR MISS OLDHAM," Nance read aloud. "I have just learned that you are invited to a young people's supper party to-night at Mrs. McLean's, and I therefore hasten to release you from your engagement to dine with me. Your mother will spare you, I am sure, on this one evening, and I hope you will enjoy yourself with your friends. With kindest regards, believe me,

"Cordially yours,
"EMMA K. WALKER."

"Isn't she a brick?" cried Judy, dancing around the room and clapping her hands.

"It was awfully nice of her," said Nance thoughtfully. "I wonder how she knew I was invited to the McLean's?"

"Some good fairy must have told her," answered Molly, half to herself, as she stirred brown sugar into a saucepan.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MCLEAN SUPPER.

[204]

Nance did get a telegram from her mother that afternoon. It was very vague about trains and merely said: "Arrive in Wellington about two this afternoon. Meet me. Mother."

Fortunately, the girls were as familiar with the train schedule as with their own class schedules, and knew exactly what train she meant.

"It's the two-fifteen, of course," announced Judy. "Shall we go down with you to meet her, Nance?"

"Why, yes; I think mother would like that very much," answered Nance, pleased with the idea. "She loves attention."

Therefore, when the two-fifteen pulled into Wellington station, our three freshmen, together with Margaret Wakefield heading a deputation from the Freshman Suffrage Club, and Miss Bowles, teacher in Higher Mathematics, were waiting on the platform.

[205]

"There she is!" cried Nance, with a note of eagerness in her voice that made Molly's heart ache.

They all moved forward to meet a gaunt, tired-looking woman, with a sallow, faded complexion and a nervous manner; but her brilliant, clear brown eyes offset her unprepossessing appearance. Glowing with intelligence and with feverish energy they flashed their message to the world, like two mariner's lights at sea, and those who caught that burning glance forgot the tired face and distraught manner of the woman of clubs.

"How are you, my dear?" she said, kissing Nance quite casually, without noticing where the kiss was going to land, and scarcely glancing at her daughter.

She had evidently been making notes on the trip down and still carried a pencil and some scrap paper in one hand, while the other grasped her suit case, of which Nance promptly relieved her. She shook hands cordially with Miss Bowles, and the girls whom Nance introduced, searching the face of each, as a recruiting officer might examine applicants for the army. Then they all climbed into the bus and presently she plunged into a discussion with Miss Bowles on the advance of the suffrage movement in England and America.

[206]

"And this is the woman," whispered Judy to Molly dramatically, "who has spoken before legislatures and represented the suffrage party abroad and been regent of Colonial Dames and President of National Societies for the Purification of Politics and—and lecturer on 'The History of Legislation——'"

"How under the sun can you remember it all?" interrupted Molly.

"I don't think I have got them straight," answered Judy, "but they all sound alike, anyhow, so what's the odds?"

Molly discreetly took herself off to Judy's room that afternoon, leaving Nance and her mother together for the short time that elapsed before the lecture was to begin. But Nance soon followed them.

"Mother wants to be alone," she said. "She has some notes to look over, and she has never read her day-before-yesterday's mail yet. By the way, you are not going to the lecture, are you?"

[207]

"Of course we are," answered the girls in the same breath.

"But the walk?"

"That can be postponed until to-morrow," answered Molly promptly. "The boys are going to spend the night at the McLean's, you know."

Thus Nance's happiness was all arranged for by her two devoted friends.

The gymnasium was only half full when the girls escorted "the most distinguished clubwoman in America" across the campus and into the great hall. The freshmen had turned out in full force, partly to do honor to Nance and partly because President Margaret Wakefield had been talking up the lecture beforehand. Miss Walker and others of the faculty were there, and in a far gallery seat Molly caught a glimpse of Professor Green, whose glance seemed to be turned unseeingly in her direction.

If Judy and Molly had had any fears as to how the absent-minded member of clubs was going to conduct herself on the platform, all doubts were soon dispelled. After the introduction made by the President, the lecturer's nervous manner entirely disappeared. She approached the front of the platform with a composure marvelous to see, and in a cultivated, trained voice—not her everyday voice, by any means—she delivered an address of fervid and passionate eloquence; a plea for woman's rights and universal suffrage so convincing that the most obstinate "anti" would have been won over. After the lecture there was an impromptu reception on the platform; then tea at Miss Bowles' room and at last home to dress for the supper parties.

[208]

Judy and Molly had hastened ahead, leaving Nance to tear her mother from her circle of admirers with the plea that she would be too late. At twenty minutes before seven they hurried in, Mrs. Oldham looking so frail and exhausted that it hardly seemed possible she could keep up. While her poor daughter dashed into her own clothes, her mother sat limp and inert during the process of having her hair beautifully arranged with lightning speed by the deft and handy Judy, while Molly gave the weary woman aromatic spirits of ammonia in a glass of water and presently

hooked her into a dinner dress which was really very handsome, of black lace over gray satin.

"Thank you, my dears," she said amiably, giving an absent-minded glance at herself in the glass. "You are very kind, I am sure. I am such a busy woman I have little time to spare for beautifying; but I must say Miss Kean has improved my appearance by that high arrangement of hair."

[209]

They were surprised that she remembered Judy's name until they learned from Nance later that such was her training in meeting strangers, she never forgot a name or face.

"Now, where am I going?" continued the famous clubwoman. "You will drop me there, you say? You are going somewhere, Nance?"

"Yes, mother," answered Nance patiently. It was the third time she had told her mother that fact.

At last they got her be-nubiaed and be-caped, and at exactly two minutes past seven o'clock deposited her at the President's front door.

Then, with feelings of indescribable relief, they ran gayly across the campus, chattering and laughing like magpies.

Ten minutes later they were seated at Mrs. McLean's large round supper table.

Professor Green, seated just opposite Nance, gave her happy, glowing face a long questioning look, then turning to Molly next to him, he said:

[210]

"She is enjoying it, isn't she?"

"Yes," whispered Molly; "thanks to you, good fairy."

"But the wish must come before the fairy acts, so that, after all, one is far more important than the other," he replied.

"Wasn't the lecture wonderful?" asked Molly.

"Very remarkable," he answered. "Women like that should take to the platform and leave families to other women to rear."

"They certainly can't do both," said Molly, remembering poor Nance's outburst the afternoon before.

"And if you have the vote," went on the Professor in a louder voice, and with a kind of mock solemnity, "what will you do with it?"

"They'll pitch all the men out of office, Professor," called Dr. McLean, who had overheard this question; "and they'll do all the work, too, and we men will begin to enjoy life a little. We've been slaves long enough. I'm for the emancipation of men," he cried, "and Woman's Suffrage is the only way to bring it about."

They all laughed at this original view of the question, and Mrs. McLean, a charming woman with a beautiful Scotch accent, impossible to imitate, observed:

[211]

"My dear, the women are just as great slaves as the men, and they work much harder, if only you knew it. But you don't because we are careful to conceal it. There are *vera* few women who do not wear their company manners in the presence of a man, take my word for it."

"Is that the reason you are always so charming, Mrs. McLean?" put in Professor Green. "But I suspect you have only company manners."

"Not at all, Professor; young Andy will tell you that I can be rude enough at times."

Andy McLean, a tall, raw-boned youth with sandy hair and a thin, intelligent face, was too deeply engaged in conversation at that moment with Nance, to hear his mother's speech.

"Let him alone, he's busy," remarked his father with a humorous smile.

"There's an old song we sing at home," went on Mrs. McLean, "'there's nae luck in tha' hoose when the gude man's awa', but it should be the gude wife, for if ever a house goes to sixes and sevens it is my own house when I leave the two Andys and take ship for Scotland for a bit of a visit. There's nae luck in the hoose for certain, and glad they are to get me back again, if 'tis only for their own personal comfort."

[212]

"Hoity, toity, mother," exclaimed the doctor; "we're joost as glad to have you for your ainsel', my dear."

"Now, is it so, then?" laughed the gude wife. "Well, that's satisfying assurance, truly."

They found the doctor and his wife very amusing, and Molly liked Lawrence Upton, too, who was seated on her other side. He was a typical college youth, tall and stalwart, his brown hair brushed back in a pompadour, his clear, ruddy complexion glowing with vigor. In fact, he was one of the leading athletes at Exmoor, and had won a championship at high jumping and running.

"I hope we'll have some dancing after dinner, Miss Brown," he said. "I hear Southern girls fairly float, and I'd like to have a chance to find it out."

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed with me, then," answered Molly. "I've been leading at most of

the college dances this fall, and it's ruination to good dancing, you know. A leader is always pulling against the bit like a badly trained horse."

[213]

"You look to me like a thoroughbred, Miss Brown," said the gallant youth. "I'm not afraid of your pulling against the bit."

There *was* some dancing after dinner in the McLean's long, old-fashioned drawing-room, while Mrs. McLean herself played long old-fashioned waltzes on the piano, funny hop polkas and schottisches of antique origin. They enjoyed it immensely, however, fitting barn dances to the schottisches and mazurkas and two steps to the polkas. Twice Professor Green engaged Molly in a waltz. She had anticipated that his dancing would be as old-fashioned as the music, but to her surprise, she found him thoroughly up to date. In fact, she was obliged to admit that the Professor in English Literature danced better than any of the younger men at Mrs. McLean's that night.

It was really the most delightful evening Molly had spent since she had been at Wellington. To Nance, it was the most delightful evening of her entire life and Judy, who always enjoyed the last time best of all, told Mrs. McLean when they left that she had never had a better time in her life.

[214]

After the dance, they sat around the big open fire, roasting chestnuts, while Dr. McLean sang a funny song called "Wee Wullie," and Judy followed with an absurd "piece" on the piano called "Birdie's Dead," in schottische time, which sent them into shrieks of laughter and amused Dr. McLean so that he laid his head on his wife's shoulder and wept with joy.

Sitting in the inglenook by the fireplace, Professor Green said to Molly:

"I have been waiting to say something to you, Miss Brown, and I will ask you to regard it as confidential."

She looked up thinking perhaps it was the comic opera he was going to talk about, but she was vastly mistaken.

"When, as Botticelli's Flora, you came to that night with the words, 'I saw her——' you did not guess, did you, that I, too, had seen her?"

They looked at each other and a flash of understanding passed between them. They now shared two secrets.

"I always wanted to tell you," he continued in a low voice, "how much I admired your generous silence. You are a very remarkable young woman."

[215]

With that the party broke up. Later, stretching her long slenderness in the three-quarter bed beside Judy, Molly smiled to herself, and decided that some older men were almost as nice as some young ones.

