

Grace Harlowe's First Year at Overton College eBook

Grace Harlowe's First Year at Overton College

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Contents

Grace Harlowe's First Year at Overton College eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	7
Page 1.....	8
Page 2.....	10
Page 3.....	12
Page 4.....	14
Page 5.....	16
Page 6.....	18
Page 7.....	20
Page 8.....	22
Page 9.....	24
Page 10.....	26
Page 11.....	28
Page 12.....	30
Page 13.....	32
Page 14.....	34
Page 15.....	36
Page 16.....	38
Page 17.....	40
Page 18.....	42
Page 19.....	44
Page 20.....	46
Page 21.....	47
Page 22.....	49

Page 23.....	51
Page 24.....	53
Page 25.....	55
Page 26.....	57
Page 27.....	59
Page 28.....	61
Page 29.....	63
Page 30.....	65
Page 31.....	67
Page 32.....	69
Page 33.....	71
Page 34.....	73
Page 35.....	75
Page 36.....	77
Page 37.....	79
Page 38.....	81
Page 39.....	83
Page 40.....	85
Page 41.....	87
Page 42.....	89
Page 43.....	91
Page 44.....	93
Page 45.....	95
Page 46.....	97
Page 47.....	99
Page 48.....	101

Page 49.....	103
Page 50.....	105
Page 51.....	107
Page 52.....	109
Page 53.....	111
Page 54.....	113
Page 55.....	115
Page 56.....	117
Page 57.....	119
Page 58.....	121
Page 59.....	123
Page 60.....	125
Page 61.....	126
Page 62.....	128
Page 63.....	130
Page 64.....	132
Page 65.....	134
Page 66.....	136
Page 67.....	138
Page 68.....	139
Page 69.....	141
Page 70.....	142
Page 71.....	144
Page 72.....	146
Page 73.....	148
Page 74.....	150

Page 75.....	152
Page 76.....	154
Page 77.....	156
Page 78.....	158
Page 79.....	160
Page 80.....	162
Page 81.....	164
Page 82.....	166
Page 83.....	168
Page 84.....	170
Page 85.....	172
Page 86.....	174
Page 87.....	176
Page 88.....	178
Page 89.....	180
Page 90.....	182
Page 91.....	184
Page 92.....	186
Page 93.....	188
Page 94.....	190
Page 95.....	192
Page 96.....	194
Page 97.....	196
Page 98.....	198
Page 99.....	200
Page 100.....	202

Page 101.....	204
Page 102.....	205
Page 103.....	206
Page 104.....	208
Page 105.....	209
Page 106.....	211

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
Chapter Page		1
		1
CHAPTER I		1
CHAPTER II		4
CHAPTER III		10
CHAPTER IV		15
CHAPTER V		20
CHAPTER VI		23
CHAPTER VII		27
CHAPTER VIII		31
CHAPTER IX		35
CHAPTER X		38
CHAPTER XI		40
CHAPTER XII		44
CHAPTER XIII		46
CHAPTER XIV		49
CHAPTER XV		53
CHAPTER XVI		56
CHAPTER XVII		60
CHAPTER XVIII		64
CHAPTER XIX		68
CHAPTER XX		71
CHAPTER XXI		77
CHAPTER XXII		80
CHAPTER XXIII		85
CHAPTER XXIV		90
The End		94
CATALOGUE OF		94
		100
		101
Section 2. Information about the		105
Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm		
		105

Page 1

Chapter Page

- I. Off To College 7
- II. J. Elfreda Introduces Herself 15
- III. First Impressions 29
- IV. Miriam's Unwelcome Surprise 44
- V. An Interrupted Study Hour 55
- VI. A Disturbing Note 62
- VII. Grace Takes Matters Into Her Own Hands 72
- VIII. The Sophomore Reception 84
- IX. Disagreeable News 95
- X. The Making of The Team 102
- XI. Anne Wins a Victory 109
- XII. Ups and Downs 118
- XIII. Grace Turns Electioneer 125
- XIV. An Invitation and a Misunderstanding 132
- XV. Greeting Old Friends 142
- XVI. Thanksgiving with the Southards 150
- XVII. Christmas Plans 161
- XVIII. Basketball Rumors 171
- XIX. A Game Worth Seeing 181
- XX. Grace Overhears Something Interesting 190
- XXI. An Unheeded Warning 206
- XXII. Turning the Tables 214

XXIII. Virginia Changes Her Mind 227

XXIV. Good-bye to their Freshman Year 239

Grace Harlowe's First Year at Overton College

CHAPTER I

OFF TO COLLEGE

"Do you remember what you said one October day last year, Grace, when we stood on this platform and said good-bye to the boys?" asked Anne Pierson.

"No, what did I say?" asked Grace Harlowe, turning to her friend Anne.

"You said," returned Anne, "that when it came your turn to go to college you were going to slip away quietly without saying good-bye to any one but your mother, and here you are with almost half Oakdale at the train to see you off to college."

"Now, Anne, you know perfectly well that people are down here to see you and Miriam, too," laughed Grace. "I'm not half as much of a celebrity as you are."

Grace Harlowe, Miriam Nesbit and Anne Pierson stood on the station platform completely surrounded by their many friends, who, regardless of the fact that it was half-past seven o'clock in the morning, had made it a point to be at the station to wish them godspeed.

"This is the second public gathering this week," remarked Miriam Nesbit, who, despite the chatter that was going on around her, had heard Grace's laughing remark.

Page 2

"I know it," agreed Grace. "There was just as large a crowd here when Nora and Jessica went away last Monday. Doesn't it seem dreadful that we are obliged to be separated? How I hated to see the girls go. And we won't be together again until Christmas."

"Oh, here come the boys!" announced Eva Allen, who, with Marian Barber, had been standing a little to one side of the three girls.

At this juncture four smiling young men hurried through the crowd of young people and straight to the circle surrounding the three girls, where they were received with cries of: "We were afraid you'd be too late!" and, "Why didn't you get here earlier?"

"We're awfully sorry!" exclaimed David Nesbit. "We had to wait for Hippy. He overslept as usual. We threw as much as a shovelful of gravel against his window, but he never stirred. Finally we had to waken his family and it took all of them to waken him."

"Don't you believe what David Nesbit says," retorted Hippy. "Do you suppose I slept a wink last night knowing that the friends of my youth were about to leave me?" Hippy sniffed dolefully and buried his face in his handkerchief.

"Now, now, Hippy," protested Miriam. "If you insist on shedding crocodile tears, although I don't believe you could be sad long enough to shed even that kind, we shall feel that you are glad to get rid of us."

"Never!" ejaculated Hippy fervently. "Oh, if I only had Irish Nora here to stand up for me! She wouldn't allow any one, except herself, to speak harsh and cruel words to me."

"We shan't be able to speak many more words of any kind to you," said Miriam, consulting her watch. "The train is due in ten minutes."

When Grace Harlowe and her three dear friends, Nora O'Malley, Jessica Bright and Anne Pierson, began to make history for themselves in their freshman year at Oakdale High School, none of them could possibly imagine just how dear they were to become to the hearts of the hundreds of girls who made their acquaintance in "Grace Harlowe's Plebe Year at High School." The story of their freshman year was one of manifold trials and triumphs. It was at the beginning of that year that Grace Harlowe had championed the cause of Anne Pierson, a newcomer in Oakdale. Then and there a friendship sprang up between the two girls that was destined to be life long. The repeated efforts of several malicious girls to discredit Anne in the eyes of her teachers, and her final triumph in winning the freshman prize offered to the class by Mrs. Gray, a wealthy resident of Oakdale, made the narrative one of interest and aroused a desire on the part of the reader to know more of Grace Harlowe and her friends.

In “Grace Harlowe’s Sophomore Year at High School” the girl chums appeared as basketball enthusiasts. In this volume was related the efforts of Julia Crosby, a disagreeable junior, and Miriam Nesbit, a disgruntled sophomore, to disgrace Anne and wrest the basketball captaincy from Grace. Through the magnanimity of Grace Harlowe, Miriam and Julia were brought to a realization of their own faults, and in time became the faithful friends of both Anne and Grace.

Page 3

During “Grace Harlowe’s Junior Year at High School” the famous sorority, the Phi Sigma Tau, was organized by the four chums for the purpose of looking after high school girls who stood in need of assistance. In that volume Eleanor Savelli, the self-willed daughter of an Italian violin virtuoso, made her appearance. The difficulties Grace and her chums encountered in trying to befriend Eleanor and her final contemptuous repudiation of their friendship made absorbing reading for those interested in following the fortunes of the Oakdale High School girls.

Their senior year was perhaps the most eventful of all. At the very beginning of the fall term the high school gymnasium was destroyed by fire. Failing to secure an appropriation from either the town or state, the four classes of the girls’ high school pledged themselves to raise the amount of money required to rebuild the gymnasium. In “Grace Harlowe’s Senior Year at High School” the story of the senior class bazaar, the daring theft of their hard-earned money before the bazaar had closed, and Grace Harlowe’s final recovery of the stolen money under the strangest of circumstances, furnished material for a narrative of particular interest. After graduation the four chums, accompanied by their nearest and dearest friends, had spent a long and delightful summer in Europe. On returning to Oakdale the real parting of the ways had come, for Nora and Jessica had already departed for an eastern city to enter a well known conservatory of music. Marian Barber and Eva Allen were to enter Smith College the following week, Eleanor Savelli had long since sailed for Italy, and now the morning train was to bear Miriam Nesbit, Grace Harlowe and Anne Pierson to Overton, an eastern college finally decided upon by the three girls.

“Last year we left you on the station platform gazing mournfully after the train that bore *me* away from Oakdale,” remarked Hippy reminiscently. “How embarrassed I felt at so much attention, and yet how sweet it was to know that you had gathered here, not to see David Nesbit, Reddy Brooks, Tom Gray or any such insignificant persons off to school, but that I, Theophilus Hippopotamus Wingate, was the object of your tender solicitations.”

“I expected it,” groaned David. “I don’t see why we ever woke him up and dragged him along.”

“As I was about to say when rudely interrupted,” continued Hippy calmly, “I shall miss you, of course, but not half so much as you will miss me. I hope you will think of me, and you may write to me occasionally if it will be a satisfaction to you. I know you will not forget me. Who, having once met me, could forget?”

Hippy folded his arms across his chest and looked languishingly at the three girls.

A chorus of giggles from those grouped around the girls and derisive groans from the boys greeted Hippy’s sentimental speech.

Suddenly a long, shrill whistle was heard.

Page 4

"That's your train, girls," said Mr. Harlowe, who with Mrs. Harlowe, Mrs. Nesbit and Mary Pierson had drawn a little to one side while their dear ones said their last farewells to their four boy friends. The circle about the three girls closed in. The air resounded with good-byes. The last kisses and handshakes were exchanged. Reckless promises to send letters and postcards were made. Then, still surrounded, Grace, Miriam and Anne made their way to the car steps and into the train. Grace clung first to her mother then to her father. "How can I do without you?" she said over and over again. Tears stood in her gray eyes. She winked them back bravely. "I'm going to show both of you just how much I appreciate going to college by doing my very best," she whispered. Her father patted her reassuringly on the shoulder while her mother gave her a last loving kiss.

"I know you will, dear child," she said affectionately. "Remember, Grace," added her father, a suspicious mist in his own eyes, "you are not to rush headlong into things. You are to do a great deal of looking before you even make up your mind to leap."

"I'll remember, Father. Truly I will," responded Grace, her face sobering.

"All aboard! All aboard!" shouted the conductor. Those who had entered the train to say farewell left it hurriedly.

"Good-bye! Good-bye!" cried Grace, leaning out the car window.

From the platform as the train moved off, clear on the air, rose the Oakdale High School yell.

"It's in honor of us," said Grace softly. "Dear old Oakdale. I wonder if we can ever like college as well as we have high school."

CHAPTER II

J. Elfreda introduces herself.

For the first half hour the three girls were silent. Each sat wrapped in her own thoughts, and those thoughts centered upon the dear ones left behind. Anne, whose venture into the theatrical world had necessitated her frequent absence from home, felt the wrench less than did Grace or Miriam. Aside from their summer vacations they had never been away from their mothers for any length of time. To Grace, as she watched the landscape flit by, the thought of the ever widening distance between her and her mother was intolerable. She experienced a strong desire to bury her face in her hands and sob disconsolately, but bravely conquering the sense of loneliness that swept over her, she threw back her shoulders and sitting very straight in her seat glanced almost defiantly about her.

“Well, Grace, have you made up your mind to be resigned?” asked Miriam Nesbit. “That sudden world-defying glance that you just favored us with looks as though the victory was won.”

“Miriam, you are almost a mind reader,” laughed Grace. “I’ve been on the verge of a breakdown ever since we left Oakdale, and in this very instant I made up my mind to be brave and not cry a single tear. Look at Anne. She is as calm and unemotional as a statue.”

Page 5

"That's because I'm more used to being away from home," replied Anne. "Troupers are not supposed to have feelings. With them, it is here to-day and gone to-morrow."

"Yes, but you were transplanted to Oakdale soil for four years," reminded Grace.

"I know it," returned Anne reflectively. "I do feel dreadfully sad at leaving my mother and sister, too. Still, when I think that I'm actually on the way to college at last, I can't help feeling happy, too."

"Dear little Anne," smiled Grace. "College means everything to you, doesn't it? That's because you've earned every cent of your college money."

"And I'll have to earn a great deal more to see me through to graduation," added Anne soberly. "My vacations hereafter must be spent in work instead of play."

"What are you going to do to earn money during vacations, Anne?" asked Miriam rather curiously.

"I might as well confess to you girls that I'm going to do the work I can do most successfully," said Anne in a low voice. "I'm going to try to get an engagement in a stock theatrical company every summer until I graduate. I can earn far more money at that than doing clerical work. I received a long letter from Mr. Southard last week and also one from his sister. They wish me to come to New York as soon as my freshman year at college is over. Mr. Southard writes that he can get an engagement for me in a stock company. I'll have to work frightfully hard, for there will be a matinee every day as well as a regular performance every night, and I'll have a new part to study each week. But the salary will more than compensate me for my work. You know that Mary did dress-making and worked night and day to send me to high school. Of course, my five dollars a week from Mrs. Gray helped a great deal, but up to the time Mr. Southard sent for me to go to New York City to play *Rosalind* I didn't really think of college as at all certain. Before I left New York for Oakdale, Mr. and Miss Southard and I had a long talk. They made me see that it was right to use the talent God had given me by appearing in worthy plays. Mr. Southard pointed out the fact that I could earn enough money by playing in stock companies in the summer to put me through college and at the same time contribute liberally to my mother's support.

"The home problem was really the greatest to be solved. I felt that it wouldn't be right for me to even work my way through college and leave Mary to struggle on alone, after she had worked so hard to help me get a high school education. So the stage seemed to be my one way out after all. And when once I had definitely decided to do as Mr. Southard recommended me to do I was happier than I had been for ages."

"Anne Pierson, you quiet little mouse!" exclaimed Grace. "Why didn't you tell us all this before? You are the most provoking Anne under the sun. Here I've been worrying

about you having to wait on table or do tutoring and odds and ends of work to put yourself through college, while all the time you were planning something different. We all know you're too proud to let any of your friends help you, but since you are determined to make your own way I'm glad that you have chosen the stage, after all."

Page 6

"I think you are wise, Anne," agreed Miriam. "With two such people as Mr. Southard and his sister to look after you, there can be no objection to your following your profession."

"I am glad to know that you girls look at the matter in that light," replied Anne.

"Suppose we had offered any objections?" asked Grace.

"I'll answer that question," said Miriam. "Anne would have followed the path she had marked out for herself regardless of our objections. Am I right, Anne?"

"I don't know," said Anne, flushing deeply. "You have all been so good to me. I couldn't bear to displease my dearest friends, but it would be hard to give up something I knew could result in nothing save good for me." Anne paused and looked at Grace and Miriam with pleading eyes.

"Never mind, dear," comforted Grace. "We approve of you and all your works. We are not shocked because you are a genius. We are sworn advocates of the stage and only too glad to know that it has opened the way to college for you."

"Shall you let the fact that you have appeared professionally be known at Overton?" asked Miriam.

"I shall make no secret of it," returned Anne quietly, "but I won't volunteer any information concerning it."

