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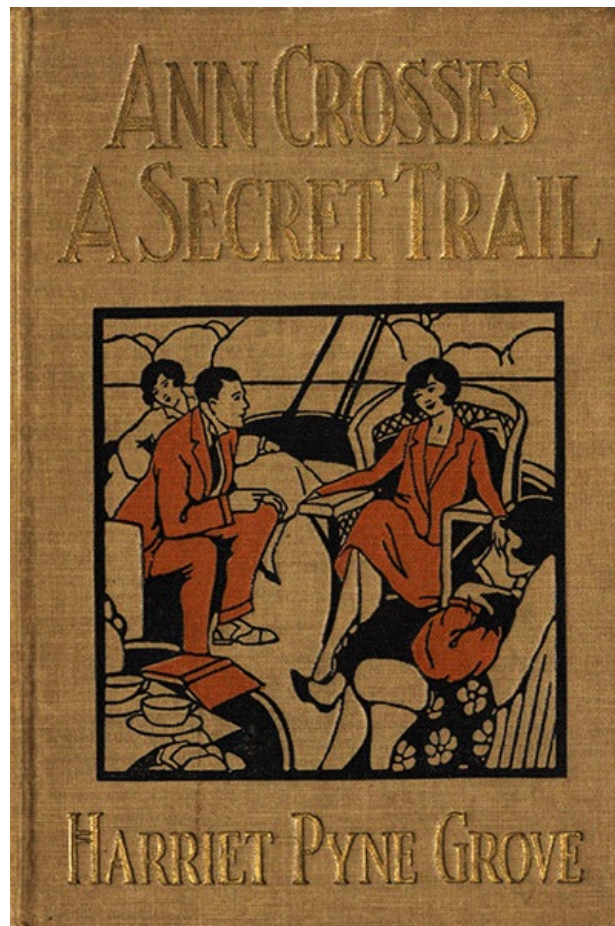
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ANN CROSSES A SECRET TRAIL



It was cool enough for a wrap on deck.
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ANN CROSSES A SECRET TRAIL

By HARRIET PYNE GROVE

AUTHOR OF

"Ann Sterling," "The Courage of Ann," "Ann and the Jolly Six," "The
Greycliff Girls Series," etc.



A. L. BURT COMPANY
Publishers New York

ANN STERLING SERIES

A SERIES FOR GIRLS 12 TO 18
YEARS OF AGE

By HARRIET PYNE GROVE

ANN STERLING
THE COURAGE OF ANN
ANN AND THE JOLLY SIX
ANN CROSSES A SECRET TRAIL

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ANN CROSSES A SECRET TRAIL

Made in "U. S. A."

Ann Crosses A Secret Trail

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CHAPTER I

ON THE SURFACE

AFTER the members of the Jolly Six had departed from Sterling Ranch for their respective homes, Ann Sterling suffered the usual reaction. It had been "such a wonderful house party," she told her mother. The presence of her aunt at the ranch depressed Ann, though after talking matters over with her father, she decided once more not to worry. Little things, however, irritated her, and she had to force herself to be polite and kind and not to let it seem that she avoided her aunt. This was the easier to manage because Suzanne was there. She and her cousin enjoyed a few quiet visits with Marjorie and Clifford Hart and rode out somewhere every morning, for the good of themselves and their horses. Kendall Gordon, Clifford's college friend, had gone and the other boys were making up for lost time on the summer's work, though Herman Olson once brought his sister Hilda, who had been away all summer and had not seen Ann at all.

The beautiful little lodge among the peaks, Ann's "very own," was visited once more before Suzanne went East with her mother. Mr. Sterling risked his new car, to take Madam LeRoy and Mrs. Tyson there, with Ann, Suzanne and Mrs. Sterling. They drove very slowly, reaching the lodge without accident; but Madam LeRoy insisted that the slow pace was for the sake of the car, not for her, "though I can enjoy the scenery twice as well because of it," she said. "I do not wonder, Ann," she added, "that you love your mountains."

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Mrs. Tyson frequently asked her mother if the altitude affected her, though the elevation was not particularly great at "Sterling Heights." But they heard no more from her about "Mother's mind failing," and as Madam LeRoy openly expressed her irritation at being warned about her heart, Aunt Sue desisted. On the surface, everything was pleasant and happy.

Ann's grandmother walked about with Ann and Suzanne, admiring the falls, the rushing river, the emerald lake, the peaks with their snow, and the floating clouds. "I am glad that I decided to come up," she said. "I would not have missed this beautiful picture, to take back East with me.

Then, girls, if you are here some time without me, as you will be, of course, I shall know how to imagine what you are doing."

"And it will be much more delightful, Grandmother, since you have been here," promptly spoke Ann. "We shall have you to associate with all this. By the way, Grandmother, we want your picture, too."

On the porch, with the background of the logs; on the lake shore, with a background of peaks and clouds; in various nooks among the trees, the girls snapped not only Madam LeRoy, but the rest of the family, alone or in groups. "These are for my family album," laughed Ann. "I'm going to have a special album for Sterling Heights Lodge."

"Is that what you are going to call it?" inquired Mr. Sterling.

"I think so, though I may change my mind again. I wish that I could put the beauty of the place into a name that would be appropriate."

Madam LeRoy thought of several more improvements that she asked the privilege of helping to make another season, talking with Mrs. Ault, who promised to take care of the rugs and furniture, making things snug for the winter before she and Mr. Ault left the place. The Sterling party stayed over one night only.

Then, "at last," Nancy said to Ann privately, as Mrs. Tyson, Suzanne, Felice and the chauffeur rolled away in the Tyson car, intending to pick up Maurice Tyson further East, when he should leave the young men with whom he was camping.

Everybody, including Grandmother, drew a sigh of relief. There would be no more living on the surface, trying not to express what they felt. There would be no more listening to little poisoned barbs of speech implying criticism, expressing a feigned anxiety about Madam LeRoy, in the guise of virtue and devotion.

Rita came right out one day soon after the departure and asked Ann what she thought of her aunt. "Nothing here suited her," said Rita. "You could feel how superior she felt to us all. You would have thought that your mother had kidnaped your grandmother by the way she shook her head to me once and said that they ran a terrible risk by bringing her mother away from the sanitarium where she put her.

"I spoke right up and said, 'From what I hear there are others that have taken worse risks than that in regard to their mother.' Of course I meant her, and I went right out of the room with my dust cloth, for fear I might say something else. Nancy told me a lot, you see, and I thought I'd better ask you if it was true."

"What Nancy told you is probably true in the main, though I suppose that there is a lot of gossip among Grandmother's servants that may not be true."

"She,—I mean Mrs. Tyson—was not going to let you folks have her mother and her mother's money, I suppose. That is what Nancy said. But it was a queer performance, in my opinion, to come right here, after what Nancy says she has done to your mother. It put you in a funny position, too. You couldn't turn her out, though I think, myself, that that's what ought to have been done!"

"We couldn't do that, Rita," laughed Ann. "People can't act like 'fish-wives' in a fight. Can you imagine Mother's doing anything of the sort?"

"Indeed I could not! And to be taken advantage of that way! If anything happens, we know what we know out here about the Sterling family!"

"I hope that it's good, Rita."

"It most certainly is!"

"Nothing is going to 'happen,' Rita. Grandmother knows us by this time. But you see, Rita, Aunt Sue is Grandmother's daughter and Mother's own sister. So it would make Mother feel bad to have any gossip about it out here."

"You are right, Ann, and you need not warn me. I'll not say a word outside of the family. And yet, Ann, Mrs. Tyson can't say and do the things she does and have it all kept a secret!"

"I suppose not," thoughtfully said Ann.

"We all liked that boy of hers, though, who stopped here on his way to your place in the mountains. My, but he is a handsome chap, and with such pleasant ways! Suzanne, too, is a pretty girl and pleasant for the way she's been spoiled."

Ann supposed that the spoiling of Suzanne had also been revealed by Nancy, from whom Rita had had so much information about the LeRoy establishment in the East.

It was characteristic of Mrs. Sterling's reserve that she had not told Ann what took place when

her sister first made her appearance at the ranch. "What did you say to her, Daddy?" Ann had asked her father, but her father passed the matter over lightly. "Very politely, Ann," he replied, "I said to her frankly what your mother could not say, in regard to the openness of future relations and our regret that things had been misrepresented in the past, with the hope that such methods would not be used again. Then I made her welcome at the ranch and got out as quickly as I could!"

Time was all too short for all that had to be done before Ann started in on her sophomore year at school. Mrs. Sterling was tired with the strain which she had been under while her sister was there. "Never mind, Ann," she said. "Leave all the traps that need mending behind. Perhaps we'll have more time another summer. Your frocks are in pretty good condition and we shall have time to buy what is necessary in the East before school begins."

"Am I going with you to Grandmother's before school begins?" Ann joyously asked.

"Indeed you are. I would not appear there without you for anything," her mother replied with a whimsical smile. "I need your courage to sustain me, little daughter, since your father is not going East with us. Just think, Ann, how many years it has been!" Mrs. Sterling looked away toward the distant mountains with a sad expression.

"See here, Mother, you are to be happy, not sad, to think about going back. Suppose Aunt Sue is there to spoil it a little. She hasn't a bit more right there than you. I'm afraid that you have what Katherine says her father calls an 'inferiority complex,' when you think of your older sister. Don't let her browbeat you, little mudder! She thinks that she is always right, or pretends to think it, and wants to run the universe. I believe that you *do* need your little old Ann to keep up your spirits!"

"Indeed I do, 'Gentle Hands,' but I am not without some spirit, my little daughter. Nobody there shall know what I feel."

"Good. And don't feel that you are 'company' there, Mother. Since Aunt Sue runs it all, I have always felt that way, but now it seems as if things ought to be different, don't you think so?"

"We shall be Mother's guests, of course. Yet, Ann, things cannot be changed all in a minute,—even if my mother were a younger woman, you know, able to take charge of a big establishment like that. I shall most certainly not place myself in opposition to my sister in regard to household affairs. They are not of enough importance. Mother is thinking matters over. Unless your Aunt Sue persists in making trouble, and I think that she has had a lesson in that respect, there will be little change, unless it is as regards financial affairs. Mother intends to look into that, she says. If they are not straight, it may make a difference."

"I see," said Ann. "Whatever happens, Mother, you can count on me not to embarrass you by making any trouble. I'll be peaceful unless attacked!" Ann was laughing now.

"No aggressive warfare?"

"Exactly, Mother, and yet I am ready to defend you and Grandmother to the last gasp!"

"My Montana heroine!" laughed her mother, falling into Ann's melodramatic mood. "Very good. I told you that I would not go without you, you see."

CHAPTER II

WHISK!—NEW ENGLAND AGAIN

How differently Ann felt this time as she approached the now dear home of her Grandmother on her trip from the West, no one but Ann herself could have told. Then, the mystery of her Grandmother's attitude toward her mother was to be solved; now, her mother and grandmother were with her, peacefully talking of their plan to go South after Christmas, her mother showing nothing of any strong feeling which may have at times possessed her when she thought of it all. Then, Ann was wondering who would meet her, how her aunt's family would regard her; now, she was returning and would count upon a warm welcome from Roy and Madge, Maurice, Suzanne, and perhaps her Uncle Tyson, though she was not sure but he might consider her responsible for any new attitude of her grandmother in respect to finances. Uncle Tyson was next to the throne, thought Ann, the throne as expressed in Aunt Sue.

Ann was eager to have her mother once inside of the old home and watched her lovingly from time to time.

"No," her grandmother was saying, "I was not interested in Sue's plan to go abroad. I do not want to go myself, and I did not feel like sacrificing myself this time, probably financing the whole thing. It will be much better to have a Christmas reunion here, if William can come on from Montana, as we hope; then we can spend the rest of the season in Florida. I have not been there for years."

Ann wondered who would go, the older folks, of course, with, perhaps, Madge and Roy.

"What do you think of the place?" asked Madam LeRoy, as the chauffeur drove them into the drive.

"Beautiful," said Mrs. Sterling, a smile on her face, as she looked at the familiar grounds, changed a little, to be sure, but the same, with the great trees, the old lilac and syringa bushes, the flower beds in much the same places. "There is more shrubbery and some of the young trees have grown into large ones," Mrs. Sterling continued. "But there is the old arbor,—oh, it is good to see it again, Mother!" Mrs. Sterling's eyes filled as she looked, and without apology she drew out her dainty handkerchief to wipe them.

Madam LeRoy looked at her daughter with some tenderness. "All this absence and misunderstanding was needless. I hope that I may remember that, to keep me strong enough in dealing with Sue." This she said in a low tone, not to be overheard by the chauffeur.

Mrs. Tyson had had the good taste not to go to the station to meet them, nor was she outside, nor in the hall. A beaming Munson was at the door with a man and a maid or two to take the luggage and orders from the travelers. "Mrs. Tyson was called to the village, Madam," said Munson, "on a matter of business. She left her apologies and said that she would be back before dinner."

"Thank you. You may send Rose to me, please. I left Nancy at her friend's in the village. Attend to her baggage, also, and did you see to engaging a maid for Mrs. Sterling?"

So Grandmother was going to have a maid for Mother, too! Would wonders never cease! Ann looked on with interest, while the butler indicated one of the maids at hand as the one recently engaged for Mrs. Sterling. If Mrs. Sterling were as surprised as Ann, she did not show it, and after all, it is not so difficult to fall into ways to which you have once been accustomed.

Everything was done in a matter of fact way, quiet, rather formal, yet Ann was conscious of a new feeling and atmosphere, of approval in the glances directed toward her pretty mother, so sweet, so dear, as Ann thought. Then there came an interruption. Roy, unabashed, slid straight down the stairs upon the "sacred bannister," as Ann said afterward.

"Hello, Gramma! Awful glad to see you back. It's been a terribly long time,—and Ann, I howled and yelled when I found out that they had gone and started for Montana without me! Old Maurice, too!"

Ann wondered if Roy were in for a rebuke from Madam LeRoy, but none was forthcoming. She bent over the little boy to kiss him. "Glad to see 'Gramma' back, are you, dear? Well, that is good. Gramma is glad to see you, too. And I have a real wild West suit for you in my trunk."

"Oh, goody! You're a good sport, Gramma," he added, to the horror of Munson. But Madam LeRoy only laughed. "As soon as the trunks are brought up, Roy, come to my room. I have to rest and get ready for dinner now."

"All right. I'll watch for the trunks."

Rose, who had given Ann a welcoming smile, in remembrance of one trying day when she had served Ann to a lunch, eaten in worried loneliness, so far as the family was concerned, respectfully followed the travelers upstairs and showed Mrs. Sterling, with her new maid, the room that was to be hers. It was next to Ann's, who was told that her mother's maid would also serve her. "I'll not be much bother to you, Adeline," said Ann. "Take good care of Mother, for she is worn out."

This was luxury. Her own room, her own bath, a maid when she needed one,—and Mother next door! "I wonder," thought Ann, "if it is the room she used to have." It was, as Ann found a little later.

Suzanne was away with Madeline for a week end visit in Boston, it seemed. Maurice had driven his mother to the village. Madge, thinner than ever, and much taller, waited for Ann, sitting outside her door, as Ann found when she started out after dressing. "Why, Madge, dear child! Why didn't you knock?"

"I promised I wouldn't. But I was going to be right here, just the same!"

Ann embraced the child and accompanied her, down the stairs and out to the lawn, where they

wandered around the walks a little while, Madge picking a few flowers for Ann. "You have grown so, Madge," said the surprised Ann. "I have not seen you, though, for almost a year. I missed seeing you at the spring vacation."

"Yes; why didn't you stay, then, Ann? Miss White said that she saw you when you were leaving. Was it because Grandmother wasn't here? Don't you care for the rest of us? I asked Mother about your coming, and she wouldn't tell. 'Run along, Madge, and be a good girl,' she said. And then they went out to your ranch and did not take us! But then, we ought to be used to that, I suppose. Mother does not like to be bothered with us."

All Madge's grievances came out at once. Ann's quick sympathy went out to the little girl who had so little real mothering.

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"There was a good reason for my not staying, Madge, that time I came for such a short stay. Yes, I care a great deal for Grandmother, and there was a reason why I had to see her, Madge; but I do care very much for you and Roy and I was sorry not to see you. Some day, Madge, I hope that you may come with me out West and see our ranch and the lovely place in the mountains that my father gave me. But after all, it is not good for little girls to travel so much. I could not when I was as young as you are."

"Couldn't you? But then I think that your mother stayed with you, didn't she?"

"Yes. Mother and Father taught me my lessons."

Madge thought a little before she spoke. "Well, I'm rather glad that Mother does not teach me. I suppose that she knows a lot, but we couldn't tease her the way we tease Miss White and our other teachers."

"It doesn't seem to me, Madge, that it is a very good thing to tease your governess. She can not teach you so much."

"Oh, it's all so stupid anyhow. I learn more when I read in the library the things I want to read."

Ann said nothing to this, realizing that Madge's teaching must be poor indeed, or Madge unusually hard to interest, if such were the case.

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As they walked along the hedge of shrubbery at the far side of the lawn, Mrs. Tyson's small car, Maurice driving, came in and up to the manor. Maurice saw Ann, though she was at some distance from the drive, and saluted as he swept by. Mrs. Tyson looked out and bowed, as Maurice mentioned the fact that Ann was there. "So they came," she said.

"As they telegraphed they would," dryly remarked her son. He opened the door for his mother, assisted her out of the car and carried several packages up the steps, handing them to the butler. Then he rapidly left the verandah, crossed the lawn, and made his way to where Ann and his little sister were standing.

"I would have met you, Ann, if Mother had not insisted on my driving her to the bank. This is fine—having you here again." It was a charming Maurice that met Ann without the familiarity that had embarrassed her before, yet with a real warmth of feeling that Ann enjoyed. He, at least, was glad to see her. Always clean and spotless of attire, the fresh tints of youth were good to look upon in Maurice. This was not the Maurice it seemed, that said goodbye with such daring and impertinence upon the mountain heights!

"We were well taken care of, Maurice. Yes, I am glad to be here again. I love this place, and it seems different now that Mother is here, too."

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"I am glad that she is," soberly said Maurice. "I want to get acquainted with my aunt Elizabeth. I see no reason why this should not be a happy visit, do you, Ann?"

Ann hesitated a moment. "Suppose that we try our best to make it so, Maurice?"

"It is a bargain. Madge, will you be good, too?" Maurice ruffled Madge's short locks with a brotherly hand.

"Depends upon what you mean by being good. I find that the different members of the family have different notions about that. If you mean by my being good that I'm to let you and Ann visit, and go away, then I'm not going to do it!"

"Why Madge, do you think that your brother would be so impolite?" mockingly said Maurice. But he let Madge put her two arms through his and lean on him, as they strolled along, and Ann liked him for it.

"Do you remember that night when you and Ann and Roy and I played Go-Bang and things?" inquired Madge.

"Do I? How could I forget it? Do you remember it, Ann?"

"Yes, indeed," laughingly said Ann. "There was a game of hide and seek on."

"Yes, and Maddy and Suzanne never found you either."

"No," said Maurice. "But it would be safer if you would forget that, Madge."

Madge looked at Maurice with understanding, when she replied, "I'll not mention it to the wrong people, Maury. But Suzanne is nicer than she was. I don't think that she is as crazy about Maddy, either."

"Is that so? Pretty good thing, then, don't you think so?"

"M-hm. Oh, bother,—there's Miss White calling me!"

Madge waited as long as she dared, then ran toward the house to join her governess.

"What have you been doing, Ann, since I saw you last?" asked Maurice. They had reached the little arbor among the evergreens by that time and Maurice flicked away some leaves and twigs from the seat with his handkerchief. "Sit down a bit, sweet cousin,—'Gentle Hands,' is it?"

"So Never-Run called me; but you could hardly accuse that old Indian of sentiment, could you?"

"It is not misplaced this time," said Maurice, sitting down beside Ann and leaning back against the lattice, hands over his head. "Is that a new frock you have on?"

"Same old one. I've had no time this summer to think of frocks."

"I don't believe that you spend much time thinking of them anyhow."

"I wonder how I ought to take that, Maurice. A girl that doesn't think of them at all is likely to be what the girls call 'dowdy,' and a girl that thinks about them too much is usually frivolous."

"You are neither dowdy nor frivolous, Ann, and have so many good looks that you need never worry."

"Thanks, kind cousin," said Ann rather laconically, "this is so good of you! But what have you been doing yourself?"

"You have not answered my question," answered Maurice, "but I rather got you off the subject by my remarks, so unresponsively received! Why, I finished up the camping trip, joined Mother, came home and have hung around more or less ever since. Oh, yes, I went down to New York with Ron on his yacht, but we were not gone long."

"That must have been fun. You mean Ronald Bentley?"

"Yes, none other."

"I liked Ronald, as well as Jack Hudson; but 'Beano' Bates!"

Maurice laughed. "Oh, Beano is a pretty good scout. He hasn't a lot of brains, but he can spend his money." Maurice looked teasingly at Ann. He had not known Ann this long without learning how to provoke her.

"A noble thing to like him for!"

"Your ideals, my dear cousin, are a wonderful thing in this world of get and grab, but they won't work in every day life, I am afraid."

"Mine have worked so far, Maury."

"But you have never had to dig for the simoleons."

"Have you, that you know so much?"

"I can't say that I have, and frankly, sweet Ann, I don't want to."

Ann was a pretty picture as she sat looking at Maurice, thoughtfully considering what he was saying.

"I can see, Maurice, that it must be terribly hard not to have what makes one comfortable. And it would be awful to have somebody you love working too hard, or not having the necessities, or even the opportunities! But I just know, Maury, inside of me, that it doesn't do people any good to put so much stress on having a lot of money and—oh, 'slashing around,' as Rita says, and trying to live at the top notch, better than anybody else."

"That is a fine theory, but how about yourself? Don't you like pretty clothes and traveling and having fun with the girls at school?"

"Yes. And that is one trouble here, Maurice. I'm afraid that I'll get to liking to have a maid and not doing anything useful and wanting as pretty things as Suzanne has and getting lazy about school work and everything."

"That last remark has no 'pussonal' application, has it, Ann?" Maurice was looking at Ann with amusement.

"I wasn't thinking of anybody but myself in making it, Maurice. But you can't believe how I hate to get to studying sometimes. Still, I'd hate to fall behind the rest, so I guess pride will keep me going this year, if nothing else does."

"Some have one sort of pride and some have another, Ann. If I 'get by' at college, it's enough for me. You haven't any use for that kind of a student, have you?"

"I might be very *fond* of one," laughed Ann, "but I couldn't admire the attitude!"

"Maybe I'll turn over a new leaf this year, Ann, if I can, at this late day. It *would* be sort of a disgrace, wouldn't it, if I found I couldn't get by?"

"I'd be sorry for your father if you missed graduating."

"You wouldn't care yourself, any?"

"Certainly I would," but Ann felt guilty at the thought of how little interest she had taken the previous year in what Maurice did. He was a kind, agreeable cousin, in a family where she was having a hard time; that was all.

"Ann, I have been wanting to apologize to you, ever since I came home, for the way I embarrassed you in saying goodbye. We boys had been kidding each other about different things and were in wild spirits, more or less, and like an idiot I spoke impulsively, as usual, and spoiled it all. What are you smiling at?"

"The 'as usual.' But Maurice, I think it good of you to explain. It did annoy me, more than you can imagine; but I concluded that you did not mean to hurt me, for you have been lovely to me always. I haven't been holding it against you."

"I don't believe that you would hold it against me, Ann, but I was sorry,—not for what I said, but for the time and manner of it. And 'as usual' did not refer to a habit of proposing to girls, which is what I suppose you smiled at?"

"You are too much of a mind reader, Maury," laughed Ann. "I told you then that you were crazy, and I still think it a crazy idea, suggested by your mother, perhaps, as you said,—"

"Mother did not suggest it, Ann," Maurice quickly interrupted Ann. "It was on the way out. I was expressing myself to Mother, in no uncertain terms, on visiting your mother and father at the ranch. I told her that I would have nothing to do with it, and that after certain things that I knew about had happened, she would show a good deal of 'nerve' to walk in on you there.

"Mother was icy and cool, and told me what she thought of my opinion, and went on, as she does, about not deserting her dear mother, who needed her and all that! I may as well tell you, Ann, because you have seen it. Mother has her fine points, but when it comes to putting it over us children, as she used to, it simply can't be done any more!"

"Don't, Maurice!" said Ann, her hand up to stop him, for well as she knew what he said was true, she could not bear to have him say it. "She is your mother, at least."

"One thing that I like about you, Ann, is that you are so sincere. I can't imagine your deliberately trying to deceive me."

"Thank you, Maury. I never will."

"You might think that because we are her children we will try the same sort of thing. But some times it works the other way. Our Dad isn't happy,—you can tell that. He has talked to me, Ann. I'm not much for him to be proud of, but I'm square, Ann; and since I smashed that car I have tried to be easier on Dad."

Ann's brows were knit as she listened. It was one thing to think what she thought of Aunt Sue and matters among the Tysons, and another thing to listen to Maurice tell about it. It jarred Ann's feeling of fitness, if nothing else. Maurice went on.

"Not that I'm trying to make myself out anything but an extravagant fellow. I like to have a good time all right. But I started to tell you where you came into the conversation with Mother. When she started talking about Grandmother, I let her 'rave on,' and then I declared what I thought where you were concerned, that you had just as much right as the rest of us to have a share in Grandmother's affections and money. It isn't only the money, Ann, with Mother. She's jealous. I don't know what started it (Ann could have told him) but that is a fact. Then I said a few things about you and added that if you were not my cousin I'd like to marry you some day. Mother took it up too quickly! She said that the relationship between us need make no difference, and that she thought it an excellent idea. I wanted to clear up your notion that it was Mother's first thought. Nobody can help loving you, Ann. Look at Clifford Hart and that Gordon man, and you should have heard Jack go on about you. That is why I wanted to get a word in."

"Well, Maurice, if it is of any satisfaction to you to know it, I will say," laughed Ann, "that your amazing suggestion at the lodge was my first proposal!"

"It will not be the last, and that is why I wanted your promise."

"So you said. But Maury, look here. It is going to be ages before I get out of school and finish what I am going to do. Why, Daddy and Mother think that I am not anywhere near grown up yet. And I am going to be one of the world's greatest pianists and have to study and play six hours a day, after a while, and go abroad and everything!"

"Go abroad with me after we are married. You can do the whole thing just as well then. Let's see. I finish this year. Then I'll get my father to give me some sort of an easy job. I'll tell you; I'll handle the foreign end of it. That is the very thing!" Maurice slapped his hand upon his right knee with emphasis. "You will be through school, if you must finish it, in two years, though that is too long,—I mean in two years after I am out of school. By that time, with a fat check from Grandmother, we ought to get along." Maurice looked at Ann with what Madeline would have found an irresistible smile, as he leaned forward, in his earnestness, to take Ann's hand.

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Ann patted her cousin's hand with her free one, then withdrew both. "You are looking too far ahead, Maurice. Neither of us knows a thing about real love. It is going to worry me too much to think about this. *Please*, Maury, don't!"

Maurice straightened up and leaned back against the lattice again. "Now isn't she flattering? The prospect is so terrible that she begins to beg for mercy!"

"Not that, Maury,—oh, what shall I say to you!"

Maurice saw that he was really distressing Ann and like the gentleman that he was he hastened to reassure her. "Well, Ann, if this really worries you, I will not talk about it. You understand what I think, at any rate. Think it over, but do *not* let it spoil your good time. I'll not remind you of it for some time,—unless some one of the boys gets too deeply interested in you. I'm glad that you are going to a girls' school, anyhow."

"Meanwhile, you will find the *right* girl, Maurice."

Maurice smiled. "We'll go back to the old cousinly relation, if you like," said he, "but I claim all the privileges of affection." Rising, he held out his hands to Ann, who put her own in them, letting him draw her to her feet. Then he took her arm lightly and led her along the walks again, approaching the house. They talked of other things, but when Ann left Maurice at the foot of the stairs, he said. "Perhaps, after all, I'm not too closely related."

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"The proverbial infant, changed in its cradle?" laughed Ann.

"Something like that, perhaps."

Ann did not think that Maurice had any such idea, but still, when she entered the drawing room and found no one but her mother present, she asked, "Isn't Maurice Aunt Sue's son?"

"Certainly."

"And isn't Aunt Sue your own sister?"

"Of course; why?"

"I was just wondering."

At this moment Madam LeRoy and her daughter, Mrs. Tyson, entered, and with profuse apologies on the part of Aunt Sue, who had purposely delayed, Mrs. Sterling was welcomed by her older sister. But the effect had been the opposite to that which was intended. Elizabeth Sterling was feeling very much at home in the familiar rooms of the old house.

CHAPTER III

28

MADAM LEROY "AT HOME"

If Mrs. Tyson did not offer a particularly warm welcome to her sister, upon her return after so many years to the old home, Madam LeRoy spared no pains to show her pleasure at the presence of her younger daughter. Her attitude was reflected in the deference shown by the servants and in the interest of a few callers, notified by Madam LeRoy of Mrs. Sterling's presence.

Perhaps Ann's greatest interest, in spite of her claims at not being "frivolous," was in her mother's pretty clothes, purchased, for the most part, the previous spring, when she and Grandmother were away together. But two or three gowns in the very latest style arrived for Mrs. Sterling, who was both amused and pleased at Ann's delight. "You are the prettiest thing, Mother," she said. "Why didn't you give me your eyes and hair and fairness? If Dad could only see you now."

This was one evening when Ann was watching her mother's being arrayed for dinner. Two former school-mates of her mother's, who had married and lived in the neighborhood, were to be dinner guests. The husbands, too, were coming and Mrs. Sterling had been expressing her regret that her own husband was so far away. "Never mind, Ann; your father will be here for our first real 'family reunion' since our marriage."

"Yes, at Christmas time," sighed Ann, "so far away!"

"It is a long time," said her mother soberly. "If it were not for Mother, nothing could induce me to be separated so long. But this year I must try to do what Mother wants and be with her, here and in the South."

"Now, Mrs. Sterling, just a touch of rouge and you will be complete," said Adeline, giving a last pat to Mrs. Sterling's hair, and looking coaxingly down into Mrs. Sterling's face.

"Not at this late day, Adeline," smiled Mrs. Sterling. "I have gotten along thus far without paint and I think that I can make my appearance without it. The Indians wear it sometimes, out where I came from."