CHAPTER XVII.

[216]

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE.

Just about this time a new figure appeared at Wellington College. She was known as "inspector of dormitories," and her office was mainly sanitary, and did not infringe on the duties of the matrons. The new inspector lodged at Queen's, since there was an empty room in that establishment, and her name was Miss Steel.

"If she had had her choice of all the names in the English language, she could not have chosen a more suitable one," remarked Judy who had taken a violent dislike to Miss Steel from the first.

She was indeed a steel-like person, steely eyes, steel-gray hair, pale, thin lips, and at her belt metallic chains from which jangled notebook and pencil. When she spoke, which was rarely, her voice was sharp and incisive, and cut the air like a knife. But her most objectionable quality, the girls thought, was that she never made any sound when she walked, the reason being that she had rubber heels on her shoes.

[217]

The first real encounter the girls had with Miss Steel was at a Thanksgiving Eve spread given by the combined G. F. Society, most of the members having received bountiful Thanksgiving boxes from home. Nance's neglected and lonely father had sent her a five-pound box of candy in lieu of the usual box, which takes a woman to plan and pack, and Judy's devoted parents, always on the fly, had shipped her a box of fruit. All the others had received regular boxes full of Thanksgiving cheer, and the feast was to be a grand one. Each member invited guests, and by general vote extra ones were asked: Frances Andrews, who declined because she was going away, and two freshmen who lived in the village, and were working their way through college. Judith Blount was to be there by invitation of pretty Jessie Lynch, and Molly had invited Mary Stewart.

Most of the girls wore fancy costumes, and Molly's and Nance's large room was the scene of an

extravaganza. The feast was piled on four study tables placed in an unbroken row and covered with a white cloth.

[218]

Jessie had worn her famous ballet costume, and was as pretty as a little captive sprite. Judith was in a gorgeous Turkish dress consisting of full yellow silk trousers, a tunic of transparent net and embroidered Turkish slippers. Nance wore her Scotch costume, and at the last minute Molly, who had been too busy even to think of a costume all day, dressed herself up charmingly like a Tyrolean peasant in what she could collect from the other girls.

A great many of the guests had arrived and the room was filled when a chambermaid appeared in the doorway with a tray of cards.

"Some gentlemen to call, Miss," she said, endeavoring not to smile at a Little Boy Blue and a Little Lord Fauntleroy, who were waltzing together.

There were four cards on the tray: "Mr. Edwin Green," "Mr. George Theodore Green," "Andrew McLean, 2d," and "Mr. Lawrence Upton."

"Well, of all the strange times to pay a call," exclaimed Molly. "Will you say that we are very sorry, but we must be excused this evening," she said to the maid.

[219]

The servant bowed and slipped away, while all the girls in the room pounced on the cards.

"Well, I never! Four beaux, and one of them a professor!" cried Jessie, showing the cards to Judith.

"Miss Brown could hardly claim Cousin Edwin as a beau," said Judith, her black eyes snapping. "His younger brother, George, often drags him into things, and poor Cousin Edwin consents to go because George is so timid, but as for paying a social call on a freshman, even the most self-confident freshman could hardly regard a visit from him as that."

"I don't regard it as that," ejaculated Molly.

She was not accustomed to sharp-tongued people, and it was really difficult for her to deal with them properly, as Judy could, and Nance, too. But she forced herself to remember that Judith was a guest in her room, and was about to partake of some of her good Kentucky fare. She turned away without saying another word, and fortunately the maid came back just then and relieved the strained situation.

"The gentlemen say they must see you, ma'am," she said; "and if you won't come down to them, they'll just come upstairs."

[220]

"What?" cried a chorus of girls.

Suddenly there was a wild scramble on the stairs; shouts of laughter, a sound of heavy boots thumping along the hall, and four tall young men burst into the room. There were shrieks from disappearing Boy Blues and Fauntleroy's, who endeavored to cover their extremities with sofa cushions, the captive sprite rushed into a closet and a wild scene of disorder and pandemonium followed.

"Don't be frightened, ladies," said the tallest young man, who wore correct evening clothes, from his opera hat and pearl studs to his pointed patent leather pumps. His hair was light and curly, and he had a long yellow mustache, like Lord Dundreary's.

"Ladies! ladies! why all this excitement?" called another of the quartette, dressed in full black and white checked trousers, a short tan overcoat, a red tie and a brown derby.

The third young man wore a smoking jacket and white duck trousers, and the fourth was dressed in an English golf suit and visored cap.

"Oh, you villains!" cried Jessica, popping her head out of the closet. "You have frightened us almost to death. Do you think I wouldn't know you, Margaret Wakefield, even in that sporting suit. Come over here and show yourself!"

[221]

The bogus gentlemen were indeed three of the evening's hostesses and one of the guests. Mary Stewart wore the evening clothes, borrowed from her brother for a senior play to take place shortly. Judy had on the golf suit, Sallie Marks the dinner coat and Margaret the rakish sporting costume.

"But where did you get the cards?" asked Judith, ashamed of herself, now that the visitors' real identity was disclosed.

"I wrote to Dodo and asked him for them," answered Judy, giving her a look, as much as to say, "What affair is it of yours?"

After the banquet was commenced and the fun waxed fast and furious, there was a cakewalk at the last, with a box of "cloud-bursts" as the prize, the eight hostesses taking turns as judges.

"After this wild orgy, I think we'd better be leaving," said Mary Stewart. "It's getting cold and late, but we've had a glorious time. Will you permit a gentleman to kiss you on the cheek, Molly?"

"That I will," answered Molly, "and proud of the honor."

[222]

Slipping on a skirt and a long ulster, Mary took her departure with Judith and the other girls, who did not have rooms at Queen's, and pretty soon the party had disbanded.

"I'll stay and help you gather up the loaves and fishes," Judy announced. "It'll soon be ten, but we can hang a dressing gown over the transom and draw the blinds and no one will know the difference just this once," she added, proceeding to carry out her ideas of deception.

"I'm still hungry," observed Nance. "I had to wait on so many people I didn't have a chance to eat any supper myself."

"So am I famished," said Molly; "but I was ashamed to confess it."

"I'd like a cup of hot tea," observed Judy, who had waited on nobody but herself.

"When Mrs. Markham comes around," cautioned Nance, "in case she knocks on the door, one of us be ready to put out the light. Judy, you slip into the closet. She's been known to come in, you know, after one of these jamborees."

"Mrs. Markham's away," answered Judy. "'Steel beads' is taking her place until after Thanksgiving."

[223]

The girls munched their sandwiches and talked in low voices. Suddenly there was a sharp rap on the door. Instantly the light went out and there was dead silence. Judy, crawling on all fours toward the closet, was about to conceal herself behind protecting skirts, when the rap was repeated.

"Well, what is it?" called Nance, the boldest among them, "the light is out."

There was no answer and the rap was not repeated.

The girls waited a few moments, and then cautiously lighting a student's lamp with a green shade, proceeded with their supper. Judy looked at her watch. It was a quarter of eleven.

Again they were interrupted. This time by some pebbles thrown against the window.

Molly raised the sash softly and gazed down into the darkness below.

"What is it?" she called.

"It's Margaret," answered a voice from the yard. "For the love of heaven, can't you let me in? I'll explain afterward. I wouldn't mind ringing up Mrs. Markham, but I'm afraid of that Steel woman."

"Wait a minute," answered Molly, and closing the window, she turned to consult with the others.

[224]

"There's nothing to be done but to go down," they decided, and Molly insisted on being the sacrificial lamb. Judy made her slip on her nightgown over her dress, and her dressing gown over that, in order to appear in the proper guise in case anything happened.

But they were doomed to another shock that night.

Just as Molly opened the door she came face to face with Miss Steel standing outside in the hall.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Molly politely, feeling thankful she had put on her nightgown, "I thought I heard a noise outside."

"You seem to be sitting up very late to-night, Miss Brown," said Miss Steel, looking at her coldly. "I was told to enforce the ten o'clock rule in Mrs. Markham's absence, and I must ask you to get to bed at once, unless you wish to be reported."

"I'm sorry," said Molly.

The woman seemed unnecessarily stern, she thought, because, after all, this was not a boarding school, but a college. However, she went back, and closed and bolted the door. In her heart she felt a contempt for any one who would creep about and listen at people's doors. Mrs. Markham would have been incapable of it.

[225]

Just then there came another pebble against the window.

Judy crept to the window this time.

"Wait, Margaret," she called. "Miss Steel is about."

There was perfect stillness for several long black minutes. The three girls sat in a row on the floor listening with strained ears and to Judy at least the adventure was not without its enjoyment. At last they felt that it might be safe to act. Taking off their shoes they moved noiselessly to the window and looked down. There stood the courageous Margaret in full view on the roof of the piazza. She had actually shinned up one of the pillars, which was not such a difficult feat as it might seem, as the railing around the piazza had placed her within reach of the wooden grillwork and swinging onto that she had drawn herself up to the roof. She had skinned her wrist and stumped one of her stockinged toes, having removed her shoes and hidden them under the house, but she appeared now the very figure of courage and action, waiting for the next move. The three girls stood looking down at her in a state of fearful uncertainty as to what should be done next, and as if this were not exciting enough, three light telegraphic taps were

[226]

heard on the door.

"That's not Miss Steel," whispered Judy.

"Who is it," she called softly through the keyhole.

"Jessie," came the answer.

Instantly the door was opened and Jessie crept in.

"Miss Steel is up," she whispered. "I saw her on the landing below just now. Be careful. I am scared to death because Margaret hasn't come back."

For an answer, they led her to the window and pointed to the shadowy figure of her roommate on the piazza roof.

Because Molly had conceived a dislike and distrust for Miss Steel, she made up her mind to outwit her and save her friend. She reflected that if Margaret tried any of the girls on the second floor whose windows opened on the roof, she might get in but she would still have the third flight to make and as the stairs creaked at every step, it would be a difficult matter. Fortunately Miss Steel's room was on the other side of the hall. [227]

"I have a scheme," she whispered at last. "Now, don't any one move. I can manage it without making a sound."

There was a ball of twine on the mantelpiece. Thank heavens for that. She tied one end to the back of a cane chair, which she let slowly out of the window. Then, snipping off the end of the cord, she gave it to Nance to hold. Another chair, which was fortunately smaller, she let down in the same way and finally a stool. Margaret placed one on top of the other, mounted the precarious and toppling pyramid, and with the strength of arm and wrist which showed her gymnasium training, pulled herself to the window sill and was in the room.