"I wonder what our freshman year at Overton will bring us," mused Grace. "I have read so many stories about college life, and yet so far Overton seems like an unknown land that we are about to explore. From all I have heard and read, exploring freshmen find their first term at college anything but a bed of roses. They are sometimes hazed unmercifully by the upper classes, and their only salvation lies in silently standing the test. Julia Crosby says that she had all sorts of tricks played on her during her first term at Smith. Now she's a sophomore and can make life miserable for the freshmen. I am going to try to cultivate the true college spirit," concluded Grace earnestly. "College is going to mean even more to me than high school. I don't imagine it's all going to be plain sailing. I suppose, more than once, I'll wish myself back in Oakdale, but I'm going to make up my mind to take the bitter with the sweet and set everything down under the head of experience."

"To tell you the truth," Miriam said slowly, "I am not enthusiastic over college. I value it as a means of continuing my education, and I'll try to live up to college ideals, but I'm not going to let anyone walk over me or ridicule me. I'm willing 'to live and let live,' but, as Eleanor Savelli used to say when in a towering rage, 'no one can trample upon me with impunity.'"

"I wonder when we shall see Eleanor again," said Anne, smiling a little at the recollection called up by Miriam's quotation.

"That reminds me," exclaimed Grace. "I have a letter from Eleanor that I haven't opened. It came this morning just before I left the house." Fumbling in her bag, Grace drew forth a bulky looking letter, bearing a foreign postmark, and tearing open the end, drew out several closely folded sheets of thin paper covered with Eleanor's characteristic handwriting.

Page 7

"Shall I read it aloud?" asked Grace.

"By all means," said Miriam with emphasis.

Grace began to read. Anne, who sat beside her, looked over her shoulder, while Miriam, who sat opposite Grace, leaned forward in order to catch every word. They were so completely occupied with their own affairs, none of them noticed that the train had stopped. Suddenly a voice shrilled out impatiently, "Is this seat engaged?" With one accord the three girls glanced up. Before them stood a tall, rather stout young woman with a full, red face, whose frowning expression was anything but reassuring.

"Yes—no, I mean," replied Grace hastily.

"I thought not," remarked the stranger complacently as she stolidly seated herself beside Miriam and deposited a traveling bag partly on the floor and partly on Grace's feet.

"These seats are ridiculously small," grumbled the stranger, bending over to jam her traveling bag more firmly into the space from which Grace had hastily withdrawn her feet. Then straightening up suddenly, her heavily plumed hat collided with the hand in which Grace held Eleanor's letter, scattering the sheets in every direction. With a little cry of concern Grace sprang to her feet and, stepping out in the aisle, began to pick them up. Having recovered the last one she turned to her seat only to find it occupied by their unwelcome fellow traveler.

"I changed seats," commented the stout girl stolidly. "I never could stand it to ride backwards."

Grace looked first at the stranger then from Miriam to Anne. Miriam looked ready for battle, while even mild little Anne glared resentfully at the rude newcomer. Grace hesitated, opened her mouth as though about to speak, then without saying a word sat down in the vacant place and began to rearrange the sheets of her letter.

"I'll finish this some other time, girls," she said briefly.

"Oh, you needn't mind me," calmly remarked the stranger. "I don't mind listening to letters. That is if they've got anything in them besides 'I write these few lines to tell you that I am well and hope you are the same.' That sort of stuff makes me sick. Goodness knows, I suppose that's the kind I'll have handed to me all year. Neither Ma nor Pa can write a letter that sounds like anything."

By this time Miriam's frown had begun to disappear, while Anne's eyes were dancing.

Grace looked at the stout girl rather curiously, an expression of new interest dawning in her eyes. "Are you going to college?" she asked.

“Well, I rather guess I am,” was the quick reply. “I’ll bet you girls are in the same boat with me, too. What college do you get off at?”

“Overton,” answered Grace.

“Then you haven’t seen the last of me,” assured the stranger, “for I’m going there myself and I’d just about as soon go to darkest Africa or any other heathen place.”

“Why don’t you wish to go to Overton?” asked Anne.

Page 8

"Because I don't want to go to college at all," was the blunt answer. "I want to go to Europe with Ma and Pa and have a good time. We have loads of money, but what good does that do me if I can't get a chance to spend it? I'd fail in all my exams if I dared, but Pa knows I'm not a wooden head, and I'd just have to try it again somewhere else. So I'll have to let well enough alone or get in deeper than I am now."

The stout girl leaned back in her seat and surveyed the trio of girls through half-closed eyes. "Where did you girls come from and what are your names?" she asked abruptly. "Partners in misery might as well get acquainted, you know."

Grace introduced her friends in turn, then said: "My name is Grace Harlowe, and we three girls live in the city of Oakdale."

"Never heard of it," yawned the girl. "It must be like Fairview, our town, not down on the map. We live there, because Ma was born there and thinks it the only place on earth, but we manage to go to New York occasionally, thank goodness. Ever been there?" she queried.

"Once or twice," smiled Miriam Nesbit.

"Great old town, isn't it?" remarked their new acquaintance. "My name is J. Elfreda Briggs. The J. stands for Josephine, but I hate it. Ma and Pa call me Fred, and that sounds pretty good to me. Say, aren't you girls about starved? I'm going to hunt the dining car and buy food. I haven't had anything to eat since eight o'clock this morning."

J. Elfreda rose hurriedly, and stumbling over her bag and Grace's feet, landed in the aisle with more speed than elegance. "You'd better come along," she advised. "They serve good meals on this train. Besides, I don't want to eat alone." With that she stalked down the aisle and into the car ahead.

"It looks as though we were to have plenty of entertainment for the rest of our journey," remarked Anne.

"I prefer not to be entertained," averred Miriam dryly. "Personally, I am far from impressed with J. Elfreda. She strikes me as being entirely too fond of her own comfort. Now that she has vacated your seat, you had better take it, Grace, before she comes back."

Grace shook her head. "I don't dislike riding backward," she said, "if you don't mind having her sit beside you. Perhaps some one will leave the train by the time she comes back; then she will leave us."

"No such good fortune," retorted Miriam. "She prefers our society to none at all. I think her advice about luncheon isn't so bad, though. Suppose we follow it?"

Five minutes later the three girls repaired to the dining car and seated themselves at a table directly across the aisle from their new acquaintance. J. Elfreda sat toying with her knife and fork, an impatient frown on her smug face. "These people are the limit," she grumbled. "It takes forever to get anything to eat. If I'd ordered it yesterday, I'd have some hopes of getting it to-day." Then, apparently forgetting

Page 9

the existence of the three girls, she sat with eyes fixed hungrily on the door through which her waiter was momentarily expected to pass. By the time that the chums had given their order to another waiter, J. Elfreda's luncheon was served and she devoted herself assiduously to it. When Grace and her friends had finished luncheon, however, the stout girl still sat with elbows on the table waiting for a second order of dessert.

"Good gracious!" remarked Miriam as they made their way back to their seats. "No wonder J. Elfreda is stout! I suppose I shouldn't refer to her, even behind her back, in such familiar terms, but nothing else suits her. I'm not charitable like you, Grace. I haven't the patience to look for the good in tiresome people like her. I think she's greedy and selfish and ill-bred and I wouldn't care to live in the same house with her."

"You're a very disagreeable person, Miriam, in your own estimation," laughed Grace, "but fortunately we don't take you at your own valuation, do we, Anne?"

"Miriam's a dear," said Anne promptly. "She always pretends she's a dragon and then behaves like a lamb."

"What time is our train due at Overton?" asked Miriam, ignoring Anne's assertion.

"We are scheduled to arrive at Overton at five o'clock," answered Grace. "I wish it were five now. I'm anxious to see Overton College in broad daylight."

At this juncture J. Elfreda made her appearance and sinking into the seat declared with a yawn that she was too sleepy for any use. "I'm going to sleep," she announced. "You girls can talk if you don't make too much noise. Loud talking always keeps me awake. You may call me when we get to Overton." With these words she bent over her bag, opened it, and drew out a small down cushion. She rose in her seat, removed her hat, and, poking it into the rack above her head, sat down. Arranging her pillow to her complete satisfaction, she rested her head against it, closed her eyes and within five minutes was oblivious to the world.

The three travelers obligingly lowered their voices, conversing in low tones, as the train whirled them toward their destination. Their hearts were with those they had left, and as the afternoon began to wane, one by one they fell silent and became wrapped in their own thoughts. Grace was already beginning to experience a dreadful feeling of depression, which she knew to be homesickness. It was just the time in the afternoon when she and her mother usually sat on their wide, shady porch, talking or reading as they waited for her father to come home to dinner, and a lump rose in her throat as she thought sadly of how long it would be before she saw her dear ones again.

Far from being homesick, self-reliant Miriam was calmly speculating as to what college would bring her, while Anne, who had quite forgotten her own problems, sat eyeing Grace affectionately and wondering how soon her friend would make her personality felt in the little world which she was about to enter. And J. Elfreda Briggs, of Fairview, slept peacefully on.

Page 10

CHAPTER III

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

"Overton! Overton!" was the call that echoed through the car. After handing down the hats of her friends, Grace reached to the rack above her head for her broad brimmed panama hat. Obeying a sudden kindly impulse, she carefully deposited J. Elfreda's hat in the sleeping girl's lap, touched her on the shoulder and said, "Wake up, Miss Briggs. We are nearing Overton."

J. Elfreda sleepily opened her eyes at the gentle touch, saying drowsily, "Let me know when the train stops." Then closed her eyes again.

Miriam shrugged her shoulders with a gesture that signified, "Let her alone. Don't bother with her."

At that moment the train stopped with a jolt that caused the sleeper to awake in earnest. She looked stupidly about, yawned repeatedly, then catching a glimpse of a number of girls on the station platform, clad in white and light colored gowns, she became galvanized into action, and pinning on her hat began quickly to gather up her luggage. "Good-bye," she said indifferently. "I'll probably see you later." Then, rapidly elbowing her way down the aisle she disappeared through the open door, leaving the chums to make their way more slowly out of the car. As they stepped from the car to the station platform Grace caught sight of her at the far end of the station in conversation with a tall auburn-haired girl and a short dark one. A moment later she saw the three walk off together.

"J. Elfreda found friends quickly," remarked Anne, who had also noticed the stout girl's warm reception by the two girls. "I wonder what we had better do first. What is the name of the hotel where we are to stop?"

"The Tourraine," replied Miriam.

The newcomers looked eagerly about them at the groups of daintily gowned girls who were joyously greeting their friends as they stepped from the train.

"I had no idea there were so many Overton girls on the train," remarked Grace in surprise. "The majority of them seem to have friends here, too. I wonder which way we'd better go."

"By the nods and becks and wreathed smiles with which those girls over there are favoring us, I imagine that we have been discovered," announced Miriam, rather sarcastically.

Grace and Anne glanced quickly toward the girls indicated by Miriam. A tall, thin, fair-haired girl with cold gray-blue eyes and a generally supercilious air occupied the center of the group. She was talking rapidly and her remarks were eliciting considerable laughter. Amused glances, half friendly, half critical, were being leveled at the Oakdale trio of chums.

Grace flushed in half angry embarrassment, Anne merely smiled to herself, while Miriam's most forbidding scowl wrinkled her smooth forehead.

"I think we had better inquire the way to our hotel and leave here as soon as possible," Grace said slowly. A sudden feeling of disappointment had suddenly taken possession of her. She had always supposed that in every college new girls were met and welcomed by the upper classes of students. Yet now that they had actually arrived no one had come forward to exchange even a friendly greeting with them.

Page 11

"Well, if this is an exhibition of the true college spirit, deliver me from college," grumbled Miriam. "I must say——"

Miriam's denunciation against college was never finished, for at that juncture a soft voice said, "Welcome to Overton." Turning simultaneously the three girls saw standing before them a young woman of medium height. Her hand was extended, and she was smiling in a sweet, friendly fashion that warmed the hearts of the disappointed freshmen. She wore a tailored frock of white linen, white buckskin walking shoes that revealed a glimpse of silken ankles, and carried a white linen parasol that matched her gown. She was bareheaded, and in the late afternoon her wavy brown hair seemed touched with gold.

"I am so glad to meet you!" exclaimed the pretty girl. "You are freshmen, of course. If you will tell me your names I'll introduce you to some of the girls. Then we will see about escorting you safely to your boarding place. Have you taken your examinations yet?"

"No," replied Miriam. "We have that ordeal before us." Her face relaxed under the friendly courtesy accorded to them by this attractive stranger. She then introduced Grace and Anne. Their new acquaintance shook hands with the two girls, then said gayly, "Now tell me your name."

Miriam complied with the request, then stated that through a friend of her mother's they had engaged a suite of rooms at the Tourraine, an apartment hotel in Overton, until their fate should be decided.

"The Tourraine is the nicest hotel in Overton," stated Mabel. "I am always in the seventh heaven of delight whenever I am fortunate enough to be invited to dine there."

"Then come and dine with us to-night," invited Miriam.

Mabel Ashe shook her head. "It's very nice in you," she said gravely, "but not to-night. Really, I am awfully stupid. I haven't told you my name. It is Mabel Ashe. I am a junior and pledged to pilot bewildered freshmen to havens of rest and safety."

"Do you consider freshmen impossible creatures?" asked Anne Pierson, her eyes twinkling.

The young woman laughed merrily. "Oh, no," she replied. "You must remember that they are the raw material that makes good upper classmen. It takes a whole year to mould them into shape—that is, some of them. Now, come with me and I'll see that you meet some of the upper class girls."

As they were about to accompany their new acquaintance down the platform, a tall, fair-haired girl walked toward them followed by the others upon whom Miriam had

commented. "Wait a minute, Mabel," she called. "I've been trying to get hold of you all afternoon."

"You're just in time, Beatrice," returned Mabel Ashe. "I wish you to meet Miss Harlowe, Miss Nesbit, and Miss Pierson, all of Oakdale. Girls, this is Miss Alden, also of the junior class."

Beatrice Alden smiled condescendingly, and shook hands in a somewhat bored fashion with the three girls. "Pleased to meet you," she drawled. "Hope you'll be good little freshmen this year and make no trouble for your elders."

Page 12

"We shall try to mind our own affairs, and trust to other people to do the same," flashed Miriam, eyeing the other girl steadily.

Grace looked at her friend in surprise. What had caused Miriam to answer in such fashion? There was an almost imperceptible lull in the conversation, then Mabel Ashe introduced the other girls. "Now we will see about your trunks, and then perhaps you would like to walk up to the college," she said briskly. "It isn't far from here. Some of the girls prefer to ride in the bus, but I always walk. I can show you some of the places of interest as we go."

"Come over here, Mabel, dear," commanded Beatrice Alden, who had moved a little to one side of the group. Mabel excused herself to her charges, and looking a little annoyed, obeyed the summons. Beatrice talked rapidly for a moment in coaxing tones, but Mabel shook her head. Grace, who stood nearest to them, heard her say, "I'd love to go, Bee, and it's awfully nice in you to think of me. I'll go to-morrow, but I can't leave these poor stranded freshmen to their own homesick thoughts to-day. You know just how we felt when we landed high and dry in this town without any one to care whether we survived or perished."

"If you won't go to-day, then don't trouble about it at all," snapped Beatrice. "I know plenty of girls who will be only too glad to accept my invitation, but I asked you first, and I think you ought to remember it. You know I like you better than any other girl in college."

"You know I appreciate your friendship, Bee," returned Mabel, "but truly I wish you cared more for other girls, too. There are plenty of girls here who need friends like you."

"Yes, but I don't like them," snapped Beatrice. "I'm not going to make a martyr of myself to please any one. My mother is very particular about my associates at Overton, and I don't intend to waste my time trying to make things pleasant for the stupid, uninteresting girls of this college. I did not come to Overton to take a course in doing settlement work. I came here to have a good time, and incidentally to study a little."

"Now, now, Bee, don't try to make me believe you haven't just as much college spirit as the rest of us," admonished Mabel in a low tone. "Don't be cross because I can't go to-day. Come with me, instead, and help look after these verdant freshmen. There was a positive army of them who got off the train."

Without replying Beatrice turned and walked sulkily away toward the other end of the platform. Mabel looked after her with a half frown.

"I am afraid we are causing you considerable inconvenience," demurred Grace. "Please do not deprive yourself of any pleasure on our account."