"Just as you say, madam," sighed Adeline, with regret. She saw nothing amusing in being denied those final touches of "complexion," as Ann called it. But Mrs. Sterling's face was so fine without it, that she took some pride after all, in the results of her handiwork, and smiled at the two, who went out into the hall and downstairs like two girls together, arm in arm.

"Isn't it funny," said Ann, "that Ronald Bentley's mother should turn out to be one of your old chums?"

"Why 'funny,' Ann?"

"Oh, I don't know, only that I should know him pretty well and not know about how intimate you and she used to be."

The Bentleys had arrived when Ann and her mother went into the long and beautiful sun parlor, or glassed porch, which was a comparatively recent addition to Madam LeRoy's mansion. Prettily furnished, it was so attractive that it was a favorite spot now for both family and guests.

"Elizabeth LeRoy!" exclaimed Mrs. Bentley, warmly embracing Ann's mother. "How glad I am to see you after all these years. I hope that I was not the one to stop writing."

"It was probably I, Grace," said Mrs. Sterling, "for I was going about and doing many things in those first years of my married life."

Mrs. Bentley was a sprightly little woman of about Mrs. Sterling's age, too thin for beauty, but with an expressive, interesting face. From her it was evident, Ronald inherited his heavy eyebrows and deep-set grey eyes. Mr. Bentley was expansive and much at home with Mr. Tyson, with whom he was associated in the business in which the larger part of Madam LeRoy's fortune consisted. Ronald had been included in the invitation, for the sake of the young people, who betook themselves to a corner of the porch where cozy seats and a small table looked inviting. It was a warm, September evening and every one was pleased when Munson the dignified, himself brought out iced lemonade and delicate glasses.

This done, he hastened to the hall, for another car came rolling in to bring the other guests, a Judge and Mrs. Hays. In them Ann was not so much interested, though it may have been largely because they had no young and fascinating son! Ann was not so much different from other girls of her age, after all. She and Suzanne, Maurice and Ronald were having a merry time of it, while the older folk renewed acquaintance.

"Say, Maury, if the girls go to Florida, as you suggested, we'll take a run down in the old boat, or the yacht, in the Christmas vacation."

"Sure thing."

"But Father is coming at Christmas time, Maury," Ann objected. "I'd love to go to Florida, but I haven't the faintest notion that I can."

"Ann," said Suzanne, "if you and I don't go with our respective parents to the land of flowers, I'll give you the biggest box of chocolates that Maurice can find for me,——"

"And pay for," added her brother, knowingly.

"Of course. What are brothers for?"

"Do you really think so?" dubiously queried Ann. "How could it be managed, with school, and father's coming, and all?"

"Oh, school!" exclaimed Suzanne. "That could be fixed, and as far as your father is concerned, I overheard Grandmother say to Mother that she thought Uncle Sterling would go too. Perhaps you'd better not say anything about it, Ann. Maybe they mean to surprise you. I didn't think of that."

"I'll be surprised still," said Ann, "but I hope that it is so. Florida, land of alligators and cypress swamps,—"

"You will love it, Miss Ann," Ronald declared, as Ann hesitated. "Think of more agreeable things than alligators,—blue skies, for instance, and bluer waters and sitting on the deck of my yacht as we sit here, going down the inland waterway."

"Is your yacht strong enough to go out into the real ocean?"

"Yes, but when it is rough or stormy, you know, it takes a large vessel to keep the passengers from feeling the swell and waves too much."

"I see. I have never been out on the ocean."

"Why, Ann!" Suzanne exclaimed. "Then I was on your mountains before you have been on my adorable ocean."

Ann nodded and smiled. "Do you like the sea the way I like my mountains?"

"Indeed I do! But you must have the ocean this winter. We'll go in bathing and have more fun!"

"Count us in on that," Maurice added. "We can do a good deal in two or three weeks' vacation, can't we, Ronald?"

"Yes. Dad and Mother will take the yacht down when they go, perhaps, and we can get there more quickly by train, then take the girls yachting after we get there. We'll get up a party. There are always a lot of our friends going, you know."

Maurice assented, though the Tysons had not gone to Florida for a long time. Maurice, however, had enjoyed a recent trip with Ronald on such a vacation.

"Do you dare come back before spring after you once go down?" asked Ann.

"Yes; we do," replied Ronald. "My father goes back and forth, two or three times during the season. He is careful, you know. But don't you remember how suddenly the temperature changes, even up here, warm one minute, and cold as Greenland the next!"

"True," said Ann, "like the Chinooks that we have, warm winds that melt the snow off in a jiffy. Then comes a blizzard!"

"I've never been in your country, Miss Ann. Why didn't I go with you fellows this summer, Maury?" asked Ronald, with some regret.

"Beano said that he coaxed you to go along," said Maurice.

"You forget that Ron doesn't like Beano," Suzanne reminded her brother.

"It wasn't that so much," protested Ronald, "but the boys had fixed the car for sleeping and I thought that three would be one too many."

"It wasn't when I was along," said Maurice. "I refused to go, too, at first, for the same reason, but they had a tent and all the appurtenances thereto; so I concluded to join them."

"But you were with them such a short time. It didn't appeal to me for all summer, not with Beano, I will confess."

"I can't blame you," said Ann, and Ronald looked at her with some approval in his deep eyes. "He was kind and pleasant, but did not make what you would call a hit, Maury, with our Western boys and girls."

"Conceit is Beano's middle name," said Maurice, laughing.

The next affair at the LeRoy house for Mrs. Sterling's benefit was a reception, one of those "pink teas," according to Maurice, who said that he would carefully keep out of the way. It was a day-time "at home," so planned for the benefit of the older folks who might not care to come to an evening gathering, and only the adult friends were invited. Ann was in the room one morning when she heard her grandmother and Mrs. Tyson discussing the list.

"You aren't going to invite *her*, Mother, are you?" asked Mrs. Tyson, pointing to a name. "She is the worst gossip in six towns!"

"That is the reason I am inviting her," calmly said Grandmother, to Ann's great amusement. "She will talk anyhow, and is a great deal more likely to be friendly if we invite her. She has a somewhat privileged position, in spite of her terrible tongue." Then Grandmother noticed that Ann was listening, and turned smiling eyes upon her. "Let this lady be a warning, Ann, not an example. And remember what the epistle of James says about the tongue, 'a restless evil' and 'full of deadly poison!'"

35

"I can not see any necessity for inviting her, Mother," repeated Mrs. Tyson. "It only gives her a better opportunity to talk. She is no friend of Elizabeth's; why should we have her?"

"Why all this discussion, Sue? You well know that I have always included her in any general gathering like this. She would be offended, and then the vials of her wrath would descend indeed!"

"Do you want Suzanne and me to dress up and be around, or may we stay away?"

"Do you not want to be with us, Ann?" asked Grandmother in surprise.

"Oh, yes, if we can do anything to help entertain."

"You can. I want a pretty group of girls to serve the guests. Wear your prettiest frock and do your mother honor."

"I'll do my best, Grandmother."

Ann was being constantly surprised at her grandmother's energy, not knowing that it had been her natural way before the illness which had made her withdraw for some time, both because of her own weakness at first, and later because of her daughter's insistence. It was so much easier to yield to Sue than to oppose her. Sue always had insisted on her own way, but it had never taken the form of interfering so much with her mother's plans and life, she thought; at least she *had* thought so until the revelation came of her engineering the misunderstanding between Elizabeth and herself. Well, well,—that was past.

36

The second week of Ann's stay with her mother was closing when this reception took place. Ann and Suzanne were full of their plans for returning to school and the group of girls, including Madeline, had much to discuss. The rooms were prettily decorated with flowers. Ann's mother looked distinguished in a filmy summer gown and shared the entertaining with her mother and sister. A host of handsomely gowned ladies came in shining limousines with attentive chauffeurs. There was the usual buzz of conversation.

The girls did not make their appearance until time to serve, in the beautiful room devoted to that purpose. There the table was a shining center of costly linen, bright silver and cut glass, which glittered under the artificial lights. A mass of crimson roses gave fragrance.

"Is this Madam LeRoy's grand-daughter from the West?" impressively inquired a large, rather strong-featured woman, expensively and expansively gowned, whose hands flashed with diamonds, as she accepted the plate of ice-cream which Ann offered. "No; no coffee, thank you. Unfortunately, it keeps me awake, no matter when I drink it. Sit down, won't you, a minute, to get acquainted?"

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There was no one on either side of this guest, for it was now late in the afternoon and most of the guests had been served. A few ladies, in twos and threes were scattered about the room. Mrs. Bentley, who was pouring coffee, had little to do and was chatting with one of the guests, who stood by the table to talk to her.

Glancing around to see if she were needed anywhere, Ann sank her silken slimness upon the chair next to the friendly lady.

"Yes, Mrs. Lewis," said Ann, who had caught the name from Madeline when she had offered coffee. "I shall be glad to sit down a minute. Almost every one is served, I think."

"I could scarcely find time to come," returned Mrs. Lewis. "There were so many friends to visit; and I only now consented to come. I came with my daughter, who has been served."

"Aha," thought Ann, gravely listening and clasping her hands loosely in front of her. "She is not fond of food, but yet—"

"They tell me that you are quite an expert in Western ways, riding, hunting, racing, breaking broncos and all. Ever had any encounters with the Indians?"

38

"Our Indians are all very peaceful, Mrs. Lewis. I ride a little, catch a few trout occasionally and can hit a mark when I shoot, but I never race and I would not know how to break horses or broncos."

"Why I understood that your horse won a race at a fair."

Now who had told her that? Ann felt decidedly annoyed. "He did," she calmly replied, "but he was entered and ridden without our knowledge by a young man who worked for my father."

"Of all things! How things can get twisted in the gossip one hears! But I suppose that it is true about the large fortune left you by the Indian whose life you saved?"

"Scarcely that, Mrs. Lewis, but I happened to be the one to tie up a wounded Indian and he sent me a rather valuable gift. He is still living. See, the stones in this little ring, and this odd bracelet, that I scarcely ever wear." Ann was wearing the snake bracelet, which had been beautifully polished and worked over by a jeweler recently.

"Curious, indeed," said Mrs. Lewis, bending over to examine the bracelet. "It must have been young Bates who told me about the Indian's leaving you a fortune; but perhaps I misunderstood him. I thought that it would make you quite independent; but I suppose that now you will have a share in your grandmother's estate." Mrs. Lewis took no warning from the surprised look with which Ann openly regarded her. What sort of a woman was this? And how did she know about Grandmother's affairs?

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A volley of questions followed, all delivered in that easy, smooth, glowing way of which Mrs. Lewis was capable. Ann replied as best she could, poor, sincere Ann, who did not know how to get out of it.

"How does your mother like coming back to us after her long neglect of her mother and friends?" So ran on this human radio, thinking with her tongue, as Ann afterward told her mother. But frank Ann must have inherited some of her mother's and grandmother's nature, for she immediately froze, and after a second's pause, turned lifted brows upon the inquirer, repeating, "'Neglect?' That is scarcely the word, is it?"

"Your aunt certainly felt it; for she has remarked to more than one friend how much she regretted that Elizabeth saw fit to break away from the close family circle. But she is looking very lovely and your grandmother seems delighted to have her back."

Ann's ire was mounting, but how could she say anything discourteous to one so much older, and a guest, however she might be transgressing the laws of courtesy. But Ann had little opportunity to say anything, in fact, without interrupting, and an amusing thought came to Ann which almost made her laugh out,—if she could only turn the dial or press the button to shut off this disagreeable broadcasting of family affairs! But the "loud speaker" kept on.

40

"Madeline is a pretty girl, though rather wild, they say. It seems that she was engaged to Maurice before he went to college, but that she broke off the engagement when she heard that he is not Mrs. Tyson's son."

Ann had been thinking of an excuse to break away, but just as Mrs. Lewis started this last remark, one of the girls brought her a plate of ice-cream and heaped it with a variety of the cakes. They looked good and Ann began to dip her shining spoon into the frozen ice, giving attention to the words which Mrs. Lewis repeated for her benefit, as soon as the young lady was out of hearing. She could scarcely refrain from giving Mrs. Lewis another look of amazement, but kept her face calm and broke off a piece of pink frosting. "You must be mistaken, Mrs. Lewis," she said. Ann knew that if Madeline had ever had the opportunity to be engaged to Maurice it would scarcely be she who broke it off, and what in the world was that last suggestion?

"I forgot that being a stranger here, you scarcely would have heard the gossip about Maurice. I should probably not have mentioned it,—but of course, if it is true, he would have no share in your grandmother's money, and I do not think that the facts should be concealed. Some other girls may fall in love with him,—"

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"For Grandmother's money, do you mean?" Ann did manage to get in this comment.

Mrs. Lewis laughed. "Well, you know how the girls are nowadays. It takes plenty of money to keep them."

"I see, but Mrs. Lewis,—" Ann had no chance!

"At the home of one of our Boston friends a lady was visiting who had been in Paris at the time when Sue LeRoy married Mr. Tyson. She said that there was a rumor after the marriage that Mr. Tyson was a young widower with an infant son, and that your aunt was so angry when she found it out, that rather than have it known,—yes, thank you, Madeline, those are delicious little cakes."

"Your mother wants you, Ann,—excuse her, please, Mrs. Lewis. Bring along your cream, Ann; I'll put it somewhere for you." Suzanne, with an expression of amused horror, which Ann had caught across the room, had hastily come to the rescue.

Mrs. Lewis, who was just about to ask Ann if the gossip were known in the family, saw her victim depart with real regret.

"I knew how you must have been suffering, Ann," laughed Suzanne, as the two girls walked away. "Come out in the back hall and finish your cream. Your mother does want you, but there

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isn't any hurry."

"I—I never saw, I mean, heard, such a person! She must have been the one that your mother didn't want Grandmother to invite because she was such a gossip."

"Grandmother didn't want to offend her, I guess."

"That is what she said."

"What did she get out of you, Ann?"

"Mercy, I don't know. I felt like a mouse, being played with by the cat."

"Cat is what she is, Ann. What she doesn't know, she makes up."

"She certainly has imagination!"

Mrs. Lewis had succeeded in annoying Ann thoroughly. Values in the neighborhood went down for Ann immediately. "I'm glad I don't have to live around here," she thought, for at present, under the spell of an insincere member of the community, she had no thought for the true friends. The suggestion about Maurice was too absurd! Had not her mother just told her to the contrary? However, she wished that since Mrs. Lewis had told her that much, she had had opportunity to finish, if for nothing more than for Ann to tell her that it was not so.

Several of the girls came out and stood around Ann, some of them, like her, finishing their own little lunch. "I oughtn't to have eaten a bit of ice-cream," said one of them, a pretty brunette of about Ann's age. "Your mother wants me to sing pretty soon and I never can sing so well if I have eaten it."

"Take a cup of hot coffee, Lou, to warm up your throat," Suzanne suggested.

"That would be the other extreme."

"You are to play her accompaniment, Ann," announced Suzanne. "That is what your mother wanted you for."

"I hope that it is an easy one," said Ann, putting the last bit of soft frosting in her mouth.

"It is," Louise assured her.

When Ann went into the drawing room, she found her mother surrounded by a group of old and new friends. There was a comparatively small number of the company left, which fact consoled Ann, rather dreading to play before them. But she loved her grandmother's big grand piano and touched it with affectionate fingers as she played the prelude to the song. In spite of the ice-cream, Louise Stanton sang well, her voice girlish, but fresh and sweet. Afterward, Mrs. Sterling proudly introduced Ann to her friends, who looked with kindly eyes upon Elizabeth LeRoy Sterling's daughter. There were "lovely" people here, after all, and Mrs. Lewis had not remained upon the scene.

CHAPTER IV

BACK TO THE JOLLY SIX

ANN did not think best to trouble her mother with any of the gossip with which she had been afflicted through Mrs. Lewis. What was the use? Through Suzanne, however, Grandmother heard that Ann had been engaged in a long conversation with the lady, and she spoke of it the next morning, as she was taking her outing among the flowers. Ann had joined her and under her direction was picking some of her grandmother's favorites.

"Suzanne tells me that our friend Mrs. Lewis was entertaining you, or demanding entertainment of you, yesterday."

"Yes, Grandmother. Isn't she an awful woman?"

"Did you wonder that I quoted what I did in description?"

"No. Her tongue is poisonous all right. But it was such a surprise. She was so pleasant, indeed, all the way through, you would have thought that she was telling pleasant things. Do you suppose that she meant to be——." Ann paused for a fitting word.

"Malicious?" Grandmother supplied.

"That is the word. Thank you."

"I do not suppose so. I scarcely know. But her conversation always consists in comments upon other people. She has no other subject, and unfortunately she likes best the unhappy phases, something to make people exclaim. But do not let anything she may have said trouble you, Ann. Whatever of criticism or innuendo she may have given you,—let it go. She ought to be a warning to us all,—to let the doings of our neighbors alone."

45

"That is so, Grandmother. We have enough to do, I guess, to look after ourselves."

"We surely have. How would you like, Ann, to go to Florida with us?"

"O Grandmother!" Ann stopped plucking a posy and straightened up to look at Madam LeRoy with shining eyes. "Could I—without hurting anything?"

Madam LeRoy laughed. "You mean school, I presume?"

"Yes, of course, Grandmother!"

"I think that it could be managed, not to have you fall behind in your studies."

"Study a little there, you mean?"

"Just that. Will you be thinking happy thoughts about it, Ann?" Grandmother was looking at her with eyes that were half sad, half amused. Such a combination is possible.

"*Won't I?*" asked Ann. "I'll want to think about it so much that I won't want to study."

"I'll risk you on that," said Grandmother. "Don't forget that I have never had reason to be anything but proud of you. Please keep up the record, child."

46

"I will try, Grandmother," said Ann with earnestness. "You are so good to me!"

Ah, it was not the freshman cottage, or hall, any more! When Ann, Suzanne and Madeline, with several more girls whom they had met on the train, arrived within the Forest Hill grounds, they saw many improvements added during the summer. Greetings from youth to youth, taxis full of jolly old girls and subdued new ones, trucks of trunks and bags and boxes,—all the usual sights of a girls' school in the throes of opening were to be seen. Busy teachers, a small host of assistants in different lines, janitors and assistant janitors, truck-men, grocery wagons and express wagons, bringing supplies, contributed to the general air of enterprise.

There was not a sign of any one among Ann's particular friends of the Jolly Six at the administration building, where Ann's party went first. The girls had left their names and application for admittance to the new sophomore cottage, which was to add to the provisions for the sophomore girls. The school was growing and Ann's class was one of the largest freshman classes they had had.

"Wouldn't it be awful if there is any mistake and we don't get our rooms?" asked Madeline, suddenly taking a panic.

47

"Don't worry, Maddy," said Suzanne. "They won't turn us out. For some reason or other, I'm not so particular this year, though I would like to get in the new cottage. The old girls had the first chance if they wanted it; but some of them wanted to go in the old one anyhow, because of 'tradition' they said."

"Tradition doesn't appeal to me," Madeline announced, "though there is something in those high and airy halls, and the rooms with high ceilings. But they are hard to heat in the winter, Mother says. She wants me to be in the new building."

"Let me see, young ladies," said the teacher who was helping assign girls to their rooms. There was a crowd in the office, girls waiting their turn, for different purposes. The list was consulted. "Miss Tyson and Miss Birch go to the new cottage, suite number 29, with Miss Frost and Miss Simpson, I think." There seemed to be some difficulty in making out the names right there. Something had been written in.

"Miss Sterling goes to the Castle, with Miss Ward, Miss Frost and Miss Robson,—some mistake there, Miss Frost's name in both places. Well, I suppose that it does not matter. She came several days ago and has doubtless found her place."

"So you won't even be in the building with us, Ann," said Suzanne, quite regretful this time. A year ago she would have been relieved and delighted.

48

"I'd just as lief be in the other building but for that, Suzanne," said Ann. "But if we go to

Florida at Christmas time, it will not make much difference."

"Oh, are you going to Florida, Suzanne?" cried Madeline. "Why haven't I heard a word about it?"

"I guess I didn't think of it when I was with you, Maddy. Besides they were only talking of it. Ann says that Grandmother spoke to her, though, as if it were all settled."

"I must ask Mother if I can't go, too," said Madeline, "but I know that they have other plans."

If Madeline hoped to be invited to go with the LeRoy-Tyson-Sterling party, she was disappointed. Neither of the girls felt free to give the invitation, for one thing, and Suzanne had been thinking for some time that Madeline was very cool and exacting at times.

"It will be fine if your people can go," said kind Ann. "Have you ever been there?"

"Oh, yes," said Madeline, with a toss of her head. "Mother used to go to Palm Beach every winter."

As Ann rapidly rounded the administration building to reach the walk which led to the "Castle," she almost ran into Marta Ward, who greeted her with enthusiasm. "Why it's Ann!" she exclaimed. "When did you get in?" The girls embraced and Ann explained that she had only just arrived and had been directed to the Castle.

49

"Yes," cried Marta, "are you disappointed that you did not get into the new cottage? We were next on the list, I think, but the girls who have been here longer got the first chance and then Madeline and Suzanne were to be with Genevieve, and—say, Ann, whom do you think we have in our suite, for they have put four of us together?"

"I could make a good guess, I think, Marta, from somebody's name that was down in two places. But I am astonished, just the same."

"Yes, it's Frostie herself," laughed Marta. "Will wonders never cease!"

"Honestly? How did it happen?"

"I don't know exactly, but Aline says that Eleanor and Genevieve had a serious quarrel or misunderstanding or something, and besides, Eleanor can't endure Madeline. So it seems that when she found out how things had been arranged, without consulting her, she claims, she went up in the air and went to Miss Tudor; and finally, Miss Tudor arranged for us to be together. She thinks a great deal of you and Aline, and I am a necessary evil, I guess."

"Not much. Eleanor need not get snippy, or I'll do some going up in the air," Ann laughed.

"Really, Ann, Eleanor is just as nice as she can be about things. If I had not known that bunch of girls last year, I would not suppose that Eleanor belonged."

50

"What in the world will Suzanne and Madeline think about it?" queried Ann, a little worried. "They just went over there. I wonder who is in Eleanor's place."

"I haven't the least idea. You know that the Sig-Eps wanted to have a cottage of their own and took steps about it, didn't you?"

"No."

"Well, they did; and they wanted this new cottage. But Miss Tudor told them that if they wanted a cottage, perhaps they could get some of their alumnae to help them build one. Otherwise, the school would continue to be divided according to 'age and status of scholarship or rank!' This new hall is too large for a sorority hall any way. The girls said that afterwards, and also said that they would want a chapel or small auditorium for their meetings and entertainments."

"That wouldn't be a bad idea for the 'Bats,' would it?"

"No; let's start working for it. It would be a good way for the school to get new dorms, and the girls would love their houses."

"The only objection I can see is that it makes things still more clannish, and they are too much so already. We'd better talk it over with Miss Tudor before we do anything."

"But she really suggested it."

51

"That is so; but perhaps it was on an impulse. Even teachers are known to do that occasionally, and change their minds afterwards."

"I will go back with you," said Marta, laughing over Ann's last remark. "Both the other girls are

there, and the rest of the Jolly Six have their suite there, too, a few doors away. We'll have to take in Eleanor and Aline and make it the Jolly Eight."

"You don't imagine that Eleanor would ever be intimate with our crowd, do you?"

"Stranger things have happened. How can she resist us, tell me that?"

"Of course, I had not thought of how irresistible we are! Have a chocolate, Marta. Maurice gave Suzanne and me each a box when we started. Madeline was disappointed that she was not remembered, too, but Maury did not come to the station. His train, in fact, left before ours. How did you like Maurice, Marta?"

"He has the making of a fine man,—if he is not spoiled. His gay temperament is very taking, but I imagine that it is a source of danger, too."

"You talk like an old lady, Marta," laughed Ann, who had been guilty of similar thoughts, however, in regard to her cousin.

"I thought about him," said Marta simply. "He watched you so much and I got to thinking."

"It is not wise to think too much, fair room-mate; and by the way, I may run off at Christmas time for quite a stay."

"How is that?"

"Grandmother plans to have me and Suzanne—Suzanne and me, I mean,—go to Florida with them. I don't know how long I shall be gone, but I'll do some studying there, Mother thinks."

"It will be fine for you, though I shall certainly miss you."

"I hate to go, with you not along, but I couldn't miss it."

"I should think not!"

"When did you get in, Marta?"

"Only yesterday evening. I have been unpacking. I gave Aline and Eleanor the choice of rooms; was that all right?"

"Certainly it was. You mean of the bedrooms, I suppose."

"Yes. There wasn't much choice, but I suggested that since both were there, they select the one they preferred. Both the girls were very pleasant about it and demurred a little, but selected their room and went ahead. You will find us pretty well fixed up, Miss Sterling!"

"Good. Let's stop first and see Katherine and Dots and the others. My luggage hasn't been sent up yet, has it?"

"No."

Warm welcome waited at the Katherine-Dots-Ethel-Lucile headquarters. "Oh, is it *Ann!*" exclaimed Dorothy. "Come right in and see our studio,—latest effects in tapestry, water colors and oils."

Ann saw nothing but new curtains and Lucile's paints, but expressed her admiration and returned the embraces of her chums. "Last time I saw you girls we were in the 'Western Wilds,'" she said.

"Yes, and what a grand time we had!" Katherine exclaimed. "Say, Ann, I heard from Beano Bates,—what do you think of that!"

"And I have had a letter from your faithful Edgar. Quick, girls, get me a fan," Lucile added, as Ann pretended to be overcome.

"Little did I think," said Ann, "when I urged you girls to come out to Montana, what an effect you would have upon our men!"

"Seriously, Ann, Edgar wrote a bright, interesting letter. I'll let you read it." Lucile laughed again at Ann's lugubrious aspect, which she threw off at once, however, forgetting the pose in the things that the rest had to relate. Lucile Early and Ethel Johns had been at their homes in New York, enjoying their native city and incidentally shopping for school. Dorothy Horton, in Maine, had visited a girls' camp for a week, before her mother returned from her trip. Katherine Neville, in Ohio, had spent the time, she said, in "domestic pursuits," cooking for the family and trying to reproduce some of Rita's fine concoctions. "Mother ran off for a little rest," she said.

"You have a new family, or, rather are a new family in your suite, I hear," said Dots. "Are you surprised, Ann?"

"Very much so, but it is all right. Marta and I are used to being by ourselves, but we can get

along and it will be fun to have more in the family. We used to envy you girls last year, didn't we, Marta?"

"We can call our suite a studio, too," Marta added, "a musical one, for Eleanor sings, Aline plays the violin, and our accomplishments you well know!"

"Sure enough," laughed Katherine. "Well, let the musical studio join ours tonight and have a good old fudge or something reunion. Ask Eleanor and Aline, won't you, for us? If they have any doings planned with the Sig-Eps, all right."

"Thanks,—we'll come. You won't have to make fudge. I'll bring my chocolates." But at this the girls laughed, for the box, passed around several times, was much depleted, and Ann waved it away, when Katherine held it out to her. "Put it somewhere till the appointed hour, then. I'll not want it. Now to join the family."

Ann gathered up her wraps and umbrella and took her departure, Marta leading the way. Before opening the door, however, Marta turned and gave Ann a whimsical look, as if to say,—"it's a risk, but here we are."

No one was in the little sitting room, which looked cosy with bright cushions, pennants and pictures already in place; but Eleanor looked out from the other bedroom, as Ann went into hers. "Is that Ann?" she asked. Ann placed her things in the inner room and went out to meet Eleanor, and in a moment, Aline. "Glad to see you," said Eleanor. "I imagine that you are surprised to see us in your family. But it is a fine old suite and I think it lucky for us to get it. It is larger than most of them, and I like being on the second floor."

Ann, still holding Eleanor's hand, for Eleanor had taken hold of her arm, looked around at the large windows, the comfortable couch, the window seat with drawers below, to which Eleanor pointed, and expressed her enthusiasm. "Sit down," said Eleanor, still the hostess. "I suppose Marta told you how this happened?"

"As much as I knew about it," said Marta, stretching out on the couch.

"Yes. I couldn't say much, could I?"

"Not if you were wise," laughed Marta.

"Well, I had a good reason for not rooming with Genevieve anyhow, and the whole arrangement was made before I knew much about it. I was to blame a little; for it was suggested to me last spring and I didn't say nay exactly, too lazy to have the trouble of refusing. Then with my accustomed habit of putting everything off, I did not even write about it this summer; only Mother wrote, asking Miss Tudor to do as well by me as she could, it seems, and did not ask for a new room-mate, as I wanted her to. *She* didn't want to get into trouble either. Then we both forgot about it. We had a lovely trip to Alaska this summer,—neither of us had ever been there. So it went. My real trouble with Genevieve was about another matter, and of course I'd rather not speak of that."

"Of course not," said Ann, "and I'm sure you need not have explained anyway. As you say, we are lucky to have this suite, and if we can get through the rushing season without coming to blows over the Sig-Eps and the Bats, I have no doubt but we can be the best of friends." So, laughingly said Ann; and Marta cried, "Hear, hear!"

"One thing that will be of great advantage to me," smiled Eleanor, "is having all my accompanists in the suite. You can't get away from me, girls. Promise me, both of you, that if one is sick the other will play,—and poor Aline will have to do it all the time. I adore violin accompaniments, and it will be good practice for her in public appearances!"

"If I were only a contralto singer," said Marta, "you would have a world-renowned quartet. Too bad that you have two pianists!"

"Suits me," laughed Eleanor. "I'll never have to worry."

"It will be easy to arrange practice hours, too," said Ann. "Dear me, no practice to speak of all summer, but oh, such a glorious time!"

CHAPTER V

THE DISTRESSED DAMSEL

ANN did not see Suzanne at dinner, and heard afterward that she, Madeline and Genevieve had gone to town for their dinner, to "Polly's." Ann's trunk had been sent to the suite and Ann was busy unpacking, when Marta came running up the stairs, not far from the open door. "You're wanted, Ann," said she, out of breath. "Suzanne is downstairs and wants to see you."

"Why doesn't she come up?"

Marta lifted her brows and nodded toward Eleanor's door, through which Eleanor, writing a letter, could be seen.

"Sakes!" softly said Ann. "I'm right in the middle of this! And it is going to be a pretty state of things if Suzanne won't come where Eleanor is!" But Ann picked up her scarf and started out.

Suzanne was strolling up and down the lower hall while she waited for Ann, rather avoiding the stairway, for she did not want to run into Eleanor or Aline. "Hello, Ann," said she, "come out for a little walk with me. I want to see you."