"Be quiet," they whispered. "Miss Steel is about."

The four girls lay down on the couches and waited a long time. Judy really fell asleep in the interval before they dared risk pulling back the chairs. It was, in fact, a risky business, and had to be done cautiously and carefully to keep them from bumping against the walls of the house. At last, however, the whole thing was accomplished. [228]

Margaret explained that she had gone over to one of the other houses to return the clothes she had borrowed and had joined another Thanksgiving party and stayed longer than she had intended. They also had been held up by the matron, and had been obliged to put out the lights and hide everything under the bed. She had escaped from the house by a miracle without being found out, and had trusted to luck and her friends for getting into Queen's unobserved.

And now, at last, the adventure was almost over. After another interminable wait, Judy and Margaret and Jessie crept off to their rooms.

Judy's door was still ajar when she saw a flash of light on the stairs, which heralded the approach of Miss Steel, still fully clothed, and walking noiselessly as usual. Judy closed her door and locked it softly.

"Only a spy would wear felt slippers," she said to herself scornfully. Then she laughed. "It was rather good fun to be sure, but would it have mattered so much, after all, if Margaret had boldly come in at the front door and explained?" [229]

They would never have gone to all that trouble to deceive nice Mrs. Markham, her thoughts continued as she removed her manly attire, but Miss Steel was different.

As for Molly, her thoughts were about the same as Judy's.

"A lady doesn't creep," she was thinking, as she thankfully crawled into bed; "a lady doesn't listen at doors or wear soundless slippers in order to walk like a cat. No, Miss Steel is decidedly not a lady."

And when Molly came to this decision about a person, she avoided them carefully ever afterward. Her definition of a "lady" was about the same as a man's definition of a "gentleman." It had nothing whatever to do with birth or education.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FOOTBALL GAME

During those fast flying weeks which tread on one another's heels so rapidly between Thanksgiving and Christmas, came one of the most important events of the season. [230]

It was announced on the bulletin board as the "Harboard-Snail Football Game," and was, in fact, a grand burlesque on a game played not long before between two university teams.

Quite half of the Wellington students took part in the affair and those who were not actively engaged were placed in the cheer sections to yell themselves hoarse. There were a dozen doctors, an ambulance, stretcher bearers, trained nurses and the two teams in proper football attire.

Everybody in college turned out one Saturday afternoon to witness this elaborate parody. A coach drove over from Exmoor fairly alive with students, and the fields outside the Wellington athletic grounds were black with people.

[231]

Judy was a member of the corps of physicians who were all dressed alike in frock coats reaching well below the knees, gray trousers and silk hats. They had imposing mustaches, carried bags of instruments and were the most ludicrous of all the actors that day.

But it was the stretcher bearers who seemed to excite the greatest merriment in the grand parade which took place before the game began. They were dressed something like "Slivers," the famous clown, in full white pantaloons and long white coats cut in at the waist with wide skirts. The members of the cheering sections which headed the grand column were dressed in every sort of absurd burlesque of a college boy's clothes that could be devised.

"How they ever collected all those ridiculous costumes is a marvel to me," exclaimed President Walker to Dr. McLean, whose face had turned an apoplectic purple from laughter and who occasionally let out a roar of joy that could be heard all the way across the field.

Following the cheering sections in the parade were the two teams, hardly recognizable at all as human beings. Their wigs of tousled hair stood out all over their heads like the petals of enormous chrysanthemums. Most of them wore nose guards or their faces were made up in a savage and barbaric fashion. In their wadded football suits, stuffed out of all human recognition, they resembled trussed fowls. In the vanguard of this strange and ludicrous procession stalked a gigantic figure of Liberty. She was about fifteen feet high, and her draperies reached to the ground. Her long red hair blew in the breezes and she carried a Wellington banner, which she majestically waved over the heads of the multitude. By her side ran a dwarf. They were the mascots of the two sides.

[232]

"Why, if that isn't our little friend, Miss Molly Brown," exclaimed Dr. McLean, pointing to Liberty. "She's a bonnie lass and a sweet one. Think now, of her being able to walk on those sticks without losing her balance. It's a verra great achievement, I'm thinking, for a giddy-headed young woman. For they're all giddy-headed at seventeen or thereabouts."

It was indeed Molly, the only girl in all Wellington who could walk on stilts. The seniors had advertised in *The Commune* for a first-class "stiltswoman," and Molly had promptly offered her services. Jessie had been selected as the dwarf.

[233]

"I hope the child won't fall and break her neck," said Mrs. McLean on the other side of the doctor. "It's verra dangerous. Suppose she should become suddenly faint——"

"Don't suppose anything of the sort, mither. You've no grounds for thinkin' the lass will tumble. She seems to be at home in the air."

Professor Green, just beyond Mrs. McLean, frowned, and put his hands in his pockets. He wondered if Dr. McLean had forgotten that he had been sent for just three weeks before when Molly had fainted in the gymnasium, and the Professor breathed a sigh of relief when Liberty presently descended to the earth and the game began.

It was one of the bloodiest and roughest games in the history of football. The ambulance bell rang constantly. Every time a victim fell, the cheering section on the other side set up a wild yell. Doctors and nurses were scattered all about the edges of the field attending to the wounded and the stretchers were busy every minute. As fast as one man tumbled another jumped into his place, and at last when there came a touchdown the players seemed to have fallen on top of each other in a mad squirming mass.

[234]

People laughed that day who were rarely seen to smile. Even Miss Steel's severe expression relaxed into a cold, steely smile.

Molly had gathered up her long cheesecloth robe and was sitting with Jessie on a bench at the side of the field.

"Isn't it perfect, Jessie?" she was saying. "I don't think I ever enjoyed anything so much in all my life. It will make a wonderful letter home."

Jessie smiled absently. With a pair of field glasses, she was searching the faces of the spectators for two friends (men, of course), who had motored over to see the sport. At her belt was pinned the most enormous bunch of violets ever seen. In fact, they were two bunches worn as one, from her two admirers. Presently Judith joined them on the bench. Ever since the Thanksgiving spread she had endeavored to be very nice to Molly.

"Hello, Ju-ju!" called Jessie; "you are a sight."

"I know it," she said. "I feel that I am a disgrace to the sex. I only hope I'm not recognizable."

[235]

"Your shiny black eye is the only familiar thing about you. The rest is entirely disguised."

"I think I'd recognize that ring, Miss Blount," put in Molly. "Almost everybody knows that emerald by sight now, who knows you at all."

Judith glanced quickly at her finger.

"Do you know," she exclaimed, "I forgot I was wearing it? How stupid of me! I am booked to take Rosamond's place in a minute. Will one of you girls take care of it for me? I shall be much obliged."

"You'd better take it, Jessie," said Molly, looking rather doubtfully at the ring. She had only one piece of jewelry to her name, a string of sapphires, which had belonged to her mother when she was a girl.

But the ring was too big for Jessie's slender, pretty little fingers.

"I can't," she said, "unless I wear it on my thumb, and it might slip off, you know. You'll have to take it, Molly."

Molly slipped it on her finger and held it up for admiration.

"It's the most beautiful ring I ever saw," she exclaimed. "It's the color of deep green sea water. Not that I ever saw any, but I've heard tell of it," she added, laughing. [236]

"You don't mean to say you have never seen the ocean!" cried Judith in a pleasant tone of voice.

Molly had never seen her so amiable before.

"No," replied the freshman, "this is the nearest I have ever been to it."

"Well, thanks for taking care of my ring," went on Judith. "I'll see you after the game," and she departed to take up her duties on the field, just as Rosamond, at the appointed time, with a gash across her face, made with finger-nail salve, was borne from the field on a stretcher.

After the game came another grand procession in which all the wounded took part, Molly on stilts, with Jessie running beside her, as before.

All that morning Molly had felt buoyed up by the fun and excitement of the great burlesque. But, now that the game was over, as she strode along on the giant stilts, she began to feel the same overpowering fatigue she had experienced that night at the living picture show. For a week she had been living on her nerves. Often at night she had not slept, but had tossed about on her bed trying to recall her lessons or make mental notes of things she intended to do. On cold mornings, her feet and hands were numb and dead and Judy often made her run across the campus and back to start her circulation. And now that numbness began to climb from her toes straight up her body. Molly turned unsteadily and with shaky strides at least six feet long, hastened across the field. Her feeling that she must get out of the noise and turmoil, away from everybody in the world, carried her back of a row of sheds under which the players sat during the intermissions. Once in this quiet place she let herself down from the stilts. She was conscious of being very cold. There was a deep red light in the western sky from the setting sun, then the numbness reached her brain and she remembered nothing more until she opened her eyes and saw Dr. McLean at one side of her and Professor Green at the other. [237]

"Here she comes back at last," exclaimed the doctor. "Aye, lass, it's a good thing this young man has an observant eye. Otherwise ye might have been lying out here in the cold all night. You feel better now, don't you?" [238]

"Yes, doctor," answered Molly weakly.

"I don't like these fainting spells, my lass. You're not made of iron, child. You'll have to give up one thing or t'other—study or play."

But there were other things Molly did beside studying and playing. Of course the doctor did not know about the "cloud-bursts" and the shoe-blackening and the tutoring.

"Aye, here comes one of my associates with a carriage," he went on, chuckling to himself. "Shall we have a consultation now, Dr. Kean?"

Judy, still in her absurd burlesque costume, had driven up in one of the village surreys.

As the two men lifted Molly into the back seat, she noticed for the first time that she was wearing a man's overcoat. It was dark blue and felt warm and comfortable. She slipped her hands into the deep pockets and snuggled down into its folds. Certainly she felt shivery about the spine, and her hands and feet, which were never known to be warm, were now like lumps of ice. As the doctor was still wearing his great coat of Scotch tweed, it was evidently the coat of the Professor of English Literature she had appropriated.

"It's awfully good of you to lend me your coat," she said to Professor Green, who was standing at the side of the carriage while the doctor climbed in beside her. "I'm afraid you'll take cold without it." [239]

"Nonsense," he said, almost gruffly, "I'm not dressed in cheesecloth."

"But I have on a white sweater under all this," said Molly timidly.

The carriage drove away, however, without his saying another word, and later that afternoon, after Molly had taken a nap and felt rested and refreshed, she engaged one of the maids at Queen's cottage to return Professor Green's overcoat with a message of thanks. Then, with a sigh of relief, because when she had borrowed anything it always weighed heavily on her mind, and because she felt somehow that the Professor was provoked with her, she turned over and went to sleep again.