“Nonsense,” smiled Mabel. “I am not depriving myself of any pleasure. Oh, there goes one of my best friends!” Putting her hands to her mouth she called, “Frances!” A tall slender girl, with serious brown eyes and dark hair, who was leisurely crossing the station platform, stopped short, glanced in the direction of the sound, then espying Mabel hurried toward her.

Page 13

"Good old Frances," beamed Mabel. "You heard me calling and came on the run, didn't you? This is the noblest junior of them all, my dear freshmen. Her name is Frances Veronica Marlton. Doesn't that sound like the heroine's name in one of the six best sellers?" Mabel introduced the three girls in turn. "Now let us be on our way," she commanded, looking up and down the station platform at the fast dissolving groups of girls. "I don't see any more stray lambs. I think the committee appointed to meet the freshmen has fulfilled its mission. And now for your hotel. It is past dinner time and I know you are hungry and anxious to rest."

Picking up Grace's bag she led the way through the station followed by Grace and Miriam. Anne walked behind them with Frances Marlton. The little company set off down the main street of the college town at a swinging pace. It was a wide, beautiful street, shaded by tall maples. The houses that lined it were for the most part old-fashioned and the wayfarers caught alluring glimpses of green lawns dotted with flower beds as they walked along.

"It makes me think of High School Street in Oakdale!" Grace exclaimed. "If ever I feel that I'm going to be homesick, I'll just walk down this street and make believe that I'm at home! That will be the surest cure for the blues, if I get them."

Mabel Ashe, who was now walking between Grace and Miriam, looked at Grace rather speculatively. "You won't get them," she predicted. "You'll have so many other things to think of, you won't think of yourself at all. Here we are at the college campus. Over there is Overton Hall."

The eyes of the newcomers were at once focussed on the stately gray stone building that stood in the center of a wide stretch of green campus, shaded by great trees. At various points of the campus were situated smaller buildings which Mabel Ashe pointed out as Science Hall, the gymnasium, laboratory, library and chapel. In Overton Hall, Mabel explained, were situated certain recitation rooms, the offices of the president, the dean and other officials of the college. Around the campus were the various houses in which the more fortunate of the hundreds of students lived. It was very desirable to secure a room in one of these houses, but somewhat expensive and not always easy to do. Rooms were sometimes spoken for a whole year in advance.

"Do you room on the campus?" asked Grace.

"Yes," replied Mabel. "I live at Holland House. I was fortunate enough to have a friend graduate from here and will me her room. I entered Overton the autumn following her graduation."

"One of our Oakdale girls is a junior here," remarked Grace. "Her name is Constance Fuller. She graduated from high school when we were sophomores. We do not know her very well, and had quite forgotten she was here. This afternoon on the train, Anne,

who never forgets either faces or names, suddenly announced the fact. I wonder if she has arrived yet. We came early, I believe, but that is because we are obliged to take the entrance examinations.”

Page 14

"Now I know why the name, Oakdale, seemed so familiar!" exclaimed Mabel Ashe. "I have heard Constance mention it. She is one of my best friends. Does she know that you are to be here?"

"No," replied Grace. "We haven't seen her this summer. We were away from Oakdale." Grace did not wish to mention their trip to Europe, fearing their companion might think her unduly anxious to boast. One of the things against which Julia Crosby, her old time Oakdale friend, and a senior in Smith College, had cautioned her, was boasting. "Avoid all appearance of being your own press agent," Julia had humorously advised. "If you don't you'll be a marked girl for the whole four years of your college career. The meek and modest violet is a glowing example for erring freshmen."

"I'll remember, Julia," Grace had promised, and she now resolved that she would think twice before speaking once, whatever the occasion might be.

"Constance has not arrived yet," said Mabel. "I heard her roommate say this morning that she expected her to-morrow. She rooms at Holland House, too. I shall tell her about you the moment I see her. This is the Tourraine," she announced, pausing before a handsome sandstone building and leading the way up the steps that led to the broad veranda, gay with porch boxes of flowers and shaded by awnings.

"Won't you come up to our rooms?" asked Miriam.

"Not to-night, thank you," replied Mabel. "Frances and I will be over bright and early to-morrow morning to pilot you to the college. Then you can find out about the examinations. Good-night and pleasant dreams." Extending their hands in turn to the three girls and nodding a last smiling adieu, the two courteous juniors left them on the hotel veranda.

"I must admit that I have been agreeably disappointed," said Miriam Nesbit as the three girls stood for a moment before entering the hotel to watch the retreating backs of their new acquaintances.

"I, too," replied Grace. "I can't begin to tell you how dejected I felt while we stood there on the station platform and no one came near us or appeared to be aware of our existence."

"It was enough to discourage the most optimistic freshman," averred Anne.

"I wonder who J. Elfreda Briggs's friends were," commented Miriam. "She never said a word about knowing any one at Overton. I imagine she is a thoroughly selfish girl, and the less I see of her in college the better pleased I shall be."

As their suite of rooms had been engaged in advance it needed but a word to the clerk on Grace's part, then each girl in turn registered and they were conducted to their suite.

“This suite seems to be supplied with all the comforts of home,” observed Miriam, looking about her with satisfaction. “I am thankful to have reached a haven of rest where I can bathe my grimy face and hands.”

“So am I,” echoed Grace, setting down her suit case and sinking into an easy chair with a tired sigh. “I am starved, too. Let us lose no time in getting ready for dinner. After dinner we can rest.”

Page 15

For the next half hour the travelers were busily engaged in removing the dust of their journey and attiring themselves in the dainty summer frocks which they had taken thought to pack in their suit cases.

"I'm ready," announced Grace at last, as she poked a rebellious lock of hair into place, and viewed herself in the mirror.

"So am I," echoed Anne.

"And I," from Miriam. "Why not walk down stairs? We are on the second floor, and I never ride in an elevator when I can avoid doing so."

The trio descended the stairs and made their way to the dining room, where they were conducted to a table near an open window which looked out on a shady side porch.

"So far I haven't been imbued with what one might call college atmosphere," remarked Miriam, after the dinner had been ordered and the waiter had hurried off to attend to their wants.

"I felt a certain amount of enthusiasm while those upper class girls were with us, but it has vanished," said Anne. "I am just a professional staying at a hotel."

"I imagine we won't begin to regard ourselves as being a part of Overton College until after we have tried our examinations and found an abiding place in some one of the college houses. I hope we shall be able to get into a campus house. I have always understood that it is ever so much nicer to be on the campus. We really should have made arrangements before-hand, and if we hadn't waited until the last moment to decide to what college we wished to go we might be cosily settled now."

"Perhaps we are only fulfilling our destiny," smiled Miriam Nesbit.

"Perhaps," agreed Grace in a doubtful tone. "Once we are in our hall or boarding house I dare say we will shake off this feeling of constraint and become genuine Overtonites."

"Had we better study to-night?" inquired Grace as they made their way from the hotel dining room.

"I think it would be a wise proceeding," agreed Miriam. "I want to go over my French verbs."

"So do I," echoed Grace. "Let's study until ten, and then go straight to bed."

Ten o'clock stretched well toward eleven before Grace put down her text book with a tired little sigh and declared herself too sleepy for further study.

It had been arranged that Miriam should occupy the one room of the suite while Grace and Anne were to share the other, which had two beds. The long journey by rail had tired the travelers far more than they would admit. For a few moments, after retiring, conversation flourished between the two rooms, then died away in indistinct murmurs, and the prospective Overton freshmen slept peacefully as though safe in their Oakdale homes.

CHAPTER IV

MIRIAM'S UNWELCOME SURPRISE

The two days that followed were busy ones for Grace, Anne and Miriam. The morning after their arrival Mabel Ashe and Frances Marlton appeared at half-past eight o'clock to conduct them to Overton Hall. There they registered and were then sent to the room where the examination in French was to be held. Examinations in the other required subjects followed in rapid succession and it was Friday before they had settled themselves in Wayne Hall, the house in which they were to live as students of Overton College.

Page 16

Wayne Hall was a substantial four-story brick house, just a block from the campus. It was looked upon as a strictly freshman house, but occasionally sophomores lived there, as the rooms were well-furnished and the matron, Mrs. Elwood, had a reputation for looking out for the welfare of her girls.

To their delight Grace and Anne had been allowed to room together, while Miriam had by lucky chance secured a room to herself across the hall.

"If that poor little yellow-haired freshman hadn't failed in all her examinations I shouldn't be rooming alone," said Miriam rather soberly as she dived into the depths of the now almost emptied trunk.

"Did you meet her?" asked Grace, who, seated on the bed beside Anne, watched Miriam's unpacking with interested eyes.

"No," replied Miriam. "One of the freshmen at the table told me about her. She said that the poor girl cried all day yesterday and last night. She didn't dare write her father, who, it seems, is very severe, that she had failed. He won't know she's coming until she reaches home."

"What a pity," said Anne sympathetically. "It must be dreadful to fail and know that one must face not only the humility of the failure, but the displeasure of one's family too."

"If I had failed in my examinations neither Father nor Mother would have said one reproachful word," said Grace.

"Of course I'm sorry for her," said Miriam, "but considering the fact that I am now going to room alone, I shall write to Mother and ask her to send me the money to furnish this room as I please. I'd like to have a davenport bed, and I want a chiffonier and a dressing table to match. There's room here for a piano, too. I'll have it over in this corner and then I'll——"

Rap, rap, rap! sounded on the door.

"Come in," called Miriam frowning at the interruption.

The door opened to admit Mrs. Elwood, and following in her wake, laden with a bag and two suit cases, her hat pushed over her eyes, a half-suspicious, half-belligerent expression on her face, was J. Elfreda Briggs.

"Well I never!" she gasped in astonishment, dropping her belongings in a heap on the floor and making a dive for the nearest chair. "You're the last people I ever expected to see. Where have you been, anyway? I supposed you'd all flunked in your exams, given up the job, and gone back to Glendale, Hilddale—what's the name of that dale you hail from?"

“Oakdale,” supplemented Anne slyly.

“Yes, that’s it. Oakdale. Foolish name for a town, isn’t it?”

During this outburst Mrs. Elwood had stood silent, looking at J. Elfreda with doubtful eyes. Now she said apologetically, “I’m very sorry, Miss Nesbit, but could you—that is—would you mind having a roommate after all? My sister, Mrs. Arnold, who manages Ralston House just down the street from here, took Miss Briggs because she thought one of her girls wasn’t coming back. Now

Page 17

the girl is here and she has no place for Miss Briggs. Of course, if you insist on not having a roommate, my sister and I will see that Miss Briggs secures a room in one of the other college houses." Mrs. Elwood paused and looked questioningly at Miriam, who stood silent, an inscrutable expression on her face. Grace and Anne, remembering Miriam's dislike for the stout girl, wondered what her answer would be.

The settling of the question was not left to Miriam, for during the brief silence that followed Mrs. Elwood's deprecatory speech J. Elfreda had been making a comprehensive survey of her surroundings. "It's all right, Mrs. Elwood," she drawled. "Don't worry about me. I like this room and I guess I can get along with Miss Nesbit. You may telephone the expressman to have my trunk sent here. I'm not going back to Ralston House with you. I'm too tired. I'm going to stay here."

Mrs. Elwood looked appealingly at Miriam, as though mutely trying to apologize for J. Elfreda's disregard for the rights of others.

Miriam's straight black brows drew together. She stared at their unwelcome guest with a look that caused a slow flush to rise to the stout girl's face. Suddenly her face relaxed into a smile of intense amusement, and extending her hand to J. Elfreda, she said, "You are welcome to half this room, if you care to stay."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the other girl for the second time, as she shook the proffered hand. "Honestly, I thought you were going to give me a regular freeze out. You looked like a thunder cloud for a minute. I expect it won't be all sunshine around here, this year, for I'm used to having things go my way, and I guess you are, too."

"Then perhaps learning to defer to each other will be good practice for both of us," suggested Miriam.

"Perhaps it will, but I doubt if we ever practise it," was the discouraging retort.

"I'll notify my sister that you are to be here, Miss Briggs," broke in Mrs. Elwood. "Then I'll see that this room is made ready for two. Thank you, Miss Nesbit." She turned gratefully to Miriam.

"All right," answered J. Elfreda indifferently. "You can fix it up if you want to, but I warn you that I'll probably buy my own furniture and throw out all this." She waved a comprehensive hand at the despised furniture.

"You are at liberty to make whatever changes you wish," Mrs. Elwood responded rather stiffly, and without further remark left the room.

“She didn’t like my remark about her furniture,” commented the stout girl, “but I’m not worrying about it. It’s funny that I should run into you girls, though. What kind of a time have you been having here, and did you pass all your exams?”

The girls replied in the affirmative, then Grace asked the same question of Elfreda.

“Of course,” was the laconic answer. “I had a tutor all summer, besides I told you on the train that I wasn’t a wooden head.”

Page 18

"Where did you stay until you went to Ralston House?" asked Anne. "We saw you go away from the station with two girls when you left the train, and we've seen you twice at a distance during examinations, but this is the first chance we've had to talk with you."

J. Elfreda stared at Anne, her eyes narrowing.

"Do you want to know just what happened to me?" she asked slowly. "Well, I'll tell you three girls about it, because I've got to tell some one and I don't believe you'll spread the story."

"We won't tell anyone," promised Grace.

"How about you two?" asked the stout girl.

"I'll answer for both of us," smiled Anne.

"All right then, I'll tell you. Now remember, you've promised."

The girls nodded.

"Well, it was this way," began Elfreda. "When I left the train I hadn't gone six steps until two girls walked up to me and asked if I were a freshman. They said they were on the committee to meet and look after the girls who were entering college for the first time. I said that was very kind of them and asked them to show me the way to Ralston House. They picked up my suit cases and we started out. They asked me my name and all sorts of questions and I told them a little about myself," continued the stout girl pompously. "They seemed quite impressed, too. Then one of them said she thought I had better see the registrar before going to Ralston House, for the registrar would be anxious to meet me. They both said I was quite different from the rest of the new girls, and made such a lot of fuss over me that I invited them into that little shop across from the station to have ice cream."

"And then?" asked Miriam.

"Then," said J. Elfreda impressively, "after they had had two sundaes apiece, at my expense, they played a mean trick on me. They took me into a big building a little further down the street, down a long hall, and left me sitting on a seat outside what I supposed was the registrar's office. They said I must wait there and the registrar's clerk would come out and conduct me to the registrar. They said that it was against the rules to walk into the office and that it was the business of the clerk to come out every half hour and conduct any one who was waiting into the registrar's private office.

"Well, I sat there and sat there. It made me think of when I was a kiddie and used to watch the cuckoo clock to see the bird come out. But there wasn't even a bird came out of that door," continued Elfreda gloomily. "People passed up and down the hall, and

every once in a while a man would walk right into the place without knocking, or seeing the clerk, or anything else.

Page 19

"After I had sat there for at least two hours, I made up my mind to go in even if I were ordered out the next minute. I marched up to the door and opened it and walked into the office. There was no one in sight but a young woman who was putting on her hat. 'Where's the registrar?' I asked. 'He hasn't been here to-day,' she said. 'I thought the registrar was a woman,' I said. She seemed surprised at that and asked what made me think so. I said that two of the students had told me so. Then she looked at me in the queerest way and began to smile. 'Do you want to see the registrar of Overton College?' she asked. 'Of course I do,' I said, for I began to suspect that something was wrong. Then she stopped smiling and said it was too bad, but whoever had sent me there had played a trick on me and brought me to the office of the Register of Deeds. Instead of Overton Hall I was in the county court house. Now can you beat it?" finished Elfreda slangily.

"I should say not," cried Grace indignantly. "I think it was contemptible in them to accept your hospitality and then treat you in that fashion. No really nice girl would do any such thing, even in fun."

"I should say not," sympathized Miriam, forgetting that she did not yearn for J. Elfreda as a roommate. "What did you do after you discovered your mistake?"

"I left the Register's office, his deeds, and all the rest of that building in pretty short order," continued Elfreda. "When I reached the street I went straight back to the station and hired a carriage to take me to Ralston House. Mrs. Arnold gave me my supper even though it was late, and the next day I saw the registrar in earnest. I told her the whole story and described the girls. I didn't know their names, but she said she thought she knew who they were from the description. So I suppose she'll send for me before long to identify them."