"I wish that you would come upstairs, Suzanne," said Ann. "I'm just in the midst of unpacking and the room is a sight. Still, Marta won't mind, and we'll not go to bed for ages. I have to study like everything."

"I wouldn't go to your suite tonight for a thousand dollars! The idea of Eleanor's doing that way! That is what I want to talk about."

The girls walked out of the hall and out upon the campus to one of the benches, under a beautiful elm. Girls were scattered everywhere over the green lawns, but this seat was empty.

Ann felt from Suzanne's manner that she was in for something disagreeable, but calmly waited for the explosion, if explosion there was to be.

Suzanne came to the point immediately, sitting down and leaning toward Ann, her hands tightly clasped. "Did you know anything about this, Ann?"

"What do you mean? Did I know *beforehand*, you mean, about rooming arrangements? Indeed I did not. Did you?" Ann asked this question as keenly as Suzanne, though without the feeling behind it.

"Genevieve wrote Madeline a few days before we came that she had asked for a suite for us all. She was counting on rooming with Eleanor, and Eleanor has played her a mean trick! I did not say anything about it to you, Ann, because it was uncertain about our getting the suite, and I did not suppose that you would care; you were planning to room with Marta, weren't you?"

"Certainly. We did not even ask to be in a suite, though we had expressed a preference for one, to Miss Tudor, one time. This was one great surprise to me, Suzanne."

"I suppose so, but I wanted to make sure. And I can't tell you, Ann, how I feel about Eleanor's turning us down this way!" Suzanne's eyes filled with tears. She started to speak again and could not. Finally she put her head down on Ann's shoulder, shaking all over in the effort to control herself and keep from breaking into a storm of tears.

Ann took her hands and squeezed them, without saying a word. With a sob and a sigh, Suzanne presently raised her head. "Were any girls looking at us?" she asked.

"No,—not a soul around. Never mind, Suzanne. It isn't worth feeling so bad about it."

"Yes, it is, too, Ann. You don't know what it means among our crowd of girls to be in with Eleanor." There it was again! Ann's sympathy received a jolt. It wasn't that Suzanne cared so much for Eleanor, after all!

"So I have been wondering if something can't be done about it. Would you and Marta care, if Eleanor and Aline should room with Maddy and me?"

"Not a bit, but could you plan a thing like that, Suzanne? Where would Genevieve come in? And wasn't she the one who arranged for that particular suite?"

"Yes, but it's her fault that she is out with Eleanor. Couldn't you ask Eleanor about it?"

"Not I, Suzanne. You girls will have to fix it up among yourselves." Ann spoke very decidedly.

"But you could find out whether she dislikes me or not, couldn't you?"

"Probably. I don't believe that Eleanor has anything against you. Marta said that it was Genevieve, and then, that Eleanor does not like Madeline."

"Then don't you suppose that I could room with you?"

"And turn Marta out? Why, Suzanne!"

"Well, she might not care much. Besides, Grandmother would much rather have me room with

you. She did not like it a bit last year, Mother said, when she found out that I was rooming with Madeline instead of you. But Mother persuaded her, told her that Maddy and I had been friends so long and that you did not care."

"Grandmother never mentioned it to me. I had expected to room with you, Suzanne; but I knew Marta as well as I knew you, of course, and we have become fast friends. I wouldn't do anything to hurt Marta for worlds!"

"It could be fixed up through our parents, you know."

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Ann wanted to tell Suzanne that she was a "selfish little pig" and the words were on the tip of her tongue,—but she refrained. It would not do. Here was a bit of scheming that would be worthy of Aunt Sue. What Suzanne could not get in one way she would get in another!

"If you won't do anything about it, I'm going to ask Marta myself," Suzanne continued.

"For pity's sake, Suzanne! Don't do anything of the kind!"

Suzanne set her lips together. How much her profile looked like Aunt Sue.

"Would you and Marta care, then, if it were arranged for Maddy and me to come with Eleanor and Aline? That would give Genevieve the old suite in the new cottage, and she'd get over being mad about it!"

"So far as I am concerned, if you can arrange to room with Eleanor and Aline, it is all right. I don't think that Marta would care, though it certainly would be a bother, after getting settled. But how about Eleanor's not liking Madeline?"

"Maybe I can get some other Sig-Ep girl that she *does* like."

"If you can fix it up, Suzanne, I'll not stand in your way. This was a surprise, and it really does not make any difference to me,—just till the Christmas vacation. Do you think that it is important enough to stir things up so?"

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"Yes. If I could room with Eleanor this year, it would probably mean for the junior and senior years, too. Maybe Eleanor is going South, too, with her mother."

"I see. All right, Suzanne; do anything you want to, but don't expect me to take a hand. You will have to see Eleanor yourself."

"That is what I hate to do. I believe that I'll talk to Miss Tudor first, tell her that I am not satisfied. She'll want to keep in with Mother."

"Perhaps," dryly said Ann.

That ended the interview and the girls separated, Suzanne to join some other girls, after being assured by Ann that all traces of tears were removed, and Ann to resume her interrupted task of unpacking. She was both annoyed and troubled. Marta noticed her abstraction but made no comment. Both girls studied busily, chiefly in their bedroom this time, for Eleanor and Aline were talking in their common study.

Ann was too busy the next day to think of anything but lessons, though she wondered if Suzanne would go to work "upsetting things."

The worst arrangement suggested was the one whereby she and Suzanne would room in the suite with Eleanor and Aline. Not that she did not like them all, but she wanted Marta or some one of the Jolly Six, her very own congenial friends, with much of the same interests and purposes. But she told herself, as she had in wakeful hours of the previous night, that they all would have to be consulted anyhow about the matter and it would be handled by headquarters in final arrangements. "No use to worry," she thought. The best plan, if change was to be made, was for Suzanne and some one of the "Sig-Eps" to move in with Eleanor and Aline. That would be much better for Suzanne, Ann thought, than continuing to room with Madeline. Perhaps she *ought* to do something about it! It *would* be a shame for Suzanne to be with both Genevieve and Madeline!

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At dinner, for the girls were at present sitting where they pleased at table, Suzanne joined Ann and afterward almost dissolved into tears again telling Ann about matters at their suite. "Miss Tudor has put a new girl in with us, temporarily, she said, and she is awful. Genevieve is tearing her hair, figuratively speaking, and we are all upset. I am to see Miss Tudor pretty soon."

Poor Ann wondered what her duty was in the matter, and hoped that she need have nothing to do with it. Ought she to give her consent to taking Suzanne in place of Marta, if Miss Tudor suggested it? What would Marta think? Perhaps she and Suzanne could take a room or a two room suite together, and let Marta get a new room-mate, staying with Eleanor and Aline. There! *That* was what she would suggest, if she had anything to say about it. That would fulfill her duty

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to her cousin and not turn anybody out. Of course, that would not suit Suzanne. Ann felt fairly dizzy with the different plans that suggested themselves. What a bother!

No wandering about the campus that evening. "Bunny" had announced a theme, the assignment in Math looked hard, and there were pages and pages of new and more difficult French to prepare. Ann got out her books and went to work at the table in the study, where Eleanor and Aline found her later. Marta was still out with the girls.

"Got a wonderful song, Ann," said Eleanor, waving some sheets of music. "I borrowed it from the girl who owns it. It has an exquisite violin obligato and I want you to do the accompanying, if you will. I'm sending for copies. We were just trying it over in the parlor. Sara played the piano part."

Ann stopped work long enough to look at the music "I'd like to go right down and try it over, but I can't,—got to study."

"I have to, too," said Eleanor. "Aline and I have a miserable harmony lesson to work out. Will it bother you if we do it together?"

"I'll not even hear you," laughed Ann.

The girls had scarcely started on the harmony lesson, when there came a knock. One of the girls acknowledged Eleanor's "Come in" by poking her head inside the door and saying, "Miss Tudor wants to see you, Eleanor."

Ann, busy with a problem, heard it as in a dream, but waked up sufficiently to her surroundings to hear Aline say, as Eleanor hurried out, "It's about the suite, Eleanor!" And Eleanor answered, shortly, "That's all settled!"

Aline disappeared from the room a little later, and soon, who should appear but Suzanne, in some excitement. "I saw that Eleanor went over to the administration building, and that Aline was outside, so I ran up a minute. I saw Miss Tudor and talked with her,—all about it. She did not say much, but said that she would see me again after she had talked to the other girls. So she is going to do something!"

Suzanne was feeling some confidence about the affair, Ann could see. "You'd better not put on your kimono, Ann, for she may send for you. Do your best for me, cousin," said artful Suzanne.

"I will," said Ann, "though I don't know what is 'best.' I fancy that Miss Tudor will do the settling of it, don't you?"

"She can be *influenced*," replied Suzanne.

Ann did not believe this, in the sense in which Suzanne meant it, and thought that Suzanne exaggerated her own importance and that of her family. "She thinks that the Huntington-LeRoys are the whole thing!" thought Ann. "And to get her own way and be with Eleanor, for the sake of I don't know what, she'd do anything and turn anybody out!" Ann was thoroughly disgusted. She laid aside her "math," decided that she could not think up a theme while her mind was so distracted, and picked up the new French text, rather technical and difficult, but she could more easily read along and look up the new words in her dictionary than do anything else. She went into her bedroom, looked in the glass to see if her hair were in condition to appear before the dean, and sat down by the window with her book. If Eleanor came in and did not want to speak to her about where she had been, it would be simpler for her to be out of the way. She shut the bedroom door, as this occurred to her.

But it was not long before Aline and Eleanor came in, talking, as Ann thought, in some excitement, though their voices were low. "Ann!" called Eleanor, rapping sharply upon the bedroom door.

"Come in," called Ann in reply.

Both girls came in and sat down on the bed, looking at Ann and each other. "You tell her, Eleanor," said Aline, clasping the head of the bed with one arm, crossing her small slippered feet and cupping her pointed, poetic chin with her free hand.

"Surely I will," replied the efficient Eleanor, her eyes flashing. "Are you satisfied with this arrangement, Ann, or would you like to get out of it?" she asked directly.

"I should prefer to leave things as they are," promptly replied Ann.

"From what I know of you," said Eleanor, "I judge that you are telling the truth."

"I am," said Ann.

"Did you see Suzanne and know that she was going to see Miss Tudor about this rooming business?"

"Yes. Suzanne was very much upset, and hurt, because she thought that perhaps you did not

want to room with her. She says that she is just sick over it. She wanted me to talk to you about it, but I told her that I would not get into it."

Eleanor looked thoughtful. "I like Suzanne," she said, "but I can't bear Maddy, nor Genevieve, now. Of course you know that Miss Tudor has been talking to me about it. She gave me a good lecture, too, on not having consideration for other people, and upsetting plans and so forth. I certainly am *mad* about it!" Eleanor's eyes flashed fire again; then she looked at Ann, and they both laughed, Aline joining.

"I suppose you think, Ann, that it is a tempest in a tea-pot; but these things make a lot of difference."

"Yes, they do," answered Ann, sobering again. "It *is* important whom you room with. I can't say that I am very anxious to have Suzanne stay with Genevieve and Madeline—both pretty reckless about some things."

Eleanor nodded. "Say, Ann, I've always wanted to explain about that time when you came on us and we had the cigarettes. I don't do that sort of thing, but we were in high spirits and Gen dared us. She and Maddy think that it's smart, and that is one of the reasons that I don't want to room with Genevieve,—but please don't say anything about it. I couldn't tell Miss Tudor that."

"What is Miss Tudor going to do?" asked Ann.

"Mercy, I don't know! She's talking to Genevieve and Madeline now. Probably she will send for you next. That is why I wanted to talk with you. Miss Tudor asked me if I would object to having Suzanne room here with you,—of course, she gave me to understand that I hadn't much to say about it, but still, she wants a good arrangement for everybody. I told her that it would be all right with me, but that I thought it mean to turn Marta out. Then I didn't know how you would like it, I said. I was so mad because of the good scolding I had, that I talked right up to her!"

Ann laughed. "Lots of good it will do, Eleanor."

"Exactly. But it was some consolation to me."

"I'd have a great time with three Sig-Eps in the suite with me, wouldn't I?" laughed Ann. She did not mind giving this hint.

"I thought of that, but it would only be two, at that. I can't get Aline into the Sigs. Her mother was a Bat."

A direct look was exchanged between Ann and Eleanor. "Thanks," said Ann, storing away the knowledge, as Eleanor meant her to do. The Bats would be after Aline now. They had thought it useless before, as she and Eleanor were so intimate. But they had wondered why they did not hear of her initiation as a Sig-Ep. Eleanor was a "pretty good scout" after all.

"I don't like it of Suzanne, if this is her scheme, to leave Maddy out in the cold; but if she wants to room with you it would be much better for her. I don't see why she didn't do it last year,—yes, I do, too. She and Maddy are more congenial in many ways. That is nothing against you, either." Eleanor was surely frank, Ann thought. Probably Eleanor had learned some things during her freshman year, as they all had.

CHAPTER VI

THE DEAN SENDS FOR ANN

"Miss Tudor blames me for the whole thing," continued Eleanor, "but I said that I'd leave school before I'd go back with the girls, Gen and Maddy. 'Now, now, Miss Frost,' she said, 'don't say anything that you would regret.'" Eleanor raised her finger warningly in imitation of Miss Tudor's manner. "And Miss Tudor *would* let me go, too, rather than have any of the girls tell *her* what to do!"

"Do you blame her?" laughed Ann.

"Not a bit of it," said the amusing Eleanor. She had come out of her reserve with a vengeance. "Well, what are we going to do about it?"

"Take what comes," said Ann.

"She may ask you to suggest."

"I hope not. Is there any other Sig-Ep girl, or one that isn't, that you would like to be with Suzanne, in case Marta and I give up our share in the suite and take a single room?"

Eleanor eyed Ann suspiciously. "I bet that is what you'd rather do!"

"No; as I told you, I'd rather let things alone. Yet it does worry me, the more I think about Suzanne. And I could not bear to turn Marta out, you see. Marta is the kind that would do it in a minute, and I hope she doesn't even hear about it! Let me tell you, girls, I'm not going to suggest *any* plan to Miss Tudor, but I'll tell her what I think if she asks me."

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As Ann spoke there came another rap, this time on their outer door. "For me, I suppose," said Ann, rising to admit the caller.

Ann did some rapid thinking as she crossed the campus. While it would spoil Suzanne considerably to have her own way about rooming with Eleanor, any arrangement which would take her out of Madeline's close intimacy would be good. But Ann felt rather disgusted by this time with the whole affair and the fact that she had to be drawn into it.

She had been told that she was to go to Miss Tudor's private rooms and thither she directed her way, rapping gently. Some way, although she knew that she was not to be corrected for any fault, the very idea of being sent for by the dean made Ann nervous. She felt worried over the affair, and when she was admitted, sitting down to wait for Miss Tudor, she found that her hands were cold and felt her face grow flushed at the thought of the coming interview.

"Good evening, Miss Sterling," said Miss Tudor, entering from a door behind Ann. Ann immediately rose, as she replied to the greeting, and was waved back to her chair as Miss Tudor sat down. She came right to the point.

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"You know, I presume, the matter about which I want to talk to you?"

"Yes, Miss Tudor. Suzanne, Eleanor and Aline have told me."

"Do you want to room with your cousin?"

Ann hesitated. "I want to do what is the square thing, Miss Tudor. It does not seem fair to turn Marta out. I think a great deal of her, besides. But it would be better for Suzanne not to room with Madeline and Genevieve."

Miss Tudor nodded. "If I could make suitable arrangements for the other girls, would you and Marta together be willing to give up the suite that you have now with Eleanor and Aline?"

"So far as I am concerned, yes, Miss Tudor. Marta and I were both surprised at this arrangement, but we like the girls. Eleanor has been real fair and we are very fond of Aline."

"I am glad to hear you say so. That is all, then, Miss Sterling."

What a relief to be outside the door. Had she said the right thing? Was it mean to imply what she did about Genevieve and Madeline? Would Miss Tudor think that she, Ann, was one of those "goody-goody" girls that Suzanne talked about with such contempt? "I don't care," she told herself. "I have to make good here, and I've something else to do besides run around with them. Dear me! If Suzanne rooms with me, I'll have to do most of my studying in the library, I guess!"

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Crossing the campus again, she met Marta hurrying in the direction from which she had just come. "Say, Ann," she cried, before she reached Ann's near neighborhood, "what's all this? Miss Tudor sent for me, and Eleanor says that you are,—have been there. What's up?"

"Didn't Eleanor tell you?"

"No; she wouldn't, just laughed; and I thought that she seemed a bit embarrassed."

"I can't imagine Eleanor's losing her way of carrying things off! But I'll let Miss Tudor explain what is on hand,—largely because I want you to remember what she does say. Will you?"

"I'll try," laughed Marta.

"And Marta! I don't know what Miss Tudor is going to do about the matter that has come up, but promise me that you will come to me right afterwards and hear what I have to say about it."

"I promise," cried Marta, running on.

But Ann was troubled. "Let the old lessons go!" she thought. "I'm going to be right there when Marta comes out. She might think that I am in with the girls in wanting to room with Suzanne, or something!" Whereupon, Ann retraced her steps and chose a quiet spot upon the broad porch of the administration building. Ordinarily, she would be supposed to be in her room, as study hours had long since commenced. But she thought that she would be able to explain her presence if questioned.

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She had scarcely seated herself, behind one of the pillars, when Miss Bunn, or "Bunny", came

out of the building and looked around before descending the steps. Ann immediately felt like a transgressor.

Seeing some one behind the pillar, "Bunny" came around to see who it was. "Why, Miss Sterling," she said, "I am surprised! Do you not know that study hours have begun?"

"Yes, Miss Bunn," said Ann, rising, "but my room-mate is in Miss Tudor's room and I have just come from the same place. I thought that I would wait a few minutes for Marta."

Miss Bunn's nose gave the familiar twist. "It is very irregular for you to be here. It will be quite dark in a few minutes."

"Yes, Miss Bunn," replied Ann, having a bright thought. "Don't you think that it really would be better for me to wait for Marta, so we can go across the campus together?"

"Perhaps it would," said Miss Bunn, somewhat doubtfully. "But if Marta should be detained some time, do not wait,—not more than a *very few minutes*, Miss Sterling. Otherwise I shall have to report you as out of your room in study hours."

"Very well, Miss Bunn," respectfully said Ann, for the first time feeling like being impertinent to a teacher. She remained standing while Miss Bunn, still with the attitude of disapproval, slowly walked down the steps and around the walk.

"Fussy old thing," thought impatient Ann. "She just wanted to show her authority!" But Ann did not realize how Miss Tudor had impressed all her staff with the importance of looking after these girls, many of them accustomed to very little restraint at home, much less than would have been good for them. The trouble with poor, conscientious Miss Bunn was that her manner with the girls prejudiced them against her, with the result that even the obedient ones resented her authority.

Time went slowly, especially since Ann felt out of place. She thought that at least fifteen minutes must have gone by when she looked at her watch, barely to be seen in the fading light, to find that only five minutes had passed since she last consulted it. And here came Marta.

"Well!" exclaimed the surprised Marta, "that you, Ann? She didn't keep me long, did she?"

"It seemed ages. I was worried for fear she would say something that you would not understand about what I thought, and then, with the girls in the suite, perhaps there would not be a good chance to tell you all about everything. Bunny came by and reminded me that it was study hours; but this was too important, so I stayed."

"Come on over to my practice room. It may not be my room, of course, for our practice hours may be changed; but it will be a good place to talk. Nobody will mind. I think that Bunny was ahead of time about study hours. We'll not be supposed to keep them tonight,—oh, of course, to stay off the campus. But there go some girls now. There will have to be a lot of going back and forth. Come on."

The girls went to the building in which both had practiced on their respective instruments the previous year. It was dark, and when they tried the doors they were locked. "I might have known!" exclaimed Marta, in disgust. "Idiot!—I am referring to myself, Miss Sterling!"

"Your explanation is accepted," laughed Ann, "but I might have had a brain or two about *me*! We'll just sit down a few minutes on these steps to unburden our souls."

"I've precious little to unburden," said Marta. "Miss Tudor began as if it were a social call. She asked me about what sort of a summer I had had, then seemed very much interested in my description of your home and the lovely mountain cabin, lodge, I mean. She asked me how you and I became acquainted, how we got along together, if we belonged to the same sorority with Eleanor and Suzanne, and who my special friends in the school were."

"Foxy Miss Tudor!" Ann remarked.

"Yes; I began to smell a mouse when she began to inquire about my friends. It was something about rooming, of course. Then she asked me if I would be willing to make a change to some other suite or a room, if the present arrangement did not seem best. She said, too, before I answered, that you 'expressed yourself as willing to give up the suite.'"

"Aha!—angelic Miss Tudor!"

Marta peered through the gathering darkness to see if Ann were losing her mind. "Why all this enthusiasm about our dean?" she inquired.

"I may tell you some time," replied Ann.

"That was all. I told her that I did not care much, and if it were easier all around for her to change us, I did not mind."

"Marta, you are an old dear, and I shall not worry a mite about what Miss Tudor is going to do.

Let's go home, look over our lessons and go to bed. I think that it was a shame to post lessons and send us to our teachers the opening day. They never did that before. They must have a new system and are speeding up. We do lose a lot of time; and they had all our books ready."

"Just the same, I don't believe that we shall recite, on account of the new students in all the classes. But Ann, *why* did you want me to come right to you after seeing Miss Tudor? What has been going on?"

"If you don't mind, Marta, I'll wait, until whatever is to be done is done, and then tell you."

"All right. As you say, 'curiosity killed the cat,' and I'm sleepy."

The girls talked of other things as they sped toward their new home. There they found the suite empty, as Ann had hoped. She did wish that no explanations would be necessary tonight. No telling what idea of self-sacrifice Marta might get,—and spoil it all. Both girls were sleepy after a full day. It was bath and bed, trusting to luck and early rising for the lessons of the morrow.

Ann felt comfortable as she drifted off to sleep. She hoped that she had not been hypocritical in what she had said to Eleanor. She really would have preferred no change. But if there must be one, it was pleasant to think that she and Marta were not to be separated.

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CHAPTER VII

SETTLED AT LAST

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"It was really too easy," said Ann afterwards, "the way things were fixed up. Nothing like having somebody who can decide for you. Catch me trying to fuss myself with school arrangements! I'm certainly glad that I did not take up Suzanne's suggestion and go ahead to change things."

The next morning there was a mad scramble to get ready in time, to get lessons, which, it was warned, would be expected; to have breakfast, do a thousand things, more or less, and reach classes on time. Not much thought could be given to affairs in the rooms and suites. Eleanor and Aline rushed over to the conservatory building; Marta had both matters musical and matters literary to engage her attention; and Ann, last but not least, reading Latin and French at an early hour, went over to breakfast without a belt which covered some shirring on her dress, and would have gone to class unmindful of her beltless condition, had not Marta noticed that the dress looked "different" and discovered what was lacking. "This is the life," laughed Ann, hastily fastening her belt, as she flew out of the room to make the early class.

"I like it," said Marta, coming abreast of Ann and wishing that she could slide down the bannisters. "Are we going to be late?"

80

"Hope not," said Ann, who had spent too long a time in looking over another lesson.

So the day went, with the usual fun and the usual worries, hoping that one would be called on for the part best learned, or easiest to do impromptu; but the teachers were merciful to the recent comers and the mountains and impassable streams of learning became level plains to young feet.

At dinner there were the customary special announcements. Then a list of names was read, while every one listened intently for her own name.

"The following persons," read Miss Montgomery for Miss Tudor, "will see the dean about special matters relating to changes in rooming or studies. This must receive immediate attention. The young ladies will go to the library and will be sent for in the order desired."

The names were then read, in alphabetical order; and they included, Ann noted, the names of all in her own suite and those in the new cottage suite occupied by her cousin and her friends.

A bevy of girls, some wondering for what reason they had been called, all talking, laughing, or exchanging confidences in low tones, reached the library after dinner. At the table Ann had caught a look from Eleanor, who whispered to her, as they were on their way, "Do you know what is to be done?"

81

"I do not," said Ann, "though from something Marta said, I fancy that she and I are not to be separated. Marta does not know all the proceedings."

Eleanor nodded, and just then Aline joined her. In the library, Genevieve and Madeline were

careful to keep at some distance from Eleanor but Suzanne did not join them. She came in later, with two other girls of her "set."

One or two new girls were sent for first. Then Eleanor and Ann were asked to come together. Miss Tudor looked worn with the efforts of the first days, but was as energetic as ever, holding in her hand a paper, evidently a list of what was to be done.

"I wanted you to come together, girls, for one reason, that the pleasant relations between you might not be disturbed. Eleanor, Ann did not ask for the arrangement that I am going to make. She only said that she did not think it fair, if any change were made, for Marta to suffer in the case."

Miss Tudor paused a moment, and Eleanor said, "Yes, Miss Tudor. Ann said the same thing to me when we talked about it."

"Very well. I am making very few explanations about this and shall ask you both to keep your own council. The girls in the other suite are going to be offended. Genevieve, at least, deserves it, and I am not so sure, Eleanor that I am doing right in making it so easy for you, when you upset the whole thing."

"Yes'm," meekly said Eleanor.

"But it seems best to break up that arrangement. I am going to put Suzanne, with Lora Collier, in the suite with you, in the place of Marta and Ann. Both of them told me that they were willing to change, if it seemed best to me; and Miss Sterling, (Miss Tudor regained her formality), I think that you will not be displeased with the suite in which I am placing you and Miss Ward. This is the slip, with number and names."

Miss Tudor handed each girl a slip and rose, dismissing them by that simple act. But Eleanor hesitated. "Excuse me, Miss Tudor, but I understood that Lora was not coming back."

Miss Tudor smiled. "So did I, until last night, when we received a wire, asking that I place her with some of her friends. Do you think that you two singers can get along without jealousy?"

"I should think we can!" exclaimed Eleanor, "and Miss Tudor, I want to apologize for the way in which I spoke to you the first time I was here. You have certainly poured coals of fire on my unworthy head."

Again Miss Tudor smiled. "I accept the apology, Eleanor. See that you are a good girl!"

"The best I can be!" exclaimed Eleanor, as the two girls walked out of the door.

"Ann, the very idea! I'm awfully sorry that you girls are not to be with us, but since the change is to be,—Lora! Hurrah!"

"I say so too, Eleanor," said Ann, taking Eleanor's arm. "Lora will be a good room-mate for Suzanne, and you will all be Sig-Eps but Aline. I may as well warn you now that we'll get her into the Bats, if she will come."

"I want you to. I've exhausted all my arguments on Aline. Her mother died not so very long ago, and she was a Bat, so it is hopeless. Let's see your slip, Ann; who is with you?"

"There aren't any other names. Isn't it funny?"

"She is giving you a suite by yourselves till she has to put somebody in it. There aren't enough sophomores to fill the two halls; So I shouldn't be surprised but you'd have it all to yourselves."

"Unless there are too many freshmen and they have to put a few over here."

"That is not likely. They enlarged the freshman hall two years ago. See,—here is my slip, all four names on it. What is your number? Second floor, isn't it? I hope that it isn't too far away. I'm coming around once in a while if you have no objections."

"Objections! What an idea. I have a lot of studying to do, for I have to make good for my Dad. But I'm the most 'gregarious' being you ever saw. So he says!"

"All right. Now let me tell you something, Ann. It's another confession, like the apology I just gave Miss Tudor. But one some way just can't imagine your taking a superior air and saying, 'that's just what I thought of Eleanor Frost'."

Ann was laughing at this, and wondered what was coming. "When I first asked you to play for me, it was partly because I knew you could do it and partly because I was mad at Suzanne for refusing. Then the girls wanted me to be president of the sops this year and I said I would, so I started out to be a politician. I thought that you had a lot of influence in your crowd,—"

Here Ann gasped, stopped in the middle of the walk and looked at Eleanor, who laughed and continued.

"And if I got you to liking me you wouldn't fight me perhaps. The funny thing was that I got to liking you, on your own account, and I adore your grandmother, to say nothing of your mother. And while I still will not refuse the presidency, please punish me by putting up somebody else and voting for her."

"Of *all* things!" exclaimed Ann. "What on earth makes you tell me this?"

"I don't know myself; only I thought that I'd feel better. I'd like to be a *real* friend of yours, and I am ashamed of the way it began."

Ann held out her hand. "Shake hands on it, Eleanor. I'm glad to have as strong a girl as you are for my friend. I'll have to confess that I was too much influenced by that 'forest fire' conflagration, and haven't known until lately how fine you are. I don't wonder that Suzanne felt 'killed' over your withdrawing from her suite."

85

The girls clasped hands, Eleanor saying that it was too bad not to be able to exchange sorority "grips". They walked along after that, talking of everything else but the recent revelation and the affair of the suite. "I'll remember the number, Ann," said Eleanor, as she reached their present location and went in, while Ann went on to find her new quarters.

"You can help us move," saucily said Ann, while Eleanor, like Suzanne, accustomed to a maid at home, lifted her brows and remarked, "Mayhap I will."

The suite, for whose number Ann was looking, was at the end of another corridor, which ran at right angles to that on which The Jolly Six had their quarters. The outside door was unlocked, the key in it, and there were evidences of fresh dusting and cleaning. Ann ran first to the window to see what the view might be and found that she looked out toward the hillside, the little stream and the rustic bridge. "O lovely, lovely!" she cried, and started back, intending to bring over an armful of clothes at once. At the door she almost ran into Marta who was on a similar errand, and remarked that at every turn she ran into her room-mate.

"Look here, Marta, isn't this prodigious?—and splendiferous?" Ann drew Marta to the window to see the same picturesque hillside. "See that baby cottontail,—right down under the window,—in those bushes!—now he's gone!"

86

Marta drew out her slip and pointed to the two names. "Are we really going to be by ourselves for a bit?"

The girls exchanged glances and smiles. "It will be easier to study, but it would have been fun to be in a suite with other girls."

"That may happen yet;" said Marta. "Come on, let's get moved as quickly as possible. I'm going for an armful of books."

"Noble girl! I was thinking of clothes."

"What's the difference? Both of 'em have to come."

At Eleanor's suite there was an excited and happy group of girls. "I hired one of the chambermaids to pack my trunk and things," Suzanne was saying. "Madeline won't speak to me and I hate to go over there. Ann, won't you go over and see that the things in the bureau drawers get in?"

"Why should I run into trouble, if you do not want to go yourself, my dear?" asked Ann, delving into her closet and coming out with dresses and coats.

"Isn't she mean?" complained Suzanne, half in earnest.