Just as the clock in the chapel tower sounded midnight she sat up in bed.

"What is it, Molly, dear?" asked Nance, who was wakeful and uneasy about her friend.

Molly was looking at her right hand wildly.

"The ring!" she cried. "Judith's emerald ring—it's gone!"

[240]

The ring was indeed gone. Neither of her friends had seen it on her finger since she had been in her room.

It was gone—lost!

"It must have slipped off my finger when I fainted," sobbed the poor girl.

Nance had summoned Judy at this trying crisis, and the two girls endeavored to comfort their friend, who seemed to be working herself into a state of feverish excitement.

"Never mind, we'll find it in the morning, Molly," cried Nance. "You know exactly where it was you fell, don't you? Somewhere behind the sheds. It's sure to be there. Judy and I promise to go there first thing, don't we, Judy?"

"Yes, indeed," acquiesced Judy, who loved her morning sleep better than anything in life. But Judy was learning unselfishness since she had been associating with Molly and Nance.

There was no more sleep for poor Molly that night, however, and she lay through the dragging hours with strained nerves and throbbing temples wondering what would happen if she did not find the ring.

CHAPTER XIX.

[241]

THREE FRIENDS.

Nance was still sound asleep when Molly crept from her bed and dressed herself. It was a dismal cold morning. A fine snow was falling and she shivered as she tied a scarf around her head, threw her long gray eiderdown cape over her shoulders and slipped from the room, without waking her friend, who was weary after the excitements of the day before.

Across the wind-swept campus she hastened, anxiety lending swiftness to her steps, and at last reached the Athletic Field. At the far end snuggled several low wooden sheds like a group of animals trying to keep warm by staying close together.

"I must hurry," Molly thought, "or the snow will be so thick I shall never be able to find the ring," and summoning all her energy she ran as fast as she could straight to the spot where she remembered to have dropped the day before behind the sheds. Breathless and tingling all over with little prickly chills, she knelt down and began to search in the dead grass, brushing the snow away as she hunted. She had not stopped to find gloves, neither had she wasted any time lacing her boots, but had slipped on some pumps at the side of the bed.

[242]

For a long time Molly searched every inch of the ground back of the sheds where she might have been. Then, with an ever-growing feeling of desperation, she hunted in the field itself, across which she had followed the parade. And it was here that Judy and Nance found her so absorbed in her search that she had not even noticed their approach.

"Oh, Molly, Molly! what are we going to do with you?" cried Nance, seizing her by the arm impulsively. "You'll kill yourself by your imprudence. Why didn't you wait and let us look?"

Molly opened her mouth to answer, and the words came out in a husky whisper. She had entirely lost her voice from hoarseness, without even knowing that she had caught cold.

"I've looked everywhere," she whispered, "and I haven't found it. I couldn't have lost it while I was on the stilts, because I never let go of them for a moment. It must have been when I fainted."

[243]

"Judy, you take her home while I look again," volunteered Nance.

"Take her to the infirmary, you mean," answered Judy, and she promptly led Molly by a short cut toward the last house on the far side of the campus, where stood the small college hospital.

Molly obediently allowed herself to be piloted along. Her cheeks were burning; there was a feverish light in her eyes, and she no longer felt cold at all, but hot all over with little chills along her spine.

"I'm afraid I'm a great nuisance, Judy, dear. I hope you'll forgive me, but I'm really in great trouble," she said huskily, as Judy confided her to one of the two nurses at the hospital.

"Don't worry," was Judy's parting command. "We'll find the ring. It can't possibly be lost utterly. It's too big and green. I'll see Judith Blount, too. Some one may have found it and returned it to her by this time. I'll leave a notice on the bulletin board and stand my little St. Joseph on his head," she added laughing. "You may be sure I'll leave nothing undone to find that old ring."

[244]

The first thing Judy did after breakfast that Sunday morning was to pay a visit to Judith Blount. There was a placard on her door announcing to whom it might concern that Judith was busy and did not wish to be disturbed, but Judy knocked boldly and at an impatient "Who is it?" replied: "I wish to see you on important business. Please unlock the door."

Judy couldn't make out why Judith Blount looked so white and uneasy when she entered the room; nor why her expression changed to one of intense relief a moment later.

"I came to ask you," began Judy abruptly, "if any one had found your emerald ring."

"Miss Brown has my ring," answered Judith promptly.

"Didn't you know that Molly had fainted and is now ill in the hospital and the ring is lost?"

"My emerald ring lost?" Judith almost shouted.

"Don't carry on so about it," put in Judy. "It'll be found. Molly herself was up at dawn this morning. She stole away before anybody could stop her, and went to the field to look for it, but she hasn't been able to find it, and neither has Nance, who looked for it later. Nance has gone down to the village to find the surrey that took Molly home. We are all doing everything we can and in the meantime I thought I would tell you so that you could help us."

[245]

Judy could be very impudent when she wanted to, and she was impudent now, as she stood looking straight into Judith's angry black eyes.

"She should have been more careful," burst out Judith in a rage. "How do I know that——" she stopped, frightened at what she was about to say.

"Better not say that," said Judy calmly. "It simply wouldn't go, you know, and you must know as well as I do that it would be absolutely false."

"How do you know what I was going to say?"

"I could guess," said Judy, shrugging her shoulders. "I can often guess things you would like to say, but don't, Miss Blount. What I came for was to ask you to help us find the ring. Molly is very ill, and, of course, it's the loss of the ring as much as anything else that's made her so. We're all doing the best we can, and if you'll just kindly add your efforts to ours, it might help some."

[246]

"Supposing the ring isn't found, what redress have I? It's been in our family for generations. It was brought over from France by a Huguenot ancestor——"

"Nice place to be wearing it, then, at a football game!" exclaimed Judy indignantly. "And then forcing other people to take charge of it for you! Redress, indeed! Do you want Molly to pay you for your ring? I tell you, Miss Blount, that a person who really had Huguenot ancestors would never have suggested such a thing. It wouldn't have been Huguenot etiquette."

And Judy flung herself out of the room and down the steps before the astonished Judith had time to realize that she had been insulted by an upstart of a freshman.

It looked very much for a day or two as if Molly were going to have a congestion in one lung. For several days she was a very sick girl. She had a strange delirium that she was looking for something while she was walking on stilts. Many times she asked the nurse if sapphires were as valuable as emeralds, and once she demanded to know if an emerald as large as her little finger nail was worth much money, say, two acres of good orchard land. But the lung was not congested, as Dr. McLean had at first thought. In a day or two the fever subsided and by Thursday she was able to sit up in bed, propped by many pillows and see Judy and Nance.

[247]

Her room was a bower of flowers. They had even come from Exmoor, Lawrence Upton having sent her a box of lovely pink roses. Mrs. McLean had brought her a bunch of red berries from the woods, and one day two cards were brought up, one of which looked familiar: Miss Grace Green and Mr. Edwin Green, inquiring as to the improvement in Miss Molly Brown's condition, were pleased to hear that she was better.

And now Nance and Judy sat on either side the young invalid, each trying to assume a cheerful expression and each feeling that whatever disagreeable things had happened—and several had happened—they must be hidden from Molly at all costs.

Judith Blount had scattered reports around college of an extremely hateful character which Molly's friends had done their best to suppress. The ring had never been found, although everything had been done that could be thought of in the way of advertising and searching.

[248]

Moreover, Miss Steel had asked twice of Molly's condition in a very meaning tone of voice, and had wished to know exactly when the nurse thought Molly would be able to see visitors. These things the girls knew, and since Molly was still weak and very hoarse, her friends were careful to keep off dangerous subjects.

Strange to say, Molly had never mentioned the ring to any one since she had been in the hospital.

"Everybody has been so beautifully kind," she was saying, "and really, I think the rest is going to do me so much good, that when I get well I'll be better than I was before I got sick," she added, laughing.

"We've missed you terribly," said Nance dolefully.

"Queen's just a dead old hole without you, Molly, dear," went on Judy affectionately.

Molly smiled lovingly at her two friends.

"You are the dearest—" she began, taking a hand of each when the nurse entered.

"Miss Stewart would like to see you, Miss Brown."

[249]

"Oh, yes," cried Molly; "do ask her to come up."

Nance and Judy did not linger after Mary Stewart's arrival. Her face also wore a serious look, and she took Molly's hand and gazed down into her face almost with a compassionate expression.

"How are you, Molly, dear?"

"Oh, I'm much better," replied Molly, cheerfully. "I shall be up by to-morrow, the doctor says, and I expect to go back to Queen's Sunday."

Mary sat down and drew her chair up close to the little white bed.

"It's almost providential my being in the hospital like this," went on Molly, "it's rested me so. You see, I was terribly worried about something when I came here."

"And you aren't worried any longer?"

"No; I've conquered it. I know it's got to be faced; but I believe there will be a way out of it, and I'm not frightened any more. I have always had a kind of blind faith like that when things look very black."

"You are talking of the emerald ring, aren't you, Molly?"

[250]

"Yes, Mary. I know it hasn't been found, of course. I can tell that by the girls' faces, and I know that Judith Blount is—well, she is your friend, Mary——"

"Oh, no; not now," put in Mary. "We've had a—er—difference of opinion that has—well, not to put too fine a point on it, broken up our friendship. I always admired her, without ever really liking her."

Molly looked at Mary and a very tender expression came into her heavenly blue eyes.

"Was the difference about me?" she asked presently.

Mary hesitated.

"Yes, Molly; since you force me to tell you, it was."

"She has been saying some horrid things? Of course, I knew she would. I was prepared for that. And I could tell——" Molly paused. "No, no, I mustn't!" she exclaimed hastily.

"What could you tell, Molly?"

"Don't ask me. I would never speak to myself again, if I did tell. She has been saying that I never lost the ring, that I was poor and needed the money, and things like that. Tell me honestly, isn't that the truth?"

[251]

Mary nodded her head and frowned. There was a silence, and presently Mary's strong, brown fingers closed over Molly's slender ones.

"Molly," she began in a business-like tone of voice, "I'm almost glad that this subject has come up because I came here really to——" she broke off. "It's very hard," she began again. "I hardly know how to put it. You knew, Molly, dear, that I was rich, didn't you?"

"Why, yes; I guessed you must be, although you have been careful not to mention it yourself. You're the most high-bred, finest girl I ever knew, Mary," she added impetuously.

Mary laughed.