"But you're not going to?" questioned Grace in astonishment.

"Why not?" returned the stout girl calmly. "Do you think I'll let slip a chance to get even with them? I guess not."

"But this will be carried to the dean and they will be severely reprimanded and the whole college will know it," expostulated Grace.

"Well, the whole college should know it," stoutly contended Elfreda. "I'll show those two smart young women that I'm not as green as I appear to be."

Grace was on the verge of saying that J. Elfreda would have shown more wisdom by keeping silent, but suddenly checked herself. She had no right to criticize J. Elfreda's motives. To her the bare idea of telling tales was abhorrent, while this girl gloried in the fact that she had exposed those who annoyed her.

"I'm sorry you told the registrar," she said slowly. "Perhaps in the rush of business she'll forget about it."

"She'd better not," threatened Elfreda, "or she'll hear it from me. When it comes to getting even, I never relent. I'm just like Pa in that respect. However, let's change the subject. Now that I'm here, show me where I can put my clothes," she added, addressing Miriam. "Do you keep your things in order? I never do. The morning I left home Ma said she felt sorry for my future roommate."

Page 20

Elfreda kept up a brisk monologue as she opened one of her suit cases and began hauling out its contents. Miriam made a gesture of hopeless resignation behind the stout girl's back.

"I must go to my room and get ready for dinner," said Grace, her eyes dancing. "Coming, Anne?"

Anne nodded and the two girls beat a hasty retreat. Elfreda's calm manner of appropriating things and Miriam's resigned air were too much for them. Once inside their room they gave way to uncontrolled merriment.

"I knew I'd laugh if I stayed there another second," confessed Anne. "Poor Miriam. I heartily agree with Ma, don't you?"

"Yes," smiled Grace. Then, her face sobering, she added, "I am afraid she is laying up trouble for herself. I wish she hadn't told."

CHAPTER V

AN INTERRUPTED STUDY HOUR

The first two weeks at Overton glided by with amazing swiftness. There was so much to be done in the way of arranging one's recitations, buying or renting one's books and accustoming one's self to the routine of college life that Grace and her friends could scarcely spare the time to write their home letters. There were twenty-four girls at Wayne Hall. With the exception of four sophomores the house was given up to freshmen. Grace thought them all delightful, and in her whole-souled, generous fashion made capital of their virtues and remained blind to their shortcomings. There had been a number of jolly gatherings in Mrs. Elwood's living room, at which quantities of fudge and penuchi were made and eaten and mere acquaintances became fast friends.

The week following their arrival a dance had been given in the gymnasium in honor of the freshmen. The whole college had turned out at this strictly informal affair, and the upper class girls had taken particular pains to see that the freshmen were provided with partners and had a good time generally. At this dance the three Oakdale friends had felt more at home than at any other time since entering Overton. In the first place, Mabel Ashe, Frances Marlton and Constance King had come over to Wayne Hall in a body on the evening before the dance and offered themselves as escorts. Furthermore, the scores of happy, laughing girls gliding over the gymnasium floor to the music of a three-piece orchestra reminded Grace of the school dances in her own home town. J. Elfreda had also been escorted to the hop by Virginia Gaines, one of the sophomores at Wayne Hall, who had a great respect for the stout girl's money, and it was a secret relief to Grace that she had not been left out.

Page 21

Now the dance was a thing of the past, and nothing was in sight in the way of entertainment except the reception and dance given by the sophomores to the freshmen. This was a yearly event, and meant more to the freshmen than almost any other class celebration, for the sophomores, having thrown off freshman shackles, took a lively hand in the affairs of the members of the entering class. It was sophomores who under pretense of sympathetic interest wormed out of unsuspecting freshmen their inmost secrets and gleefully spread them abroad among the upper classes. It was also the sophomores who were the most active in enforcing the standard that erring freshmen were supposed to live up to. The junior and senior classes as a rule allowed their sophomore sisters to regulate the conduct of the newcomers at Overton, only stepping in to interfere in extreme cases.

Grace and her friends had met nearly all the members of the sophomore class at the freshman dance, but in reality they had very few acquaintances among them that bade fair to become their friends.

"I don't suppose we'll have the honor of being escorted to the reception by sophomores," remarked Grace several evenings before the event, as she and Miriam strolled out of the dining room. "We'll have to go in a crowd by ourselves and look as though we enjoyed it."

"Why not stay at home?" yawned Miriam. "I'm not as over-awed at the idea of this affair as I might be."

"No," replied Grace, shaking her head. "It wouldn't do. We ought to go. The dance is to be given in honor of the freshmen, and it's their duty to turn out and make it a success. Are you going to study your Livy to-night, Miriam?"

"If I can," replied Miriam grimly. "It depends on what my talkative roommate does. If she elects to give me another instalment of the story of her life before she came here, Livy won't stand much chance. We have progressed as far as her twelfth year, and I was just on the point of learning how she survived scarlet fever when the doctor didn't expect her to live, last night, when she happened to remember that she hadn't looked at her history lesson and I was mercifully spared further torture."

"Poor Miriam," laughed Grace. "But you could have said you didn't want her the day Mrs. Elwood brought her here. What made you decide to let her stay? I saw by your face something interesting was going on in your mind."

Miriam looked reflectively at Grace. "I don't know I'm sure just why I let her stay. It wasn't because I wished to please Mrs. Elwood, though she is so nice with all of us. I had a curious feeling that I ought to take J. Elfreda in hand. If it had been you whose room she invaded you wouldn't have hesitated even for a second. Ever since you and I settled our differences back in our high school days I've always held you up to myself as

an example. Now, honestly, Grace, you would have taken her in without a murmur, wouldn't you?"

Page 22

"Ye-e-s," said Grace slowly, her face flushing. "I would have said she might stay, I think. But, Miriam, you mustn't hold me up as an example. I couldn't be more generous and loyal and broadminded than you."

"In the words of J. Elfreda, 'let's change the subject,'" said Miriam hastily. "Where's Anne?"

"Anne is out visiting the humblest freshman of them all," replied Grace. "Her name is Ruth Denton. Anne singled her out in English the other day, scraped acquaintance with her, and found that she has a room in an old house in the suburbs of the town. She takes care of her own room, boards herself and does any kind of mending she can get to do from the girls to help her pay her way through college. Anne only found her last week, but I have promised to go to see her, too, and I want you to go with me."

They had paused at the door of Miriam's room. Her hand on the door, she said earnestly, "I'd love to go, Grace. I might know that you and Anne couldn't rest without championing some one's cause."

"What about you and J. Elfreda?" questioned Grace slyly.

"Oh, that's different," retorted Miriam. Opening the door she glanced about the room. Her own side was in perfect order, but J. Elfreda's half looked as though it had been visited by a cyclone. The cover of her couch bed was pulled askew and the sofa pillows ornamented the floor. Shoes and stockings were scattered about in wild disorder. Her dressing table looked as though the contents had been stirred up and deposited in a heap in the center. From the top drawer of the chiffonier protruded a hand-embroidered collar, and a long black silk tie hung down the middle of the piece of furniture, giving it the effect of being draped in mourning.

Catching sight of this Grace pointed to it, laughing. "It looks as though she were in mourning, doesn't it?"

"For her sins, yes," replied Miriam grimly. "Isn't this room a mess, though? I've picked up her things ever so many times, but I'm tired of it. Come in here to-night, Grace. I want to see how it seems to have my dearest friend in my room, all to myself."

"All right," laughed Grace. "I'll get my books."

Five minutes later she reappeared and, cosily establishing herself in the Morris chair that Miriam insisted she should occupy, the girls began their work. For the time being silence reigned, broken only by the sound of turning leaves or an occasional question on the part of one or the other of the two. Finally Miriam closed her book triumphantly. "That's done," she exulted. "Now for my English."



"I wish I was through with this," sighed Grace, eyeing her Livy with disfavor. "I never do learn my lessons quickly. I have to study ever so much harder than you and Anne. Now, if it were basketball, then everything would be lovely. Still, you're a champion player, too, Miriam, so you've more than your share of accomplishments. Anne, too, excites my envy and admiration. She can act and stand first in her classes, too, while I have to work like mad to keep up in my classes and am not a star in anything. Perhaps during this year I shall develop some new talent of which no one suspects me. It won't be for study, that's sure."

Page 23

Miriam smiled to herself, but said nothing. She knew that Grace already possessed a talent for making friends and an ability to see not only her own way clearly, but to smooth the pathway of those weaker than herself that was little short of marvelous. She knew, too, that before the end of the school year Grace's remarkable personality was sure to make itself felt among her fellow students.

"What are you smiling to yourself about, Miriam?" demanded Grace.

But at this juncture the door was burst violently open and J. Elfreda Briggs dashed into the room, threw herself face downward on her disordered bed and gave way to a long, anguished wail.

CHAPTER VI

A DISTURBING NOTE

Miriam and Grace sprang to their feet, regarding the sobbing, moaning girl in blank amazement.

"What on earth is the matter, Elfreda," said Miriam.

The answer was another long wail that made the girls glance apprehensively toward the door.

"She'll have to be more quiet," said Grace, "or else every girl in the house will hear her and come in to inquire what has happened." Going over to the couch, she knelt beside Elfreda and said almost sharply, "Elfreda, stop crying at once. Do you want all the girls in the house to hear you?"

"I don't care," was the discouraging answer, but in a lower tone, nevertheless; but she continued to sob heart-brokenly.

"Tell me about it, Elfreda," said Grace more gently, taking one of the girl's limp hands in hers. "Something dreadful must have happened. Have you had bad news from home?"

"No-o-o," gasped the stout girl. "It's the sophomores. I can't go to the reception. They won't let me." Her sobs burst forth afresh.

Grace rose from her knees, casting a puzzled glance toward Miriam. "I wonder what she means." Then placing her hands on Elfreda's shoulders she raised her to a sitting position on the couch and dropping down beside her put one arm over her shoulder. Miriam promptly sat down on the other side, and being thus supported and bolstered by their sympathetic arms, Elfreda gulped, gurgled, sighed and then said with quivering lips, "I wish I had taken your advice, Grace."

“About what?” asked Grace. Then, the same idea occurring to them simultaneously, Miriam and Grace exchanged dismayed glances. Elfreda had come to grief through reporting the two mischievous sophomores to the registrar.

“About telling the registrar,” faltered Elfreda, unrolling her handkerchief from the ball into which she had rolled it and wiping her eyes.

“I’m so sorry,” Grace said with quick sympathy.

“You’re not half so sorry as I am,” was the tearful retort. “I’ll write to Pa and Ma that I want to go home next week. They’ll make a fuss, but they’ll send for me.”

“Are your father and mother very anxious that you should stay here?” asked Miriam.

Page 24

"A good deal more anxious than I am," responded Elfreda. "Ma picked out Overton for me long before I left high school. She thinks it the only college going and so does Pa."

"Then, of course, they will be disappointed if you go home without even trying to like college."

"I can't help that," whined Elfreda. "I can't stay here and have the whole college down on me, and that's what will happen. You girls don't know how serious it is."

"I think you had better begin at the beginning and tell us everything," suggested Miriam, a trifle impatiently.

"It was the night of the freshman hop that they began to be so mean," burst forth Elfreda. "I went to the dance with Virginia Gaines, that sophomore who sits next to me at the table."

"Who do you mean by 'they'?" asked Grace.

"Alberta Wicks, the tall red-haired girl, and Mary Hampton, the short dark one. They took me over to the court house," was the prompt answer. "The registrar reported them to the dean. She sent for them the very day of the dance and gave them an awful talking to and they were perfectly furious with me for telling. They found out that Virginia had invited me to the dance, and told her the whole story. She was horrid to me, and hardly spoke to me all the way to the gymnasium or coming home. They must have told every girl I know, for not one of them would come near me. I had to sit around all evening, for I didn't know half a dozen girls, and you three were too busy to look at me. You can imagine I had a slow old time, and I was glad to get home. Maybe you noticed I wasn't very talkative that night after we got back to the house, Miriam?"

Miriam nodded.

"After that, Virginia and I didn't speak. I didn't care much anyhow, for she made me tired," continued Elfreda. "But when the talk about the sophomore reception began I saw that they were going to hand me a whole block of ice. It was bad enough to have them cut me in classes and on the street, but I had set my heart on the reception and wrote to Ma to send me a new dress. It came yesterday. It's pale blue with pearl trimmings and it's a dream. But what good does it do me now?" She stared gloomily ahead of her for an instant, then went on:

"Of course, I knew no one would invite me, but I made up my mind to ask if I could go along with you folks, and I was going to ask you to-night, when just before dinner a boy came here with this note." From the inside of her white silk blouse she drew forth an envelope addressed to "Miss J. Elfreda Briggs." Handing it to Grace she said briefly: "Read it."

Grace drew a sheet of paper from the envelope, unfolded it and read:

“Miss Briggs:

“In reporting to the registrar two members of the sophomore class you have offended not merely those members, but the class as well. You have shown yourself so entirely incapable of understanding the first principles of honor, that Overton would be much better off without you. Do not attempt to attend the sophomore reception. If you are wise you will leave Overton and enter some other college.

Page 25

"The Sophomore Class."

Grace handed the note to Miriam.

"What do you think of it?" asked Miriam, looking up from the last line.

"I don't know what to think," rejoined Grace. "It doesn't seem as though a whole class would rise up to settle what is really a personal affair. Even though the sophomores are angry, they have no right to threaten Elfreda and advise her to leave Overton. If the dean knew of this affair I am afraid there would be war indeed."

"Shall I tell her?" asked Elfreda eagerly. "I think I'd better; then they won't dare to make me leave college."

"Listen to me, Elfreda," said Grace firmly. "No one can make you leave college unless you fail in your studies or do something really reprehensible, but there is one thing you must make up your mind to do if you wish to stay here, and have the girls like you."

"What is it?" inquired Elfreda suspiciously.

"You mustn't tell tales," was Grace's frank answer. "No matter what the girls do or say to you, don't carry it to the officials of the college."

"Do you mean that I'm to submit to all kinds of insults and not take my own part?" demanded Elfreda, forgetting her grief and assuming a belligerent air.

"You are not fighting your own battles when you carry your grievances to the dean, the registrar, or any other member of the faculty," said Grace gravely. "You are merely giving them unpleasant information to which they dislike to listen."

"Humph!" was the contemptuous ejaculation. "The dean made it hot for the girls just the same. I guess she didn't object much to hearing about it."

"You are not looking at things in their true light, Elfreda," put in Miriam. "I'll venture to say that when the members of the faculty were students they were just as careful not to tell tales as are the girls here to-day. Of course, if students are reported to them, they are obliged to take action in the matter, but I'm sure that they'd rather not hear about the girls' petty difficulties."

"Petty difficulties!" almost screamed Elfreda. "Well, I like your impudence." Jerking herself from the girls' embrace she stood up and walked to the other side of the room. Stumbling over one of her shoes she kicked it viciously aside, then, leaning her head against the door, her sobs broke forth afresh.

In a twinkling Miriam was beside her. "Poor Elfreda," she soothed. "You are tired and worn out. Take off your hat and coat and bathe your face. You'll feel ever so much better after you've done that. You mustn't be cross with Grace and me. We are only trying to help you. While you are bathing your face, I'll make some chocolate and we'll have a cozy little time. Won't that be nice?"

Elfreda nodded, winked back her tears, and slowly drawing the pins from her hat, flung it on the foot of her bed. Her coat followed, and seizing her towel from the rack she stalked out of the room and down the hall to the bath room.

Page 26

"Miriam, you're a darling and a diplomat!" exclaimed Grace, closing the door, which the stout girl had left wide open. "Chocolate is the one thing calculated to reduce J. Elfreda to reason. We will feed her, then renew our lectures on tale-bearing. Never call me a reformer. I am certain that before the year is over J. Elfreda won't know herself."

"Nonsense," scoffed Miriam. "She is an interesting specimen, and furnishes variety, of a certain kind," she added with an impish grin, glancing comprehensively at the disordered room. "As long as I have taken her unto myself as a roommate I might as well do what I can for her. What seems so strange to me is that with all her money she is so crude and slangy. She doesn't seem to have any ideals or much principle either. Yet there is something sturdy and frankly independent about her, too, that makes one think she's worth bothering with after all."

"How did her father make his money?" asked Grace.