"Gracious me, Suzanne," said Eleanor. "Brace up and go over after your jewelry and little things. If the girls won't speak to you, go ahead anyway. The sooner it's over the better. *Look* at Ann!"

87

Ann's load was arranged for her departure on the first trip. One hat, back to the front, was on her head. In each hand she carried several shoes, precariously held together, and draped over shoulders and arms were as many frocks and coats as she could manage.

"You'll muss 'em, Ann," Suzanne suggested.

"I would be grateful for assistance," was Ann's suggestion in return. "No, not these," she said, refusing to unload, as Eleanor and Aline ran to her assistance. "There are others in the closet, friends!"

Laughingly the girls, even Suzanne, selected a load from those garments of Marta and Ann which remained in the closet, and the parade down two corridors began. Other girls, from suites on the way, heard the laughter and came to look and join in the merriment, or to pick up a shoe

or two, dropped along the way.

"Oh, isn't this a ducky suite?" said Suzanne. "See what a pretty rug there is in the study. I'm glad, Ann, for I feel guilty, turning you and Marta out in this fashion!"

"Yes," said Aline, who had brought the hangers and was trying to help Marta hang up the frocks. "This looks like the 'ejections' you read about, where people are turned out with all their household furniture and clothing. We haven't gotten to the furniture yet!"

88

Once started, the girls were having such a good time over it that they helped with more clothes and the books, until in a short time nearly everything was carried over, leaving the little things of the "top drawers" to be packed more leisurely in the suit-cases.

Ann, who repented of her careless reply to Suzanne, for she saw that her cousin was really distressed over her own moving, offered to go over with her, to help pack and oversee the maid, who would need telling about what clothes to select. She was rewarded by Suzanne's gratitude. "O Ann, *will* you?" she cried. "I shan't mind so much if you are with me! Anyhow, I think that Maddy thinks I'm going to room with you."

"It is just as well," said Ann. "Did you set any time for the maid to come over?"

"Yes." Suzanne looked at her watch. "She could come in about half an hour. Maybe Genevieve and Maddy are not in the suite yet. *Will* you come?"

They were in Ann's suite now and Ann looked at the books to be arranged, thinking, too, of the lessons to be learned. "It's a mess to leave you with, Marta," she said.

"Go right along," replied Marta. "I don't blame Suzanne for not wanting to go over alone."

Fortunately for Suzanne, neither Genevieve nor Madeline were as yet at home. "They are probably telling the whole school about it," said Suzanne resentfully.

89

"I can't blame Madeline much, can you?" remarked Ann.

"N-no, maybe not," Suzanne acknowledged. "Nobody knows a thing about Lora's coming, I guess."

Rapidly the girls packed and placed everything out in plain sight which was to go in the trunk. The maid arrived and was given directions while the girls started away, with the smaller articles in Suzanne's bag and a suit-case which Ann carried. The trunk might not be sent over until morning. But after Suzanne and Ann were half way across the intervening distance, Ann bethought herself of a box which she had forgotten. "I'm not sure where I left it, Suzanne, so I'd better go right back and get it. It is the one with some of your treasures,—you remember—that you packed and gave to me to put in the suit-case. I said I would, and laid it down while I got something else."

"Oh, yes! If you will get it, Ann,—it's a shame, though."

Ann ran back and by the "irony of fate," as she told Marta afterwards, had to meet Madeline at the door. "Excuse me, Madeline," she said. "I have been helping Suzanne pack up and forgot to get one box."

Madeline stepped back, with exaggerated politeness. Ann, who procured the box as rapidly as possible, thought at first that Madeline was refusing to speak to her; but as she left the door, Madeline looked after her and said, "I hope that you are satisfied at last, to get Suzanne away from me!"

90

Ann stopped, surprised, yet knowing how Madeline must feel about it. It made all the difference possible in the tone of her reply. "Suzanne is not going to room with me, Madeline."

Proceeding on her way down the stairs and out upon the campus, Ann reproached herself, however for the statement. After all, she *had* been glad to "get Suzanne away" from Madeline, though not for the reason that Madeline supposed. Then she thought of Suzanne's remark to Marta about feeling guilty for turning Marta out. Was that sincere, or for making an impression on Eleanor? Such had been her thought. "Look here, young lady," she said to herself, "it's lots easier to judge other people than to be perfectly sincere yourself!"

CHAPTER VIII

91

"RUSHING" ALINE FOR THE "BATS"

It was at rather a late hour that evening when Ann and Marta attacked what Suzanne called "the everlasting lessons". The Jolly Six had gathered in to see the new headquarters, and even after study hours had commenced, Suzanne or Eleanor would whisk around, to say something, or to bring some little forgotten article. Lora Collier was arriving late, and according to Suzanne, nobody in the suite could study for the excitement. "The reputation of the family rests with you, as usual," teased Suzanne, a new Suzanne, it seemed, so happy, in spite of a few twinges of conscience in regard to Madeline. Suzanne's conscience was waking up a little.

"Say, Ann, tell me honestly now," said Marta, "wouldn't you have preferred to stay in the suite with Suzanne?"

"Who's been talking to you, Marta Ward?" asked Ann in return.

"Suzanne and Eleanor made a few remarks that informed me of something back of all this."

"I may as well tell you the whole story now, then," said Ann, "and first of all, let me say that while I liked being with Eleanor and Aline, as long as you were with me, and while I like Suzanne, I should have been much troubled *about* you, had Miss Tudor arranged it that way, and homesick *for* you, Marta Ward." 92

With this introduction, Arm told Marta all that had happened, from Suzanne's first coming to her about Eleanor's leaving the suite, to the events of the evening. "And I believe that we are the best off of all, Marta," she concluded. "Isn't this restful and fine? Why, we can each have a bedroom if we want to,—and all this closet room! The girls don't think that we'll have anybody put in with us at all, though you will want some one after I go to Florida, as I suppose I shall. Perhaps you could change then, and room with Lora in Suzanne's place."

"Time enough to think of that later. I'm glad that everybody is so happy. It is too bad about Madeline, though."

"She likes Genevieve. They are really more congenial, and you'll see her getting over this,—if for no other reason than that Suzanne is sister to a very handsome brother."

"Why, Ann!"

"That is rather terrible for me to say, isn't it? But 'mark my words',—and it will make Suzanne feel better. Trust Miss Tudor, too, to do something to fix Genevieve and Madeline. For all Madeline said what she did to me, she wasn't the least bit cast down." 93

"We are going to have a lot of company here, Ann."

"Indeed we are. We'll have to *plan*, to get all our lessons in, because of the rushing, and we'll begin with Aline!"

"*Aline?* You haven't suddenly taken leave of your senses, have you, my dear room-mate?"

"Not yet, Marta. Aline's mother was a Beta Alpha Tau. Her mother died not so very long ago, it seems, and Aline won't hear to going into the Sig-Eps. Naturally, she hasn't offered herself to the Bats, and I wondered why in the world the Sig-Eps hadn't initiated her long ago. Eleanor herself told me!"

At that astonishing statement, Marta almost gasped. "It behooves us to get right at it, then," she said, "and we must find out about the other new girls right away. There was a fine looking girl at dinner with Genevieve. She was rather over-dressed, but looked like a girl of some force, and Genevieve was being too nice to her for words."

Ann nodded assent "I saw her," she said. "But we'll get in touch with the senior girls tomorrow and ask what they know and what they want us to do. I know that they will want Aline, as much as if we had had a meeting."

"By the way, did you hear Katherine tell me that a meeting is called for tomorrow afternoon, right after lessons, after last hour, and that meanwhile we are to find out all we can about the new girls. We can't take many in this year, you know, because our number is so nearly filled." 94

"But we must not miss any especially fine girls," said Ann. "The others will be just as anxious as we are, so we must arrange to meet them."

"What do you think about our numbers?"

"It always seems to me, Marta, that a sorority that has a comparatively large number of members in the chapter stands a chance of not being so 'exclusive', which is the main criticism, Mother says, upon the sororities. However, let the authorities concern themselves about it. As long as they have 'em, and especially one as 'chawming' as the Bats, and I belong to it, I'm not worrying. At the same time, I can't think it all there is of school life, like some of the girls, can you, Marta?"

"I should say not! But it is lots of fun. Hurrah for the Beta Alpha Taus!"

On the following afternoon, a group of merry girls were arranging themselves upon the hillside for a meeting. Some had brought cushions. Others found convenient stone or rock; and still others sat down upon the green hill itself, with its grass, weeds and vines.

"Look out there, Kit," warned Lucile Early. "There is some poison ivy near that bush."

95

"It never poisons me," replied Katherine Neville, pulling aside some sticks from the place she had chosen.

"Where is poison ivy?" asked Ethel Johns, jumping up. "It poisons me all right. That summer I went to camp I spent two weeks in the little hospital room from being poisoned by it."

Lucile moved over to the other side of what was forming itself into a circle and sat down by Dorothy Horton. The Jolly Six was out in force, for here came the other two members, Ann Sterling and Marta Ward. "Ho there, Dots," laughed Ann, "may I sit down by you?"

"Come right along," Dorothy invited, and Ann threw a cushion down, then dropped upon it, leaning over to engage in a low conversation with Dorothy. There were many secrets in the air now. Exchange of experiences or of facts was going on around the circle. The senior girls carried the greatest responsibility. The junior girls came next, in dignities and consultation; then, the new sophomores, eager to help with the important activities on hand. It was wonderful not to be a freshman any longer. A whole year of experience made a Forest Hill girl something more than a mere initiate. Her feet were founded upon the rock of residence, familiarity and enthusiasm. It was her school home, beloved, dearest of colleges!

96

Ann had no thought of any trouble in persuading the girls that Aline would make a desirable member. The only contingency that might arise was one of numbers, in case the older girls had those in the upper classes whom they wanted to add to the sorority.

Sorority meetings and sorority affairs are shrouded in much secrecy. One would scarcely dare describe one of the official meetings, so to speak. And as for those prescribing the duties of faithful members or the rites of initiation, what dire consequences might follow one shudders to consider! But this meeting was an ordinary, informal gathering, designed only to consider ways and means in the important provision for handing the Beta Alpha Taus down to future ages.

There were several preliminary interruptions, due to the difficulty of getting settled. "All ready, Alice?" asked the secretary, who had come without any paper and had just secured an old envelope from the sweater pocket of a friend. From another she borrowed a short pencil.

"You're a great secretary, Jean," remarked the one who surrendered the pencil. "I suppose that I'll never see that again, either." This was said laughingly, with no intent to wound.

"I hadn't a minute to get ready. Alice called me and told me to come right over, that we would be late. Yes, perhaps I *can* remember to hand back your precious pencil. You must have had it last year, I think, and when was it sharpened last?"

97

"I found it, in the table drawer of my new suite," laughed the lender.

"Ow,—girls!" A girl on the opposite side of the circle jumped up with what Virgil would have termed a feminine shriek. "Look out! There he goes!"

Half the girls were on their feet by this time, but Ann and Dots, who had seen the dire monster glide in a different direction from their position, sat laughing.

"What on earth!"

"What is it!"

"I nearly sat *down* on it!"

"A garter snake, girls," announced Alice, who was Alice Mann, the present head of the "Bats". "Hurry up, please, and get in order. We haven't much time before dinner. Come to order at once, please." Alice was clapping her hands; and several other girls, who were quietly sitting and ready, softly seconded her clapping. In a moment all was quiet, though several girls still nervously looked about them, to make sure that none of the hated species was near.

"We shall come right to the point, and I want to hear from those who have names to propose for our consideration. We shall not elect, I suppose. Then I want to know how we shall arrange for our first informal banquet and whom we shall invite. We'll have to do what we are going to do right away, if we get our bids in first with several, who know nothing about our sororities and will go with the jolliest or most attentive crowd."

98

"Madam President."

"Miss Price."

"I propose that inasmuch as we took in a larger number of freshmen than usual last year, we bring in a number of upper classmen, some juniors and seniors that made good last year and did not enter a sorority, and also look up a few juniors that have just come in. Then, of course, we'd better add a few freshmen. We have enough in the present sophomore class."

Ann looked at Dorothy in dismay. "We'll vote against that," she whispered. "What's the *matter* with her?"

"Have you a list of girls that you think eligible?" asked Alice Mann.

"Yes; shall I read it?"

"If you please."

"That is all set up," whispered Dorothy, "but I suppose they had to have some idea."

The girls listened while the list was read, and when it was finished its reader sat down, several girls were on their feet at once. The president recognized one of them.

"Madam President, is there a motion before the house?"

"Miss Price, did you offer that list or your suggestion as a motion?"

"Yes,—if you want one to start on."

"Very well, Miss Price moves that we elect from the juniors, seniors and freshmen,—is that right?"

"Madam President,—"

"In a moment. Is there a second to that motion?"

"I second it."

"Very well. The motion has been moved and seconded that we elect from the seniors, juniors and freshmen. Any remark? Now, girls a motion is before the house and I suppose that you can talk about it all you please."

The girls who had first risen were still standing and were recognized in turn.

"Madam President, I suppose that it is not necessary to talk about the motion, is it? In Congress they talk about everything on earth sometimes, so my father says."

Alice laughed a little. "If you follow the example of Congress, I'm afraid we'll not get anywhere this afternoon. It is not necessary to be too formal anyhow. Get to work!"

Katherine was standing now. "Madam President, as a sophomore, I do not like to have my class discriminated against. Suppose that we fail to pass that motion and substitute one that merely suggests the offering of suitable names from any class. We can use our judgment afterwards in selection."

A little further discussion followed. Then the president put the "crazy" motion—this was Dots' term for it,—and it was lost. Katherine was permitted to put a different motion. The list was read again. One or two other girls presented additional names and then Ann was on her feet.

"As one of the sophomore members I feel a little timid about presenting names, particularly since it has been suggested that we have enough sophomores. I acknowledge, too, that we have; but there is one fine girl that I am sure none of you know, or knew last year, would be eligible. The Sig-Eps have done their best to get her,—of that I was told by a loyal Sig-Ep—but this girl's mother was a Bat, which we did not know, though I suppose it is in the records."

The girls were listening intently. Who could it be that had been rushed by the Sig-Eps and wouldn't join?

Ann avoided telling the name a little longer. "It isn't so very long since her mother died and that makes her all the more ready to join her mother's society, I think. Now, Madam President, do you think that you could consider her name if I should give it? Indeed I am ready to propose her at once, for she is gifted in several different ways and a lovely girl that everybody likes, so far as I know."

"Who is it, Ann? Who is it?" came from several sources, sophomore as well; for in the rush of events, Ann had not had time to talk privately with any of the Jolly Six or her other friends.

"I am sure that we are all anxious, Miss Sterling, to know who the girl is," said Alice, again clapping her hands for order.

"I haven't even had time to talk it over with anybody except my room-mate since I found out. This girl, too, has made no effort, I assure you, to let it be known that she favors the Bats. I understood that her room-mate found it out accidentally. She is Aline Robson."

"Aline!"

"Why, I supposed that she was already a Sig!"

"Let's not miss Aline,—it will make a sensation all right!"

"Let's have her in right away and give her a big initiation to impress the natives!"

"What is your pleasure, ladies?" laughed Alice, who was as surprised as any one. Aline, small, reserved, but gifted and industrious, had made an impression upon her schoolmates in the one year that she had been with them. "Miss Price," Alice continued, recognizing that young woman, one of the seniors.

"I want to withdraw what I said about our having enough sophomores. Honestly, girls, I believe that it will make a stir and a good impression for us if we get Aline in instanter. Madam President, I move that we waive all rules and put it through now, sending Ann Sterling to present Aline with our invitation and bid to the greatest sorority in Forest Hill college!"

"Hear, hear!"

There was no objection and presently the deed was done. Ann was to see Aline at the close of the meeting. But there were other interesting matters. The girls began to talk about other desirable members.

"This girl, fellow Bats," said one of the juniors, "comes from another school, with all kinds of honors, for one thing; and while I do not like to speak of such a mundane matter, she also has plenty of money, which would help like everything in getting our new cottage that has recently been suggested."

"Fie, fie," jokingly said Dots.

"Well, I know the Bats are not a 'society' crowd, but we are not blind to the fact that if those who are fine girls anyhow are able to help us out financially, it is no drawback. I'm one of the practical sort!"

"The 'root of all evil', Jane!"

"You have it wrong,—it's the *love* of money that's the 'root of all evil'!"

So it went. One girl was good and interesting, but would not "fit in" with the rest. Another pleased everybody. A committee was appointed to find out more about these girls and others before a second meeting to be held that evening after dinner. "It is too soon, girls," said one distressed member of the committee. "It's nearly dinner time now!"

"Very well," said the president of the meeting. "Come around to our suite when the bell rings for the close of study hours,—and come 'tout de suite', too."

"Listen to Alice's French, and punning, too!"

"Wait a minute, Ann," called Alice, as Ann, happy in the thought of Aline, was about to leave, with Katherine and Lucile, it happened.

Ann waited for Alice, who put her arm over Ann's shoulder as they walked toward the buildings. "You know, don't you, Ann, that it is best not to be too precipitate in a thing of this sort?"

Ann looked inquiringly at Alice. "You mean not to take it for granted that Aline is ready to fall into our arms at once?"

"Yes. The girls, of course, will not do or say one thing till they get the report from you."

"I have been wondering how to manage it," said Ann. "I know Aline pretty well by this time, especially since we came very near to being suite-mates. Still, the Bats haven't paid her any particular attention since the first of last year."

"We did then, didn't we? That makes it a little better."

"Yes, but then we thought that it was not best to bid her,—she was so surrounded with the Sig-Eps and so intimate with Eleanor, though they didn't room together. Of course I did not know about it then, but I heard Katherine and Dots talk about it."

Alice walked along without saying anything further for a few moments. "How would it do, Ann, if after dinner we get hold of Aline, some of our crowd, maybe go outdoors, or bring her around to our suite, as it happens; and then when you go back to your building, I will stroll along with you and perhaps say something about our having found out that she had not joined the Sig-Eps, and being glad of it, or something like that—you never can tell what is best to say until the times comes."

"That is one reason why you are at the head of the Betas, Alice," said Ann. "You always *do* know just the nice thing to say!"

"Thanks, Ann. You are a loyal Beta Alpha Tau. I'm certainly glad that we got you in! Well, now, after what I am going to say has been said, and of course Aline will know anyhow, having been here a year, what we Bats are after,—then the way will be paved for you to have a serious little talk with her. Just tell her the facts, Ann, for they are certainly complimentary, the interest the girls took and how they want her. But I want a lot of our girls to meet her beforehand, anyhow, for the 'psychological effect'."

"I'm so glad, Alice, that you thought of this, because while we do want to hurry it up, it ought to be done in the right way. Goodbye. I'll tag on to Aline and tell her that I want to see her about something, if I can't get her away from her crowd in any other way."

"Very well, Ann, goodbye till after dinner! The rushing season for Aline will be short I hope."

"Yes; and I'm so glad that you think we'll have a special feast to celebrate her coming in,—if she does, and I'm pretty sure of it, on account of her mother you know."

Ann ran happily over to her suite, to hug Marta in the excess of her emotions, and to tell her about the plan of attack.

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CHAPTER IX

AT "POLLY'S" ONCE MORE

How hard it was to study these first days, when so much of importance to the Beta Alpha Taus and the other sororities was "hanging in the balance"! Marta and Ann scored success in their work only by early rising. It was fortunate for Ann that her heaviest work had been done in her first year. She still had a few extra hours to make up, but they were divided between the first and second semesters and were in studies which were not particularly hard for Ann. She concentrated her powers during regular study hours, rose an hour early, and spent the rest of the time, those happy hours between lessons and meals, in the service of the Beta Alpha Taus and the "Owls", her literary society. It was great fun to "cast dull care away", as she told Marta, and have a good time with the girls. Walks, rowing, canoeing, swimming, climbing the hills, usually with some new girls in tow,—everything took on a new pleasure and excitement. The "rushing season" was decidedly thrilling.

But alas for "best-laid plans" again! The desired hurrying of Aline into the ranks of Beta Alpha Tau was not so easily accomplished. That evening, after dinner, Aline responded pleasantly to the overture of the Bats. It was natural enough that Ann should be with her, and some of the other members of the Jolly Six; but she naturally noticed the fact that attention was being paid her by the senior and junior girls of the sorority. Not for nothing had Aline spent a year in a girls' school.

When, noticing that all the girls, with the exception of two new girls, were Betas, she was about to refuse an invitation to Alice's suite and slip away, Alice informed her that she was particularly desired. "You do not know my especial brand of fudge," she said, and Ann joined in, with the remark that no one who ever tasted it was known to refuse a second invitation. "Come on, Aline. We won't stay but a minute if you have anything important to do. I've got to get to work, too."

Aline yielded, and had as fine a time as anybody. Alice's fudge was all that had been claimed for it, and the study bell rang before the gay conversation ceased. The girls hastily brought their visiting to a close and started out, Ann slipping her arm through Aline's and not hurrying. Alice followed and strolled a little beyond the door of the senior cottage, where she and her suite-mates occupied a first floor suite. Over the campus, girls were making their way to cottages or to the music rooms.

"I must go back, girls," said Alice, turning to Aline, and taking both her hands. "We Betas, Aline, have only *just discovered* that you did not join the Sigs! 'Animus meminisse horret'! I can hardly forgive the Sigs for letting the impression get out that you were theirs,—Ann, you tell her about it, and humbly recommend your Beta sisters!"

With this, Alice smilingly left the girls, turning back at the door for a last glimpse.

"Well!" exclaimed Aline. "Alice is your president, or 'chief,' or head executioner, or whatever you call it, isn't she?"

"Yes."

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"Her quotation from the pious Aeneas was cute. I am wondering what all this means, of course; but I don't know whether I want you to talk to me about it or not, as she suggested."

Ann was a little surprised. "I'll not, if you do not want me to, Aline, but I have some things that I would like to say to you. It is perfectly true that we have just found out that you are not a Sig-Ep; and we know that it is by no fault of *theirs* that you are not. Are you pledged to some other sorority, Aline?"

"No. I didn't mean that, Ann, but I hate the 'rushing'. It always seems so insincere to me, and when I noticed the older girls in the crowd, I felt embarrassed. I don't mean, Ann," Aline added, noticing that Ann seemed a little subdued, "that I thought anything insincere tonight. I enjoyed the fun. Isn't Dots a case?—and that Jane Price!" Aline laughed in recollection.

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"Well, Aline, I don't want to urge you to anything you do not want to do. We'll start out on that basis. You know most of the Beta Alpha Taus and what sort of girls they are, so it is not necessary to recommend them, even 'humbly', as Alice said. You are perfectly able to make up your mind on that without assistance! What I want to tell you is in regard to how bad we want you to join us and what happened this afternoon. I'll ask you to remember that you had a little rushing from the Bats last year, till they thought it of no use. My! It makes me sick to think of it,—but maybe you wouldn't have joined us anyway."

Aline made no reply to this.

"This was our first meeting this afternoon, Aline, to plan the campaign. Various girls were brought up,—their names, I mean,—as desirable to consider, but there was no thought of bidding any one to-day, until your name was suggested and the fact was made known that you were not a Sig. I wish you could have heard the girls! They surely will feel bad if you turn us down, for I am authorized to invite you to join the Betas and as soon as possible. It was unusual, Aline, just as it is unusual for me to tell about one of our meetings."

There was a pause. Then Aline replied, "Ann, I—but thank you and the rest of the Betas very, very much, I don't know. Last year, I suspect I might have joined you. Mother was a member of your sorority. But now, so many of my friends are Sigs,—"

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"But you aren't joining the sorority, are you? I happen to know that they want you as much as ever."

"No, on account of Mother; and, well, I don't care for all of them, you know, girls like Genevieve and Madeline."

"Are there any of the Betas that you object to?"

"Oh, no!"

Ann did not know what else to say. They had stopped in the lower hall of the Castle to finish their private conversation and were in constant danger of being interrupted. "Well, Aline," she finally said, "think it over. I hope that you can tell me tomorrow. You will receive a more formal notice and note from Alice, through the secretary, tomorrow anyhow. But the girls wanted me to tell you tonight and they hope very earnestly that you will see your way clear to join us."

"You are a dear, Ann," said Aline, "I will—"

But here came Eleanor from one of the downstairs suites. "Here you are, Aline, I wondered what was keeping you. I've stayed over time. We'd better get to work, if Bunny does not get us and give us a black mark."

"I want to see you about something tomorrow, Eleanor," said Ann. "Keep a date for me, will you?"

Laughingly Eleanor said that she would and went up the stairs with Aline, Ann behind them.

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No one had thought of the fact that the girls were not supposed to leave their own halls after the bell for the close of study hours had rung. The Betas would scarcely want to antagonize or deceive the authorities for their meeting, Marta said, when she and Ann thought about it, and this conclusion was confirmed when a rap on the door came just before the bell rang. It was Alice, who stood just inside the door, closing it, to tell them that the meeting was "off", and to ask what Aline had told Ann. Alice shook her head doubtfully when Ann told her of the conversation. "I hope we get her, but I don't know," said she. "We'll have a short meeting tomorrow noon, before lunch,—at the rustic bridge. If it rains, we'll meet on the big porch of the senior cottage, or in my suite, if there are too many around. Please tell the other girls, Ann, and I'll not take the time to go there. Bunny challenged me, to give the countersign, in the hall; but I had permission!"

"What is the countersign, Alice?" laughed Marta, but Alice only flung up her hand in a salute and disappeared down the corridor.

"She's an awfully nice girl," said Marta. "I'll be sorry to have the senior group go out of Forest Hill this year."

"Yes, won't you?"

The next day was Ann's busiest day. She had no opportunity to talk with any of her friends if she had her lessons, except bits of chat on the way to and from class; and then, indeed, Ann's mind was full of the coming lessons.

The noon meeting was what Marta called short and sweet. It was decided to have a "spread" at Polly's, whether Aline joined then or not. They would make it a guest affair, inviting Aline and the few other girls, whom they wanted to meet the Beta Alpha Taus *en masse*, in the hope of interesting them.

"We'll make it an afternoon tea, girls," said Jane, "if you approve; and we'll have darling little invitations, hand painted, with parrots in one corner. Who paints? You do, Lucile, and Alice,——" Jane looked around for more artists, and several hands went up.

"Good. There won't be many to do, of course, so it will take very little time."

"How about place cards?" Alice inquired. The group must have presented an odd appearance, for they all stood close, arms about each other, or peering over shoulders at Alice and Jane, who were in the center.

"Sure enough. Well, we'll make them much like the invitations and do it all at the same time. Put the motion, Alice, please."

The gong rang for lunch as the "Bats" passed their resolution to have the Saturday afternoon spread at Polly's, if permitted. Alice was to see about that.

In the evening after dinner, Eleanor joined Ann in the parlors, where a group of girls were singing to Ann's playing. Eleanor sang with them, and, with Lora, made such attractive music that even Bunny, who, the girls said, hated music and was fit for "treason, stratagem and spoils", put her head in at the hall door, and stepped in at last to listen.

But the little group presently began to break up, for the outdoors called them. Eleanor leaned over Ann and asked, "What did you want to see me about, Ann? Was it Aline?"

"Yes. How did you guess?"

"Because you were with Aline, did not tell *her* what you wanted to see me about, and she had been off with a lot of you Bats."

"Smart girl. Yes, that is it. You were good enough to let me know that she would not join the Sigs, so I thought that I would ask your advice on how to get her with us. She hesitates on your account, I think. Wouldn't the Sigs all understand that Aline would join us because it is her mother's sorority?"

"I would," replied Eleanor, "but I don't know. You know how funny some girls are."

"Yes, but suppose it runs on and Aline does not join *any* sorority. I think that she will be sorry not to have had the fun of it and the pleasant friendships. It isn't as if we were all at swords' points with each other. Miss Tudor has certainly kept her word about having a lot of them! We compete in the rushing season, of course, and sometimes mean things are said; but after all, nobody takes it so very seriously. Don't you agree with me?"

"To a certain extent. Your sorority in a way does determine your more intimate friendships. You are with that group of girls more, and some of the girls are pretty snobbish about it."

Now Ann had thought that Eleanor belonged to that type. It was interesting to hear Eleanor herself mention snobbery and, in a sense, disclaim it.

"I will talk with Aline," continued Eleanor, "if I have a good opportunity, at least to let her know that I will not stand in her way. We can be just as good friends, though I *very much regret* not having her in the same sorority, and, Ann, I'll ask her once more, finally, if she will not come with us!"

"You have a perfect right to do that, Eleanor. If Aline joins us, I want it to be because she wants to, as well as for the reason that her mother was a member. That is, I don't want her to feel forced to come in,—well, you know what I mean."

"Yes. I'll talk to Aline tonight. After that, go ahead. Aline may come to you herself. Perhaps she'd rather. I suppose that she was to answer your proposition, if you made one?"

"I did; and she said that she would think it over. Say, Eleanor, you will not talk this over with any of the other Sigs, will you? I did not give the source of my information on Aline's not having joined the Sigs."

"This is between Aline and me," said Eleanor.

It was on Friday night, the one before the Saturday tea at Polly's, when Aline came around to Ann's suite and found her alone. Aline carried in her hand the pretty card of invitation with its gay little parrot. It bore the letters "R.S.V.P." upon it and Aline had already accepted, to Marta's and Ann's delight. But for a moment Ann felt startled. Could it be, after all, that Aline would not come, that there was not a bit of hope for the "Bats"? But she welcomed Aline and made her sit in the best rocker, where the view was prettiest.

"The shades of night are falling fast,' Aline, but you can see my favorite hilltop and a few pink and lavender streaks from the sunset. Going to society meeting?"

"Yes; aren't you?"

"Oh, yes. I have too many lessons for next week to do it, but I have tried staying home from the meeting and could not accomplish anything."

"So have I. I work better, anyhow, when the pressure is on and I haven't time to get what I'm getting!"

"Me, too!"

"Well, Ann,—I suspect that you think I've taken my time about deciding whether to join the Bats or not."

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Ann's heart was in her mouth,—so she afterward declared. "Better be slow than come to a wrong decision," she said. "And you have to get acquainted with our girls, too,—the ones in the upper classes, at least. You accepted our invitation to the tea at Polly's tomorrow, didn't you?"

"Yes," replied Aline, "but,—"

Ann's heart sank again.

"I felt some way, Ann, that,—well, I'd rather decide before I went to your social gathering, and so I came around to tell you that I have decided to be a Bat!"

"Oh, oh, oh,—how wonderful that is,—you dear old Aline! Why, I was simply scared to death when you began that way! Did you realize how my heart was going down into my toes? Aline! You *mean* it and will *join* us!"