"That's nice of you to say such things, dear, because I haven't but one ancestor on my paternal side and that's father, but he's generations in himself, he's so splendid. But to go on, Molly, dear, I am rich, not ordinarily rich, but enormously, vastly rich. It's absurd, really, because we'll never spend it, and we don't care a rap about saving it; but whatever father touches just turns to gold."

"I wish he'd touch something for me," laughed Molly, wistfully.

"Now, listen to me, dear, and don't interrupt. Father adores me to that extent that I could spend any amount of money and he would just smile and say: 'Go ahead, little Mary, go as far as you like.' But, you see, I only want a few very nice things, consequently, I can't be extravagant to save my life."

Molly laughed aloud at this naïve confession.

"The point I'm coming to is this, Molly: Judith Blount is being exceedingly horrid over that ring. I believe myself it will be found eventually. But until it is found, I want you—now don't interrupt me and don't carry on, please—I want you to ask her the value of her old ring and give her the money for it. If she chooses to be ill-bred, she must be treated with ill-bred methods."

"But, dearest Mary, I can't——" began Molly.

"Yes, you can. I haven't known you but a few months, Molly, but I've learned to love you in that time. And when I really care for any one, which is seldom, she becomes a sister to me. You are my little sister, and shall always be. I shall never change. And between sisters there must be no foolish pride. Now, Molly, I want to settle this thing with Judith Blount once and for all, through you, of course. She is not to know I had anything to do with it. You must tell her that you have raised the money and would like to pay her the full value of the ring. When the ring is found, she can give you back the money. That will stop her wicked, wagging tongue, at least."

Molly tried hard not to cry, but the tears welled up in her eyes and trickled down her cheeks. She took Mary's hand and kissed it.

"I wish I could kiss you, dearest Mary," she sobbed; "but you see, I've got such a bad cold."

How could she thank Mary for her generous offer or explain that her family would never allow her to accept the money, even if she felt she could herself?

"You are the finest, noblest, most generous girl," she went on brokenly.

"No, I'm not," said Mary. "It's easy to do things for people we love and easier still when we have the money to do it with. If I hadn't been so fond of you, Molly, and had been obliged to deny myself besides, that would have been generosity. This is only a pleasure. A sort of self-gratification, because I've adopted you, you see, as my little sister."

Molly lay quietly for a while with her cheek pressed against Mary's hand.

"Are you thinking it over?" asked Mary at last, patting her cheek.

"I'm thinking how happy I am," answered Molly.

"As soon as you are well, then," went on Mary, rising to go, "you must have an interview with Judith and settle the whole thing."

Molly smiled up at her friend and squeezed her hand.

There are times when two friends need not speak to express what they think.

"Even if I never win the three golden apples," she reflected after Mary had gone, "I have won three friends that are as true as gold."

CHAPTER XX.

MISS STEEL.

With the wonderful powers of recuperation which natures like Molly's have, on Sunday morning she was up and dressed, almost dancing about her room in the infirmary, long before it was time for Dr. McLean to call and grant her permission to leave.

It was good to be up and well again; it was good to be at college, for she had been homesick for Wellington since she had been shut up in the hospital, and better still, it was good to have friends, such friends as she had.

As for the emerald ring—a shadow darkened her face. The thought of the emerald ring would push its way into her mind.

"I believe it will come out all right," she said to herself. "I believe it—I believe it! I couldn't help losing it, and if it isn't found, I can't help that, either. I just won't be miserable, that's all. I feel too happy and too well."

"Are you at home to visitors this morning, Miss Brown?" asked a sharp unmusical voice at the door.

"Oh, yes; do come in," answered Molly, rising to meet Miss Steel, who had walked up the

uncarpeted steps and along the echoing corridor without making a sound, as usual.

Molly's manners were unfailingly cordial to visitors, and when she shook hands with Miss Steel and insisted on making her take the armchair, that flint-like person visibly softened a little and faintly smiled. Molly wondered why the sanitary inspector had called on her, but she appreciated attentions from anybody and was as grateful for being popular as if it were something entirely new and strange to her.

She showed Miss Steel her flowers and pinned a lovely pink rose on the inspector's granite-colored cloth coat. She made light of her illness, and rejoiced that she was returning in a few hours to dear old Queen's. She was, in fact, so wonderfully sweet and charming that Sunday morning that it must have been very difficult even for the stony inspector to touch on the real business of her visit.

At last, however, Miss Steel buckled on her armor of decision, averted her eyes for a moment from Molly's glowing face and plunged in. [257]

"I don't suppose, Miss Brown, you suspected my title of 'Dormitory Inspector' here was merely a nominal one, and that I had another motive in being at Wellington College?"

Molly hardly liked to tell her that they had long considered her a spy and detested her for that reason. She said nothing, therefore, and sat in her favorite position when listening intently with her hands clasping one knee and her shoulders drooping; a very wrong position indeed, considering that it would eventually make her round-shouldered and hollow chested; but Molly was never more graceful or comfortable than when she adopted this unhealthful attitude.

"I am an inspector," went on the other, "but I am an inspector of police, that is, a detective. Doubtless you have heard of certain mysterious things that have happened at Wellington this autumn; the attempt to burn the gymnasium, which we now believe was only a practical joke to frighten the sophomore class; the cutting of the electric wires one night, and there are a few other things you have not heard; for instance, Miss Walker has received lately several anonymous letters—two of them about you——" [258]

Molly started.

"About me?" she exclaimed.

"Yes," said Miss Steel, watching her closely. "But they were not disagreeable letters, strange to say, since anonymous letters usually are. They expressed the most ardent admiration for you. They mentioned that you had enemies who were trying to ruin your reputation."

"How absurd!" exclaimed Molly indignantly. She detested anything deceitful and underhand with all her soul. "When did these letters come?"

"Just since you have been at the Infirmary."

"They must be about the emerald ring," broke in Molly.

"Exactly," answered the inspector. "You have lost a valuable emerald ring belonging to another girl who is making it disagreeable for you."

"But I didn't want to take care of her ring," protested Molly. "She insisted on it. It was too big for my finger, and when I fainted it must have slipped off. I've done everything I could to find it, but she needn't worry. She'll be paid for it, if two acres of good apple orchard that were to have paid my college expenses have to go." [259]

"Nonsense, child!" exclaimed Miss Steel, suddenly melting into a human being. "I'm going to find that ring for you if it takes the rest of this winter."

Molly seized her hand joyfully. By one of those swift flashes of insight which come to us when we least expect them, it was revealed to Molly that she had made a friend of the inspector.

"I have been here almost a month," continued Miss Steel, giving the girl's hand a little vicelike squeeze, which was her way of expressing cordiality, "and I have found out a great many things. A girls' college is a strange place. There is a good deal of wire-pulling and petty jealousy among a certain class of girls, and yet I have reason to know that the code of honor here is exceedingly high, and I find myself growing more and more interested in the girls and their lives. Nowhere but in college could such devoted friendships be formed. They are elevating and fine, especially for selfish girls, who learn how to be unselfish by example. The girls develop each other. Your G. F. Society, for instance, has had a remarkably refining and, shall I say, quieting effect on Miss Andrews——" [260]

Molly started. She was amazed at the inspector's insight into the college life.

"Which brings me to the point I have been aiming to reach. Since I have been here I have taken pains to learn the history of Miss Andrews as well as to study her character. She is a strange girl. Doubtless you know the incident of last year?"

Molly shook her head.

"To begin at the beginning: Miss Andrews' parents were rather strange people. Her father is a city politician who never made any secret of his grafting methods. Her mother was an actress

and is dead. Frances hadn't been brought up to any code of honor. She had been allowed to do as she chose, and had all the money she wanted to spend. If she is vulgar and pretentious, it isn't really her fault. Last year she offended her class by telling a falsehood. She was under honor, according to the custom here when a student leaves the premises, to be back from some visit by ten o'clock Sunday night. She missed the ten o'clock train and took the train which arrived at midnight. However, as luck would have it, the ten o'clock train was delayed by a washout and drew into Wellington station just in front of the train Frances was on. She, of course, found this out immediately, and taking advantage of it, she gave out that she had been on the earlier train, which saved all unnecessary explanations. It must have been a great temptation for a girl brought up as she had been. But truth always comes to the top, sooner or later, and as the President of her own class happened to have been on the earlier train, she was found out. She was summoned by the Student Council, tried and found guilty. Then she was treated, I imagine, something in the same way that a French soldier is expelled from the army. Figuratively speaking, her sword was broken and her epaulettes torn from her uniform!"

[261]

"How terrible!" exclaimed Molly.

"Yes; it was pretty severe. But she was very defiant, and said dreadful things, denounced her class and college. Few girls would have had the courage to return to college next year, but she came back, hoping to live her dishonor down, and when she found her class to a member ignored her very existence, she became almost insane with bitterness and rage, and having studied her character closely, I judge that for a while, until your secret society took her in hand, she was hardly responsible for her actions.

[262]

"Now, Miss Walker is very sorry for Frances Andrews; but she considers her a dangerous element in college, and at mid-years she would like some definite reason for asking her not to come back. I am speaking plainly, because Miss Walker is convinced that you know a definite reason and through some mistaken idea of kindness, you keep it to yourself. In fact, Miss Brown, Miss Walker is convinced that you and you alone saw Frances Andrews cut the wires in the gymnasium that night."

"But I didn't," cried Molly, much excited; "or, rather, it wasn't Miss Andrews."

Miss Steel looked at her in surprise, so sure was she that Molly would confirm her suspicions.

Molly sat down again and clasped her knees with her long arms. Her cheeks were crimson and her eyes blazing.

"Who was it, then?" asked the inspector.

"I can't tell you that, Miss Steel. If I should give you the girl's name I should be dishonored all my life. I have been brought up to believe that the one who tells is as low as the one who did the deed. When we were children, my mother would never listen to a telltale. I do think it was a wicked, mischievous thing to have done—a contemptible thing; but I'd rather you found out the name of the girl in some other way than through me, especially right now——"

[263]

"Why right now?"

But Molly would not reply.

Miss Steel could see nothing but truth in the depths of Molly's troubled blue eyes. She took the girl's hand in her's and looked at her gravely.

"You are a fine girl, Miss Brown," she said, "and if you tell me that the girl who cut the wires was not Miss Andrews, I believe you implicitly. Of course, Miss Walker would never tell Miss Andrews not to return to Wellington without something very definite and tangible on which to base her dismissal. Luke Andrews, the girl's father, is as hot-headed and high tempered as his daughter, and he would probably make a great deal of trouble and cause a great deal of publicity if Frances were asked to leave college quietly."