"Lumber," replied Miriam. "They own tracts of timber land in Michigan. Elfreda can have anything she asks for."

Grace sat down on Miriam's bed, her chin in her hands. She was thinking of the note she had just read and wondering what had better be done. Miriam, despite her avowal that she was tired of picking up her roommate's scattered clothing, busied herself with reducing Elfreda's half of the room to some semblance of order. Going to the closet, she took down an elaborate Japanese silk kimono and laid it across the foot of Elfreda's bed.

"What had we better do about this note?" Grace asked, picking it up from the table and re-reading it.

"What do you think?" questioned Miriam.

"I think we had better ask the advice of some upper class girl," said Grace. "I'm going to see Mabel Ashe to-morrow morning. I'll tell her about it. Elfreda mustn't be cheated out of her right to go to the reception."

"But if the whole sophomore class objects to her, what then?"

"I don't believe the whole sophomore class does object to her," returned Grace. "I have a curious conviction that not many of them know her even by sight. I think that this note was written for spite."

"Do you think Miss Wicks and Miss Hampton wrote it?" queried Miriam.

"I don't want to accuse any one of writing it, but they are the only students who would have an object in doing so," declared Grace. "I hear Elfreda coming down the hall. Don't say anything more about it just now," she added in a lower tone.

“My goodness, I forgot all about the chocolate!” exclaimed Miriam, scurrying to a little oak cabinet in one corner of the room and taking out the necessary ingredients. “Here, Grace, open this can of evaporated cream with the scissors. You can use that paperweight for a hammer.”

Fifteen minutes later, wrapped in the folds of her kimono, J. Elfreda sat drinking chocolate and devouring cakes as though her very existence depended upon it.

Page 27

"You girls are ever so much nicer than I thought you'd be," she said reflectively, between cakes. "I must say that I'm agreeably disappointed in you, Miriam. I was pretty sure you were a regular snob, but you're nothing like one. I couldn't help thinking about what you said, Grace, while I was bathing my face," she continued. "It made me mad for a minute, but I've come to the conclusion that you were talking sense, and from now on the faculty will have to go some to get any information from me."

CHAPTER VII

GRACE TAKES MATTERS INTO HER OWN HANDS

"We have had, what might be considered by some people, a momentous evening," remarked Grace as Anne Pierson walked into their room shortly before ten o'clock. Having left the now almost cheerful Elfreda to the good-natured ministrations of Miriam, Grace had said good night and returned to her own room for a few more minutes of silent devotion to Livy.

"What happened?" asked Anne as she hung up her wraps, took down her kimono, and prepared to be comfortable.

"What might be expected," returned Grace, and briefly recounted what had transpired in Miriam's room.

"Wasn't it nice of Miriam to make a fuss over her, though?" said Anne warmly.

"Yes, of course, but it isn't Miriam's amiability that I'm thinking about at present. It's what we'd better do to straighten out this trouble for Elfreda," said Grace anxiously. "I felt glad when I came to Overton that I did not have to worry about any one but myself, and now I'm confronted with Elfreda's troubles."

"I think it would be best to see Miss Ashe first," agreed Anne, after a brief silence.

"That settles it, then, I'll go. Tell me about your new freshman friend, Anne."

"She's a very nice girl," Anne replied, "and has lots of the right kind of courage. She lives in a big, bare room in the top of an old house, clear down at the other end of the town, and the way she has made that room over to suit her needs is really wonderful. She has one corner of it curtained off for her kitchen and has a cupboard for her dishes, what there are of them. She cooks her meals over a little two-burner gas stove, and does her own washing and ironing. Every spare moment she has she devotes to doing mending. She does it beautifully, too. Ever so many girls have given her their silk stockings and lingerie waists to darn."

“Poor little thing,” mused Grace. “I suppose she never has a minute to play. I don’t see how she manages to do all that work and study, too. I wish we could do something to help her.”

“I don’t know what we could do,” returned Anne thoughtfully. “I imagine she wouldn’t accept help. She strikes me as being one of the kind who would rather die than allow her friends to pay her way.”

“There must be some way,” Grace said speculatively, “and some day we’ll find it out.”

Page 28

"Sometimes I feel as though I had earned my college money too easily," confessed Anne. "The work I did on the stage wasn't work at all, it was pure pleasure. Ruth Denton's work is the hardest kind of drudgery."

"But think how hard you worked to win the scholarship," reminded Grace.

"That was work I loved, too," replied Anne, shaking her head deprecatingly over her own good fortune.

"Never mind," laughed Grace. "Just think of how hard you might have had to work if you hadn't been a genius, and that will comfort you a little."

"Grace, you are too ridiculous," protested Anne, flushing deeply.

"Anne, you are entirely too modest," retorted Grace. "Come on, little Miss Nonentity, let's go to bed or I won't get up early enough to-morrow morning to see Mabel Ashe before my first recitation."

"All right," yawned Anne. "To-morrow night I must stay in the house and write letters. I've owed David a letter for a week. I wonder why Nora and Jessica don't write."

"They promised to write first, you know," said Grace.

"If we don't hear from them by Saturday we'd better send them a postcard to hurry them up. Let's go down to that little stationer's shop to-morrow and see what they have. I must find one that will suit Hippy's peculiar style of beauty."

Laughing and chatting of things that had happened at home, a subject of which they never tired, Grace and Anne prepared for bed.

The next morning Anne awoke first. Glancing at the little clock on the chiffonier she exclaimed in dismay. They had overslept, and there was barely time to dress and eat breakfast before chapel.

"Oh, dear," lamented Grace as she slipped into her one-piece gown of pink linen, "now I can't go to see Mabel until after luncheon. How provoking!"

But it was still more provoking to find, when she called at Holland House, late that afternoon, that Mabel Ashe had made a dinner engagement with several seniors and had just left the house. "What had I better do about it?" Grace asked herself. "Shall I put it off until to-morrow or shall I take matters into my own hands? It's only four days now until the reception, and those girls may do a great deal of talking during that time." She paused on the steps of Holland House and looked across the campus toward Stuart Hall. "I'm sure I heard some one say that both Miss Wicks and Miss Hampton live there," Grace reflected. "I don't like to do it, but it's the only thing I can think of to

do.” Squaring her shoulders Grace crossed the campus, a look of determination on her fine face. Mounting the steps of Stuart Hall she deliberately rang the bell.

Miss Wicks and Miss Hampton were both in, the maid stated, ushering Grace into the big, attractively furnished living room. A moment later there was a scurry of footsteps on the stairs and Alberta Wicks, followed by Mary Hampton, entered the room.

Page 29

Grace rose from her chair to greet them. "Good afternoon," she said pleasantly. "I shall have to introduce myself. I am Grace Harlowe of the freshman class. I saw you at the dance the other night but did not meet you."

"How do you do?" returned Alberta Wicks in a bored tone, while the other girl nodded indifferently. "I remember your face, I think. I'm not sure. There was an army of freshmen at the dance. The largest entering class for a number of years, I understand."

"Freshmen are perhaps not important enough to be remembered," returned Grace, smiling faintly. Then deciding that there was nothing to be gained by beating about the bush she said earnestly, "I hope you will not think me meddlesome or presuming, but I came here this afternoon to talk with you about something that concerns a member of the freshman class. I refer to Miss Briggs, whom I am quite certain you know."

"Miss Briggs," repeated Alberta Wicks, meditatively. "Let me see, I think we met her _____"

"The day she came to college," supplemented Grace.

"How did you know that?" was the sharp question.

"I saw you and Miss Hampton when you approached her, and also when you walked away from the station with her," Grace said quietly. "Miss Briggs rode part of the way on the train with us to Overton."

A deep flush rose to the faces of both young women at Grace's indisputable statement. There was an uncomfortable silence.

"I know also," continued Grace, "that you conducted her to the county court house instead of the registrar's office and left her to find out the truth as best she might."

"Really," sneered Alberta, "you seem to be extremely well informed as to what took place. It is quite evident that Miss Briggs published the news broadcast."

"She did nothing of the sort," retorted Grace coldly. "She did tell my roommate and me, and I regret to say that she also told the registrar, but she now realizes her mistake in doing so."

"Her realization comes entirely too late," was the sarcastic reply. "She should have thought things over before going to the registrar with anything so silly."

"Ah!" ejaculated Grace. "I am glad to hear you admit that the trick you played was silly. To my mind it was both senseless and unkind. However, I did not come here to-day to discuss the ethics of the affair. Miss Briggs has received a note forbidding her attendance at the sophomore reception and advising her to leave Overton. It is signed



'Sophomore Class.' It states her betrayal of two sophomores to the registrar as the cause of its origin. What I wish to ask you is whether the sophomores have really taken action in this matter, or whether you wrote this note in order to frighten Miss Briggs into leaving college?"

"I do not admit your right to interfere, and I shall certainly not answer your question, Miss Harlowe. You are decidedly impertinent, to say the least," replied Alberta in a tone of suppressed anger. "I cannot understand why you should take such an unprecedented interest in Miss Briggs's affairs and I shall tell you nothing."

Page 30

[Illustration: "I Am Sorry That We Have Failed to Come to an Understanding."]

"Very well," said Grace composedly. "I see that I shall have to go to each member of the sophomore class in turn in order to find out the truth. I cannot believe that these girls are so lacking in college spirit as to ostracize a newcomer, even though she did act unwisely."

"You would not dare to do it!" exclaimed Mary Hampton excitedly. She had hitherto taken no part in the conversation.

"Why not?" asked Grace. "I am determined to go to the root of this matter. I don't intend Miss Briggs shall leave college, or be sent to coventry either. She has acted hastily, but she will live it down, that is, unless word of it has traveled too far. Even so, I hardly think she will leave college. I am sorry that we have failed to come to an understanding."

Grace walked proudly toward the door. Inwardly she was deeply disappointed at having failed, but she gave no sign of feeling her defeat.

"Come back!" commanded Alberta Wicks harshly, as Grace stood with her hand on the door knob. Grace turned and walked toward them. Her face gave no sign of her surprise.

"Do you really intend to take up this affair with every member of the sophomore class?" demanded Alberta, eyeing Grace sharply. There was a faint note of dismay in her voice, despite her attempt to appear unconcerned.

"Yes," answered Grace firmly. "The only alternative would be to take it to the faculty, and that is not to be thought of. I shall make a personal appeal to each sophomore for Miss Briggs."

"Then I suppose rather than bring down a hornet's nest about our ears, we might as well tell you that the majority of the class know nothing of this. A number of sophomores, with a view to the good of the college, decided themselves to be justified in sending the letter to Miss Briggs. We do not wish young women of her type at Overton, and Miss Briggs will do well to go elsewhere. She will never be happy at Overton."

"Is that a threat?" asked Grace quickly.

Alberta merely shrugged her shoulders in answer to Grace's question.

"You may call it what you please," remarked Mary Hampton sullenly.

"Thank you," said Grace gravely. "I think I have a fair idea of the situation. I believe I know too, just how many sophomores were concerned in the writing of the letter, and

am sure that their adverse opinion will neither make nor mar Miss Briggs. Good afternoon.”

With this Grace walked serenely out of the house, leaving behind her two discomfited and ignominiously defeated young women.

“Do you believe she would have kept her word and put the matter before the class?” asked Mary Hampton after Grace had gone.

“Yes,” responded Alberta, frowning. “She wouldn’t have hesitated. She meant what she said. She is one of those tiresome persons who is forever advocating fair play. She only does it as a pose. She imagines, I suppose that it will attract the attention of the upper class girls. I should like to teach her a lesson in humility, but it is dangerous, for with all her faults she is by no means stupid, and unless we were very careful we would be quite likely to come to grief.”

Page 31

CHAPTER VIII

THE SOPHOMORE RECEPTION

It was the night of the sophomore reception and the gymnasium was ablaze with light and color. All day the valiant sophomore class had labored as decorators. Sofa cushions, portieres, screens and anything else that might add to the beauty of the decorations had been begged and borrowed from good-natured residents of the campus and nearby boarding houses. There were great branches of red and gold leaves festooning and hiding the gymnasium apparatus, and the respective sophomore and freshman colors of blue and gold were in evidence in every nook and corner of the big room. There was a real orchestra of eight pieces from the town of Overton, seated on a palm-screened platform which had been erected for the occasion; while a long line of freshmen in their best bib and tucker crowded up to pay their respects to the receiving line of sophomores, headed by the class president.

The freshmen of Wayne Hall had elected to go together, and Ruth Denton had also been invited to take dinner and dress with Anne, then go with her and her friends to the reception. At first Ruth demurred on account of her gown, which was a very plain little affair of white dotted swiss. Then Grace had come to the rescue and insisted that Ruth should wear a very beautiful white satin ribbon belt with long, graceful ends, belonging to her, which quite transformed the simple frock. There was also a white satin hair ornament to match, and Miriam's clever fingers had done her soft brown hair in a new, becoming fashion. Even Elfreda had insisted on lending her a white opera cape and praising her appearance until the little girl was in a maze of delight at so much unexpected attention. Grace, Anne, and Miriam had put on their graduating gowns and Elfreda was arrayed in all the glory of the gown she had ordered for the occasion and afterward entertained so little hope of wearing.

Just as they were ready to start the door bell rang. There was a sound of laughing voices and the patter of slippered feet on the stairs, and Mabel Ashe, accompanied by Frances Marlton, Constance Fuller, and two other juniors, appeared on the landing.

"Better late than never," announced Mabel cheerily, as Grace appeared in the doorway. "We've come to take you to the reception. We weren't invited until the eleventh hour, but we're making up for lost time."

"Why, I didn't know juniors were invited to the reception," exclaimed Grace, taking Mabel's extended hand in both her own. "Judging from all outward signs I suppose you are going to the reception, else why wear your costliest raiment?"

"Your deduction is not only marvelous but correct," returned Mabel. "We were invited because the sophomores found themselves lacking not in quality, but quantity. There

weren't nearly enough sophomore 'gentlemen' to go round, so we juniors were pressed into service.

Page 32

"I'm so glad," returned Grace warmly. "We know nearly all the freshmen, but we know only a few sophomores. We were lamenting to-night because we expected to be wall flowers."

"Not if Frances and I can help it," promised Mabel. "Girls, I want you to meet Miss Graham and Miss Allen, both worthy juniors. You already know Constance."

The "worthy juniors" nodded smilingly as Mabel presented Grace and her friends.

"Get your capes and scarfs," directed Mabel briskly. "We must be on our way. I'm sure it's going to be a red-letter affair. The sophomores have nearly worked their dear heads off to impress the baby class. Do you girls all dance, and how many of you can lead?"

"Miriam and I," answered Grace. "Anne is not tall enough. Elfreda and Ruth will have to answer for themselves."

Ruth Denton confessed to being barely able to dance. Elfreda, who looked really handsome in her blue evening gown, answered in the affirmative. Grace noted with secret satisfaction that the stout girl was keeping strictly in the background and making no effort to push herself forward. "If she only behaves like that all evening the girls will be sure to like her, and if anything comes up later about this registrar business there won't be such fuss made over it," Grace reflected.

"Come on, Grace!" Frances Marlton's merry tones broke in on Grace's reflections. "I'm going to be your faithful cavalier. I'll offer you my arm as soon as we get downstairs. We never could walk two abreast in state down these stairs."

Grace followed Frances's lead, smiling happily. Julia Graham, a rather stout, pleasant-faced young woman in pink messaline, bowed to Miriam. Anne found herself accepting the arm of Edith Allen, while Constance Fuller took charge of Ruth Denton. The crowning honor fell to J. Elfreda, for Mabel Ashe walked up to her, slipped her arm in that of the astonished girl, saying impressively, "May I have the pleasure, Miss Briggs?"

The little party fairly bubbled over with high spirits as they set out for the gymnasium in couples, but to Elfreda the world was gayest rose color. To be escorted to the reception by the most popular girl in college was an honor of which she had never dreamed. Only a few days before she had resigned all hope of even going, but through the magic of Grace Harlowe she was among the elect. For almost the first time in her self-centered young life, she was swept by a wholly generous impulse to do the best that lay within her in college if only for Grace's sake. While she listened to Mabel's gay sallies, answering them almost shyly, her mind was on the debt of gratitude she owed Grace, who, without mentioning her visit to Alberta Wicks, had assured her that she had made inquiry and found that the letter was not the work of the sophomore class as a body. Grace had refused to voice even a suspicion regarding the writer's identity, but had so

strongly advised Elfreda to pay no attention to the cowardly warning, but attend the reception as though nothing had happened, that the stout girl had taken her advice.