"I certainly do; but why, what did I say that made you think I was going to refuse?"

"Why, your hesitation. 'Yes,' you had accepted the invitation, 'but,'—wait till I call Marta and the girls, *please*," for Aline, rather embarrassed, was rising to go.

"All right, I'll stay, then." Aline sat down, while Ann flew up the corridor, knocked and opened the door with sad lack of propriety, calling, "Kit, Dots,—everybody, come around to our suite and meet a new Bat!"

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Dorothy came hurrying toward Ann with extended arms. "Is it Aline?"

"Aline it is," said Ann, rapturously returning Dorothy's hug, and turning to meet the happy looks of the other girls, who rushed up to ask her how and wherefore. "I'll answer all questions another time," said she. "Come around now to welcome her! Isn't it fine?"

In a trice the entire Jolly Six surrounded Aline with affectionate and sincere greetings. Aline herself was happy, now that the deed was done and there was no retreat. It had been regrets in regard to Eleanor that had been the chief obstacle. Those Eleanor's generosity had removed, for Aline's sake. Ann felt like giving her the entire credit, but it was a thing that could not be mentioned without spoiling it all. Together they all went to the literary society meeting, as "Owls," happily anticipating the banquet of the morrow. It would, in spite of the former uncertainty, celebrate Aline's decision!

"Polly's" was decorated in attractive style, for the Beta Alpha Tau tea was not the only one given upon that Saturday afternoon. "Polly" had taken over other rooms, in the same building and on the same floor, which were made to connect, but offered some privacy for separate parties. Ann well remembered her first lunch in that popular place, when she saw Suzanne, decked in all her glory, proudly accompanying the Sigma Epsilons in a similar feast. For some reason the Sigs were not in the number of guests at the Polly Inn that Saturday. There were rumors, too, of a split in the ranks and trouble over the type of girls that were to be "bid." Genevieve and Madeline were said to lead one faction; Eleanor, and girls who made her list of particular friends, another.

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There was much going back and forth between suites, with many consultations and queries as to what would be suitable to wear. A junior girl, one who had been considered by the Bats as most desirable, asked Ann what she should wear and begged her to come to the junior cottage, to help her select. Ann was surprised to be regarded as authority on clothes, but readily consented. "You are dressed in such good taste, I notice," said the junior, "and I want to wear what is customary here. I'd know what to put on at home."

In pretty afternoon dresses, with hats and gloves, the girls made the 'buses that took them to town look like moving rainbows, and they fluttered into "Polly's" with happy faces. Ann, as one of the old girls now, had no more wonderings as to whether she should fit this or that occasion. Her background was established. Ann's distinctly interesting personality, her independence of character, the high quality of her work and the charm of her pleasant ways and sincerity had made her known, not only in her own class but in the school. Her chief delight at present was that Aline had accepted the Betas' bid and that she was present as not merely a guest but a prospective initiate.

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"Now, if we can only get the other girls that we want," she thought, as she looked around the long table and noted with what care Alice and the senior girls in charge had seated the guests, their place cards next those girls who were good entertainers and especially attractive. "It's certainly no harm to put our best foot foremost," she thought, and said as much to Lucile, who happened to sit on the other side of her.

Lucile nodded and gave her a meaning look, or what was intended to be one. "Do your best," she whispered, with a glance at the junior who had turned out to be in Ann's charge, with a junior "Bat" on the other side of her.

With so much information about the school to be given and received, and with the natural excitement and pleasure incident to the beginning of a new school year, subjects of conversation were not lacking. The new girls could scarcely help enjoying the atmosphere of fun and good humor which prevailed, the stories of funny events, school delights and calamities, and the very presence of the prettily dressed, merry girls. Last but not least, as more than one of the Bats said, Polly's "eats" were neither to be despised nor easily forgotten!

CHAPTER X

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CONSIDERING VARIOUS THINGS

In the whirl of events it is not to be supposed that Ann forgot home affairs. Sometimes, when lights were out and she composed herself for the night, she had a sudden pang of homesickness. Once some noise wakened her in the middle of the night and she blushed in the darkness to think of how prudishly she had talked to Maurice on one occasion. "What must he think of me!" she thought. Yet there was an impulsiveness about Maurice that warranted caution. She did like him very, very much, and had appreciated the real affection with which he had received her into the family circle. As she lay awake, unable to fall asleep again for some time, she fancied them all there at her grandmother's home. How was her mother enjoying it? It was not likely that she would let Ann know details, if they were annoying. How were Grandmother's business affairs coming on? Would Aunt Sue and Uncle Tyson really take advantage of her confidence? Grandmother was pretty wide awake about things now.

Then she pictured her father in Montana,—so far, far away! It was hard on him to have Mother gone. She wondered if she would ever hear again from the old Indian, Never-Run, and her hand stole under her pillow to a small silk bag which her mother had made her. In this, unless she forgot it, she put the curious bracelet Never-Run had given her, together with certain precious mementos, the pretty jewelry that she had received from her grandmother at different times, and often what cash she had on hand. It was convenient for burglars, but also handy to swing on her arm during fire drill, which might or might not be the real thing. Her little ruby and diamond ring she usually wore, as well as her wrist watch. "It must be nearly morning," she thought at last, after tossing for what seemed hours; but she had forgotten to put her flashlight under her pillow and was afraid to waken Marta by getting up. Finally she began to doze, and after a wild dream in which she and Maurice were dashing along a narrow mountain road, with Clifford on "Clipper" after them and calling to them to stop, she fell sound asleep.

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The Beta Alpha Taus were pretty well satisfied with the results of their "rushing" season. There were a few disappointments, to be sure, for other sororities were after some of the same girls. But they added a small number of desirable and attractive Forest Hill girls, including the new

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junior that liked Ann. Alice said, with some satisfaction, that they “had enough” and their share. The Owls, too, employed their activities in securing new members. Ann said that they scarcely had time to work at what they were supposed to come to school for, until sorority and society matters were settled. Fortunately, that was always done early; then the girls settled down to work with a better grace.

Ann and Marta congratulated themselves on their own good opportunity; for while their suite was often full of girls and gradually was becoming a central meeting place for Owls and Bats, according to Eleanor, who was herself an Owl, their study hours were quiet. They spread out their belongings all over the suite, till Marta said she hardly knew how they would “condense,” in case Miss Tudor sent some one to share it with them. But the weeks flew on to the middle of the term and they had not been disturbed.

Meanwhile, Madeline and Suzanne had effected a truce, spoke to each other and were able to meet in functions of the Sigma Epsilons without indulging in any side flings of unpleasantness. Genevieve, also, was able to acknowledge Eleanor’s presence by cool bows. This state of things had been brought about through sister Sigs, who told both Madeline and Genevieve that it would not do, and urged Suzanne and Eleanor to apologize. This Ann learned through Aline and Eleanor. It helped the situation marvelously, said Aline, that Miss Tudor had removed the temporary suite-mate whom Genevieve and Madeline did not like, and filled the suite by placing there two new girls, a “wee bit” flashy in appearance, but more sensible than Genevieve or Madeline. One of the girls was the daughter of a millionaire, by report, and Genevieve, with superior airs, let it be understood that the personnel of the suite was perfectly satisfactory and much superior to what it would have been had Eleanor and Suzanne remained. This, of course, was not put in so many words, merely implied. But it reached Eleanor, who shrugged her shoulders and passed it on to Suzanne, always delighted to have the least of confidences from Eleanor. The new girls with Genevieve and Madeline were taken into the same sorority, though late in the term.

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In spite of Ann’s best efforts, she could not get in any extra practice hours, as she had intended. The literary work, which she was too proud to neglect, took up the greater part of her time. Outside of her regular practice period, however, there were occasions on which she accompanied the girls, either Eleanor or Lora, or found a few minutes in between to practice on some solo for a society meeting. Her teacher said that she was advancing, which was encouraging, but it did not satisfy Ann’s ambition. She almost envied Marta, who was making the music course her particular object; but she knew that her parents would not hear to her dropping out of the regular course.

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“The trouble with me, Marta,” she said, “is that I am too divided up. I can’t pursue one thing, like you.”

“Don’t worry, Ann. You will have a fine foundation for ’most anything later on and your fingers are gifted. I’ve got to get something as quickly as possible, for I’m going to make most of my income when I get out of college. So I propose to make it doing what I like best.”

Mr. Sterling wrote to his daughter occasionally, from Montana, where he was, as usual, busily employed with ranch affairs and other matters. But it was from her mother that Ann learned the most about her father’s doings.

Maurice wrote one gay letter toward the beginning of the term, with no reference to anything discussed between them. He signed himself, however, “Yours, in spite of discouragements.”

Clifford Hart wrote several interesting letters, chiefly about school matters, though he urged her to take good care of herself and not to forget her Montana friends or the good old days. From Kendall Gordon, who took such a fancy to Ann during the summer, she received more than one carefully written message, more formal than those from Cliff and Maurice, yet expressing considerable interest in Ann and her surroundings. Ann was grown up, she thought sometimes. She heard from Inga and Hilda, her two partly Swedish girl friends. Greta was too busy to write, she supposed. Inga was going to school again. Poor Inga, so gifted, so tied! Grandmother had expressed an interest in Inga. Ann wondered if Grandmother could not have done something for Inga. But home and duty came first, she supposed. Perhaps some day Inga would have an opportunity to develop that wonderful voice.

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One afternoon her thoughts had been turned upon home affairs, as she lay resting upon their couch in the central study. Marta was away practicing. Ann had just returned from her last class after a full day. There was plenty of time to get ready for dinner and she was too lazy to study before that. Stretched out, she almost dozed off, when Eleanor tapped and came in.

“For once!” exclaimed Eleanor. “For once, I do not find you studying—are you sick?”

Ann laughed and rubbed her eyes. “Not a bit of it! ‘Sick’ because I was not studying? I didn’t know that I had such a terrible reputation as that. But I have had to dig in a good deal between times of society rushing, banquets, feasts, and one thing or another. How do you like being president of the sophomore class?”

“It is not a very hard duty,—but I am surprised over it.”

"Reward of merit," laughed Ann.

"I think that you had a hand in it, in spite of what I said to you."

"Maybe I did; but, of course, if we could have elected a Bat,——" Ann lifted her brows and left it there.

"I didn't work for it, Ann."

"I know you didn't, but some of the rest of us did. We had had a Bat the freshman year, and it was only fair, besides, we wanted a girl like you, and so it happened. Honestly, Eleanor, I wouldn't have believed the first of last year that you and I would ever be friends like this; would you?"

"No, Ann, but we are never going to stop being friends, I hope."

"Not a bit of it. You'll come out to Montana next summer, won't you?"

"I will if I can. Couldn't you and Suzanne come to our place this year some time, say the spring vacation?"

"It would be lovely, Eleanor, but I suppose that our plans are too indefinite to make any definite ones for me."

"By the way, what I came in for was to bring you a letter from your mother, I suppose. The mail was just being put in our boxes as I came away and Marta gave me this for you. She said that she was going off somewhere, I've forgotten where, with Ethel Johns, and would not be back till just before dinner." Eleanor opened one of two books which she had been carrying and took out the letter, which she handed to Ann.

"Thanks, Eleanor,—but you are not going, are you? I'm in no hurry to read the letter."

"I can't stay this time. Take another nap. I'm afraid I wakened you."

After Eleanor left, Ann raised the curtain a little and stretched out again, tearing open the end of the letter. It was a good fat one, such as she loved to get from her mother.

"Dearest Daughter," she read. "Forgive me for making you wait a little longer than usual for your letter from me. There have been so many things going on, and you know that Mother wants me with her a great deal. We are making up for lost time. I think that Mother has rather overdone the having company for me. She is tired and Sue gloats a little over the fact, I think,—not that I would accuse her of wanting Mother to be ill, but it proves, you see, that her pretended concern about Mother's health is right."

Ann was surprised at her mother's plain speaking, but since the denouement in regard to many things at Grandmother's, her mother had broken over her long reserve with Ann. Rapidly Ann read on.

"We have about finished entertaining the 'country-side,' village and town, I think, and I am glad. To be sure, we shall be entertained in turn and have already received many invitations. But Mother need not go unless she desires. Sue goes right along with me and so far as I can see, has accepted the situation. She seems to have recovered from her chagrin at the failure of her plans and matters move as usual. I told you, I think, that Mother lets her continue to direct the household.

"There are some arguments between her and Mother, who is then tired, indeed. Sue is disappointed at not being able to persuade Mother to the trip abroad and is putting obstacles in the way of the Florida trip. Why this should be so I can not see; for she would enjoy the trip. Mother tells me privately that if there is much more of it, she will simply arrange to go with your father and me, and let the rest do what they please and entirely at their own expense. In that case, my dear, you will not be too much disappointed, I hope, if you do not accompany us, after our Christmas all together at your grandmother's. Oh, yes,—Sue wants to take the whole party, maids and all, to one of the most expensive hotels at Palm Beach. Mother thinks that the business this year scarcely warrants that expense and prefers a more quiet spot, perhaps an apartment, though she is willing to take a house somewhere, close this one except for one or two servants, and take the whole outfit down. Privately, I think that this would entail as much expense as the other. But I am out of the way of many things that once I would have felt were natural enough.

"I tell you this that you may understand the situation. What Mother decides I do not much care, just so she is not worn out with argument, which is worse than entertaining. I see clearly why Mother let so much slip into your Aunt Sue's hands. It was easier than the continual fretting. Your Uncle Tyson looks worried, except in the presence of Mother. Maurice has made a flying trip home and back to school again. I do not know what brought him, perhaps nothing special, but he had several conversations with his father which were rather argumentative, I thought, not being able to get beyond the sound of their voices as we sat in the drawing room.

"Do not think from all this that I am leading a worried existence myself. As was the case with

you last year, I am trying to grasp the situation the best I can, in the hope of being able to protect Mother from any unhappiness. I have enjoyed meeting my old friends, and the most of the time passes pleasantly. The Bentleys are over often, and from Maurice I understand that he and Ronald are intimate, which is a good thing for Maurice, I judge. Maurice is very much of a gentleman with his 'long-lost aunt,' as he calls me. I like the boy very much and hope that he will finish his senior year with some honors, though I fear me that he is not much of a student.

"Madge and Roy talk of you a good deal. I see them every day for a time. Mother, indeed, asked me to take a little interest there, if I could without offending or interfering with Sue. The governess has little control and is far from being a good person to be in charge."

This was all of the letter which pertained to the LeRoy family. With a little Montana news and private messages for Ann, the letter closed.

"Hum," said Ann. "I wonder if I'd better tell Suzanne that Florida may be only a bright dream for us. No,—I'd better not bring Suzanne's possible complaints into it."

CHAPTER XI

A WELCOME GUEST AND MORE FAMILY HISTORY

THE busy weeks sped on. Ann Sterling, well and happy, looked forward to the Christmas reunion. Suzanne was planning a trip home at Thanksgiving; but in order to have any visit at home, she also planned to miss two or three days of school. "I'm starting a day early," said Suzanne, "and if I can persuade Mother to let me, or if she will only forget about sending me back, you'll not see me till the middle of the next week!"

It was a temptation to Ann, for Suzanne suggested that Ann go, too, and surprise her mother. But Ann well knew how hard it was to make up work. It was much easier to keep right on, especially since Christmas was not so far away. On the other hand, it had been such a long, long time since the fall term opened! So it seemed, at least, in the light of Suzanne's going home. Many of the girls who lived within easy traveling distance were going. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have Thanksgiving dinner with her mother? So Ann was thinking the first of Thanksgiving week. She could leave with Suzanne a day early without much difficulty, but come back on time. Thursday to Monday with Mother!

Marta came running into the suite with great excitement on Tuesday. "Say, Ann, would you mind if I abandoned you shamelessly and vamosed with some of the girls?"

Ann, who was running ribbon through the top of a slip, raised big dark eyes to give Marta a pretended glare. "What do you mean, varlet,—slave? Desert me in this evil hour?"

"It is a shame, but it is only for a few days, Ann," laughed Marta. "I was hoping that the girls would invite you, too, and so they would, if they did not know you were going home if anywhere."

"Who is it, Marta?"

"Ethel and Lucile. I'm to be divided up, it seems, between them."

"Horrible thought!"

"Silly Ann! I mean, of course, that I am to spend part of the time with Ethel and part with Lucile. They are quarreling over which is to have me for Thanksgiving dinner and which for Sunday dinner!" Marta was pleased and happy over the prospect, Ann could see. How fine it was. Marta had not had many breaks in the long school year. Ann had longed to take her to her grandmother's, but dared not, largely on account of Suzanne.

"You will have a glorious time! Think of it! In New York at Thanksgiving,—or any other time, for that matter! I'll get along all rightee. I'll read up French and Latin ahead, read for my big semester theme,—time will just fly! Besides, I may go to Grandmother's yet."

"I wish you would, Ann. It will be lonesome here."

"With all the girls that have to stay?"

"Yes, it will. I know by sad experience."

"I guess I could stand it for once, Marta. Don't think of it. I *could* go, so it is my own fault if I don't. See? What clothes are you going to take?" Ann thought that this was the best way to get Marta's thoughts off her regrets.

"Sure enough; what *would* you take?"

Marta was immediately concerned about the usual question, what to wear. She began to look out what she would take with her and Ann offered to help mend, if necessary.

Wednesday came and the last recitations, from which Marta and Suzanne were excused. Suzanne, indeed, had left the night before. Ann had one "flighty moment," as she said afterward, intending a pun, when she ran to her closet and dragged out her suitcase. Should she pack and go or shouldn't she? Then she laughed at herself, thrust back the suitcase, and hung up her coat, which she had thrown over her arm. "You are a double-minded, unstable creature, Ann Sterling," said she aloud. "I'll not let you be so silly!"

Recitations were over. Ann concluded that she would run over to the administration building, to see if there was any mail, and put on her wraps for the walk. There had been a fresh snow early that afternoon, to make lovely the campus and the evergreens, which bent under the weight of the soft, white masses that clung to them. The janitors, who very likely did not appreciate the beauty of the scene as much as Ann, were sweeping the walks and the steps of the different buildings.

Cars and 'buses were coming and going. Ann felt lonely and decided that she would hunt up some companions in "misery," as soon as she saw whether or not she had any letters. As she tripped up the steps, in her sky-blue sweater and cap with white trimming, her dress a soft white wool that she had donned with the thought of the approaching dinner-time, somebody "nice" in one of the taxis thought that she was a pretty part of the winter scene. "The Sophomore Hall, please," said the visitor.

"The new one or the 'Castle?'" inquired the taxi man, who had brought many and many a girl and visitor to the Forest Hill buildings.

"The Castle, please."

Ann, unaware of any appraising eyes, went to look after her mail and was disappointed in not hearing from her mother or father. There was a fat letter from Marjorie, however, and Ann sat right down by a warm radiator in the hall, where a cushioned bench looked inviting, and read it through, with all its news of winter days in Montana. Marjorie was spending the winter at home. "Your mountains are beautiful, Ann, to-day," wrote Marjorie. "There was a big snow last night and everything is dazzling in the sun this morning. Your father was over yesterday. He looks as well as can be and according to Rita, has his grip packed for New England already!"

It was a good letter, Ann thought, and she looked out upon the wintry New York landscape, imagining other scenes back in the Rockies. She had half a mind to go to the library, since she was here, and read until dinner time. No, she would not begin work so soon. Besides, she had forgotten the pin which this frock needed to set it off, and where was her "hanky?"

Slowly Ann strolled along the walks, looking off at the hills, with their white slopes where there were no trees, or the forested portions with their snow-laden trees and bushes. After all, she thought, it would be pleasant to be here a few days, unhurried by lessons and recitations.

At the top of the stairs in the Castle, Ann caught a glimpse of Aline, who had almost reached her own door. "Hoo-hoo, Aline," she called. "Come on around, can't you?"

"Not just this minute, Ann," replied Aline, turning, with her hand on the knob of the door. "You have a caller, though. We saw you coming and she went on in."

Unsuspectingly, Ann went on to the other corridor and hummed a little tune as she opened the door, expecting to find one of the girls. There, in the rocking chair, facing the door with a smile and loving eyes, sat her mother!

"Mother! Mother!"

Ann rushed across the room and her mother rose, to meet Ann's enthusiastic greeting with a warm embrace. "Are you glad to see me, then?"

"Glad! Suppose I had started with Suzanne, as I wanted to! Why, Mother, I came the *nearest* to passing you on the way! Better not risk surprising me, Mums. Suppose I had missed you!"

"I never thought of it, for you wrote that you would not come. I, too, thought that for such a short time it would scarcely pay you, and you wanted to get ahead on your work, you said."

"You never can tell about girls, though, Mother! But it has turned out all right. Are you going to stay over Sunday and all?"

"Yes. We'll have one good visit; and when you have to work on your lessons, I will keep as still as a mouse." Mrs. Sterling dropped her voice to a stage whisper and opened wide eyes, as if awed at the vision of Ann's lessons.

Ann gave her mother another hug and laughingly reminded her that there were many years of training by the same Mrs. Sterling, when Ann studied many an hour in her mother's presence.

"There isn't anything so very important, anyhow, Mother, only my lessons for next week as usual. I was planning more, because I could keep from being lonesome that way. But I'd waste a lot of time with the other girls, you know, 'gossiping' or playing popular songs for them, or doing this or that. How is Grandmother, by the way?"

"She is herself again, sorry not to see you this time, but she approved of my coming and said that she would spare me this long, since it would be an opportunity for us to have a quiet visit together."

"It will be wonderful. We'll have the suite all to ourselves, for Marta has gone to New York with Ethel and Lucile. Why, we'll be just like two girls. You look like one yourself."

"Scarcely," said Mrs. Sterling. "But that reminds me. I must get dressed for dinner. I did not like to start my toilet for fear that you would come before I finished. I thought, by the way, that you would never come. When I saw you strolling along toward this building, I tried to concentrate and will you to hurry, but it did not work! You were going up the steps of the administration building when my taxi rolled in, too far away for me to call, and then I thought that it would be fun to surprise you. You used to like surprises."

"I do, and I have had a lot of nice ones, too. The last one at home was my cabin in the mountains. But this is a fine one. It's funny. I took my time to things. You must have been waiting quite a while."

"I have; but Aline Robson was with me. What were you doing?"

"I was lonesome and went over to see if there were a letter from you or Father. I was disappointed, but had a long letter from Marj. I'll let you read it. She says that Dad looks fine."

"That is good to hear. I shall enjoy the letter after I get ready."

How good it was to have mother around! Ann helped her hang up her wraps and extra garments, brought in one good-sized grip. She flew around to straighten the room, patting up the pillows on the couch, putting the books on the shelves and clearing the table, whisking the cover off from the dresser and putting on a fresh one before her mother should be ready to fix her hair, dusting the table and the rounds of the chairs, neglected for several busy days.

"How do you think you can get along, Mrs. Sterling, without a maid?" asked Ann, when her mother at last began to loosen her long thick hair ready for its combing.

"Never having been without one," replied Mrs. Sterling, "it *will* be difficult! Perhaps I can't quite equal the style of Adeline's coiffures, but I think that I can manage."

"How does it seem, Mother? I didn't dare ask you at Grandmother's, but does it seem natural there, or have you been away so long that it is hard to fall into the ways again? You seemed perfectly at home, and I would have thought that you had always had Adeline from your manner with her."

"It was strange at first, Ann, though one naturally knows what to do in the home where she has lived so many years. And since your father and you have been away, I could almost fancy that it had all been a dream. That was one reason that I came. I wanted to see you so much. I don't want it a dream, you see!"

"I'm no dream, Mother, and I'm glad that you feel that way about us,—though I must say that I have never been worried about losing your affection."

"That could not happen, my child, under any circumstances."

"No matter what I did?"

"No matter what you do. But I hope that you will always choose to do right!"

"I ought to, with the mother and father I have. But don't expect me to be perfect."

"Take perfection for your ideal, Ann, though you will not find it in either of your parents. When is your dinner hour, Ann? Will I be ready in time?"

"Yes; take your time, Mother. Does Miss Tudor know that you are here?"

"No; I was not sure of coming. That was one reason that I did not write. Then I knew that there was plenty of room in the suite, even if Marta were here."

Proudly Ann guided her mother through the halls, over to the dining room, and seated her in Marta's place. Miss Tudor recognized Mrs. Sterling's presence by a bow and smile. There had not been time for Ann to take her mother to Miss Tudor's rooms before the gong rang. At the table were Katherine, Dorothy and Aline, the only girls left beside Ann out of the two suites.

Permissions were freely given that evening for changes to be made at table, and as they all stood behind chairs a few minutes, while the girls gathered, the three girls had hurried over to Ann and Mrs. Sterling, invited by a gesture from Ann.

"You are a lucky girl, Ann!" Katherine exclaimed, after grace. "If all the mothers could only come!"

"I am lucky, but I'll share mine a little. All of you come around to our suite after dinner, that is, after we have seen Miss Tudor. There won't be any study hours, will there?"

"I think that the bell will ring and we'll be supposed to stay in the buildings, as usual,—that's all," said Dorothy. "But isn't your mother too tired?"

"No, indeed," declared Mrs. Sterling. "I need a good dose of *girls* more than anything else!"

"You have come to the right place for it, then, Mrs. Sterling," said Aline, looking rather wistfully at Ann and her mother. Aline missed her mother more than she ever let any one know.

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Ann had a faint idea of this and made sure that, after the meal was over, Aline, who had happened to be the one to greet Mrs. Sterling first, should accompany them from the table. They met Miss Tudor on the way out of the dining-room; rather, she joined them, and cordially welcomed Mrs. Sterling, who said that she would call to see her "tomorrow."

"Good, Mother!" said Ann, after Miss Tudor had gone on with one of the teachers. "I was so afraid that we would have to waste to-night by calling."

"Miss Tudor would not feel flattered if she heard that remark," said Mrs. Sterling.

"I like Miss Tudor, but I can see her every day," replied Ann. "Do you blame me, Aline?"

"Not a bit."

The evening would not have been properly begun without music, but the girls passed by the parlors of the administration building and went on to their own building, where Aline secured her violin; and in the Castle's drawing room, a dozen or more girls gathered around the piano, to sing for Mrs. Sterling, surprised and pleased to have her join in the Forest Hill songs and others. Then Aline, Katherine, Dorothy and Ann escorted her to Ann's suite for a good visit before bedtime. Mrs. Sterling had not been a girl herself for nothing. In her bag was an immense box of candy and she promised the girls to call them in when another "Thanksgiving box" arrived. "I had to send it," she said, "but it should be here in the morning at the latest."

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"What is it, Mother?" asked Ann.

"Wait and see, little Ann," laughed her mother. "It is another surprise."

"Do we have turkey tomorrow?" asked Ann.

"We always do," said Katherine, "and I saw some fowls arrive, dressed,—they looked to me too big for chickens."

"Your mother must have loved you, Ann," said Dorothy, "to forego the kind of a Thanksgiving dinner that I imagine they will have at your grandmother's to-morrow."

"Mother does love me better than turkey or anything, don't you, Mother?" Ann affected a childish tone which amused the girls, and the smiling Mrs. Sterling nodded an affirmative.

"But goose, Ann, is considered a Christmas bird," Dorothy suggested.

"Listen to that, now!" cried Ann. "Do you suppose that Dots means anything personal, Katherine?"

"Have a bon-bon, Ann," said Katherine in soothing tones.

That night, in spite of the bon-bons, Ann sank into a dreamless sleep. Everything was always safe when Mother was around.

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Thanksgiving was a perfect day, cold, to be sure, but crisp, sunny, an occasional icicle forming over the porch in the middle of the day. The big turkey dinner was at two o'clock, breakfast at a late hour beforehand. It was so "delicious," Ann said, "not to have to get up for lessons." Her mother, too, was tired, and had many things, practical and otherwise, to talk over with her daughter. They were invited to sit at Miss Tudor's table for dinner. This was an honor, but Ann would have enjoyed it far better with the girls at her own table. However, she had her mother and that was sufficient. The dinner was worthy of the day, the girls in high spirits, for there were to be some winter sports and a sled ride later in the day.

For the sports Ann did not care now. She would have plenty of that sort of thing at Christmas

time. These days with Mother were a welcome rest Ann was well, but had not realized how tired she was until the necessity for keeping on was over. She took a long nap in the afternoon, while her mother, after a short one, investigated the condition of Ann's clothes and was sitting with her thimble on, sewing, when Ann awakened.

"Isn't that good, to see you with your thimble on 'as of yore,'" Ann said sleepily, as she still lay on the couch where she had fallen asleep.

Mrs. Sterling looked up and smiled. "You were sleeping so soundly that I did not think I would waken you by looking over things."

"It is good of you. I neglect my clothes shamefully, I know."

"I am well aware, daughter, that you have other important things to do."

"Tell me some more about Grandmother and everybody," Ann suggested. "Did you say that Maury calls you his 'long-lost' aunt?"

"Yes. Maurice and I are great friends. By the way, he is not smoking those miserable cigarettes now, says that he hears they are bad for brains and he has to get his lessons this year." Mrs. Sterling smiled in amused remembrance. "He was out of sorts about something when he came home, just before I left, but whatever it was seemed to be fixed up with his father."

"Do you like Maury better than Cliff, Mother?"

"Why the comparison, Ann?"

"Well, Cliff was always around out home, and here it is Maury."

"I see. It is hard to compare the two boys. They are so different. Clifford is the more reliable, I suppose, but still, Maurice has his strong points. He has been pretty well spoiled in some ways, but seems to be waking up a little. After all, there is good blood in him."

"Not being proud of our family at all, you will admit that!" joked Ann.

"I think that Maurice is more sincere than Suzanne, though I am fond of Suzanne."

"Do you think that Maurice has been,—well, what people call 'wild?'"

"He has been gay and has spent too much money. Your uncle was talking to me one day about Maurice. Maurice was defending himself, it seems, from charges his father made against him, and said to his father that he might be thankful it was not worse,—that anyhow he 'wasn't into anything to be a disgrace,' like 'Beano' and some of them. That seemed to comfort your uncle. Your Uncle Tyson is a very sensible man, Ann. I can not believe that he is engaged in any plan to defraud your grandmother."

"You never can tell, Mother," wisely commented Ann. "I've heard that very good appearing men can carry through some dreadfully crooked things."

Ann's worldly wisdom seemed to amuse Mrs. Sterling very much. "That is very true, Ann," said she, "but one must not be too suspicious."

"What became of Grandmother's bonds, then?" asked Ann.

"Perhaps he knew nothing about them."