"I'm sorry for her," said Molly. "I think she might have been helped if she had had just a little more time. After all, the worse thing about her is her bringing up."

[264]

"And this other girl whom you are shielding, Miss Brown, does she deserve so much generosity from you?"

Molly closed her lips firmly.

"That isn't the question with me, Miss Steel," she said at last. "The question is: could I ever show my face again if I told."

"But no one need ever know, that is, no one but the President and me."

"You don't understand," said Molly wearily. "It's with me, you see. I could never be on comfortable terms with myself again. I should always be thinking that I hadn't behaved—well, like a gentleman."

Then the inspector did a most surprising thing. She went over and kissed Molly.

"I wouldn't for worlds keep you from being true to yourself, my child," she exclaimed. "It's a rare quality, and one which will make you devoted friends all your life, because people will always know they can trust you."

Molly looked at the inspector, and lo and behold, a strange transformation had taken place in that inscrutable, expressionless face. The cold gray eyes were softened by a mist of tears and the thin lips were actually quivering. She looked almost beautiful at that moment, and Molly suddenly put her arms around her neck and laid her head on the flat, hard chest.

[265]

"You'll forgive me, won't you, Miss Steel?"

"I will, indeed, dear," answered the other, patting Molly's cheek. "And now, don't bother about all this business. Get well and strong. Don't overwork, and I promise to find that ring for you if I have to turn the college upside down to do it."

Then she gave Molly a warm, motherly squeeze, kissed her on the forehead and took her departure as quietly as she had come.

CHAPTER XXI.

[266]

A BACHELOR'S POCKET.

Miss Steel was a very busy woman that afternoon. She was shut up with Judy Kean for half an hour; she visited the livery stable in the village, she paid a call on Dr. McLean and finally she went to see Professor Green.

It is in Professor Green's study on the Cloisters that we now find her, sitting bolt upright in her chair, alert and bright-eyed. At such times as this, Miss Steel is not unlike a hunting dog on the scent of his quarry.

Professor Green sits at his desk. He looks tired, and his heavy reddish eyebrows are drawn together in a frown. When the inspector came into the room he had pushed a pile of manuscript under some loose papers, but a sheet had slipped off and now lay in plain view. Across it was written in a bold hand:

"Exeunt FAIRIES in disorder, leaving WOOD SPRITE at Left Centre.

"THE SONG OF THE WOOD SPRITE."

[267]

"I hope you will pardon this intrusion, Professor. I see you are very busy," the inspector began, glancing at the manuscript with a look of some slight amusement.

The Professor hastily covered up the sheet.

"Not at all," he said politely; "I'm just idling away a little time. What can I do for you?"

He had seen Miss Steel about the building and most of the Faculty knew her by this time as "Inspector of Dormitories."

"Do you remember helping a young lady who fainted on the day of the football game?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," replied the Professor, absent-mindedly fingering a paper cutter.

"You lent her your overcoat that afternoon, didn't you?"

"Why, yes; I believe I did."

"Have you worn the coat since?"

"Certainly," he answered, laughing; "every day, and several times a day. It's the only one I have. Are you a detective?"

"Yes. Do you ever put things in the pockets of your coat?"

The Professor smiled shamefacedly like a schoolboy culprit.

[268]

"In one of them. There's been a hole in the other one for a long time—two years at least."

"Would you mind letting me see that coat?"

He lifted the blue overcoat from a hook on the door and placed it on a chair beside Miss Steel.

"Am I a suspect?" he asked politely. "Has anything been lost?"

The detective seized the overcoat and began rummaging through the pockets with a practised hand.

"Yes," she answered; "something has been lost, and extremely disagreeable things have been said by the owner about it."

"About me?" asked the Professor, still groping in the dark.

"No, no; about the girl who lost it."

"Miss Brown?"

The detective did not reply. She had run her hand through the hole in the pocket and was now searching the corners between the lining and the cloth.

"Ha!" she cried at last, exactly like the detective in a play. "Here it is!"

With a swift movement she extricated her hand from the bottomless pocket and displayed between her thumb and forefinger a large emerald ring. [269]

"Why, that's the ring of my cousin, Judith Blount!" exclaimed the Professor in amazement. "And I have had it in my pocket all this time. Great heavens! what an extraordinary thing, and how did it get there?"

"Miss Blount forced Miss Brown to take charge of it while she was playing football. After Miss Brown came to from her faint, she must have been very cold and slipped her hands in the pockets of this coat for warmth——"

"She did," confirmed the Professor.

"And the ring slipped off. When she found it was lost she got up at dawn next day and went out in her slippers in the snow to find it, and nearly caught her death. But she's had no thanks for her trouble from your relation, I can assure you. Nothing but abuse——"

"What!" shouted the Professor. "You mean to say that Judith has dared to insinuate——"

"She has," said Miss Steel.

"And she whom Miss Brown has shielded—great heavens! this is too much."

He began walking up and down the room in a rage. [270]

"Shielded from what?"

"I am not at liberty to tell you," he replied. "The girl repented of what she did. I know that, but she's an ungrateful little wretch."

A scholarly professor of English literature, however, is no match for a well-trained detective, and with a knowing smile on her lips the inspector rose to leave.

"You may return the ring," she said. "It will be a great relief to Miss Molly Brown of Kentucky to know it has been found. She was about to give up two acres of good apple orchard to pay for it; the land, in fact, which was to provide the money for her college expenses."

And with that she sailed out of the room and went straight to the home of President Walker, with whom she spent the better part of an hour.

Professor Green followed close on her heels. He did not pause at Miss Walker's pretty stucco residence, however, but hastened down the campus and rang the bell at Queen's Cottage.

Miss Brown was in, he learned from the maid. She had only arrived from the Infirmary that afternoon.

The Professor waited in the sitting room deserted by the students at that hour, those who were not studying in their rooms being at Vespers. Presently Molly appeared, looking very slender and tall, like a pale flower swaying on its stalk. [271]

The Professor rushed up and seized her hand unceremoniously.

"My dear child!" he cried, "how am I ever going to make my apologies to you for all this trouble of which I have been the unconscious cause?"

"For what——" began Molly, too much astonished to finish her question.

"The ring! The ring! It's been concealed in the ragged lining of my shabby old overcoat all this time, and that clever detective of dormitories, or whatever she is, ferreted it out just now. Perhaps I should have thought of it myself; but, you see, I hadn't even heard the ring had been lost. I am afraid you suffered a great deal."

"I did at first; but after I grew better I never let myself slip back into that state again. I kept believing it would be found. I was so sure of it that I haven't really been unhappy at all. You see, everybody is so beautifully kind and no one believed——" [272]

"Great heavens!" interrupted the Professor, storming excitedly around the room, "that ungrateful, wicked girl to have made such an accusation—she shall hear from me what she owes to you! I'll take the ring to her myself later. She is my cousin, and her brother is as near to me as my own brother, but——"

"You aren't going to tell Prexy?" cried Molly.

"I must. Besides, I nearly gave it away to Miss Steel."

"Oh, well, if that's the case, she knows already. She's a detective, and if you let two words slip, she can easily guess the rest. There's no keeping anything from her. You may be sure Prexy knows it by this time."

"I'm rather relieved," said the Professor. "Judith will probably be well punished; but she should be."

"I've always wondered," said Molly, after a short pause, "why Judith did it."

The Professor looked at her closely with his humorous brown eyes.

"Have you no idea why?" he asked.

"Except for mischief and to annoy the seniors," she answered.

"Possibly," he said. "A girl who has been spoiled and petted as she has will give in to almost any whim that seizes her. However, such actions are not tolerated at Wellington, and she will have to learn a few pretty stiff lessons if she expects to remain here." [273]

Then Professor Green shook hands with Molly, gave her a little paternal advice about taking care of her health, and took his departure. His next destination was the President's house, where he waited in the drawing-room until Miss Steel had terminated her interview. He was prepared for a round scolding from his old friend, who had known him since his early youth, but the President was inclined to be lenient with the young man.

"It all goes to show," she said at the end of the interview, "that murder will out. But why did the foolish girl do that mischievous thing? What did she have to gain by it?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Jealous of some one prettier and more popular than herself, probably," he answered.

The President sighed.

"Who can understand the intricacies of a young girl's heart," she said. "I have been studying them for twenty years, and they are still a closed book to me." [274]

When Professor Green a little later returned the emerald ring to his cousin, he cut the visit as short as possible. He told her that she had deliberately and wrongfully accused one who had shielded her even at the risk of offending the President of Wellington College, and that it was he who had given the detective, already suspicious, the clue she wanted.

Judith wept bitterly, but her cousin showed no signs of relenting.

"If you want to be loved," he said, "learn unselfishness and gentleness and truthfulness. These are the qualities that make men and women beloved. You will never gain anything by cheating and lying."

The end of the episode was a pretty severe punishment for Judith Blount. She was suspended from college for three weeks and was compelled to resign from all societies for the rest of the winter. She left college next morning early, and no one saw her again until after Christmas, when she returned a much chastened and quieted young woman. [275]

A few days after she had gone Molly received a note from her from New York. It read:

"DEAR MISS BROWN:

"Will you forgive me? I am very unhappy.

"JUDITH BLOUNT."

You may be sure that Molly's reply was prompt and forgiving.

CHAPTER XXII.

 [276]

CHRISTMAS—MID-YEARS—AND THE WANDERTHIRST.

There are few lonelier and more dismal experiences in life than Christmas away from home for the first time. Molly felt her heart sink as the great day approached. One morning a trainload of chattering, laughing girls pulled out of the Wellington station. Judy hanging recklessly to the last step, waved her handkerchief until Molly's figure grew indistinct in the distance, and Nance on the crowded platform called out again and again, "Good-bye, Molly, dear. Good-bye!"

Molly almost regretted that she had ever left Kentucky, as the Christmas train became a point of black on the horizon.

"I might have ended my days as a teacher in a country school-house and been happier than this," she thought desperately, starting back to college. [277]

Some one came running up behind her. It was Mary Stewart who had been down to see some classmates off. She was to take the night train to New York.

"When do you get off?" she asked, slipping her arm through Molly's like the good comrade she was. "I'm surprised you didn't leave yesterday, with such a long journey before you."

"I'm not going home this Christmas," replied Molly.

"Not going?" began Mary. "You're to be left at Queen's by yourself?"

Molly nodded, vainly endeavoring to smile cheerfully.