Page 33

Grace was now quietly jubilant over the way things had turned out. She was so glad Mabel had chosen Elfreda. "I wonder how she knew," she said half aloud.

"How who knew, and what did she know?" inquired Frances quickly.

"Nothing," replied Grace, in sudden confusion. "I was just wondering."

"I know what you were wondering and I'll tell you. A certain junior who is a friend of a certain sophomore told Mabel certain things."

"Frances, you are a wizard!" exclaimed Grace in a low tone. "How did you know of what I was thinking?"

"The question is," replied Frances, "do you understand me?"

"I think I know who the sophomore is," hesitated Grace, "but I don't understand about the junior."

"And I can't tell you," replied Frances gravely. "I can only say that Mabel likes you very much, Grace, and that a certain junior who is fond of Mabel is jealous of your friendship. Both Mabel and I admire your stand in the other matter. You are measuring up to college standards, my dear, and I am sure you will be an honor to 19——."

Frances finished her flattering prediction just as they stepped inside the doorway of the gymnasium. Before Grace had time to reply they found themselves among a bevy of daintily gowned girls that were forming in line to pay their respects to the president of the sophomore class and five of her classmates who formed the receiving party. After this formality was over the girls walked about the gymnasium, admiring the decorations. Mabel Ashe was fairly overwhelmed by her admirers. It seemed to Grace as though she attracted more attention than the receiving party itself. It was: "Mabel, dear, dance the first waltz with me;" "Come and drink lemonade with us, Queen Mab," and "Why, you dear Mabel, I might have known the sophomores couldn't get along without you."

"She knows every girl in college, I believe," remarked Anne to Edith Allen, as Mabel stood laughing and talking animatedly, the center of an admiring group.

"Every one loves her from the faculty down," replied Edith. "She hadn't been here six weeks as a freshman until the whole class was sending her violets and asking her out to dinners. She was elected president of the freshman class, too, and had the honor of refusing the sophomore nomination. They want her for junior president, but she will refuse that nomination, too. She is as unselfish and unspoiled as the day she came here and the most sympathetic girl I have ever known. We are all madly jealous of Frances."

Anne smiled at this statement. "It is nice to be liked," she said simply. "That is the way it is with Grace at home."

"I'm not surprised," replied Edith, regarding Grace critically. "She has a fine face. That Miss Nesbit seems nice, too. She is a beauty, isn't she?"

Anne replied happily in the affirmative. To her praise of her two dearest friends was as the sweetest music.

Page 34

"Shall we dance?" said Edith, rising and offering her arm in her most manly fashion. A moment later the two girls joined the dancers, who were circling the floor with more or less grace to the strains of a waltz.

"What kind of a time are you having?" asked Grace an hour later as she and Miriam met in front of one of the lemonade bowls.

"I'm enjoying it ever so much," was the enthusiastic answer. "I've met a lot of sophomores that I've been wanting to know, and they have been so nice to me. Have you seen Elfreda lately?"

"No," said Grace with a guilty start. "I've been having such a good time I forgot her. Let's go and find her now."

The two began a slow promenade of the room in search of the missing girl. Suddenly Grace clutched her friend's arm. "Look over there, Miriam!" she exclaimed.

Seated on a divan beside Mabel Ashe and surrounded by half a dozen sophomores was J. Elfreda. She was talking animatedly and the girls were urging her on with laughter and cries of "Now show us how some one else in Fairview looks."

"What do you suppose she is saying?" wondered Miriam. "Let's go over." They neared the group just in time to hear Elfreda say, "The president of the Fairview suffragist league." Then her round face set as though turned to stone. Her eyes took on a determined glare, and drawing down the corners of her mouth she elevated her chin, rose from the divan and shrilled forth "Votes for Women" in a tone that fairly convulsed her hearers. Then suddenly catching sight of Grace and Miriam she sat down abruptly and said with an embarrassed gesture of dismissal, "The show's over. I see my friends are looking for me. I'll have to go."

"You funny, funny girl!" exclaimed Mabel Ashe. "What a treasure you'll be when we give college entertainments. You'll make the Dramatic Club some day."

"Nothing like it," returned Elfreda, resorting to slang in her embarrassment.

"Where did you ever learn to mimic people so cleverly?" asked one sophomore.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Elfreda almost rudely. "I've imitated folks ever since I was a kid—little girl," she corrected. "You said you'd waltz with me to-night, Miriam, so come on. That's a Strauss waltz, and I don't want to miss it. Please excuse me," she said, turning to the assembled girls. She was making a desperate effort to be polite when she preferred to be rude.

“Mabel Ashe, you’re the dearest girl,” Grace burst forth as the little crowd dissolved and strolled off in different directions. “You have been lovely to Elfreda, and instead of her evening being spoiled, you know what I mean, she has actually made a sensation.”

“I am not the only one who has been looking out for J. Elfreda’s interests,” reminded Mabel. “I am glad that she has this talent. It will help her to make friends with the girls, and if nothing more is said about the registrar affair she will soon have a following of her own.”

Page 35

"Do you think anything more will be said?" asked Grace anxiously.

"Not if I can help it," was the response.

It was almost midnight when, after seeing Ruth Denton home, the four girls climbed the steps of Wayne Hall.

"It was lovely, wasn't it, Anne?" declared Grace as she slipped into her kimono and began taking the pins from her hair.

"Yes," said Anne with a half sigh. She was deliberating as to whether she had better tell Grace a disturbing bit of conversation she had overheard. After all it wasn't worth repeating. She had simply heard one freshman say to another that she had been prepared to like Miss Harlowe, but something she had heard had caused her to change her mind. Anne suspected that in some way Elfreda's troubles had been shifted to Grace's shoulders.

CHAPTER IX

DISAGREEABLE NEWS

"Hurrah!" cried Miriam Nesbit gleefully, coming into the living room of Wayne Hall where Grace sat at the old-fashioned library table absorbed in writing a theme for next day's composition class.

"What's happened?" asked Grace curiously, looking up from her writing.

"We're to go over to Exeter Field to-morrow for a try out in basketball. I do hope we'll both make the team."

"So do I," agreed Grace promptly. "But there are so many girls that we may not be even chosen as subs. Besides, our playing may not compare with that of some of the others."

"Nonsense," returned Miriam stoutly. "Your playing would stand out anywhere, Grace, even on a boys' team. I consider myself a fair player, too," she added, flushing a little.

"I should say you are!" exclaimed Grace. "Who told you about the try out?"

"It's on the bulletin board. I don't see how you missed it."

"I didn't look at the bulletin board this morning. I meant to, then something else took my attention, and I forgot all about it." The "something else" had been the extremely frigid manner in which two freshmen she particularly liked had greeted her as she caught up

with them on the way to her Livy class that morning. Grace wondered not a little at this cavalier treatment, but could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion regarding it. She finally tried to dismiss the matter by ascribing it to over-sensitiveness on her part, but every now and then it haunted her like an offending spectre.

"I always look at the bulletin board, no matter what happens," declared Miriam emphatically. "I must hurry upstairs and impart the glorious news to Elfreda. We had elected to spend Saturday afternoon in moving our furniture about, hoping to gain a few square inches of room space, but we'll have to postpone doing it. We can do it the first rainy Saturday. Hurry along with your paper and come upstairs. I'm going to make tea, and I've acquired a new kind of cakes. They're chocolate covered and taste like home and mother."

Page 36

After Miriam had gone upstairs Grace sat staring at her theme with unseeing eyes. Disagreeable thoughts would come, and try as she might she could not drive them away. She had been snubbed and she could not forget it. Giving herself a little impatient shake she turned her attention to her theme and went on writing rapidly. Half an hour later she folded it neatly, placed it inside one of her books, and went slowly upstairs. She found Miriam, Anne and Elfreda seated on the floor deep in tea drinking. Before them was a plate piled high with the new kind of cakes, and a five-pound box of candy that Elfreda had received from New York that morning.

"Sit down here, Grace," invited Anne, making room for her friend. "Give her some tea this minute, Miriam. She is a working woman and needs nourishment. Did you finish your theme, dear?"

Grace nodded. Then taking the cup Miriam offered she dropped two lumps of sugar in it, and began drinking her tea in silence.

"What's the matter, Grace?" asked Anne anxiously.

"Nothing," replied Grace. "I feel reflective. I suppose that's why I haven't anything to say. Did Miriam tell you about the basketball try out on Exeter Field?"

"Yes; but not for mine—I mean—I'm not interested in basketball," amended Elfreda, hastily. "I tell you this trying to cut out slang is no idle dream."

There was a shout of laughter from the three girls.

"Now, see here," bristled the stout girl. "You needn't laugh at me. What I meant was that—that it is very difficult to refrain from the use of slang," finished Elfreda with such affected primness that the laughter broke forth afresh.

"Humph!" she ejaculated disgustedly. "I don't see anything to laugh at. Goodness knows I'm trying hard to break myself of the habit."

"Of course you are," sympathized Anne. "We aren't laughing at you. It was the funny way you ended your last sentence."

Elfreda's face relaxed into a good-natured grin. "I am funny sometimes," she admitted calmly. "Even Pa, who doesn't smile once a year, says so."

"I must go," said Anne, rising. "I haven't looked at my history lesson, and it is frightfully long, too."

"I'll go with you," announced Grace. "I must mend my blue serge dress. I stepped on it while going upstairs this morning and tore it just above the hem. I had to change it for this, and was almost late for chapel."

"I waited for you in the hall as long as I could," said Anne. "I meant to ask you what happened, but forgot it. Grace, what do you suppose Elfreda said before you came upstairs?"

"I can't possibly guess," rejoined Grace. "J. Elfreda's remarks are varied and startling."

The two girls were now in their own room.

"These are nice ones," averred Anne. "She said that you and Miriam and I were the first girls she'd ever cared much about. She said that she had never tried to do anything to please any one but herself until she came here. Then when you stood up for her, and fixed things so she could go to the reception, she said she held up her right hand and swore to herself that she'd try to be worthy of our friendship. That's why she's trying not to use slang, and to be more generous. She keeps her things in order, too. You noticed how nice everything looked to-day."

Page 37

"Miriam, not I, is responsible for the change," said Grace. "She is a born diplomat. She knows exactly how to proceed with J. Elfreda. I hope there won't be anything more said about the registrar affair, though. I want Elfreda to like college better every day."

"Grace," said Anne hesitatingly, "if I tell you something, will you promise not to worry over it?"

"What do you mean?" asked Grace quickly, a puzzled look in her eyes. "I can't promise not to worry until I know that there's nothing to worry over. If you have heard something disagreeable about me, I'm not afraid to listen."

"I know it," said Anne. Then she went on almost abruptly. "I heard two freshmen talking about you the other night at the reception. One of them said that she had been prepared to like you, but had heard something that had caused her to change her mind." Anne looked distressed.

For a moment Grace sat very still.

"Oh, dear!" lamented Anne. "I'm sorry I told you. Now I've hurt your feelings."

"Nonsense!" retorted Grace stoutly. "It will take more than that to hurt my feelings. I am beginning to see a light, however. At the reception the other night Frances told me that Mabel had heard about my call at Stuart Hall from a senior who is a friend of a certain sophomore. Now, that sophomore is either Miss Wicks or Miss Hampton. It looks as though these two girls were not willing to let bygones be bygones. I haven't the slightest idea what they may have said about me, but I am sure they must have circulated some untruthful report among the freshmen. I don't like to accuse any one of being untruthful, but I am quite sure that I have done nothing reprehensible. Now that you have told me I'm going to watch closely. If a number of the girls snub me, I shall know that it is serious."

"Then you will fight for your rights, won't you?" pleaded Anne. "It isn't fair that you should be misjudged for trying to help Elfreda."

"I don't know," replied Grace doubtfully. "It might not be worth while. I have a theory that if one is right with one's conscience nothing else matters."

Anne shook her head dubiously. "That won't protect you from unpleasantness unless the girls think so, too. Our freshman year is our foundation year, and if we allow any one even to think that we are not putting our best material into it, the shadow is likely to follow us to the very threshold of graduation. It is easy enough to start a rumor but once let it gain headway, it is almost impossible to check it. Nearly all of your sophomore year in high school was spoiled through standing up for me. That's why I'm so determined to make you look out for your own interests."

While Anne was earnestly urging Grace to action, Grace was frantically rummaging in her closet for her blue dress. It was several minutes before she found it. If the blue dress could have spoken it would have borne witness to the fact that its owner dashed her hand suspiciously across her eyes before emerging from the closet with it over her arm.

Page 38

CHAPTER X

THE MAKING OF THE TEAM

Saturday dawned clear and sunshiny. It was an ideal autumn day, and luncheon at Wayne Hall was eaten rapidly. Everyone was eager to give an opinion regarding the basketball try out, and with one or two exceptions each girl cherished the secret hope of making the team. Anne was one of the exceptions. She had no basketball yearnings. She was ready and willing to be an enthusiastic and loyal fan, but aside from walking and dancing she had no desire to take an active part in college sports. She was extremely proud of Miriam's and Grace's fine playing, however, and never doubted for an instant that both girls would make the team. "I'm sure you and Miriam will be chosen," she asserted to Grace, as the latter stood before her mirror, viewing herself in her new felt walking hat, that had arrived that morning.

The two friends had run up to their room after luncheon to hurry into their coats and hats, preparatory to going to Exeter Field. Anne eyed Grace admiringly. "Your new hat is so becoming," she said.

"I think yours is ever so pretty, too," returned Grace. "It looks like new. No one would know that you bought it last season. You take such good care of your clothes, Anne. I wish I could take as good care of mine. I hang them up and keep them in repair, but somehow they just wear out all at once."

"Don't stop to mourn over wearing out your clothes on this gala day," laughed Miriam Nesbit, who had appeared in the open door in time to hear Grace's plaintive assertion. She was wearing a becoming suit of blue and a blue hat to match.

"Where's Elfreda?" asked Grace. "She's going, too, isn't she?"

Miriam nodded, then said slyly, "If she ever gets ready."

Just then an anguished voice called out, "Miriam, please come back. That pin you fastened in the back of my waist is sticking me and I can't reach it."

Miriam flew to the rescue, smothering an involuntary laugh as she ran. Five minutes later she and Elfreda, in a new brown suit and hat, wearing the expression of a martyr, joined Grace and Anne on the veranda, and the four set out for Exeter Field.

"I'm not going to talk about certain things to-day, Grace, but did you notice that all the girls at our table were as nice with you as ever?" said Anne in a low tone.

"Yes; I noticed it," returned Grace. "If they continue to be the same, I shall think that we have been making a mountain of a molehill."

“Look at that crowd ahead of us,” called Miriam.

A veritable procession of girls wound its way up the hilly street to Exeter Field. There were big girls and little girls, all talking and laughing happily, until the still October air rang with the sound of their gay, young voices. The majority of them were well-dressed, although here and there might be seen a last year’s hat or coat that no one seemed to notice or to mind. Overton had a reputation for democracy in spite of the fact that most of its students came from homes where there was no lack of money.

Page 39

Arriving at the field the four girls followed the crowd, which for the most part made for a long, low building at one end of the field.

"Where are they going?" asked Grace.

"For ice cream, of course," replied a young woman who stood near enough to overhear Grace's question.

"Oh, I want some ice cream," piped up Elfreda.

"Very well, my child, you shall have it," said Miriam in a grave, motherly tone.

The young woman who had answered Grace's question glanced at Miriam with twinkling eyes. Then she smiled broadly. That smile warmed Grace's heart.

"Won't you come with us?" she asked.

"Thank you, I believe I will," she replied. "I think I have the advantage. I know you are Miss Harlowe, but you don't know me. My name is Gertrude Wells, and I am a freshman, too. Now, suppose you introduce your little friends, and we'll go over to the club restaurant. I was waiting for my chum, but she has evidently deserted me."

Grace decided that she liked Miss Wells better than any other freshman she had met. She had a dry, humorous way of saying things that kept them all in a gale of laughter. Elfreda, too, seemed especially interested in her, and exerted herself to please. After their second ice all around they strolled over to where the manager of the college athletics association was marshaling the candidates for the try out. Grace and Miriam hurried off to the training quarters at one end of the field to put on their gymnasium suits.