"Then you think that Aunt Sue,——"

"Sh-sh,—Ann, we do not know."

"I know what Grandmother told me. But I'm glad to hear that you think Uncle Tyson may be all right."

"Your Aunt Sue, you know, always did think that everything at home belonged to her."

"Yes; isn't it funny? I couldn't be that way, even about our dear home. How old is Maurice, Mother?"

"Let me see. You are in your eighteenth year, aren't you?"

"Yes'm,—your daughter is getting on in years, madam."

"Very old, indeed! I was thinking of the difference in your ages. I have always understood that there were two years between Maurice and Suzanne, and Suzanne is about six months older than you. Sue had two babies when she came home from abroad. I judge that Maurice is about twenty now, possibly twenty-one by the time he graduates."

"You were married before Aunt Sue, weren't you?"

"Yes, and that year Mother and Sue went abroad. Sue was married in Paris and she remained there for some time. Then Mother came home, and Sue went around the world with her husband. Maurice was born, I believe, in some unheard of place,—I declare I have forgotten. Mother wrote me about it after she had forgiven me for marrying your father. Suzanne was born in France, I believe."

"Did Nancy or any one ever tell you that Aunt Sue was in love with Dad?"

Mrs. Sterling looked up in surprise. "No. What an idea! Of course—your father came out to see Sue in the first place, before he met me there, but,—"

"Listen, Mother; this is what the old gardener told me; rather, he referred to you as the daughter who married 'the man that the other one wanted.' I told Dad about it one time, and I supposed that he might tell you."

"Your father is too modest a man for that. I am surprised; but it would account for many things." Mrs. Sterling looked off into space and let her sewing drop into her lap.

Ann respected her mother's thoughts and kept quiet.

"Poor Sue!" her mother said at last. "I wonder if she really were in love with your father!"

"Now, Mother, don't go to pitying Aunt Sue! Think how awful it would have been for Father if she had married him. How lucky it was that he did meet you before Aunt Sue's wiles got him!"

Ann was half laughing as she spoke, but she meant what she was saying.

"I see. The inference is, I take it, that he did not do so badly in getting me!"

"You have it, Mother mine. And Aunt Sue had a lot of beaux, I understand. The chances are that she did not care at all for Father, but just hated it that you were the one he fell in love with. Do you really suppose that Aunt Sue has ever loved anybody but herself?"

"Take care, Ann. You are too hard on her."

"And you, dear Mother, are so good and unselfish that you think everybody else is, too. I have too vivid a memory of how you worried, for *years*, ever to trust anybody's happiness in the hands of Aunt Sue!"

"It is best to forget it, if you can, Ann. You must not harbor bitter feelings, Ann. It hurts you more than any one."

"I know that, Mother, because I've felt it. All the same, while I am going to be as respectful to Aunt Sue as I can possibly be, I think that it would be foolish ever to give her a chance again to hurt you. When people prove what they are,—"

"Don't be so fierce, little one. Suppose that our heavenly Father would treat us according to what He has found out we are."

"Now, Mother,—you know I can't argue with you about that!"

"When all is said, Ann, Sue is my sister. I'd rather not get worked up over anything again."

"That is so, Mother. Forgive me for stirring it all up. Say, Mums, was there any of that candy left?"

Mrs. Sterling reached to the bureau for the big box and handed it to Ann. "The girls were quite conservative, I should say," she replied, "but how you can eat anything after that dinner I can't see."

"That was hours ago, Mother! Besides we had no candy for dinner. I love your selection. I will now eat a big fat chocolate with a nut on it, and—yes,—that green bon-bon looks good,—and a yellow one. Please have one with me, Mother."

Mrs. Sterling shook her head. "No thank you, daughter. I'll wait a while."

"It is never safe to wait about candy. But if this goes, we'll make you some fudge. There is always that possibility, you know."

"How glad I am to know that. I shall be saved from starvation at least."

"Now, Mother!"

Ann would not tell her mother, she thought, about the gossip which she had heard at her grandmother's. She had been half tempted to do so when they were talking about Maurice, but this was not the time.

CHAPTER XII

THE SCRIBBLERS' CLUB ORGANIZES

THE box which Mrs. Sterling had sent to Ann was full of fruit, with some other things which the girls could enjoy after Mrs. Sterling had gone. The janitor of the Castle opened it for Ann and the fruit was separated, to be put in one of the closets as the coolest place; for the rooms were kept comfortably heated. But Ann did not investigate the other packages while her mother remained, for there was much going on, and Ann read her French to her mother, a pleasant way of studying it. Mrs. Sterling made a fine French dictionary, Ann said, for all but some technical terms which she had forgotten. At Mrs. Sterling's bidding, Ann also studied her other lessons on Friday evening, looking up once in a while to "gloat" over her mother's being there, and expressing her feelings in that fashion.

"I shall never be able to complain about not being appreciated, Ann," said her mother.

"Indeed not, and wait till poor Dad arrives! He is just merely existing till Christmas, I know."

The girls, at Miss Tudor's suggestion, hastily put together a little entertainment for Saturday night. There were some other visitors for the Thanksgiving week end, for whom the girls wanted to do something. Among so many organizations it was not hard to find something to do. One of the senior girls had written a clever one act play for her English class. To be sure it must be committed by the actors in record time, but what could not be remembered in the way of the speeches could be what the girls called "faked," by bright girls who knew the point of their remarks. It had been done before and this was not Shakespeare, whose lines must be just right!

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Aline rushed in Saturday morning to call for Ann's help. "Ann, *would* your mother mind if you play for the orchestra? We've simply got to have you. Our regular pianist, you know, is away, also the substitute, and there isn't a girl who can do it as you can!"

"Do not hesitate on my account, Ann," promptly said Mrs. Sterling. "I shall be glad to have you help."

"All right, then, Aline," Ann promised. "I am only too thankful not to be called on to help with the play. Thank fortune there are plenty of girls for that."

"Don't be too sure, Ann," joked Aline. "I'll remember you if they need any one!"

"Just remember, too, please," laughed Ann, "that I could scarcely be in the orchestra and on the platform at the same time."

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"Will you mind, Mother?" Ann asked after Aline had gone.

"Not a bit. To tell the truth, Ann, I enjoy all this. We used to do all sorts of things when I was in school. I remember the fun and excitement of it all. It was different in those days, but this takes me back to pleasant memories. Then, too, these girls are so attractive and do such clever things that I expect to enjoy the whole thing thoroughly."

"I think that it is Jane Price who has written the play, and if it is, it will be too funny for words! Jane is a dear, though, and very smart!"

"Will you have anything but the play?"

"Yes; Dots showed me the program when I was around there. She is the sophomore on the committee. First there will be an orchestral number,—ahem! They will probably choose something hard for me to play. Then the glee club will sing. Next comes the play, and we shall play an 'overture.' The girls want us to 'jazz' one of the real overtures to light opera if we can, and we are to play appropriately during part of the play it seems."

"Soft suggestions in music," inserted Mrs. Sterling.

"That is it," said Ann. "We burst into melody between scenes, too, and the Glee Club will sing again, and I think that Aline is to have a violin solo. If we can get one of the senior girls to sing, she has a lovely thing, with orchestral accompaniment, from one of the operas. But she has a cold and we don't know whether she will be equal to it or not. There will be plenty to fill in with, I'm sure. And we'll all dress up in our spuzziest clothes. You will think that you are in the Metropolitan, I know!"

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"I expect to enjoy it as much," laughed Mrs. Sterling.

"Now I wonder how she means that," said Ann, looking off into space, a twinkle in her eyes. "With all the practicing, I'm afraid that I shall have to leave you a good deal to-day, Mother."

"I will finish fixing up your clothes, child. Then I want to talk with Miss Tudor about arranging for your studies, in case we do take you with us to Florida. I feel sure that if your father goes, he will refuse to go without you."

"Good for Dad! But what a change from the stern mentor who says that lessons must go on!"

"If you stay for any length of time, your lessons will go on. If you are there only a short time, however, we are to let you get the benefit of the Florida experience."

"Well, that is pretty nice for me. I supposed that you and Father would have our part of the affair thought out."

"Yes,—as usual. What Aunt Sue's family does remains to be seen. But we have not been discussing that lately. I think that it will all turn out for the best."

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"Bless your heart, Mother, you always say that!"

"And doesn't it?"

"Certainly, but it takes some 'turning,' on our part."

"Of course it does. 'Even so faith apart from works is dead.' What I should have done, Ann, instead of worrying myself sick, during those years, was to go to Mother and have everything explained. Instead, I waited for my dear daughter to show me what could be accomplished in the line of 'works.'"

Surprised and pleased by her mother's appreciation of her efforts and success in uncovering the reasons for Grandmother's misunderstanding, Ann was rendered speechless for a moment. "Why, aren't you nice, Mother, to say this to me?" she finally said. "And aren't we having a good visit?"

"I am. Come here and give me a good hug and then run off to your practicing!"

All too soon the Thanksgiving vacation ended. The absent girls came back; the places at table were all full again; Ann's mother went home; Suzanne, who was unable to persuade her mother to a longer visit, appeared with the rest of the girls, and, for a wonder, in the best of spirits. In a few days lessons and school work had assumed their proper place and everything was in full swing. Only the weather was depressing. It had turned a little warmer, with rain, which melted the snow into a miserable slush. This was immediately cleaned from the walks, but not without an interval during which careless girls without overshoes acquired wet feet and sore throats. Ann, sad to say, was among these. She escaped tonsillitis and going to the little hospital which was full for a few days; but she gargled and took medicine and had her throat swabbed, to her great disgust. One week end she spent a great part of her time in bed and had her meals sent over.

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"You never are sorry enough for people that are sick, Marta," she philosophized one evening, when she was sitting in her bath robe by their table studying. "Not until you are sick yourself. And then, as soon as you are well, you forget it! I don't think much of human nature myself."

"Neither do I," Marta agreed.

"Still, you do find out how many friends you have, and how kind people can be. Maybe human nature isn't so bad after all."

"I'm sure it isn't," said Marta.

"Marta Ward! You would agree with anything! I believe that you don't know what I'm talking about!"

Marta looked at her dreamily, raising her eyes from her book. "Something about human nature, wasn't it?"

Ann threw back her head and laughed. "Never mind. You wanted to be polite, but your roommate would persist in talking about her own experiences while you were studying. Now you will never know the wise philosophy you have missed. Go on back, Marta. Where were you?"

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"In London," said Marta, who was reading history.

"It's almost time for the bell. Let's investigate the packages in that box when you get through with your history. I don't know what I would have done without those oranges while I was sick. They were all I wanted."

"Let me finish this chapter, Ann. Then we'll drag out the box."

Ann, who was through with lessons, or all that she felt equal to doing, threw her tired head back against the rocking chair in which she sat and closed her eyes. She knew now how girls felt

when they were not strong, and she wondered if she had ever really appreciated her health. She was feeling well now, except for a little weakness and a "scratchy" throat. She opened her eyes a little to look at Marta, who was concentrating on that last chapter of her lesson. Her blue eyes were glued to the page of the book, which she held in one of the strong hands that could do so much with the piano keys.

Finally Marta closed the book with a bang and laid it on the table. "There!" she exclaimed. "I guess that is in my cranium, long enough to recite it at least. I never *could* remember history!" She ran her fingers through her already much ruffled brown locks. "Have an orange, Ann?"

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"Thanks, Marta; I can wait on myself now, though. If you are ever sick, Marta, I'll show my gratitude!"

"I shall not get sick for the benefit of your gratitude, Miss Sterling."

"I hope not, Marta. I'll have to show it in some other way."

"Haven't I eaten as many oranges as you, besides all the good desserts that they sent and you couldn't eat?"

"I don't know about that, Marta."

"But I do. Please 'say no more' about gratitude. But, Ann, there is too much in this box to drag it out without spoiling the floor or the rug or something." Marta was in one of the closets now.

"All right,—we'll investigate, then."

Ann rose and joined her room-mate, who was ready to "stagger out," as she said, with an arm full of bundles. "I didn't realize myself that there was so much. Mother said that she put in some sugar for fudge and some other things."

The bell was ringing for the close of study hours as the girls piled the bundles on the table and searched, through the papers and other material with which the articles had been packed, for any other packages. And still those "dulcet sounds" filled the air when a series of knocks came at their door, beating a tattoo which stopped at Ann's, "Come right in."

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Their guests proved to be Eleanor and Aline, now as frequent visitors as any of the Jolly Six. "What in the world?" inquired Eleanor, as she viewed the table covered with packages.

"That is just what we are saying," said Ann. "We took a notion to find out what else was in the box that mother brought, or had sent, rather. She said that there was some sugar for fudge, and if all that is sugar we'll have enough for the rest of the year, I take it."

"Those big square packages are sugar, I suspect," said Marta, "but that is all. Why so much conjecture? Let's open up. Sit down, ladies, and make yourselves at home. I strongly suspect, from the feel thereof, that *this* big package contains nuts."

Eleanor and Aline sat down in the chairs that Marta and Ann had vacated and watched while the packages were opened.

"Nuts they are," said Ann, untying the large paper sack. "Georgia paper shell pecans! Yum-yum!"

A large paper box, opened, disclosed English walnuts, almonds, filberts and Brazil nuts, and a flat package within contained a nut-cracker and nut picks. These Ann immediately passed around and offered both box and paper sack to the guests.

"Wait till I pass around the silver dishes, Ann," warned Marta. "They will have to hold the nuts in something, for the shells at least." Hastily Marta selected clean papers, from those which had been used in packing, and handed them, as the "silver dishes," to the guests. "We have some plates in the closet somewhere," she said, "but I am sure that they are dusty from disuse."

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"We haven't had a feast for some time, have we?" queried Eleanor, cracking a huge pecan.

"Scarcely since you girls were all rushing for the sororities and the Owls." This was Aline, who remembered several delicious feasts at that gay time.

"That makes me think of what I came to see you about, girls," said Eleanor. "Ann, how would you like to be a famous authoress?"

"I hadn't thought about it, Eleanor," said Ann, who was struggling with a refractory cork in a bottle of olives, contents of another interesting package. One more tug and it was out. Ann flew to the lavatory to get rid of the liquid and was back to answer Eleanor's question.

"Have an olive, Eleanor. No, I confess I hadn't thought of entering the field of literature. But no telling what any of us may do under Bunny's training. I'll try 'most anything, Eleanor, to become famous. What is the immediate danger?"

"Joining the Scribblers' Club. Ever heard of such a thing?"

"No; not at Forest Hill."

"There isn't any; but I thought that we might organize one. Honestly, Ann, I'd like to have one. Scribbling is the only thing outside of singing that I really like to do."

"You do write fine themes, Eleanor. I was quite envious when Bunny had you read the last one and praised it so before the class."

"You never have any reason to be envious, Ann. That is one reason that I thought you would be a good one to start it. Getting praised for what I've written, though, is what started me to liking composition, I guess. Nothing like a little encouragement once in a while, is there?"

"No,—yes—what is the right answer to that? And it's precious little encouragement that Bunny ever gives. She never praised anything of mine."

"She probably thought that I needed it."

"No, Eleanor. That theme deserved it."

"And I never wrote anything so quickly. I liked the subject and happened to know something about it. I wrote it right off, just in the order that came to me, and then, boiled it down and corrected it and copied it. Well, what do you say, girls, do we have a scribblers' club or don't we?"

"With the Owls and the Bats," said Marta dubiously, "I don't see that I have much more time for outside things."

"But you take English, don't you?"

"Yes, Eleanor; I have several studies this year outside of my music."

"Very well, then. If you'd like to belong, you can offer anything that you have ever written for English. Those things go for the Owls, and the Scribblers' Club, too. I'll tell you more about our plans when—and if—we organize."

Ann was doing some quick thinking. It would be an encouraging thing for Eleanor, who was taking a new interest in her work, if this went through. It would also be good for any one who took part. If the things one had to write in class could be used, well and good.

"I'll join, Eleanor," said Ann, "if you will be content with my feeble efforts in the literary line. Suppose we have the organization here tomorrow some time. I'll make some nut fudge to celebrate, or we can have whatever else there is here." Ann, who had stopped unwrapping to eat nuts, now investigated a heavy rectangular package. "Hurrah! Boxes of sardines! Imagine, *Mother!* But Mother is thinking of the days of her youth!"

"I'll bring the bread, Ann," Eleanor offered, "and we'll have sandwiches."

"Butter, also, is necessary," Aline reminded Eleanor, who added that to her charge.

"You have some baker's chocolate there, Ann," said Marta, pointing to where torn paper revealed the edges of several cakes. "I will sacrifice myself to the occasion and make chocolate for the crowd. What is the hour, Eleanor?"

"I'm free after my practice hour, which ends at three."

"I have a last hour class," said Ann.

"Say four o'clock, then. We are always starved at that hour and never can wait for dinner. Let me take the sardines, then, Ann, and I'll have the sandwiches made by the time you come from class. It won't take long to make the fudge and chocolate."

"All right, Eleanor." Ann handed over the boxes of sardines, while Marta, who would be at the suite before Ann, said that she would have the fudge made without waiting for her.

"Then we'll all be here at four sharp, or as near to that as possible?" queried Eleanor.

"Oh, yes, Eleanor," called Marta, "how many shall we prepare for?"

"Six or eight, I think."

On the following afternoon, Ann was delighted when her teacher dismissed the last class a little early. She hurried to the Castle and her suite, where she found Marta busy, having the fudge done and the materials for the chocolate ready. "I'll go to make that while you are talking over everything," said Marta. "Eleanor has made a dandy lot of sandwiches. She got some cold boiled

ham, too, for some, and I made a few peanut butter sandwiches out of that jar that we found in the box. If you will crack a dish of nuts, I think that the feast will be complete."

"I wish that there were some of those grapes left."

"They would not have kept, even if we had not eaten them."

Scarcely had Marta said this when with a warning rap, Aline appeared bearing a china dish heaped with white and red grapes. This she deposited upon the table and sat down to help Ann with the nuts; for there were both the nut-cracker and the little hammer that accompanied the wooden nut bowl in which Ann was putting the nuts.

"The organization of the Scribblers' Club," said Aline, "will be quite eclipsed by the celebration."

"We shall be able to give our minds to it much better for not being starved," said Ann. "Don't those grapes look delicious! Where did Eleanor get them?"

"She ordered the things sent out, bread and butter and ham and grapes."

"Let's make her the president of it."

"She ought to be. She has splendid ideas for it. I saw her a little while at noon."

"Here they come!" Ann rose, looked around to see that there were enough chairs and that the cushions were properly beautiful upon the couch. From the hall came sounds of talking and laughter from several girls who were approaching the suite. Marta threw open the door as they reached it, saying, "Welcome to the Sterling-Ward."

"Sterling ward, indeed?" queried Jane Price, senior, who was in the lead. "Is this where they welcome the insane followers of the pen?"

"No," said Ann, "this is the convalescent ward, where they serve all the delicacies of the season."

There were several more girls than Ann had thought might come. It was evident, then, that Eleanor had been able to interest the older girls. Having borrowed chairs from the other Jolly Six suite, there were places for all to sit, and they settled down with gay chat as usual.

"This looks more like a spread," said Jane, "than the literary atmosphere we were led to expect."

"Our guests this afternoon, supply the literary atmosphere," Ann replied, bowing to Jane in mock dignity, her hand on her heart. Ann had grown well acquainted with Jane in sorority affairs this year.

"I'm so glad to hear that," laughed Jane, looking around the circle.

Katherine Neville was the only one of the other Jolly Six suite present. Eleanor and Aline represented their suite, making five sophomores in all. Jane Price and a bright "Sig-Ep," called Betty Howard, were seniors whom Eleanor had interested, and two juniors, Alys Little and Natalie Perkins completed the number.

It is curious how little girls think of some of the enterprises which they launch, and yet, of how much influence upon them they often prove to exert, either as organizations, or because of the friendships formed in them. This new Scribblers' Club was to become quite an important part of Ann Sterling's school life, existing apart from any social ties like those of the sororities, and based upon ability, in its functions.

"If you girls think that business matters can proceed just as well," said Ann, "I think that we are all quite ready for a little lunch to tide us over that barren period between classes and dinner." Ann stood by the table and looked around inquiringly, to find out how the girls felt about it.

"I am sure that I don't know when anything has looked so good to me as that table," sighed Jane, clasping her hands and looking at the nuts and fudge. Marta had disappeared at once upon the arrival of the girls and Ann knew that the chocolate was in process of preparation.

"By your leave, then," said Ann, "we will serve at once. Eleanor was good enough to make us some sandwiches. Marta is making the chocolate; so will you help me, Aline?"

Ann passed a little tray, from which each girl took a paper napkin, a plate, a spoon and a nutpick. The sandwiches were passed next, and it was not long before Marta came in with the chocolate.

Steaming hot, a cup of chocolate on each plate made the first course complete and sandwiches were passed more than once. The weather had suddenly changed to icy blasts, which made the walks a glare of ice and started the Forest Hill girls to planning for skating, when the lake should

at last freeze over. It was pleasant to sip the hot chocolate and look out upon the wintry landscape.

Not until the dessert, of nuts, grapes and fudge, was offered, did the girls begin upon the main issue. Then it was put through quickly.

"Who shall be the chairman of this meeting?" asked Eleanor. "I nominate Jane Price."

Unanimously Jane was put into the chair. Without preface, she asked Eleanor to present her proposition, the organization of a literary club called the Scribblers' Club. "Please tell how it is to differ from a society like the Owls or the Addisons," Jane requested.

"There are similar clubs in different schools," said Eleanor, "and it was because I heard about one of them that I wanted one for us. The idea is that only people especially interested shall belong and that each one shall present some good piece of writing, passed on by a committee or the officers of the club, to make her eligible for membership. It may be something written for class or not. Many of us have little time to write outside of what we do for English, so I thought that it would be fair to accept anything original that is considered worthy. It should at least draw a B from Bunny!"

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The girls laughed at that. "I'm not so sure," said Jane. "I presented a gem of literature to Bunny, in my sophomore year, that carries a C, and I know that she begrudged that. Suppose that we leave acceptance to the officers of the society, irrespective of what the teachers think?"

"That is what I say," said Katherine, "verses, for instance. Any verse handed in to Bunny would be graded according to the standard of Tennyson or Browning,—"

"Oh, no, Kit," said Aline. "Browning never would get by Bunny. She could find flaws in any of 'em!"

This conclusion seemed to be unanimous, laughingly conceded by the present or former pupils of Miss Bunn, the unpopular English teacher.

Eleanor went on to explain that it would be best, in all probability, to have most of the officers from the two upper classes and that after this, sophomores could only enter after the first semester, when it would be supposed that they could produce something worthy of admitting them. They were to be encouraged to apply.

After some discussion, following a motion to organize, Eleanor, with the two seniors and the two juniors, were appointed as a committee to draw up a constitution and select a list of officers to be presented at the next meeting. When these girls asked for instructions, it was generally agreed that a senior should be president and that the committee to pass on members should be composed of juniors and seniors. "And sorority or society matters are never to be considered!" added Ann.

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"We can make that clear in the constitution," said Eleanor, "that nothing but merit and interest counts."

CHAPTER XIII

A SONG IN THE AIR

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THE time between Thanksgiving and Christmas is like no other. It may bring its problems, as we keep the anniversary, but there is a certain pleasure and anticipation in the very atmosphere, especially among the young. "Do you realize it?" Marta would ask, "—only three weeks now till Christmas?" Next it was only two weeks, then only one and time to pack up.

Ann saw a great deal of Suzanne, for they consulted over gifts for this one and that one at home. Suzanne was good in suggestion for her family, which fact helped Ann not a little. The girls had so little time to shop. But some things were passed over to Ann's mother to do for her, after the list of what she thought appropriate for each one was made out. For their grandmother and mothers, Suzanne and Ann were doing a little embroidery, that they might offer something of their own.

The music and services at school treated of Christmas and the girls went around humming carols. "It came upon the midnight clear," "O little town of Bethlehem," "While shepherds watched their flocks by night," "There's a song in the air. There's a star in the sky," or "Holy Night" were favorite hymns at Chapel. And when on that last meeting of the society, Eleanor sang "Thou didst leave thy throne and thy kingly crown, When thou camest to earth for me," she

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sang with such expression and feeling that Ann received a new impression of a sober and earnest Eleanor, who cared about the higher things. Impressionable Ann was thrilled at her rendering of the last stanza, and poor little Aline, whose mother had so recently joined those heavenly choirs, clutched Ann's hand and bit her lip to keep back the tears. Aline was going home with Eleanor for the Holidays. It was, however, the second Christmas since the home had been broken up.

Marta was going back to New York with Ethel and Lucile, having added so much to the good time of everybody at Thanksgiving that both families wanted her. Ann was delighted, for she could not bear to leave Marta again at Christmas time. It was with a very happy heart that Ann said her goodbyes at school and rolled away in the 'bus to take the train. This time she and Suzanne were traveling together, in the most amicable way in the world. "O Ann, don't you *hope* that we go to Florida?" was a frequent question, put in one form or another, as they drew nearer home. It was home now to Ann, for her dearest and nearest were there now. A jolly telegram from her father had informed her of his arrival.

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It kept growing colder, the girls thought, and even in the train they wore their coats, Suzanne's a fur one. At the village station who should be there but Maurice, handsome in a big fur coat and pulling off gloves, to greet Ann and draw her furs up to her ears. "Got the big sleigh that was Grand-Dad's, Ann. Thought that I'd give you a real New England welcome!"

Ann was delighted. "Is it really Grandfather's sleigh, Maurice?" she asked. "It looks perfectly new to me, so pretty, Maurice!"

"The real, sure enough article, Ann. Of course, it has been freshly painted."

"Give me a warm, closed car for mine," said Suzanne, shivering.

"No good, Suzanne. Every car we own has something the matter with it; besides, these roads are made for sleighing. It melted, then it froze, slippery as could be,—then the snow; and it is pretty well packed by now. How does it compare with Montana, Ann?"

"'Comparisons are odious,' Maurice. This is perfect and nothing can exceed perfection, you know."

Maurice had put Ann in the front seat, tucking Suzanne in behind with robes galore. Climbing in beside Ann, he made sure that she had the robes well up around her before he started his stamping team. "Look here, Ann," said he. "I found an old buffalo robe up in the attic, and pleased Grandmother almost to death by bringing it down. It was all done up in moth-balls and things,—what makes you laugh?"

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"Its being 'done up in' moth-balls."

"You are too recently in the thralls of some English class, Ann!"

"Bunny, you know!"

"Ah, yes; I've heard of her, I believe."

Ann patted the robe, which was on top of the others. "Think what good times Grandfather and Grandmother had riding around with this!"

"Yes, and I hope that we shall have just as good times."

Maurice did not look at Ann as he said this, but he drew the robes around her, with an unnecessary care, and gave rein to the pretty blacks.

"I adore black horses," said Ann. "That is the only drawback to Zep. But Zep's character makes up for his lacking the 'coal-black' color I wanted. You can't have everything at once."

"Alas, how true," remarked Maurice, holding a tight rein. "These fellows want to run. They are feeling their oats to-day."

"I never saw you drive anything but a car, Maury."

"Didn't you? When I was a kid I used to ride everything on the place, with or without a saddle. A boy brought up in the country has a pretty good chance for a fine time."

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"Some way I never thought of you as brought up in the country."

"I would call ours a country place, wouldn't you?"

"I suppose so; but you are so close to villages and towns. It isn't like our ranches."

"No, that's so; but I like it all the better. Suzanne, are your feet warm with that little heater?"

"I'm all right, Maury; but my breath freezes when I talk! Please step on the gas!"

Ann laughed at Suzanne's comical tone. This was just what Ann liked, though she felt of her nose occasionally, from habit, she told Maurice.

"I suppose that you do have it a good deal colder than this in Montana."

"Yes; but it's dry, you know."

"So they always say. I'm going out there some time and see if it is true."

"Isn't that nice of you to doubt my word!"

"I wouldn't put it that way, Ann. I just make allowances for local pride. The first winter that you spend out there I'm coming." Maurice gave Ann a swift look, then let the horses go a little faster. "How do you like the tone of our sleigh-bells, Ann? They are the old ones, from 'time immemorial,' Grandmother says."

"It's just too Christmasy for words! Please take me out again while I'm here."

"As often as you want to go. Ron says that we are going to get up a sled party some night, a regular old-fashioned jaunt, you know."

"That will suit me, Maurice. But where is my wandering father? Why didn't he care enough for his daughter to come after her?"

"Say, Ann—that is hard on me. Not content with her gay cavalier, she is crying for Papa! Suzanne, do you realize that the thermometer has dropped at least ten degrees? Git-ap!"

"Honestly, Maurice? How do you know?" called Suzanne, above the jangling bells.

"He is just joking me, Suzanne. Don't pay any attention!"

"Well said, Ann. I won't."

"Your father, Miss Sterling, when I last saw him, was sitting before a rousing fire in Grandmother's biggest fire-place. I begged him to accompany me, but saying that he was not accustomed to such severe weather in Montana, he refused and continued to talk politics with Dad."

"I'll find out the truth yet, Maurice Tyson," laughed Ann. "Oh, here we are! How beautiful everything looks! I do love this place!"

"I'm glad that you have gotten that far, at least."

The LeRoy place was worthy of Ann's exclamation. She had last seen it with its waving foliage on the tall old trees, and the flowers, carefully tended, along the walks or in beds upon the lawn. Now the trees, as on the campus at Forest Hill, were laden with snow, the evergreens bending to the ground where the broad spruce branches spread their beauty. The shrubbery along the curving drive bore also the white wintry blossoms from the snow drifts. The walks had been cleared and the entrance was free from snow.

Maurice fairly lifted Ann from the sleigh and turned to help Suzanne out of her nest of blankets. But Ann had gone on to meet a big man, who came out upon the veranda to find his little girl and take her in a fatherly embrace. "You shouldn't have come out without a hat, Daddy. Maurice says that you are not used to cold, so couldn't come to meet me."

"I'll have to have it out with Maurice," said Mr. Sterling. "But it was comfortable before the fire this morning; and as I saw that Maurice preferred to meet you himself, I let him do it. Does he make love to you very seriously?" Mr. Sterling, Ann saw, was in joking mood.

"Not so very, Daddy. I'll not have to call on you to send him away yet."

And here was Mother, sweet and happy, all her precious family together at last, under Grandmother's roof. Ann had a glimpse of Aunt Sue and Uncle Tyson, as she passed the door on her way to the stairs; but they waited until the travelers should come downstairs to greet them. Aunt Sue, Ann thought, would not care for embraces from cold arms. Adeline was waiting for Ann, to take her wraps and make her comfortable, while Felice performed a like service for Suzanne. The house was warm and Adeline brought Ann a hot cup of chocolate with some wafers.