"Then you're to go with me. I'll come right along now and help you pack," announced Mary decisively.

"But, Mary, I can't. I haven't anything—money or clothes——"

"Don't say 'but' to me! I've got everything. I've even got the drawing-room to myself on the night train to New York. You shall go with me. I don't know why I never thought of it before. We'll have a beautiful Christmas together. Since mother's death, five years ago, Christmas has been a dismal time at our house. You'll be just the person to cheer us up. It will be like having a child in the house. You shall have a Christmas tree and hang up your stocking. Father will be delighted and so will Brother Willie."

[278]

Thus overruled, Molly was borne triumphantly to New York that same evening, and spent one of the most wonderful Christmases of her life in Mary's beautiful home on Riverside Drive. As her mother and godmother both wisely sent her checks for Christmas gifts, she was not embarrassed by any lack of ready money. She was even rich enough to purchase a new evening dress and a pretty blouse which Mary had ordered to be sent up on approval, and not for many a year afterward did she guess why those charming things happened to be such bargains. But Molly was a very inexperienced young person, and knew little concerning prices at that time.

Mary's father was a fine man, quiet and self-contained, with a splendid rugged face. He treated his only daughter with indescribable tenderness, and called her "Little Mary." They did not see much of "Brother Willie," a sophomore at Yale, and very busy enjoying his holiday. He regarded Molly as a child and his sister as an old maid, but condescended to take them to the theatre twice.

[279]

But all good things must come to an end, and it seemed just a little while before Molly found herself back at her old desk in her room at Queen's, writing a "bread-and-butter" letter to Mr. Stewart, which pleased him mightily, since Mary's guests had never before taken that trouble.

Judy came back radiantly happy. She had had a glorious time in Washington with her "vagabond" parents, as she called them. Nance, too, had enjoyed her Christmas with her father and busy mother, who had come home to rest during the holidays. Only one of Queen's girls did not join the jolly circle that now congregated in the most hospitable room in the house to "swap" holiday experiences. But a letter had arrived from the missing member addressed to "Miss M. C. W. Brown," and beginning: "My Dear Molly Brown."

"Good-bye," the letter ran. "I'm off for Europe and Grandmamma, by the *Kismet*, sailing the eighteenth. I am afraid I was too much like a bull in a china shop at college. I was always breaking something, mostly rules. I've done lots of foolish things, and I am sorry. They were jokes, of course, most of them, and intended to frighten silly self-important people. I've learned a great deal from you and your friends, but I'd rather practice my new wisdom on other people. If you ever see me again you'll find me changed. I may enter a convent for a few years in France and learn to keep quiet. You did what you could for me, and so did the others. You are a first rate lot and you make a jolly good freshman class. I shall miss you, and I shall miss old Wellington. I wouldn't have come back this year if I hadn't felt the call of its two gray towers. Somehow, it's been more of a home to me than most places, and when I'm quite old and forgotten I shall go back and see it again some day. Good-bye again, and good luck. I've told Mrs. Murphy to give you my Persian prayer rug. It's just your color of blue.

[280]

"F. ANDREWS."

Molly read the letter aloud and the girls were half sorry and half relieved over its contents. After all, Frances was a very disturbing element, but as Margaret Wakefield announced later at a meeting of the G. F. Society, she had responded to kind treatment, and she, Margaret, moved that they send her a combination steamer letter of farewell and a bunch of violets to cheer her on her lonely voyage. The movement was promptly seconded by Molly, carried by universal acclaim, and the resolution put into effect immediately.

[281]

After Christmas comes the terror of every freshman's heart—the mid-year examinations. As the dreaded week approached, lights burned late in every house on the campus and nobody offered any interference. Behind closed doors sat scores of weary maidens with pale concentrated faces bent over text-books.

Judy Kean made a record at Queen's. She crammed history for thirty-six hours at a stretch, only stopping for food occasionally or to snatch a half hour's nap.

It was Saturday and bitter cold. Examinations were to begin on Monday, and there yet remained two more blessed days of respite. Molly, in a long, gray dressing gown, with a towel wrapped around her head, had been cramming mathematics since six in the morning, and now at eleven o'clock, she lifted her eyes from the hated volume and looked about her with a dazed expression as if she had suddenly awakened from a black dream. Nance had hurried into the room.

[282]

"Molly, for heaven's sake, go to Judy. I think she's losing her mind. She has overstudied and it has affected her brain. I can't do anything with her at all."

"What?" cried Molly, rushing down the hall, her long, gray wrapper trailing after her in voluminous folds.

She opened Judy's door unceremoniously and marched in.

The room looked as if a cyclone had struck it. The contents of the bureau drawers were dumped onto the floor; the closet was emptied, clothes and books piled about on the bed and chairs, and Judy's two trunks filled up what floor space remained.

Judy herself was working feverishly. She had packed a layer of books in one of the trunks and was now folding up her best dresses.

"Julia Kean, what are you doing?" cried Molly in a stern voice.

Judy gave her a constrained nod.

"Don't bother me now. There's a dear. I'm in a dreadful hurry."

[283]

Molly shook her violently by the shoulder. She had a feeling that Judy was asleep and must be waked up.

"Get up from there this minute and answer my question," she commanded.

"What was your question?" asked Judy with an embarrassed little laugh. "Oh, yes, you asked what I was doing. I should think you could see I wasn't gathering cowslips on the campus."

"Are you running away, Judy?" asked Molly, trying another tack.

"Yes, my Mariucci," cried Judy, quoting a popular song, "*I'm gona packa my trunk and taka my monk and sail for sunny It.*"

Molly refused even to smile at this witticism.

"I know what you're doing," she exclaimed. "You are running away from examinations. You're a coward. You are no better than a deserter from the army in time of war. It's bad enough in time of peace, but just before the battle—I'm so ashamed and disappointed in you that I can hardly understand how I ever could have loved you so much."

Judy went on stolidly packing, rolling her clothes into little bundles and stuffing them in anywhere she could find a place between her numerous books.

[284]

"Have you lost your nerve, Judy, dear?" said Molly, after a minute, kneeling down beside her friend and seizing her hands.

"I suppose so," said Judy, extricating her hands, and speaking in a hard, strained voice in an effort to keep from breaking down. "I'd rather not stay here and be disgraced by flunking, but there's another reason beside that, Molly. I know I look like a deserter and deserve to be shot, but there's another reason," she wailed; "there's another good reason."

"Why, Judy, dearest, what can it be?" asked Molly gently.

"They're going to Italy," she burst out. "They're sailing on Monday. I got the letter to-day, and, oh, I can't stand it—I can't endure it. They'll be in Sicily in a few weeks—and without me! Mamma hates the cold. So do I. I'm numb now with it. Oh, Molly, they'll be sailing without me, and I want to go. You can't understand what the feeling is. There is something in me that is calling all the time, and I can't help hearing it and answering. In my mind I can live through every bit of the voyage. At first it's cold, bitter cold, and then after a few days we get into the Gulf Stream and gradually it grows warmer. Even in the winter time the air is soft and smells of the south. At last the Azores come—cunning little islands snuggling down out there in the Atlantic—and finally you see a long line of coast—it's Africa; then Gibraltar and the Mediterranean—oh, Molly—and Algiers, lovely Algiers, nestling down between the hills and looking across such a harbor! You can see the domes of the mosques as you sail in and Arab boys come out in funny little boats and offer to row you to shore. It's delightfully warm and you smell flowers everywhere. The sky is a deep blue. It's like June. And then, after Algiers, comes Italy —"

[285]

Judy had risen to her feet now, and her eyes had an uncanny expression in them. She appeared to have lost sight entirely of the little room at Queen's, and through the chaos of books and clothing, she was seeing a vision of the South.

"Come back to earth, Judy," said Molly, gently pulling her sleeve. "Wouldn't your mother and father be angry with you for giving up college and joining them uninvited?"

[286]

"Angry?" cried Judy. "Of course not. Even if I just caught the steamer, it would be all right, they would fix it up somehow, and they would be glad—oh, so glad! What a glorious time we will have together. Perhaps we shall spend a few weeks in Capri. I shall try and make them stay a while in Capri. Such a view there is at Capri across the Bay. Papa loves Naples. He even loves its dirtiness and calls it 'local color.' We'll have to stay there a week to satisfy him, and then mamma will make us go to Ravello. She's mad about it; and then I'll have my choice—it's Venice, of course; but we'll wait until it's warmer for Venice. April is perfect there, and then Rome after Easter. Oh,

Molly, Molly, help me pack! I'm off—I'm off—isn't it glorious, Italy, when the spring begins, the roses and the violets and the fresias——"

Judy began running about the room, snatching her things from the bed and chairs and tossing them into the trunks helter-skelter. Molly watched her in silence for a while. She must collect her ideas, and think of something to say. But not now. It was like arguing with a lunatic to say anything now.

[287]

At last Judy's feverish energy burned itself out and she sat down on the bed exhausted.

"So you're going to give up four splendid years at college and all the friends you've made—Nance and me and Margaret and Jessie, and nice old Sallie Marks and Mabel, all the fun and the jolly times, the delightful, glorious life we have here—and for what? For a three months' trip you have taken before, and will take again often, no doubt. Just for three short, paltry little months' pleasure, you're going to give up things that will be precious to you for the rest of your life. It's not only the book learning, it's the associations and the friends——"

"I don't see why I should lose my friends," broke in Judy sullenly.

"They'll never be the same again. They couldn't after such a disappointment as this. You see, you'll always be remembered as a coward who turned and ran when examinations came—you lost your nerve and dropped out and even pretty little Jessie has the courage to face it. Oh, Judy, but I'm disappointed in you. It's a hard blow to come now when we're all fighting to save ourselves and pull through safely. And you—one of the cleverest and brightest girls in the class. Don't tell me your father will be pleased. He'll be mortified, I'm certain of it. He's much too fine a man to admire a cowardly act, no matter whose act it is. You'll see. He'll be shocked and hurt. If he had thought it was right for you to give up college on the eve of examinations, he would have written for you to come. It will be a crushing blow to him, Judy."

[288]

Judy lay on her bed, her hands clasped back of her head. There was a defiant look on her face, and she kicked the quilt up and down with one foot, like an impatient horse pawing the ground. Then, suddenly, she collapsed like a pricked balloon. Burying her face in the pillows, she began sobbing bitterly, her body shaking convulsively with every sob. It was a terrible sight to see Judy cry, and Molly hoped she would be spared such another experience.