The girls who wished to play were formed into teams and tried out against one another and the most promising of the players ordered to step off to one side after having lined up for play three times. It was after four o'clock when Grace and Miriam were called to the field. The long wait had made Grace rather nervous. Miriam, however, was cool and self-possessed, and played with snap and vigor.

"I don't know what ails me," said Grace despairingly, as she and Miriam stood waiting for the next line up. "I didn't play my best. I tried to, but I couldn't."

"You're nervous," rejoined Miriam. "Just make yourself believe you are back in the gym at home and you can show them some star playing."

"I will," promised Grace. "See if I don't."

It was after five o'clock before the last ambitious freshman had been given a chance to display her basketball prowess or lack of it. Grace had made good her word and forgetting her nervousness had played with the old-time dash and skill that had won fame for her in her high-school days. Her playing had elicited cries of approval from those watching and she had the satisfaction of hearing, "You play an excellent game, Miss Harlowe," from the manager. Miriam, after her third trial, also received her full measure of applause, and flushed and happy the two girls clasped hands delightedly when they received word that they were to report for practice at four o'clock Monday afternoon. As they were leaving the field to go to the training shed Gertrude Wells hurried toward them. "Miss Harlowe," she called, "please wait a minute."

Page 40

Grace paused obediently while Miriam and Anne walked on ahead.

"Will you and your friends, Miss Nesbit, Miss Briggs and Miss Pierson, come over to Morton Hall to-night at half-past seven o'clock. I have invited a number of my freshmen friends, and I'd love to have you come, too. It's Saturday night you know, so you won't have to worry about recitations to-morrow."

"Thank you," replied Grace. "I will come with pleasure. Girls," she called to the three ahead, "come back here."

Gertrude repeated her invitation, which was instantly accepted. "Be sure to come early," was her parting admonition.

"This is our first freshman invitation," remarked Grace after Gertrude had left them. "I'm so glad. I had begun to think we would never get acquainted with the rest of our class."

"I understand that 19—— is the largest class Overton has ever had," said Anne.

"All the more reason why we should be proud of it," declared Miriam quickly.

"I wonder what they'll have to eat," said Elfreda reflectively.

A derisive giggle greeted this remark.

"Well, you needn't laugh," retorted Elfreda good-naturedly. "I didn't say that because I'm so fond of eating. I was just wondering whether it would be worth while to eat supper or not."

"Take my advice and eat your supper, Elfreda," laughed Anne. "I have an idea that we shall be fed on plowed field, fudge or something equally nourishing."

"Humph!" commented Elfreda. "That's just about what I thought. I hope we have something sour for supper to-night. I'm getting tired of sweet stuff. It's frightfully fattening, too."

"What on earth has come over you, Elfreda," laughed Grace. "I thought you were devoted to chocolate and bonbons."

"I was," confessed Elfreda, "until I saw you and Miriam play basketball this afternoon. I was crazy to play, too. But imagine how I'd look on the field. I couldn't run six yards without puffing. I'm going to try to get thinner, and perhaps some day I can make the team, too."

CHAPTER XI

ANNE WINS A VICTORY

The pleasurable excitement of making the team and receiving the invitation to the spread had driven all thought of the conversation overheard by Anne from Grace's mind. Above all things Grace wished if possible to establish friendly relations with every member of her class. Now that she and her friends were invited to Morton House they would meet a number of new girls. The Morton House girls had the reputation of being both jolly and hospitable. Grace had the feeling that so far they had made little or no social headway among their classmates. Aside from Ruth Denton and the students at Wayne Hall they knew practically no other freshmen.

"This spread will help us to get in touch with some of the girls we don't know," she confided to Anne while dressing that night for the party.

Page 41

"I hope so," replied Anne. "We seem to be rather slow about making friends here at Overton; that is, among the freshmen. We really know more upper class girls, don't we?"

"Yes," assented Grace. "But after to-night things will be different."

It was only a few minutes' walk to Morton House and the four girls enjoyed the brief stroll.

"I wonder if we're too early," said Grace, consulting her watch. "It lacks three minutes of being half-past seven. That's Morton House, isn't it?" pointing at the substantial brick house just ahead of them. The little party climbed the stone steps. Miriam rang the bell. Almost instantly the door opened and Gertrude Wells smilingly ushered them into the hall. "So glad you have come," she said. "All the other girls are here."

"We need not have been afraid of being too early, then," laughed Grace.

"Hardly," smiled Gertrude, "the majority of us live here. There are twenty freshmen in this house, and we invited ten more from outside. Thirty girls in all, but the living room is large enough to hold us, and Mrs. Kane doesn't mind if we make a good deal of noise. Come upstairs to my room and take off your wraps. Then we'll join the crowd." A little later they followed their hostess downstairs to the big living room, that seemed fairly overflowing with girls. The buzz of conversation ceased as they entered. Gertrude introduced them one after another to the assembled crowd of young women, who received them with varying degrees of cordiality.

Anne's observant eyes noted that one group of girls in the corner barely acknowledged the introduction. She also noted that the two freshmen whose conversation she had overheard at the reception formed the center of that group. The four girls found seats at one end of the room and the conversation began again louder than ever. Grace and Miriam found themselves surrounded by half a dozen girls who were eager to know where they had learned to play basketball. Elfreda espied two freshmen who recited history in the same class with her and was soon deep in conversation with them. Anne, being left to her own devices, sat quietly watching the throng of animated faces around her. With her, the study of faces was a favorite pastime, and she furtively watched the little knot of girls, whose lack of cordiality had been so noticeable to her.

They were carrying on a low-toned conversation among themselves, and by the frequent glances that were being cast first in the direction of Grace, then Elfreda, Anne knew that the story of Elfreda's report to the registrar was being talked over. Anne felt her anger rising. Why should Grace be made to suffer for Elfreda's mistake, and why should Elfreda have her freshman year spoiled on account of that mistake. Of course, no one liked a tale bearer, but Elfreda would never again tell tales. Besides, why should

the freshmen undertake to champion the cause of two sophomores, unless the latter had entirely misrepresented things?

Page 42

Anne could never tell what prompted her to rise and stroll over to the group. The young women were so busily engaged in their conversation that they did not notice her approach. Anne heard one of them say in a disgusted tone, "I can't understand why Gertrude invited them. She knows we dislike them."

"She seems very friendly with them," grumbled another girl. "If I had known they were to be here I should have stayed upstairs or gone out rather than meet them. They showed extremely bad taste accepting Gertrude's invitation."

"Perhaps they don't know that we are down on them," suggested a pale-faced girl rather timidly.

"Of course they know it," sputtered one of the two disgruntled freshmen. "Nell and I almost cut that Miss Harlowe the other morning. Don't try to stand up for her, Lillian. She and that Miss Briggs are beneath the notice of the really nice girls here. Overton doesn't want bullies and tale-bearers. They're not in accordance with college spirit."

The contempt with which these words were uttered stung Anne to action. Stepping forward she said quietly, although her eyes flashed, "Pardon me, but I could not help hearing what you said. Will you permit me to speak a few words in defense of my friend, Grace Harlowe?"

An astonished silence fell over the group of girls. Before one of them had time to recover from her surprise at Anne's intrusion, she began to speak in low tones that attracted no attention outside themselves, but whose earnestness carried conviction to those listening:

"You are evidently not in possession of the true account of what happened to Miss Briggs the day she came to Overton. You know, perhaps, that two sophomores took advantage of her verdancy and hazed her. Perhaps they neglected to state, however, that they accepted her invitation to eat ice cream before they returned her hospitality by conducting her to the hall of a public building where they left her to wait for the registrar. Considering the fact that she was tired from her long ride, and had had no supper, I think it was an extremely poor exhibition of the much vaunted Overton spirit. It was late that night before she reached her boarding house. She was naturally indignant and next day reported the matter to the registrar. This, I must admit, was unwise on her part. She is very sorry, now, that she did so."

"All this is not news to us," snapped Marian Cummings, one of the two freshmen Anne had overheard at the reception. She stared insolently at Anne.

"But what I am about to tell you will perhaps surprise you," Anne answered evenly. "Miss Briggs received a note purporting to come from the whole sophomore class. The

writer of the note threatened her with vague penalties if she attended the sophomore reception, and practically ordered her to leave college.”

The girls looked at one another without answering. This silence showed only too plainly that this was indeed news.

Page 43

“Miss Briggs showed the letter to Miss Nesbit, her roommate, and to Miss Harlowe,” Anne continued composedly. “She was heartbroken over it and would have left Overton if Miss Harlowe had not persuaded her to stay. Miss Harlowe did a little investigating on her own account. She suspected two sophomores of being responsible for the letter, believing the rest of the class knew nothing about it. She called on the two young women and forced them to admit their knowledge of the note. Both denied writing it. It is evident that they have misrepresented matters among their friends. As far as Grace Harlowe is concerned she is utterly incapable of doing a mean or dishonorable act. We were classmates in high school and she was beloved by all who knew her.”

Anne paused and glanced almost appealingly around the circle of tense faces. Then Elizabeth Wade, the other hostile freshman, said slowly: “Girls, I am inclined to think we have been imposed upon. Miss Pierson, I will be perfectly frank with you. We knew nothing about the note. Personally, I consider it an outrageous thing to do, and in direct violation of what we are taught regarding college spirit. Briefly, what we did hear was that Miss Briggs had reported two sophomores for playing an innocent trick on her, and that Miss Harlowe had urged her to do so. Also that Miss Harlowe had visited the two upper classmen and, after rating them in a very ill-bred manner, had ordered them to apologize to Miss Briggs.”

Anne smiled. “I can’t help smiling,” she apologized. “If you knew Grace as I know her, you’d smile, too.”

Marian Cummings’s face softened. “I do wish to know her, now,” she smiled. “After what you’ve told us I think the rest of us feel the same. I’m glad you made us listen to you, Miss Pierson.”

“So am I,” “and I,” agreed the other girls.

Anne’s face flushed with joy at her victory. “I hope 19—— will be the best class Overton has ever turned out,” she said simply, “and I hope that any misunderstandings that may arise will be cleared away as easily as this one has been.”

“Suppose we go over and congratulate Miss Harlowe on her playing this afternoon,” proposed a tall freshman, “and we might incidentally pay our respects to Miss Briggs. We must help her to live up to her good resolutions, you know,” she added slyly.

Anne was in a maze of delight at her success. The other guests had been so busily engaged with their own little groups, no one of them had overheard Anne’s defense of her friend. Grace, who was giving an eager account of the famous game that won her team the championship during her sophomore year at high school, looked up in surprise at the crowd of merry girls which suddenly surrounded her. For an instant she looked amazed, then smiled at them in the frank, straightforward fashion that always made friends for her.

Gertrude Wells, who, with three other freshmen, had been in the kitchen preparing the refreshments, appeared in the door just in time to see the girls surround Grace. She smiled contentedly, and nodding to the fluffy-haired little girl standing beside her said gleefully: "What did I tell you? Look in there."

Page 44

The fluffy-haired little girl obeyed. "How did you do it?" was the quick answer.

"They did it themselves. I just did the inviting and they did the rest. Of course there was a certain amount of chance that they wouldn't get together, but it was worth taking. After meeting her this afternoon I felt sure that the girls were wrong, but I wished them to find out for themselves. How it happened, I don't know, but we are sure to hear the story after the party is over."

While Gertrude Wells was congratulating herself on the success of her experiment, Grace Harlowe was remarking to Miriam Nesbit that she thought Gertrude Wells would be an ideal president for 19—— and that she intended pointing out this fact to the freshmen of Wayne Hall.

CHAPTER XII

UPS AND DOWNS

At breakfast the next morning Grace began her campaign, and she continued to sing Gertrude Wells's praises when she encountered a group of her freshmen friends after the services. Then Anne, Miriam, Elfreda and she went for a stroll down College Street and into Vinton's for ices. Here they encountered quite a delegation of girls from Morton House, among whom was Gertrude herself, and a great deal of mysterious intriguing went on behind that young woman's back, who, quite unconscious of the honor about to be thrust upon her, was telling her chum that she thought Grace Harlowe would make a good president for 19——.

On her way home Grace exclaimed delightedly: "Look across the street, girls! There is Mabel Ashe. Let's go over and speak to her."

Suiting the action to the word the four girls hurried across the street to greet their favorite. Mabel smiled pleasantly, stretching forth a welcoming hand, but the young woman with her regarded their presence as an intrusion and glared her displeasure at the newcomers.

"How do you do, Miss Alden?" ventured Grace politely, but Miss Alden stared over her head and with a frigid, "Really, Mabel, under the circumstances, you'll have to excuse my leaving you," she turned and marched off in the other direction.

"I suppose we are the circumstances," said Grace, with a faint smile. She was furiously angry at the unlooked-for snub, but refused to show it. Anne looked distressed, Miriam was frowning, while Elfreda glowered savagely.

"Don't mind what she says," soothed Mabel. "She feels awfully cross this afternoon because she has met with a disappointment. She has an invitation to a Pi Kappa

Gamma dance and she has been refused permission to go. Result, she is in a raging, tearing humor."

"But I thought one could always go to a fraternity dance if properly chaperoned," remarked Grace innocently.

"One can," mimicked Mabel, "if one doesn't ask permission to go too often, and if one has no conditions to work off. Now, you see why Mistress Beatrice is obliged to languish at home while the man who invited her will no doubt have to invite some other girl, who is lucky enough to have no conditions."

Page 45

"Isn't it rather early in the year to be conditioned?" asked Miriam.

"Yes, but Beatrice has been cutting classes ever since she came back this year," confided Mabel. "I am not betraying a confidence in telling you this. She admits that she neglects her work. She says she is going to settle down after mid-year's exams and work."

"I think she's about the most snobbish proposition I ever came across," announced Elfreda. "It would serve her right if she did flunk in her examinations. I hope with all my heart she falls down with an awful bump."

Elfreda had forgotten her former aspirations toward cultivating the true college spirit.

"You mustn't wish even your bitterest enemy bad luck," smiled Mabel Ashe.

"Superstitious people say that the bad luck will be visited on the head of the one who wishes it."

"I'm not superstitious," retorted Elfreda. "Of course, I believe that pins cut friendship, and that it's bad luck to see the new moon through the window, or to walk under a ladder. It's a sure sign of death to break a looking glass or dream of white flowers, too, and to drop a spoon means certain disappointment, but aside from a few little things like that, I certainly don't believe in signs."

"Oh, no, you don't believe in signs," chorused the girls, in gleeful sarcasm.

"Well, I don't," reiterated Elfreda. "That is, not a whole lot of them."

"Good-bye, children, I must leave you at this corner," announced Mabel. "Come and see me soon. I'll look you up the first evening I have free."

"I should think that Miss Alden would hate herself," remarked Elfreda scornfully, as she marched along beside Grace. "She hates you, that's sure enough."

"Nonsense, why should Miss Alden hate me? You are letting your imagination run away with you, Elfreda," laughed Grace.

"Don't you believe it," declared Elfreda doggedly. "She doesn't like you, because Mabel likes you, and she likes Mabel. Some one told me the other day that she can't bear to have Mabel look cross-eyed at any other girl here. She claims that it's because she loves her so much, but I think it's because she wants to have the most popular girl at Overton for her friend," finished the stout girl shrewdly.

"What shall we do this afternoon?" called Miriam Nesbit over her shoulder.

“Go on boosting our candidate,” laughed Anne. “Let us go for a walk after dinner. We will call on Ruth Denton. Then we’ll take her with us to Morton House. That will be a nice way for her to meet the Morton House girls. While we are there we can find out how the land lies. Then we will take Ruth home with us for supper and the rest of the evening, if she doesn’t have to study.”

At the dinner table that day Grace again introduced the subject of the class election and was pleased to note that her suggestion regarding Gertrude Wells as the best possible choice for class president had borne fruit. The two sophomores at the table who had been through two class elections, having just elected their president, smiled tolerantly at the excitement exhibited by the “babies,” and advised them not to elect in haste and repent at leisure.

Page 46

"Why don't you children find out something about what the rest of the class think before you rush into electing Miss Wells, just to please two or three girls?" asked Virginia Gaines, the sophomore who had assiduously cultivated the acquaintance of Elfreda—then dropped her at the first sign of trouble. "We sophomores wouldn't allow ourselves to be influenced by cliques. We consider the good of the class of more importance than the good of any individual member."