"You knew that I liked chocolate better than tea, didn't you, Adeline?" said Ann, as she sipped the hot drink.

"Your mother reminded me, Miss Ann."

As soon as Ann's toilet was properly made, according to Adeline's notion rather than to Ann's, she hurried to her grandmother's room and rapped. Nancy, smiling broadly, opened the door, and beyond were the open arms of Grandmother.

"Dear child, dear child! How glad I am to see you! Your Grandmother is getting so she can scarcely spare you any more!"

"Good, Grandmother! It is fine to hear that. I hope that we can be together except in school

time, and we might even manage that sometimes, if you would come oftener."

"When you go to Paris to study, I'll go with you," laughed Grandmother. She waved Ann to a seat near her and asked to hear the latest school news. How glad Ann was that there were no more things to be explained, no more uncertain strivings to find and destroy the cause of misunderstanding. "Your father seems to be having a pleasant visit," said Madam LeRoy proudly.

"I never saw Dad look happier," agreed Ann. "We are all happy,—I hope." Ann added that, for she wondered about Aunt Sue. "It will be a wonderful Christmas time. Why, Maury brought us home in the 'family sleigh,' so pretty, with its curves and fine fittings!"

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"Did you like it? That old sleigh has quite a history. I will tell you some of it this vacation, when there is an opportunity. But tell me more about those girls,—the Jolly Six, is it, or have you more in numbers, as you had in Montana last summer?"

"The Jolly Six still exists, but they are not all of my friends, by any means. We have had a wonderful time, rushing girls for the 'Bats' and 'Owls,' and Suzanne is so much happier and better off in the new suite."

"I never liked her friendship with Madeline Birch," said Madam LeRoy, "but I did not like to insist on her rooming with you last year, after Sue explained the arrangement, though it was largely for your sake that I let it alone. Although you and Suzanne are cousins, and Suzanne is a dear child, it does not necessarily follow that relationship makes people congenial. So it was that I did not interfere."

"I was perfectly willing to room with Suzanne, this year; but after the arrangements had been made, it scarcely seemed fair to Marta. Miss Tudor arranged it very sensibly, I thought."

"What did Madeline think of the new arrangement?"

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"She would not speak to Suzanne; but what with the Sig-Eps saying that it would not do to keep mad, and Miss Tudor's putting just the right girls with Madeline and Genevieve, it all blew over. Suzanne told me that Madeline will be at her Christmas party!" Ann's bright face looked up into the amused face so like her own in expression, at times.

"We have a new club now, the 'Scribblers' Club.' Eleanor asked me if I did not want to be a famous authoress, so I am considering the matter! I haven't written the great composition as yet, the one that will entitle me to membership, but I am hoping to get an inspiration this vacation."

"Write about your mountains, Ann, or something in Florida, when you get there."

"Am I really going, Grandmother?"

"Of course you are. I would not go without you. Your mother and father would not have so good a time and we would all of us be saying, 'How I wish Ann were here.'"

Grandmother, with her head on one side, was looking at Ann with a quizzical smile; but Ann knew that she meant what she was saying at that.

"It is fine to be of so much importance," returned Ann.

"My elder daughter and I have about come to an agreement in regard to where and how we go, which is high time, since we start as soon after Christmas day as possible."

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"I just can scarcely believe it, Grandmother. What is Florida like?"

"Like no place else in the United States and worth seeing, at least once. I think that I will buy a place there this time, if we find what we want. You can help me select it. How would you like that?"

"I'm afraid that I would not know enough about it. But if there are no mountains in Florida, let's get a place near the ocean. I've never even seen it, you know."

"Is that so, child? You will see it shortly, then, and the Gulf, too, if you would like. It is likely that your father will want to take some auto trips over the state. You can see it better in that way, if the roads are good."

"The Gulf of Mexico, I suppose you mean. Have you an atlas, Grandmother? I don't know a thing about Florida, except the outline of it that I used to draw with the map of the United States. There is Lake Okeechobee, I remember, and the Everglades are there."

"There ought to be atlases enough for your purpose in the library, Ann. It is not a bad idea to have some idea of the geography before you go. But have you had a visit with your father yet, Ann? I heard the bells that accompanied you not very long ago, it seems to me."

"No,—I haven't visited with any one yet; but I saw Daddy a few minutes before I went upstairs. I came around here as soon as Adeline was through with me."

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"That was good of you, my child. Come; I will go with you, and we will join the family. Nancy has been fixing a dress for me. You do not need me any more, do you, Nancy?"

"No ma'am. I know what you want done now."

They met Mrs. Sterling on the stairs. She was going up to see what detained her daughter, though she had surmised that Ann would see her grandmother as soon as she dressed. Mr. Sterling made room for Ann beside him on the davenport, in front of the fire, though not too close. His strong arm went around her and Ann leaned against him, safe with Daddy once more. Mrs. Tyson had met Ann cordially when she entered the room and Uncle Tyson had welcomed her with his usual courtesy. Suzanne had not yet come down, nor was Maurice present; but Ann had not listened long to the conversation of her elders when he appeared and drew Ann away from her father to talk to him.

Looking out of the window as they stood by a little table near it, Maurice pointed to a red-coated little figure struggling through the deep snow between walk and drive, and dragging a sled after him. "Aren't kids funny?" asked Maurice. "Roy would rather go through the snow than go around by the walk. I used to think it fun myself. He'll come in all wet, and with ice-cold feet, and say that he has had a great time!"

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"Bless him!" murmured Ann. "I'll go out and see him." With Maurice, Ann went through the devious passages of the old house to the kitchen and the back porch, where Roy, as commanded of him, would make his first appearance. Madge, who had been reading in the library and had not even heard the bells which announced the arrival, came out into the hall, just in time to meet Ann and welcome her with more enthusiasm than Madge was ordinarily known to show. She made the third bound kitchenward.

Roy, stamping off the snow on the back porch and boisterously entering, was quite surprised to see members of the family waiting. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Oh, yes; hello Ann. When did you get in?"

"Do you mean to say that you did not see us coming in the sleigh, literally 'with bells on,' as Maurice says?"

"I was slidin' down hill over in the hollow. Never heard a thing. Yes, you can kiss me, if you want to; I don't usually let 'em any more. I'm getting too big."

This was a new phase in Roy. "I'll do it for you, if you like," offered Maurice with a very sober expression.

"She might not like it," as soberly replied Roy, offering his cold cheek to Ann, who patted his shoulder as she bestowed her salute. "You are my friend, Roy, aren't you?" said she.

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"I'm your cousin, and so is Maurice," said Roy.

"Then I have some rights, haven't I, Roy?" inquired Maurice.

"Better be careful. Girls are funny," replied Roy.

CHAPTER XIV

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CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS

ANN did not mind Maurice's joking ways. How serious he was she had no means of knowing, but his manner was perfectly respectful and courteous, nor did he presume on the relationship. She began, nevertheless, to have more than one thought about the future. Kendall Gordon's letters came with great regularity, whether she wrote in reply or had postponed it in the multiplicity of school duties. Clifford, too, began to write oftener and to give Ann more of a glimpse of the "real Cliff" than she had ever had. He wrote of school, the home people and of his plans for the future. It would almost seem that Clifford was trying to keep her in remembrance of her home and of what they had in common. "Do you remember"—this or that?—he would write, or "When you come home next summer, we can do"—this or that.

Suppose Maurice were not Aunt Sue's son, what then? And if not, what reason had there been for bringing him up not to know it? If Aunt Sue had been "mad" or jealous of the first wife, the more natural thing would have been to take it out on Maurice, instead of bringing him up as her own. Ah, but Grandmother's money! Maurice would not be entitled to any if he were not Aunt Sue's son! Could that be the reason? Did Aunt Sue think of that so long ago? Well, it was a puzzle. But probably there was nothing in what Mrs. Lewis had told her. Yet there would be no

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counting on what Aunt Sue would do in any case. She was the funniest woman! So Ann turned over matters in her young mind. She began to notice Maurice and Aunt Sue, looking to see if Maurice looked like her. He did not look much like his father. She had considered that he was like Aunt Sue because in general he was fair. But was he? His blond hair had grown a little darker since Ann first saw him. His eyes were not like Aunt Sue's, a dark grey, or blue-grey, she guessed, with dark lashes, while Aunt Sue's were blue, or had been. Maurice had a distinguished profile. So had Aunt Sue and Grandmother, but Maurice's features were like those of neither. Well, well! "All of which goes to prove that music is both elevating and refining,' as Cliff likes to say when something proves nothing!"

The next day Madeline came to call, happening to arrive at the same time as Ronald Bentley and Jack Hudson, who came to plan the week's festivities. This meeting did not cause Madeline any pain, as Maurice wickedly whispered to Ann when he had a good chance. But Madeline and Suzanne rather absorbed the attention of Maurice and Jack, leaving Ann to Ronald, who entertained Ann with pictures of Florida life and what they would do when the Bentleys had their yacht ready for the "briny."

"It does not look much like ocean travel here," said Ann. "The wind just howled last night and I can't associate December with any balmy days such as you describe."

"It's probably a little uncomfortable in the sun to-day in Miami," said Ronald. "I don't expect you to believe me, though. But I'll prove it to you. We're off the day after Christmas. When do you start?"

"Uncle Tyson said that we would spend New Year's in Florida, so I suppose they mean to start soon after Christmas."

"We start when the Bentleys do," said Maurice, who had overheard. "We school folks would not have much time there, if we didn't get off early. Luckily there is some sort of an educational meeting, which gives us an extra week of vacation. Come on, folks, let's go into the library and plan our campaign."

There were other callers in the drawing room and that was the reason for Maurice's suggestion. The six young people immediately repaired to the library, where Maurice drew up chairs to the table.

"This is a Pan-American or Pan-Something conference," said Maurice, opening a drawer for paper and taking out his fountain pen. "First, what do we do next?"

"Take the girls bob-sledding down the hill beyond the mills, tonight," answered Ronald Bentley.

"Good," said Maurice, writing it down, with the date. "Will you accept the proposition, young ladies?"

"*Avec beaucoup de plaisir, messieurs,*" simpered Madeline, while the other girls gave assent by smiles and nods to Maurice, as he looked at each in turn.

"That will be fun," declared Ann.

"What next?" Maurice balanced his pen on his finger and looked inquiringly at the other boys for suggestions. The girls, as those to be invited, had no suggestions to offer.

"Old-fashioned sled party, oysters at the hotel, wherever we happen to go." This was Ronald again.

"Still good, if the ladies approve." As no dissenting voice was heard, Maurice made a second note. "Next?"

"The next night is the reception at Ron's, Maury," said Jack.

"Sure enough; and the next night we have our own Christmas Eve doings."

"We can go somewhere afternoons, can't we?" inquired Jack.

"If we get home early enough," said Suzanne.

"We'll do that, if you say so. Either afternoon tea somewhere or dinner, as you like. Two afternoon sleighing parties, then, Maury. Put 'em down! Now somebody will have to telephone the other folks. Make out a list, girls, for the whole thing."

"The evening receptions are already planned and invitations out," suggested Suzanne.

"Certainly. I meant our little private performances. Want anybody else to-night?"

"Too much bother, Jack," said Maurice, to the delight of Madeline, who feared a change of escorts. "But we'll get some of the other young folks for the sled ride and the sleighing parties."

"Not too many, Maury," said Suzanne.

"The list is entirely in your hands, my dear sister." Maurice thought of one more possible amusement, but did not mention it because he wanted Ann's company, not Madeline's. This was skating, for two or three hours in the morning. He would tell Jack to ask Suzanne, if he wanted to. How would he put it? Yes, he would be taking Ann to the "pond," wouldn't Jack like to come along with somebody?

Suzanne and Madeline bent their heads together to consider whom to ask. It did not take long to select several couples among their good friends, and Suzanne handed the list to Maurice, who read it aloud. "If there are no objections, I withdraw, with great regret, to the telephone!"

"I'll do it for you, Maury," said Madeline, "if you will hold the list and look up the numbers." 188

"Self-sacrificing girl!" exclaimed Maurice. "I would be too fluttered to look up the numbers, if any of you ladies were present." Maurice, with this, escaped.

"Ridiculous boy!" Suzanne exclaimed. "Let him alone. He will be through the quicker, Madeline." Suzanne had no particular desire to hurry, but Maurice had given her foot a nudge with his own under the table, and well she knew how he would suffer under Madeline's flirtatious management of the telephoning. Besides, he would most likely, when Madeline was telephoning, summon her away from congenial society, to assist Madeline, claiming some problem or other. Maurice had been expert in escaping from Madeline even in the old days, when she and Madeline were such friends.

Jack was ready to make the fourth in the morning's skating. There was a pair of skates for Ann, left over from last year, when they had been procured for her. The "pond," as they called it, had been blown clear of snow, and following the partial melting and the following hard freeze, was as smooth as glass.

"Do I skate as well as Clifford Hart?" asked Maurice, while he and Ann sped down the length of the small body of water, now frozen so hard.

Rosy-cheeked Ann looked up at her escort in surprise. "Of course you do. Why?" 189

"No reason, except that I should prefer to do so. Cliff is such an example, you know."

"Now when did I ever tell you that?"

"Never. You would not be so impolite, sweet cousin. I merely gathered it this summer, among the Montana wild flowers, as it were."

"Please don't make fun of Clifford. He does not pretend to be a saint, and I don't like to hear you speak in that way of him!"

"I admire Mr. Hart very much."

"Maurice! I didn't think that you were like 'Beano!'"

"Gracious! How to please her!"

"Some way I didn't like your tone when you spoke of Clifford. But I'm wrong to take it up so. Please forgive me, Maurice. Maybe you can't help it if you don't like Clifford."

"I never said that I didn't like him, sweet cousin; but he likes you too well, and I fear me that you like him. See? Plain jealousy."

"Nonsense. There are a lot of interesting young men. I'm not in love with any one."

"Some consolation, Ann. Ann, I heard a bit of gossip again yesterday. It is something that I heard last summer from one of the boys and worried over, then thought that I had traced it to a person who makes up anything, I'm told, out of whole cloth. But it came from another source this time, and I'm going to Father with it, how soon I haven't made up my mind." 190

"Is it about yourself, Maurice?"

"Yes; have you heard it?"

"I heard something, but it came from an unreliable source. It seems so unbelievable, too. It is nothing to your discredit, Maurice."

Ann added the last statement, for she thought that Maurice might refer to some other report, about some college escapade or affairs among the young folks.

Maurice was silent and they glided along without a word for some distance.

"Who told you and what was said?" he finally asked.

"It was Mrs. Lewis, that woman who, I am told, is such an indefatigable gossip; but I'd rather not speak of the matter first."

"She seizes on an unpleasant report and holds on to it like a dog to a bone!" said Maurice. "I heard it first through her, when I came back from the West this summer, not from her directly, though. It is going to make considerable difference to me, Ann, whether it is true or not."

"Yes, and yet——"

"It would explain some things that I remember, too. And Ann, we would not be related, you know, though I think it would be all right for us to marry anyhow."

"Let's not talk of that, Maury, *please!*"

"All right, but you will admit that I like to think of some consolation!"

"I haven't an idea that it is true, Maury. Why worry? When you think best, report it to your father, as you said you would. That is my way. I'd go to headquarters."

"Do you suppose that I can believe headquarters?"

"Did your father ever deceive you?"

"No,—I can't say that Dad ever did. Mother, though, can get around anything."

"I have found that out."

"I want to get hold of Dad when Mother is not around. Perhaps this trip would be a good time."

"Perhaps it would. You want to get it off your mind, Maury. I'm awfully sorry that you are worried."

"I believe that you are, Ann. Because you are you, must be why I am bothering you with my worries."

"I don't consider it 'bothering.' Please enjoy your vacation, Maurice."

"I will, Ann. You are a good adviser. And I suppose that if I were glum and worried it would spoil your good time, too."

"It most certainly would! O Maurice, I'm having such a good time now, and think of going to Florida in just a few days! I can't believe it!"

"Let me see you enjoy it, then. That is all I ask."

"Oh, we'll all have a wonderful time together. Suzanne is almost as crazy as I am about it. I wish that Jack were going. She likes him, I think."

"Do you?" laughed Maurice. "Then she will be happy, for Jack is going with Ron. He told me this morning. We'll all sing 'Begone dull care' and make a playtime of it. I'll promise you not to worry. Of course, I can't help thinking of it sometimes."

"I suppose not. When you do, come around and I'll try to make you laugh. But if it is going to be on your mind, you'd better see your father right away."

"I'll see. It is rather a delicate matter to broach, Ann, and we have not been in the habit of being as free with our parents as you are with your father. Your relation with your parents seems ideal to me."

"I take all my problems to Dad," said Ann. "Mother is lovely, too, but we try to spare her a little, he and I."

Mr. Sterling declared that the young people of the family would be such wrecks after all the going of Christmas week that they would not be able to go to Florida when the time came, but Ann told him that he did not realize what constitutions they had. "We thrive on sleigh rides and parties," she asserted.

"Time will tell," replied Mr. Sterling, shaking his head with what was intended to be a mournful expression but rather failed of effect.

Rides, little talks, feasting and visiting, the exciting event at the Bentleys, where Suzanne and Ann appeared in all the glory of new frocks, and last, the grand finale at the LeRoy mansion, on Christmas eve, made up the tale of the days before Christmas. Christmas day would be quiet, a welcome rest, even with its excitement of gift giving and receiving. But the older part of the family had arranged most of that. Most of the packing for departure, too, had been done before the girls and Maurice came home from college. Ann had selected her clothes, when she came

home, with a view to Florida, bringing what her mother had directed.

The family slept late on Christmas morning, with the exception of Madge and Roy, who had their own Christmas tree in the nursery. There was usually a big tree for all; but when it was decided to have this last Christmas Eve entertainment, the plan was changed. Other gifts, beside those of the children, were to be found in various places, Ann's on a chair by her bedside, where she could examine them before she rose. It was strange to her, though she enjoyed her gifts, for their beauty and for their givers. But always before she had had some one with whom to share the fun. Last year, to be sure, she was away from home, but there was the tree. She would not disturb her mother and father, who were, without doubt, sleeping the sleep of the just. How quiet the house was! Later they would all go to church in the village, then have their family dinner.

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One present from Maurice pleased her, a handsomely bound book of verse, an anthology, in which he had marked some poems, not for their sentimental meaning, Ann discovered, with the exception of one. She would take that book to read on the way. Ann had not known that Maurice was at all inclined to verse, or, indeed, to any sort of literature. While she lay among her soft pillows she thought of many things, among them, how easy it was to misjudge people. On that lovely winter morning with its message of good will, it was easy to think kind thoughts, even toward Aunt Sue, who was, in truth, the head of a very successful and comfortable home.

Ann decided to take one more nap, after she had finished looking over her gifts; nor did she waken till Adeline rapped. "Here is your breakfast, Miss Ann," she said, "and your mother says that you will just about have time to eat it and get ready for church."

CHAPTER XV

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ANN VISITS A NEW CLIME

It was a lesson to Ann with how little confusion the exodus was accomplished. It came partly, she decided, from the excellent self-control which Grandmother, her mother and her aunt always exerted, with good plans and management. On the other hand, it was partly due to the fact that there was plenty of help in every line, each servant knowing the particular line of service he was expected to give. But Aunt Sue made a good general, Ann admitted.

Part of the family were going straight through, to Palm Beach, where Mrs. Tyson had finally persuaded her mother to engage suites at a fashionable hotel. But Mr. Sterling wanted to see something of the state in general. Accordingly, he and Mrs. Sterling, with Ann, Suzanne and Maurice, were stopping at Jacksonville for a few days. From that center they would visit the interior towns and the West Coast on a motor trip that Ann anticipated with great delight, and would also make a short stay at St. Augustine. Weather and whatever seemed the best order of things would be determined after their arrival at Jacksonville.

It was interesting to travel, Ann thought, with every comfort that money could procure for them. Ann was sure that her father would be bankrupt, keeping up with the Tyson and the LeRoy style of doing things. But when she said as much to her father, he only laughed and said that he had been getting ready for some years to be extravagant when Ann should go to school, and that he had lately "struck oil" in more ways than one.

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Just what her father meant by that Ann did not know, except that her mother had mentioned an oil investment as having turned out well, a result which is quite likely not to occur. At any rate, Ann, who remembered their more careful days and the simple way of living, felt assured that financial matters were secure. The three young people were in the highest spirits to start and Ann thought that Maurice must have laid aside his worry. And if the truth were told, Maurice had little trouble in doing it. With the sweetest girl in the world, on an interesting trip,—surely anything else could wait. But purposes were forming in Maurice which would make him a far stronger man than if he had remained the careless boy which Ann first met. He had already spoken to his father about a "job" in the mills, as soon as he should receive his diploma, to Mr. Tyson's surprise and pleasure. Plans for a summer out West with Ann had gone glimmering.

Suzanne was more interested in a good story or two and the chocolates with which Maurice had furnished the girls. But Ann, always alert for new things along the way, listened to Maurice and looked with both her eager eyes when the scenery began to grow a little tropical. "Those are mostly palmettos," Maurice told her, when she began to exclaim over "palms". "Wait till we get further south for the beautiful palms," he said.

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"Just look at all the buzzards!" exclaimed Ann, as they passed a wood where many turkey vultures were circling.

"You'll see a lot of them in Florida," said Maurice. "Watch for the black vultures. They are different and show some white on their wings."

"I thought that you said you knew nothing about birds!"

"I know a few," said Maurice, "but last summer what did I know about your Montana birds?"

"You are too modest."

"That is the first time I ever was accused of that," sighed Maurice. "Tell me some more nice things."

Ann, leaning back in the seat beside him and next to the window, looked at Maurice keenly. "I've discovered that your gay ways cover a lot of things, Maury. I imagine, for all you say, that your record at college, for instance, is not so bad."

"It might be worse," laughed Maurice, "but all the same, Ann, I have not covered the family with glory, or worked hard, as I should. I have tried to redeem the record a little this year, that's all. But school was something that had to be put through; that was all it meant to me. And it means about the same now, Ann, though I appreciate the culture of the old profs, and I see that I have absorbed *something* from them."

"I am too much the other way, Maurice. I'm inclined to think that school is everything; and when girls do not work at their lessons I put too low an estimate on them. I did with Eleanor, for one."

"You are more nearly right, Ann. I'll admit it; because if you do not do your best at whatever you work at, you lose out in habits of—what shall I call it?"

"Industry," suggested Ann.

"Right. Look, Ann. We're passing these southern pines, you see, where they are getting the turpentine. See the little receptacles fastened on?"

"Yes. How curious. They look like little flower pots at this distance."

"They have different sorts in different places. See them, Madge?"

Madge had edged on the arm of the seat and was looking curiously at the pines, which appeared to fly past. Maurice made room for the slim child between him and Ann, and talked to her about the changing scenes. "I wish that I was going along with Aunt Elizabeth and Ann on your motor trip," regretfully said Madge.

"You will do it some day, Madge," her brother assured her. "We'll take you around some when we get back. Your Uncle Sterling is going to buy a car."

"Honestly, Maurice?" inquired Ann. "I did not know that."

"He is going to get one for this trip. I heard him tell Father that he sold his car that he had last summer and would buy a new one here."

"Of all things! Dear me,—that was such a good car!"

"But not a particle of use for it until next summer, Ann."

"True enough. It is sensible, I will admit. He will enjoy getting another. Men like such things."

"How about women?"

"We like them, too, don't we, Ann?" Madge queried.

"I guess we do, Madge."

At Jacksonville the separation of the parties occurred. The Sterling party made headquarters at one of the hotels, while Mr. Sterling enjoyed the thrills, or anxieties of selecting a new car. In this Maurice, too, took an interest and accompanied him to give him the benefit of his young judgment. Yet Maurice could not waste all the time in even this interesting employment, but took the girls and Mrs. Sterling to see the sights in taxis. "It would not do for you to miss the alligator farm, Ann," said he, "such a romantic spot!"

Ann found it far from romantic, but very interesting, with its alligators of all sizes and ages. "Funny place to call a 'farm'," said she.

"It is a place where they raise stock, Ann," said Suzanne.

"If you call alligators stock," Ann replied, looking at the big pen where the larger ones were

kept together. "Imagine any one's wanting to go in there! Look at that sign, Maurice!"

"What sign?" inquired Suzanne.

"There," pointed her brother, "telling you that you enter at your own risk."

"Do you suppose that we shall really see any alligators in the wild?"

"We shall, indeed, though we may have to go to special places, Ann."

From Jacksonville they went on down the coast, staying several days at St Augustine, where the girls were especially interested in the old fort, Fort Marion. They began to feel that their vacation was flying and hoped that they would get to Palm Beach early enough to give Maurice some time with them, and Ronald's fascinating yacht. But it was not possible to hurry Mr. Sterling, nor would they let him know that they were anxious to speed on their way. However, after they left St Augustine, Mr. Sterling himself came to the conclusion that he had planned too much to be accomplished in the limited time. He decided to take them on down the East Coast to Palm Beach with no delay. From that point he could make short excursions, with the girls and Maurice, for their entertainment. The general trips over the state could wait until the young folks had gone back to school. It was his judgment that this should happen, so far as Ann was concerned. Ann, too, felt better content, to know that her work would not have to be made up to so great an extent. What Suzanne did was not for them to decide.

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The rest of the family were much surprised to see the travelers so soon, but approved the move. Ann was delighted with the beautiful surroundings. "This is well named 'Palm' Beach," she said. "I did not know that we could have such wonderful palm trees in the United States! Daddy, buy me one of these houses with a crimson bougainvillea vine!"

"Certainly, my daughter," responded Mr. Sterling, who was driving Ann and Maurice toward the causeway and down one of the palm lined avenues. "Just pick out the one you want. I've no doubt that I shall be able to induce the owner to part with it!"

"For a nice fat price," murmured Maurice.

"Don't think of such an unimportant detail as money, Maurice. Why, Daddy, I want that one we passed, the one with just the right shade of cream stucco, on the tan order, not yellow, smooth stucco, with no horrible splotches of color. The crimson vine over the door just suited it. I don't know what I'm going to do about having a scarlet hibiscus. I want one, but it will not harmonize with the crimson bougainvillea!"

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"Put it in the rear of your villa, Ann," suggested Maurice. "Have the back a different color scheme."

"Good idea. But I have discovered so many things that it will really be quite a problem to work out!"

"I'll take up landscape gardening and architecture, Ann, if you would like to have me do it. No; for one villa and its grounds, it would be cheaper to hire it done."

"I have to decide where I want it. Oh, the beautiful ocean, Maury! No wonder that Suzanne loves it! I thought that I should never get through looking, this morning from the beach. I loved the bathing, too; but isn't it funny how the sand runs away from under your feet? It almost made me dizzy at first."

"Was that it?" asked Maurice. "I noticed that you hesitated a little. But when you began to swim you were all right."

"I loved the Indian River drive," said Ann, "but the real ocean!"

Maurice "loved" Ann's enthusiasm, never noisily expressed; but in comparison with some of the girls he knew, Ann, with her honest interest in life, was refreshing. Madeline would pretend a knowledge that she did not possess. Suzanne was often bored, except about certain things. Ann was glad of what she knew, but eager to learn more about the world and everything in it that contained a bit of inspiration.

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"What did I do with that list Suzanne gave me?" asked Maurice, searching his pockets. "I honestly believe that she is going to start some sort of embroidery or tatting!"

"Somebody at the hotel showed her a new pattern of crochet, that's all," said Ann, laughing at the disgust in Maurice's tone. "She wants to take it off. Suzanne will not miss any of the outdoors, Maury."

"I should hope not. But I'm afraid she will."

They were bound for West Palm Beach, just over the causeway, where they accomplished their

shopping, took lunch at a good cafeteria, where it was great fun to select guava jelly, avocado pear salad, grape fruit in the land where it was grown, and such other Florida products as offered. Then they drove back, to find that Ronald and Jade had arrived from Daytona with the yacht.

CHAPTER XVI

A TASTE OF "THE SEASON"

THE Bentleys were living on their yacht at present. Jack Hudson was with them and they straightway invited Suzanne, Ann and Maurice to join them. But as the Sterlings were driving to Miami for a short stay, it was arranged to meet at Fort Lauderdale, twenty-five miles north of Miami, where the Bentleys expected to "park" their yacht, as Jack said. Mr. Sterling would have the young folks there, on the drive back to Palm Beach. The youngsters, as Mr. Sterling called them, were to have their chance first at all the trips, because of their limited stay. Their elders, with the exception of Mr. Sterling, would remain until May. Mr. Sterling, indeed, could prolong his stay as long as he chose, or thought best.

It was fun to shop in Miami, full of tourists as it was. They drove to the beaches, for they were obliged to try out the winter bathing, they said, at every place, if only to prove that they could. Ann was deeply interested in the variety of people that they saw, people of every degree of culture, or its entire lack, occasionally. There were "lovely people", she told her father, and some with hard faces, who did not seem to be happy in spite of the money which they evidently possessed. Wherever he could, Mr. Sterling drove on the roads by the sea, where they all filled eyes and hearts with the beauty of the southern waters and sky.

"Don't you hope that Grandmother will buy a home down here somewhere?" said Suzanne, as they were on their way back to join the Bentleys.

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Ann. "Do you really suppose that she will? What do you think, Mother?"

"I should not be surprised," answered Mrs. Sterling. "Mother begins to feel the winters very much. She would enjoy escaping the worst part of them, the long stretch from the first of January, say. Where would you choose the place for her, children?"

"Either Palm Beach or Miami," declared Suzanne at once.

"I would rather be a little farther away from so many people," said Ann. "I loved the looks of Fort Lauderdale as I went through. All those yachts and launches on New River were so wonderful. I like some of the other places that we passed through, too. In the northern places there were those immense old live oaks; down here are the palms. I wouldn't know which to choose!"

"Probably you couldn't get Mother to settle north of Palm Beach. You haven't said where you are going to put your vote, Maurice."

"Me? Oh, I'm going to have a river front place on New River, so I can dock my yacht at my own front yard." Maurice gave a smiling look at Ann as he said this. "Don't you think, Ann, that my plan is good?"

"Very good, if you know where the yacht is coming from." Ann said this gaily, as usual, but wished that she had not, for Maurice's face fell and he looked sober for some time.

"Now he is worrying again," she thought. "It seems that I can not have any sense!"