Without saying another word, Molly began quietly unpacking the trunks and putting the things back in their places. Then she pulled the empty trunks into the hall. This done, she filled a basin with water, recklessly poured in an ample quantity of Judy's German cologne, and sitting on the side of the bed, began bathing her friend's convulsed and swollen face. Gradually Judy's sobs subsided, her weary eyelids drooped and presently she dropped off into a deep, exhausted sleep.

[289]

Nance crept into the room.

"She's all right now," whispered Molly. "She's had an attack of the 'wanderthirst,' but it's passed."

All day and all night Judy slept, and on Sunday morning she was her old self once more, gay and laughing and full of fun. That afternoon she was an usher at Vespers in Wellington Chapel, with Molly and Nance, and wore her best suit and a big black velvet hat.

She never alluded again to her attack of wanderthirst, but her devotion to Molly deepened and strengthened as the days flew by until it became as real to her as her love for her mother and father.

Once in the midst of the dreaded examinations they did not seem so dreadful after all. The girls at Queen's came out of the fight with "some wounds, but still breathing," as Margaret Wakefield had put it. Molly had a condition in mathematics.

"I got it because I expected it," she said.

But Judy came through with flying colors—not a single black mark against her. Jessie barely pulled through, and her friends rejoiced that the prettiest, most frivolous member of the freshman class had made such a valiant fight and won.

[290]

CHAPTER XXIII.

SOPHOMORES AT LAST.

[291]

"Freshman, arise!
Gird on thy sword!
Captivity is o'er.
To arms! To arms!
For, lo! thou art

The words of this stirring song floated in through the open windows at Queen's one warm night in early June. Moonlight flooded the campus, and the air was sweet with the perfume of lilac and syringa.

A group of sophomores had gathered in front of the house to serenade the freshmen at Queen's, who had immediately repaired to the piazza to acknowledge this unusual honor paid them by their august predecessors.

"I think it would be far more appropriate if they sang:

[292]

"When all the saints who from their labors rest,"

remarked Mabel Hinton, who, in order to make a record, had studied herself into a human skeleton.

"Well," said Molly Brown, "when I left home last September, one of my brothers cheerfully informed me that I looked like 'a rag and a bone and a hank of hair.' I am afraid I don't feel very saint-like now, because I have gained ten pounds, and I'm not tired of anything, except packing my clothes. I'm so sorry to leave blessed old Queen's that I could kiss her brown cheek, if it didn't look foolish."

"Well, go and kiss the side of the house then," put in Judy. "You have a poetic nature, Molly; but I wouldn't have it changed. I like it just as it is."

"Do you know," interrupted Margaret Wakefield, "that Queen's, from having once been scorned as a residence, has now become a very popular abode, and there were so many applications for rooms here for next year that the registrar has had to make a waiting list for the first time in connection with Queen's. Think of that at old Queen's!"

[293]

"It's because it's the residence of a distinguished person," announced Molly. "I think we should put a brass plate on the front door, stating that in this house lived a class president who possessed every attribute for the office. She was versed in parliamentary law, she had an executive mind, and she was beloved by all who knew her."

Margaret was pleased at this compliment.

"*Voyons, voyons, que vous me flattez!*" she exclaimed. "It's your warm Southern nature that makes you so enthusiastic. Now, the real reason why old brown Queen's, with her moldering vines, is so popular all of a sudden is because you are here."

It was Molly's turn now to be pleased.

"We won't argue such a personal matter," she said, squeezing Margaret's hand. "But I'm glad I'm booked here for next year. I was afraid Nance would want a 'singleton,' she has such a retiring nun-like nature."

"Me?" exclaimed Nance, disregarding English in her amazement. "Why, I've had the happiest winter of my whole life with you, Molly. If there's a chance for another one like it, I'm only too thankful."

[294]

"Certainly Mary Carmichael Washington Brown is a modest soul," thought Judy, who happened to know that her friend had had some five or six tempting offers to move into better quarters the next year at no greater expense to herself. One was from Mary Stewart, who was to return next winter for a post-graduate course. Another was from Judith Blount, who had proposed Molly for membership in the Beta Phi Society next year, and had furthermore invited the surprised young freshman to take the study of her apartment for a bedroom and offered her the constant use of her sumptuous sitting room.

Certainly, if ever there was an expression of true remorse and repentance, that was one, Molly thought, and the allusion to roommates reminded her that she must say good-bye to Judith, for there would be no time in the morning for last farewells.

"I am going over to the Beta Phi house for a minute," she announced. "Any one want to come along?"

Margaret and Jessie, who had friends in that "abode of fashion," as it was called, joined her, and presently the three white figures were lost in the shadows on the campus.

[295]

"She is going to say farewell to black-eyed Judith," observed Judy in a low voice to Nance, "and all I would say is what the colored preacher said: 'Can the le-o-pard change his spots?'"

Nance smiled gravely. She did not possess Judy's prejudiced nature, but her convictions were strong.

"Do you think she's a 'le-o-pard,' Judy?" she asked.

"She may be a domesticated one," said Judy, "of the genus known as 'cat.'"

"Aren't you ashamed, Judy?" exclaimed Nance, reprovingly.

But it must be confessed that a few doubts still lurked in her own heart concerning the sincerity of proud Judith's repentance.

In the meantime, the three freshmen had separated in the upper hall of the Beta Phi House, and Molly had given a timid rap with Judith's fine brass knocker.

Instantly the door flew open and she found herself precipitated into a roomful of people, at least it seemed so at first, who had just subsided into quiet because some one was going to play. [296]

Molly was about to retreat in great confusion when Miss Grace Green seized one hand and Mary Stewart the other. Judith came forward with a show of extreme cordiality and Richard Blount left the piano and actually ran the full length of the room, exclaiming:

"It's Miss Molly Brown of Kentucky!"

Molly knew she was breaking into a party, but there was nothing to do but make a call of a few minutes and then take her leave as gracefully as possible under the circumstances.

Professor Edwin Green had also shaken her by the hand warmly, and pushing up a chair had insisted on her sitting down. They had all drawn their chairs around her in a semicircle, and Richard Blount had brought over the piano stool and placed it directly in front of her so that he could look straight at her.

In fact, here sat the little freshman, blushing crimson and painfully embarrassed, enthroned in a large armchair, and gathered around her was a circle of very delightful, not to say, admiring persons.

As one of these persons was Judith's brother and two were her near cousins, Molly thought she could explain their excessive cordiality. They knew the story of the ring and they were anxious to make amends. [297]

She recalled, with a furtive inner smile, the last time she was in those rooms, when, as a waitress, she had upset the coffee on the Professor's knees. How glad she was that the painful experience was well over and forgotten by now. But she was glad about many things that evening. She was happy to see that Mary and Judith had made up their differences, and were once more friends. She knew that Mary, who had the kindest heart in the world, could never stay angry long.

"I didn't know that Judith was giving a party," Molly began, still very much embarrassed. "I just dropped in to say good-bye because I am leaving to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow morning?" repeated Richard Blount. "Wasn't it lucky for me you happened in to-night. I had expected to call on you to-morrow afternoon, and think how disappointed I should have been to have found the nest empty and the bird flown."

"So you are really off to-morrow?" broke in Professor Green. "I am so sorry. I was going to ask you to have tea in the Cloisters with my sister and me in the afternoon." [298]

Again Molly smiled to herself. Tea in the Cloisters, with a distinguished professor and his charming sister! Only nine months before she had been a lonely, shivering little waif of a freshman locked in the Cloisters. The words of the sophomore "croak" came back to her:

"They have locked me in the Cloisters;
They have fastened up the gate.
Oh, let me out! Oh, let me out!
It's growing very late."

"I am sorry that my ticket is bought and my berth engaged, and the expressman coming for my trunk to-morrow at nine," she said. "If all those things were not so, I should love to drink soup ——" she stopped and flushed a deep red.

What absurd trick of the mind had made her say "soup"? "I mean tea," she went on hastily, hoping no one had heard the break.

Miss Green was talking with Mary Stewart. Richard Blount was twirling on the piano stool, his hands deep in his pockets, and Judith was engaged at a side table in pouring lemonade into glasses. [299]

There was a twinkle of amusement in the Professor's brown eyes, and he gave Molly a delightful smile.

"I must be going," she said anxiously, rising.

"Not till you've had a glass of lemonade, for I made it myself," said Richard, gallantly handing her one on a plate.

Molly looked doubtfully toward Judith.

"I don't want to be like that young man in the rhyme," she said.

“There was a young man so benighted,
He never knew when he was slighted.
He’d go to a party and eat just as hearty,
As if he’d been really invited.”

Everybody laughed, and Judith suddenly becoming a model hostess, exclaimed:

“Indeed, you must stay, Molly, and have some lemonade. Richard didn’t make it at all. He only squeezed the lemons.”

Molly, therefore, remained and had a beautiful time, and when she really did take her departure the entire party, including Judith, escorted her across the moonlit campus to the door of Queen’s. But Molly was still certain that it was the ring episode and nothing else that made them all so polite and attentive.

[300]

And so she informed Nance and Judy that night as she unlocked her trunk for the third time in ten minutes to stuff in some overlooked belonging.

But Judy sniffed the air and exclaimed:

“Ring, nothing! It’s popularity!”

Molly smiled and went to bed, feeling that her last day at Wellington had been a decided improvement on the first one.

The next morning Queen’s Cottage was a pandemonium of trunks and bags and excited young women, rushing up and down the halls. Cries could be heard from every room in the house of:

“The laundress hasn’t brought my shirtwaists! Perfidious woman!”

“The expressman’s here!”

“Is your trunk strapped?”

“I’ve got to sleep in an upper berth.”

“Don’t forget to write me.”

“Where are you to be this summer?”

“I can’t get this top down and the trunk man’s waiting!”

“Oh, dear, do hurry! We’ll miss the bus!”

[301]

“Young ladies, the bus is coming,” called the voice of Mrs. Markham from the front door.

And then, with a fluttering of handkerchiefs and many a last call of “good-bye,” the bus-load of girls moved sedately down the avenue.

Molly, looking back at the twin gray towers of Wellington, understood why Frances Andrews wanted so much to return.

“How glad I am to be only a sophomore,” she cried. “I shall have three more years at Wellington!”

THE END.

Transcriber’s Note: Besides some minor printer’s errors the following correction has been made: on page 172 “Professor” has been changed to “President” (the doctor at one side, the [President](#) at the other). Otherwise the original has been preserved, including inconsistent spelling and hyphenation.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOLLY BROWN'S FRESHMAN DAYS ***

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