The new car sped along the Dixie highway from Miami in fine shape. Maurice drove for Mr. Sterling and Ann sat by him, at his suggestion. They drove into Wyldewood to look at the "two million dollar" banyan tree and other things; but that did not take long. It seemed a short ride, compared to those which they had been taking, when they crossed the bridge at Fort Lauderdale and turned down the street by the river, where they saw the pennants of the Bentley yacht.

Mrs. Bentley saw them and beckoned from the yacht. A young fellow in sailor costume came to help them aboard. "Isn't it great?" whispered Suzanne to Ann. "I did not know that they had so fine a yacht, nor one so big as this. It is a good thing the river is so deep, for these large boats."

The wood seemed to be mahogany, shining and clean, as everything was, indeed. On the deck

there were comfortable seats, mostly wicker furniture. It was the first time that Ann had ever been on a yacht, an occasion to be remembered.

"I am all alone," said Mrs. Bentley, when her guests were seated on deck. "My men all went deep sea fishing this morning. Ron promised to bring me a whale and Jack said that he might catch a shark. Mr. Bentley made no promises."

Ann wondered if this were fun or earnest, probably fun, she thought. Whaling, she knew, was an undertaking by itself. But she did not pretend to know what they did catch in "deep sea fishing," so kept still and listened.

"They thought that you would not get here so early, though I really expected them before this."

"You are ready, are you, to undertake the addition to your family?" Mr. Sterling asked.

"Indeed I am. We have all been anticipating the fun. I wish that you and Mrs. Sterling might join us, too."

"Thank you, Mrs. Bentley," replied Mrs. Sterling, "we are sorry not to see Mr. Bentley, but I promised Mother to reach Palm Beach early. We'd better not wait."

"Then you must see our yacht, at least," said Mrs. Bentley, rising. "After the young folks go back to school, perhaps we can persuade you to a little cruise with us."

"It would not take any persuading in our case, would it, Ann?" remarked Suzanne, as they followed the rest on a tour of the yacht.

"I don't know how good a sailor I'll be," said Ann, "but I wouldn't miss this for a good deal!"

Not long after the Sterlings' departure, a small launch came past, carrying the fishermen and their catch. They had gone out with friends in the early morning.

A little further along the docks the launch found a place to dock. Here came the boys, followed by Mr. Bentley and another of his small "crew" that ran the boat for him. "We're leaving our catch, Mother," said Ron, "to be attended to at the launch. I'm going to have the sail-fish I caught mounted!"

"Ronald! Where will you put it?"

"Haven't thought that far yet, Mom!"

The fishermen boarded the yacht and made many excuses for their somewhat disreputable appearance. Jack looked rather pale. Deep sea fishing had been a trifle strenuous for him, but he disclaimed seasickness. With more excuses, they withdrew, to appear some time later in the garb of civilization, as they said, though not evening dress by any means. Mrs. Bentley had told the girls that it was not necessary to change their costume, though they had brought suitable frocks. "We shall be very informal tonight," she said. "Indeed, I think that we shall take our evening meal ashore at some pleasant place."

It was like living in a house, Ann thought, so convenient to everything. "I always did think that I would like to live in a house-boat," she confided to Suzanne, to receive a well-bred stare. Suzanne had never thought house-boats had anything to do with her!

"You do say the funniest things sometimes, Ann," she said.

As the boys had planned it, the young people went off to a moving picture after their rather early dinner, Ronald calling for a young friend on a neighboring yacht, which gave each lad a lass. This young lady was one they had met several seasons at Daytona, where the Bentleys often stayed. Quite accidentally the girls found that she knew Eleanor Frost and lived not far from her home on the Hudson. This was enough of a recommendation for Suzanne, who was friendly at once. Ann liked the appearance of Ronald's friend, Louise Duncan by name, who had met Maurice before and remembered him. It was a "happy-go-lucky" affair, not planned except for the movie, which was rather disappointing. They left before it was over and drifted into an ice-cream parlor, where they sat to visit as much as to eat the cool refreshments. Ann could not get over its being winter. "Someway, I keep thinking that I have the dates all wrong," she said to Maurice, who remained her special cavalier. "I started to put June on a letter I began to Marta this morning."

"You are not the only one who gets mixed in Florida. 'It is always June in Miami' is a favorite saying down here, you know."

"We'll all go up on our deck," announced Ronald, "and we'll get out our little banjos for some music."

There was no dissenting voice. In a short time Ann was sitting with a light wrap around her shoulders, as in summer time at home, listening to the music of guitar, mandolin and banjo, the instruments that the boys happened to play. Theirs was not the only yacht that boasted music. Voices and instruments mingled their sounds over the river's reflections. Stars and moon were

bright. An occasional boat passed. Strains from a band concert in the park reached them occasionally, till the boys said that there was too much competition and stopped. "Wait till we get out upon the bounding billow, girls," said Ronald.

"Then we shall show what we can do!" added Jack. "Tomorrow we are going to take you up New River, though, and perhaps around 'Alligator Circle'."

"What is 'Alligator Circle'?" asked Ann. "Do you mean that we may really see some alligators?"

"If it is a sunny day, I think that you may see quite a number on the banks. We are going in Dick Bell's launch, provided that you young ladies will accept our plan."

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"We are in for any fun that you suggest," declared Suzanne.

Ronald took Louise home to her floating mansion, which was conveniently located on the same side of the river. Mrs. Bentley, who, if the truth were told, had been yawning for some time, as she and her husband sat forward and listened to the various harmonies, showed Suzanne and Ann to their quarters. From the deck came the strains of "Good Night, Ladies," the college song immemorial.

The girls looked at each other with smiles as they listened, but had no way of acknowledging the message. "Isn't this a cutey cabin, Ann?" asked Suzanne as she surveyed the little stateroom.

"Not only cutey, but ducky. I'm rather glad that my first experience is on a stationary boat. With all the fun we've had, and the candy we ate, I'm afraid that I'm due for dreams tonight."

"May they be pleasant ones," said her cousin. "I've had such a glorious time that mine ought to be. Jack is such a dear! Do you know that he and Maurice are both planning to get a position in the mills after they graduate? Jack told me tonight. Father has said that he will start them in, though they may not get what they want at first. I think that he and Grandmother both want Maury to learn the business from the ground up."

"Maurice told me that he was planning to begin there, but you don't suppose that they will handle the machinery, do you?"

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"No. They would not be of much help there, I suppose, though Maurice likes that sort of thing. He was always taking everything to pieces when he was little. And till he smashed his car he had a lot of fun doing almost the same thing with that."

Morning brought sunshine and lovely clouds drifting over from the ocean. Ann looked out upon islands of water hyacinth, floating past the yacht on their way to the sound and the sea. The tide was going out. Some of the yachts and launches were already moving, for the day, perhaps, or to other shores. It was cool enough for a wrap on deck, but Maurice told the girls that it would warm up as soon as the sun "got into action."

It was about nine o'clock when the party left the yacht to go along the docks and across the bridge to where the little launch lazily rocked and waited for them. Louise had joined them and told Suzanne that there was a bit of pleasant news for her. "I'll tell you when we get on the launch,—if it is necessary," she mysteriously added.

Several young people were standing on the dock near the launch as they approached. "Why, there's Eleanor!" Suzanne exclaimed. "Where in the world did you come from, Eleanor?"

"Ann, this is our host, Dick Bell," Maurice was saying. "This is the cousin I told you about, Dick."

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For a few moments introductions were in order. Then Eleanor had time to answer Suzanne's question. "Mother and I are staying at Miami," she said. "I wrote to your address, Suzanne, to let you and Ann know that we had suddenly decided to come. But you must have started before the letter reached you. We ran across Dick yesterday, down town, and he told me about this little trip. I came up on the 'bus a few minutes ago. We decided to surprise you, though Dick told the boys, I guess."

Besides Eleanor and Richard Bell, there were two other young friends, Richard's chum, Fred Hall, and his sister, Lois Bell. It bid fair to prove a congenial party, but it would have been thrilling enough to Ann even without the fun. It was all so different, she told Eleanor. There were tall, feathery Australian pines and cocoanut palms along the river bank. In the gardens of the homes near by, the vines and shrubs were of those varieties with which she was just becoming familiar.

"Wait till we get up toward the Everglades," said Eleanor. "Then you will think it 'different'."

Ann had never heard of New River till she reached Florida. It was not like her dashing mountain rivers, but had a beauty of its own. "How dark the water is," she said to Maurice, who sat beside her as they moved up the river, under the two drawbridges, which stood open for them

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and some taller boats.

"Yes. I don't know why, unless there is something about the soil or what grows along the banks. It is a sluggish river, but the tide comes up every day to quite a distance."

"There are some compensations for its not being rapid. I love the reflections in the water. See how that palmetto is reflected, with scarcely a ripple to show that it is water!"

The launch chugged along to the accompaniment of light laughter and conversation. Rounding the curves, they advanced up stream, passing some beautiful homes on the river front, then reaching the wilder regions, where there were tangles of beautiful trees and shrubs in the swamps. As it was yet early in the season, the water birds were not wary. Herons of all sorts flew ahead of them. A fish hawk crossed the stream overhead. An American bittern, all streaked with brown, flew close enough to be distinguished without a glass.

"There!" called Dick. "There, folks, is your alligator! See him?"

But Ann, who had been following the bittern's course, saw nothing but the splash with which the alligator took the water and disappeared from view. "What a shame!" she cried. "Do you suppose that we'll see another, Maury?" she asked.

"Certainly we shall. Watch the shores, especially any place where they would be likely to lie out in the sun."

"It's like a circus with several rings, isn't it? While you watch one thing, you miss something else!"

But Ann saw the immense tarpon that leaped out of the water and back. Smaller fishes also disported for their benefit. Finally Ann saw a dark scaly body, curved around on a little hillock where the sun shone between two masses of growth on the shore. "Is that an alligator there?" she asked, pointing to the spot.

"'Tis the very reptile," replied Ronald, and Dick made the launch move more slowly, to let every one have a good look. Sleeping peacefully, his long, hideous mouth in a "grim smile", as Eleanor had it, the immense alligator was not disturbed by the passing launch. The deed was done. Ann had seen an "alligator in the wild"! But after that there were perhaps a dozen more of various sizes that they saw, one swimming in the river not far from the launch.

Up the canal at some distance, they stopped at a small place where the larger boat that takes tourists on this ride always makes a stop. There they visited an orange grove that Dick told them about, coming back to the launch laden with the sweet, yellow fruit.

"How do you say we go back, boys?" asked Dick.

"Take the cut-off and go around by the sound and Lake Mabel," said Ronald.

"That will give the girls a chance to see more," seconded Maurice.

"Around the canal we go," said Dick. "The canal scenery is nothing remarkable, girls, but when we get along further, there will be a view worth seeing."

On the dry slopes of the canal more alligators were sunning themselves. But these were all shy of being seen. One scarcely saw them, Ann thought, before they were in the river and out of sight entirely. "The Indians hunt them, you know," Dick explained. "But there are not so many to get any more, they say. A man who has been coming here for the last twenty-five years told me that there used to be thousands of alligators where there are only a few now."

"So far as I am concerned," said Ann, "there are enough." This remark brought a laugh from the boys and similar sentiments from the girls.

"Don't worry, Ann," said Ronald. "There aren't any around the towns."

But just then, something was the matter with the engine, which finally stopped, to the inward distress of at least the feminine portion of the passengers. To their credit it may be said, however, that nobody screamed.

"Steady, folks," said Dick, working away. "I'll get her to going in a minute."

The boat swung around, without direction, and Ann thought that they were going to bump into the bank. Would they upset? So far as she knew, everybody could swim. But how about the alligators?

"Take that pole, Ron," called Dick, nodding toward where a long pole was fastened. "If we swing around to the bank, hold her there, if you can. I can't find out what is the matter with this double-jointed and twisted old engine!"

"I bet I can, Dick," offered Maurice, who gave a look at Ann to see if she were frightened and rising, made his way to the engine. How handsome Maurice looked in his white flannels, Ann

thought.

"Scared, Suzanne?" asked Eleanor, noticing that Suzanne looked pale. Suzanne shook her head in the negative.

"Maury will fix it," said Suzanne. "Still, I imagine that nobody feels real comfortable. It was a mighty big alligator that splashed in last!"

"Sh-sh! Don't mention it, Suzy. The boys would get us to shore with that pole."

"Chug! Chug-chug!"

"Good for you, Maurice, you've got it!"

But no; the chugging stopped. Both Dick and Maurice were working away at the engine. "For pity's sake, Lois," said Dick Bell in a low tone to his sister, "get 'em to doing something besides watching us. It's getting on my nerves!"

Maurice, whose white flannels were not quite so white by this time, laughed as he worked and started up the old round, "Row, row, row your boat, lightly down the stream."

With some laughter, the rest joined in. "Better change it to 'Pole your boat,' as the Seminoles do, if we don't get this thing started pretty soon," growled Dick, who was nervous from his responsibility.

"Easy, Dicky," said Maurice. "I think that I have found out what is the matter. There! hand me that oil can, Dick."

In a few minutes the engine was going merrily, while Ann declared that its sound was the best music she had heard in some time.

"Fie, cousin," said Maurice, climbing around to his seat by Ann again, "better than those dulcet strains I started you all with a while ago?"

"Your voice was all right, Maury," laughed Ann, "but starting the engine was better yet. Did you find the trouble, or may we have a repetition of the act?"

"I found it, and unless something else goes wrong we'll be home as usual!"

It was worth the trying time in "Alligator Circle" to see the exquisite sky and water of sound, ocean and the little body of water known as Lake Mabel. Then came the windings of the New River, past Tarpon Bend and into the passage between the well-known shores where the Bentley yacht was docked.

Owing to the long delay in the canal, they were late for lunch and not even the juicy oranges had dulled the edges of their youthful appetites. The boys took them to the best hotel this time, where they were served at a table of their own, decorated with flowers for the occasion, with special favors of hibiscus blossoms at each plate, a hurried order, telephoned after their arrival, but eminently satisfactory to all the girls.

They were just finishing when Mr. Tyson entered the dining-room and came over to the table, whereupon all the young gentlemen rose at once. "Sit down, boys," said Mr. Tyson. "Don't let me interrupt you. I just want to tell Maurice that I want him to accompany me on a little trip after lunch, if he can excuse himself. Have you any special plans, Maurice, that will be upset?"

"None at all, Father. I think that there was some plan about going to the beach this afternoon, —Las Olas Beach. I can be spared as well as not."

"I stopped at the yacht and Mrs. Bentley told me where you are. I have had my lunch and will wait for you in the lobby. Mother wants me to look up a little property for her."

When Mr. Tyson walked away, as he did immediately, with a salute to all, the boys sat down again to finish dessert. "It will be a good chance, Ann," said Maurice in a low tone to his cousin. He did not explain what sort of chance he meant, but Ann understood.

"I think so, too, Maury. Good luck."

Maurice thought that it was a very sweet look with which he was favored, as Ann looked up at him to wish him good luck. They walked to the lobby together, with the rest of the party; then Maurice joined his father and they drove away at once.

"I wonder where the property is that Grandmother wants Dad to look up," said Suzanne.

"I don't know," replied Ann, much preoccupied.

MOONLIGHT ON THE SECRET TRAIL

It was a seven passenger car, but eight could and did ride in it that afternoon, on the trip to Las Olas beach. Maurice was gone and Eleanor had promised to go back to Miami early in the afternoon. That left Dick and Lois Bell, Fred Hall, Louise Duncan, Ronald Bentley, Suzanne Tyson, Ann Sterling and Jack Hudson. They drove first to the Seminole camp, just west of town. Ronald had mentioned it and both Suzanne and Ann felt anxious to see it. They had noticed the gayly dressed Indians on the streets and Ann was delighted to see one poling his way across the New River in one of the cypress trunk canoes.

Fred, who drove his father's car, had a great time finding the road, but finally got started in the right direction, a matter of a short time to reach the camp once the right road was found. They were nearly stuck in the sand once or twice, but they lightened the load by jumping out and pulled out safely.

"What an Indian camp!" thought Ann. Here were no tepees, nor moccasin-wearing Indians. Little that she had learned in the West about Indians would apply here, so far as what she had expected to see was concerned, with the exception of bad housekeeping! The camp site was littered with a nondescript collection of tin cans, chicken feathers, bones and old utensils.

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As ever, Ann felt hesitant about disturbing the native dwellers; but Ronald walked boldly up to several children who were standing about and asked to take their pictures, offering a silver piece at the same time. The children drew back, casting looks at their visitors, and behind them at the queer thatched lodges which were their dwellings. On the floor of one near by, a floor raised several feet from the ground so that it looked more like a low shelf than a floor, there sat a stolid old woman, who glanced at visitors and children with keen black eyes. As Ann and Ronald came nearer, they saw that she was stringing beads of bright colors.

By signs, pointing at the camera, they tried to indicate what they wanted. At last the old woman, whose neck was wound with countless strands of beads, descended to earth and spoke briefly to the children, who then posed for a picture. Several cameras clicked, as the sun shone more brightly for a time and the positions of the Indians were favorable.

"They say," said Dick, as the party went back to the car, leaving pleasant reminders, in the form of loose change, in the hand of the old woman, "that the more beads they wear, the higher their station among the Indians,—social position, you know."

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"This woman is the mother of a chief," said Ronald. "How about it, folks? Is it 'Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll'? Ready now for a swim?"

"It is," declared Suzanne. "We are. Don't you think, Ann, that these bright costumes are prettier than those of the Western Indians?"

"They are more picturesque in some ways," said Ann, "those full, long dresses of different colors, the stripes running around, are surely startling; but it seems funny that the children wear them. They are all barefooted, aren't they? Don't they need moccasins down here?"

"I should think that they would, with the snakes," remarked Louise.

"Anyhow," said Ann, "I think that our Indians wear more sensible clothes."

"You will be loyal at any cost, won't you, Miss Ann?" queried Jack Hudson. "But remember that down here the climate makes light clothing necessary."

The sea was just rough enough to be exciting. The bathers did not go out far, but plunged and dived or floated to their hearts' content. Through all the afternoon's pleasure, and Ann was interested in all of it, she was thinking of Maurice, wondering if he had yet learned the truth and what that truth was. She could scarcely wait to see him, her gallant young cousin! What a way he had of carrying off a situation with the best of humor, as in working with that engine!

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Ronald paid Ann rather especial attention that afternoon. She was, to be sure, his guest and his mother's; but he made one remark which indicated that Ann was not without interest to him. "I'm almost glad that old Maury was called away for a while," said he. "Some of the rest of us can get within three feet of you now, and have you alone for five minutes or so."

Ann looked up laughing, somewhat surprised. "Maurice is not trying to keep any one away from his cousin, I'm sure."

"Oh, is that so?" queried Ronald in sarcasm.

It was nearly seven o'clock when Maurice returned, having come in on one of the 'buses, for his

father had gone on back to Palm Beach from Delray, where they were last. Maurice seemed to be in good spirits, joking with the rest as usual, but he gave no special sign to Ann, and seemed rather to avoid any betrayal of what had passed between his father and himself. "Perhaps he could not come to the point, after all," thought Ann.

Maurice had had his dinner before he came to the yacht. The yacht party was just finishing that meal, when Mr. Bentley suggested that they take a moonlight ride out to the sound and beyond. "It was a little rough early this afternoon," said he, "but the wind has died down and I think that we shall find it calm and delightful riding. Have you ever been out on the ocean, Ann?"

"Not yet, Mr. Bentley."

The boys carried the instruments of the "orchestra" to the deck, and arranged enough seats for all the party; for they were taking Dick and Lois Bell, as well as Louise Duncan, on this evening "cruise".

What a full day it had been! Among the alligators in the morning, now going out to the sharks tonight! It all depended on how you looked at it, however, whether you saw sharks and alligators, or beautiful waters and blue sky!

Music started early. Louise brought her guitar and Dick added his ukulele to the orchestral supply. Ann enjoyed the singing and joined her voice to those of the rest; but she sat near the railing, not to miss seeing the waters and sky, and to know when first they reached the real sea. Stars were out, shining and clear. An occasional cloud that drifted across the moon only made its setting more beautiful.

"Come over here, Ann," called Maurice after a little, when the singing had stopped. They were a little tired, those active young people. A whole day of going had made this soothing motion upon the waves the most restful entertainment that Mr. Bentley could have provided. Maurice stepped around one or two of his friends, to hold a hand to Ann and lead her to the seat which, he said, he had "just reserved". "You have seen alligators and Indians, Ann, you tell me,—now come and show me the constellations."

"'Constellations'," repeated Jack to Suzanne. "Did it ever strike you that Maurice is pretty well interested in his cousin?"

"Yes. He is crazy about her, and has been ever since she first came to our house."

"What do you think of it?"

"Mother seems to think it all right. First cousins do marry, you know. Of course, Maury never said anything to me about it. But I can't help noticing lately, and Mother made a little remark that surprised me the other day. One would have thought that she *hoped* Maury would fall in love with Ann."

"Doesn't she like Ann?"

Suzanne was not quite ready to tell Jack her mother's attitude toward Ann, so she managed an evasive reply to this question.

Meanwhile Maurice and Ann occupied a wicker seat made for two. "I'm not sure that I remember much about the winter sky," Ann began.

"And I could not think of constellations to save my neck," replied Maurice. "That was just an excuse to get you here, Ann. It deceived no one, either, if you are anxious to have me truthful. Jack gave me a look that I understood. I want to tell you about my talk with Father. It was certainly surprising."

"Oh," said Ann, "I have been so anxious all afternoon!"

"Have you, dear? Excuse me, Ann,—but whether you ever learn to care for me or not, you are the dearest, sweetest, most wonderful girl that ever gave her sympathy to a good-for-nothing college boy, who has wasted half of his opportunities!"

"Don't be so hard on yourself, Maury," said Ann, as soon as she could get breath to speak, after hearing the first part of Maurice's remark. "There is a good deal to that same college boy."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, but I'm pretty well discouraged tonight. It was hard to keep going with the fun, but I don't want to appear different."

"It was,—it was true, then?"

"It was,—and more. I am simply dazed, Ann. The only happy thing about it is that I am not your cousin at all. I am holding on to that. I feel like throwing up the whole thing, college and all. How can I ever finish the year?"

"O Maury, please! You will always regret it if you give up when you are so nearly through. Please,—for me, if you like me a little!"

"A little! Hard luck, isn't it?—to fall desperately in love just when the very foundations slip from under your feet, like the sand on the shore!"

"But surely it isn't so bad as all that, Maury. Uncle Tyson cares about you and will help you start out just the same, won't he? I don't understand. You did not have any trouble, did you?"

"No, indeed. And I am asked not to talk about it openly in the family yet. I can't refuse, under the circumstances. But promise me, Ann, if anything comes up, any reason why Grandmother ought to be told, you will tell her from me. I don't want her to go on thinking,—well, I'd better tell you the whole story first. But let me tell you one thing, Ann. There will never be any deceiving of any one to *my* record, if I keep my mind!"

Maurice then began with the history of the drive and related how, after the business for Madam LeRoy had been explained, and they had driven for some little time, Maurice introduced the subject by saying that there was something which he wanted to talk over with his father. He then referred to the gossip that he had heard and asked if Mr. Tyson had any explanation. Whatever was the truth, Maurice wanted to know it and felt that he had a right to ask, though he had no desire to trouble his father.

Mr. Tyson seemed surprised. They drove along in silence for a few minutes, Mr. Tyson very sober, Maurice more and more certain that there was some story back of it. Then Mr. Tyson acknowledged that there was truth in the gossip, though he could not see how it was started.

"So it began, Ann," said Maurice. "Then Father exploded the bomb-shell! You could never guess it. For a long time father thought that I was his son, but he discovered a few years ago that I am not even that! Curiously enough, my name is Huntington, like your grandmother's, and my parents were American, for which I am thankful!"

Ann drew a long breath. "*Your* grandmother's," Maurice had said! Poor Maury! No real share in the family relationships! No wonder he was upset!

Maurice proceeded with the story which Mr. Tyson had given him. It seemed that Mr. Tyson, traveling around the world with plenty of money, had met two American girls, orphans, without any family connections so far as he ever knew. One was about to marry a man named Maurice Huntington, whom she had known in America, and with the other one, a beautiful girl, Mr. Tyson had fallen desperately in love. They had met in Japan, and from that time saw more or less of each other till they arrived in Greece, where there was a double wedding. Both young men were interested in archaeology and in art. Happy, and with plenty of means, they decided to take a house in one of the Grecian cities, to remain there as long as it pleased them. There a boy was born to each of the sisters, Mrs. Tyson's about three months the elder, and they had the same English nurse to take care of both babies.

When the Tyson baby was about five months old, its mother died suddenly, and Mr. Tyson, leaving the boy in charge of the nurse and his sister-in-law, went to France to get away from his trouble. In Paris, attracted at first by a fancied resemblance to his wife, Mr. Tyson fell in love again and after a very short courtship married Ann's aunt.

To Maurice, Mr. Tyson explained that he did not tell Mrs. Tyson of his first marriage for two reasons: first, a remark that she made during the courtship about second marriages; second, the short time which had elapsed between the death of his first wife and the second marriage. He thought that he could explain after their marriage, but found that she was very unhappy about it. (Ann thought that she could imagine the time Uncle Tyson had had over the matter, no excuses of having been so desperately in love with Aunt Sue serving to placate her.)

It was her proposition that they ignore the matter so far as their friends were concerned. Why explain? It would be several years very likely, before they returned to America. They were going to explore out-of-the-way places. They would be in Greece some time. Let the child be considered hers. It was so young that it would be better for it to regard her as its mother.

Mr. Tyson was only too glad to have the matter amicably settled and left it in his wife's hands to manage. No harm could be done, he thought. It was no one's affair, he reasoned.

When at last they returned to Greece, they found no one in the house which the Huntington's and the Tysons had taken but the English woman and one of the babies. Several weeks before, she told them, the Huntingtons and their baby had been drowned while they were on a little excursion by themselves. She was thankful to see them, for funds were lacking. She had written and did not understand why she did not hear. Mr. Huntington had naturally handled the funds. She had only her own savings to use. Mrs. Tyson was upset and wanted to leave the next day. Accordingly she and the nurse, with the baby, packed and left at once, leaving him to settle matters and sell the house. He did not think of making any special inquiries into the story of the nurse, though one of the friends whom he consulted in regard to the sale of the house had remarked that he thought the baby had died before, and another expressed himself as very sorry that he had lost the baby as well as his wife. But Mr. Tyson was hurried and had made no intimate friends there. He and Mr. Huntington had been concerned with their explorations and

study. Only one thing he remembered as seeming strange to him. The baby had not been named when his wife died, and the nurse now told him that the Huntingtons called it Maurice. That seemed strange, for he had been under the impression that his sister-in-law had been about to name her baby for its father. But his memory was hazy. The babies had not seemed of much importance then.

But Mr. Tyson understood the whole matter when, several years before, he had received a letter from the English nurse, who informed him that the baby was the child of the Huntingtons and that she was sorry for the deception. "I did not know what your wife would do about it, and I wanted the Huntington baby to have a home. I will tell no one else."

"So," said Maurice, as he quoted the nurse's words, "the Huntington baby has had a home! I suppose that I should be very grateful! Indeed, I am grateful. You should have seen poor old Dad when he was telling me. He asked me to keep on calling him father and added that he thought a great deal of his worthless son. I wondered that when he was dealing with me for my extravagance at college he did not tell me this. He didn't have the heart, he said, and it was too late for him to feel that I was not his own son. That was pretty nice of Dad! And he wouldn't give it away to Mother, either."

"I shall have to keep calling her that, of course. I haven't so many compunctions in regard to her. Yet she has been good to me. I have had as much mothering as my kid brother. Say,—it's going to be hard to realize that he isn't my brother!"

"When it comes to Grandmother,—she must not leave me any money because she thinks I am her grandson. I don't know what to do about that. Dad made me promise not to do anything right now. Promise me, Ann, that you will tell her privately any time you think she ought to know."

"I couldn't do that, Maury. It will occur to you what should be done about all this. In the whole story, Maurice, there isn't one thing for you to be ashamed of! It was just the peculiar set of circumstances. And I'm sure I'm glad that English nurse did what she did. Well, I suppose I ought not to say that, for doing what isn't square is never right. But she repented anyhow. And suppose that we'd never had you in the family!"

Ann almost regretted her impulsive words when she saw the effect they had. But was not it her duty to do what she could to cheer him up in his whirl of discouragement?

"That is dear of you to say, little one," said Maurice, taking Ann's hand in his cold one. It had cost Maurice something to go over this. "I'll never forget your sympathy, Ann, and when I make good, I'm going to ask you to be another Ann Huntington."

"Maury," called Suzanne, "got enough of constellations yet? I want you to come and start for the boys that crazy college song you sang last night."

Ann and Maurice walked the short distance to the central group, where Maurice accepted the guitar that Louise handed him and led off. Ann, watching him, came to the conclusion that however much he might be upset, Maurice was now more or less relieved, knowing the truth, and having told Ann.

When the song, a wild ditty in dialect, was over, the girls gave hearty applause. "You'd think that Maurice was the real thing from the way he reels off that foreign dialect," said Dick Bell. "Say, Maury, where were you born anyhow?"

Suzanne, laughing, answered for Maurice, "In Greece," she said. "That's where he gets his Grecian nose!"

It was late when the young people separated. Long since the yacht had left the sea and found its way to the dock in New River. Dick and his sister accompanied Louise Duncan to her own yacht. The river was very still, a cool wind blowing from the ocean, when Ann, creeping into her berth, heard the boys on deck begin to serenade them again in the soft old college tunes used by generations. Suzanne sat up in her berth to listen. But sleepy Ann lay back on her pillow with a pleased smile. "Maurice is showing me that he can 'carry on'," she thought, and her mind began to go over what he had told her. "'Ann Huntington'! Wouldn't it be odd if—?"

THE END.

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Transcriber’s Note:

- Page 5
said to Ann privately, Mrs. Tyson *changed to*
said to Ann privately, [as](#) Mrs. Tyson
- Page 6
have taken worse risks that that *changed to*
have taken worse risks [than](#) that
- Page 205
they evidently possessed *changed to*
they evidently [possessed](#)
- Page 206
looked sober for some time *changed to*
[looked](#) sober for some time
- Page 215
shone between two masses of growth *changed to*
shone [between](#) two masses of growth
- Page 225
to miss seeing the waters and sky *changed to*
to miss [seeing](#) the waters and sky
- Page 232
Mr. Tyson undersood the whole matter *changed to*
Mr. Tyson [understood](#) the whole matter

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