She smiled disagreeably at Grace, who looked at her steadily, then said, "Was your remark intended for me and my friends, Miss Gaines?"

"Not necessarily," flung back the sophomore, "unless you feel that it applies to you and to them."

"No, I don't believe it does," declared Grace with a quiet smile. "In fact, I quite agree with you in saying that the good of the class should always come first. That is why we are all anxious to nominate Miss Wells for president of 19——."

A dull flush rose to Virginia Gaines's sallow face. She was not quick-witted and could think of no reply. The other freshmen at the table were taking no pains to disguise their glee at Grace's retort. Virginia's sarcastic comment had proved a boomerang and she had gained nothing by launching it. She hurried through with her dessert and left the table without another word, casting a half malignant look at Grace as she went.

"Virginia's mad,
And I am glad,"

sang a freshman softly as the door banged.

"Please, don't," said Grace soberly. "I'm sorry she's angry, but I couldn't help it. I seem always fated to arouse sophomore ire."

"I wouldn't mind a little thing like that," comforted Elfreda. "I'd rather be the enemy than the friend of some girls."

"But I don't want to be the enemy of any girl," declared Grace, looking almost appealingly about the table.

"Of course you don't," soothed Emma Dean, a tall, near-sighted girl at the end of the table, who had the reputation of making brilliant recitations. "You couldn't antagonize the rest of us if you tried. That is, unless you deliberately broke my glasses."

A shout of laughter went up from the table. Virginia Gaines, who had lingered in the hall, heard it, and her face darkened. In spite of Grace's declaration for peace she had made an enemy.



CHAPTER XIII

GRACE TURNS ELECTIONEER

Directly after dinner that afternoon, the four girls, looking very smart in their new fall suits and hats, set out for Ruth's. They found her seated at her little table eating a very humble dinner of her own cooking. "I'm sorry I can't offer you anything to eat. I have 'licked the platter clean,' you see. But won't you have some tea? I think I have cups enough to go round, only I'm afraid I haven't enough saucers."

"Thank you," began Elfreda, "but—" then a warning pinch from Miriam caused her to eye the latter reproachfully and subside.

Page 47

"We'd love to have tea with you," smiled Miriam. "Wouldn't we, girls?"

Elfreda, who had divined the reason for the pinch, said "yes" with the others, and Ruth bustled about with pink cheeks and a delicious air of importance. She took down from the cupboard shelf a box of Nabiscos that she had been treasuring for some such occasion as the present, placing them on a little hand-painted plate, the only piece of china she possessed. When the tea was made the guests emptied the little tea-pot and ate all of the Nabiscos, to the intense satisfaction of their hostess, to whom entertaining was a new and delightful pastime.

"Now, you must put on your wraps and go with us," commanded Grace, setting her cup on the table. "We are going to Morton House to make our party call. The future president of 19—— lives there. That is, we think she is the future president and we hope to make others think so, too."

Ruth obediently went to the closet where her plain little hat and shabby, old-style coat hung. She looked hesitatingly from the smartly tailored suits of her guests to her own well-worn coat, then with a proud little lifting of her head, she took it down and began putting it on.

During their walk to Morton House the girls met several freshmen they knew, and these were faithfully interviewed as to their preference in the matter of 19——'s president. To Grace's delight none of them had made any choice in regard to candidates, so her glowing remarks as to Gertrude Wells's ability to make a good president fell on fertile soil. Fortune favored them, for when they reached Morton House they found Miss Wells out and two-thirds of the girls downstairs in the living room listening to the new songs that the curly-haired little girl at the piano had received from New York the day before. She was in the middle of one when the girls entered the room. Grace held up a warning finger and pointed to the piano.

The song ended several notes short and the little girl turned her head toward her audience, saying, "I knew some one came in."

"Won't you sing for us?" asked Anne, who loved music. The little girl's voice reminded her of Nora O'Malley's, and Nora's singing had always been a source of delight to Anne.

"Not now," smiled the singer. "I wish to talk, but I'll sing for you later."

"We came over this afternoon," said Grace to the girl sitting next to her, "to find out who Morton House wants for president. We would like to have Miss Wells——"

Grace was interrupted by a little cry of delight. The girl sprang to her feet and cried, "Hear! hear!" Then she took Grace by the shoulders and laughingly commanded, "Arise, occupy the center of the room and tell the girls what you have just told me."

Before she knew it Grace was standing in the middle of the room, earnestly advocating Gertrude Wells's cause, while the Morton House girls were making as much demonstration as was considered decorous on Sunday. Grace concluded with, "I'm quite sure that every girl at Morton House will vote for Miss Wells and every freshman at Wayne Hall, too. Before class meeting next Friday I hope to be able to convince the majority of 19—— that they will make no mistake in voting for Miss Wells."

Page 48

Grace sat down amid subdued applause, and every one began talking to her neighbor about the coming election. Ruth Denton listened to the gay chatter with shining eyes. She had forgotten all about her shabby suit. Presently the curly-haired little girl came over and sat down beside her, asking her if she liked college. Ruth looked admiringly at the little girl, whose dainty gown, silk stockings and smart pumps bespoke luxury, and answered earnestly that she liked it better every day. "You must come and see me," said the curly-haired little girl, whose name was Arline Thayer. "We recite Livy in the same section, so we have something in common to grumble about. Isn't the lesson for to-morrow terrific, though?"

"I haven't looked at it to-day," confessed Ruth happily. "I study hard on Sunday as a rule, but to-day is the first time, you see——" Ruth hesitated.

"I see," said Arline kindly. "Hereafter you mustn't study all day on Sunday. You must come and take dinner with me next Sunday and stay all afternoon. Promise, now, that you'll come."

"Oh, thank you. I'd love to come," stammered Ruth. She could scarcely believe that this dainty little girl who wore such pretty clothes had actually invited her to dinner at Morton House.

"Did you have a good time, Ruth?" asked Miriam, as they started for home late that afternoon.

"Don't ask her," interposed Anne mischievously. "She forsook me and hob-nobbed openly all afternoon with that curly-haired girl, Miss Thayer. I am terribly jealous, and there is a deadly gleam in my eye."

"Please, don't think, Anne——" began Ruth nervously, looking distressed.

"I am past thinking," retorted Anne melodramatically. "The time for action has come. I shall challenge my rival to a duel the first time I see her. We will fight with——"

"Brooms," grinned Elfreda. "I once fought a duel down in our orchard with my cousin Dick. Brooms were the chosen weapons. We certainly did great execution with them. They were new ones and the brushy part kept getting in our way until we happened to think of cutting it off and fighting with the handles. After that things went more scientifically, until Dick hit me on the nose by mistake. I wailed and shrieked and had the nose bleed, and Ma whipped Dick and sent him home. That was about the only duel I ever fought," concluded the stout girl reflectively, "but if there's the slightest possibility of either of you choosing brooms for weapons, I'll give you the benefit of my experience by training you for the fray."

"Shall I take her at her word, Ruth?" laughed Anne.

“No, I’m not worth all that trouble,” returned Ruth half shyly.

“We won’t have time to escort you home, Ruth,” remarked Grace, looking at her watch.

“We must leave you at this corner. Be a good child and don’t sit up all night to study. Come over Tuesday evening to dinner, and we’ll all study together.”

Page 49

"Thank you, I will if I don't have too much mending on hand," replied Ruth. "Good-bye. I can't begin to tell you how much I've enjoyed being with you."

"Don't try," advised Elfreda laconically. "We've had just as much fun as you have."

Miriam and Grace exchanged glances. Elfreda was making rapid strides along the road to fellowship.

"I like that girl," she announced as Ruth disappeared around the corner. "She has lots of pluck. When we asked her to go out with us to-day she looked at her old coat and hat, then at us. I could see that she was ashamed of them. But she wasn't ashamed for more than five seconds. She straightened up and looked as proud as a princess. I could see——"

"A great deal more than we did," finished Miriam. "I believe you have eyes in the back of your head, Elfreda."

"I don't miss much," agreed Elfreda modestly. "I saw you and Grace look at each other when I said we'd had just as much fun as Ruth," she added slyly. "I know what you were both thinking, too. You were thinking that I wasn't so selfish as when I came here. You needn't color so because I caught you. I am selfish, but I'm beginning to find out, just the same, that there are other people in the world besides myself."

CHAPTER XIV

AN INVITATION AND A MISUNDERSTANDING

The class elections went off with a snap. Grace nominated Gertrude Wells for president. There were two other nominations, and after the three young women had gone through the ordeal of inspection before the class, the votes were cast. Gertrude Wells was elected president by an overwhelming majority, and the nomination and election of the other class officers quickly followed. The next night Grace and Miriam gave a dinner in honor of her election at Vinton's, to which twelve girls were invited, and for a week the new president was feted and lionized until she laughingly declared that a return to the simple life was her only means of re-establishing her lost reputation for study and avoiding impending warnings.

The class of 19—— soon became used to being a regularly organized body and held its class meetings with as much pride as though it were the most important organization in college. Thanksgiving plans now occupied the foreground, and as the vacation was too short even to think about going home, the girls began to make plans to spend their brief holiday as advantageously as possible at or at least very near Overton.

“There’s a football game over at Willston, on Thanksgiving Day,” remarked Grace, looking up from the paper on which she was jotting down possible amusements for vacation. Miriam had run into Grace’s room for a brief chat before dinner. “We don’t know any Willston men, though. I think football is ever so much more interesting when one knows the players. If we were nearer the boys we might attend a fraternity dance once in a while.”

Page 50

"David says in his last letter that he is waiting impatiently for the holidays. Just think, Grace, won't that be splendid to be back in dear old Oakdale again?"

"It seems years since I kissed Mother and Father good-bye," said Grace, rather wistfully. "How I'd like to be at home for Thanksgiving."

"Don't think about it," advised Miriam. "I was as blue as indigo last night. Let's keep our minds strictly on what we're going to do with our holiday. What have you put down?"

"The football game first. Then I have tickets for a play that the Morton House girls intend to give. We might go to Vinton's for supper on Thanksgiving night. If we have a Thanksgiving dinner here that day it's safe to say supper won't amount to much. I think _____"

Grace did not finish with what she was saying. A quick step sounded down the hall and an instant later Anne ran into the room waving an open letter in her hand. "Girls, girls!" she cried, "you never can guess!"

"What is it? Tell us at once," commanded Grace, springing from her chair. "You've received good news from some one we know."

"Yes," replied Anne happily. "My letter is from Miss Southard. She wishes us to spend Thanksgiving with her and her brother in New York City. Isn't that glorious, and do you think we'll be allowed to go?"

"Hurrah!" cried Grace. "Since we can't go home, it's the very nicest sort of plan. I think we'll be allowed to go. We haven't any conditions to work off, and I haven't planned to do any extra studying either. Thank goodness, my allowance had an extra ten dollars attached to it this month. Mother wrote that she thought I might need the money, and I do. I couldn't possibly have stretched my regular allowance over this trip."

"I have money enough, I think," said Miriam. "I am a thrifty soul. I saved ten dollars out of my last month's allowance. It was really extra money that I had asked Mother for. I intended to buy a sweater and then changed my mind."

"The expenses of my trip will have to come out of my college money," confessed Anne, a trifle soberly, "but I'd be willing to spend twice that much to see the Southards. Mr. Southard is playing 'Hamlet' and so we shall have the opportunity of seeing him in what the critics consider his greatest part."

"Remember, we haven't asked permission to go, yet," remarked Grace.

"The registrar couldn't be so cruel as to refuse us," said Miriam cheerfully. "Let's besiege her fortress in a body."

“When shall we make our plea?”

“To-morrow morning after chapel,” suggested Anne. “Then we’ll have more time to plan our trip.”

The registrar’s office was duly besieged the next morning, as agreed, and the three girls hurried off to their classes with beaming faces. When they returned to Wayne Hall after recitations that afternoon it was to find Elfreda hanging over the railing in the upstairs hall, an unusually solemn expression on her face.

Page 51

"Are you going?" she called down anxiously. "Yes," nodded Grace. "At three o'clock Wednesday afternoon."

Elfreda gave a smothered exclamation that sounded like, "What a shame," and disappeared into her room, slamming the door.

"I'm coming into your room for a while," said Miriam. "Elfreda will open the door before long."

"Yes, do," returned Grace hospitably. "Is she angry because you are going away over Thanksgiving?"

"No, not angry, but awfully disappointed. She almost cried last night when I told her about it. I suspect she is crying now. She's like an overgrown child at times."

"I'm sorry we can't take her with us," deplored Grace. "Does she know where we are going?"

"Yes," returned Miriam. "She was practically thunderstruck when she learned we were to visit the Southards. The queer part of it is this. She saw Mr. Southard and Anne in 'As You Like It' last year. She thinks Mr. Southard the greatest actor she ever saw, and she even spoke of Anne's cleverness as Rosalind; she doesn't know it was Anne who played the part."

"Anne doesn't wish her or any one else here to know it," cautioned Grace. "Do you suppose any other girl here saw Anne as Rosalind?"

"Goodness knows," replied Miriam, with a shrug. "There's an old saying that 'murder will out.' If any one here did see her, sooner or later she'll be identified and lionized."

"That's just why I don't wish the girls here to know," protested Anne, who had been listening to the conversation of her friends, a slight frown puckering her smooth forehead. "I don't care to be patronized and petted, but secretly held at arms' length because I am a professional player. If the girls find out that I played Rosalind in Mr. Southard's company I'll never hear the last of it." In her anxiety Anne's voice rose above its customary low key. In fact, all three had been talking rather loudly, and the entire conversation had been carried straight to the ears of the girl who stood outside the almost closed door. Elfreda had come across the hall to hear the details of the proposed visit, but had remained outside the door transfixed at what she heard. Then she found her voice.

"So that's your idea of true friendship, is it?" demanded an angry, choking voice that caused the surprised young women to start and look toward the door. Elfreda stepped into the room, her face flushed with anger, her blue eyes fairly snapping. "You make a great fuss over me when there's nothing going on, but none of you would invite me to

go with you to New York, when you know I'm crazy to go. And that's not enough, you can't get along without talking about me. I heard every word Anne said. I know now that it was she who played Rosalind in 'As You Like It' last winter, because I saw her with my own eyes. If you girls had been as honorable as you pretend to be you'd have told me about it and I never would have said a word. But, no,

Page 52

Anne was afraid to tell, for fear she'd 'never hear the last of it,'" sneered Elfreda, mimicking Anne. "She's right, too. She never will. I'll not stop until I tell every girl at Overton the whole story. When you come back," she went on, turning to Miriam, "you'll find that I've moved. I thought you were nice and I tried to be like you, but now I don't care to live in the same house with you, and I don't intend ever to notice any of you again. With that she rushed across the hall, slammed the door, and turned the key.

"Locked out," said Miriam grimly. "I hope she'll let me in before the dinner bell rings. I'd like to change this grimy blouse for a clean one. I'll try to reason with her, once she opens the door."

"Shall we go in, too, and try to explain matters?" asked Anne. "I didn't say that she would tell the girls about my stage work. Surely, she understands, too, that we are not at liberty to invite her to go with us. I'll tell you what I will do. I'll telegraph the Southards and ask permission to invite her. They will be perfectly willing for us to bring her."

"That might be a good plan," reflected Grace. "Don't waste another minute, Anne, but telegraph Miss Southard at once."

"Yes, go ahead," counseled Miriam, "and while you're gone I'll try to pacify Elfreda."

But all Miriam's efforts to restore peace failed. When a little later she knocked gently on the door, Elfreda unlocked it, but received her roommate's friendly overtures in sulky silence. After dinner, for the first time since the sophomore reception, she spent the evening in Virginia Gaines's room and that night the two girls prepared for sleep without exchanging a word.

Meanwhile Anne telegraphed, "May we bring friend? Will explain later. Anne," and was anxiously awaiting a reply. It came the next morning while they were at breakfast and read: "Your friends always welcome. Telegraph train you will arrive. Mary Southard." Anne passed the telegram to Grace, who sat next to her. After one quick glance at it Grace passed it to Miriam. Elfreda, who sat directly opposite her, watched the passing of the telegram with compressed lips. Miriam, raising her eyes from the yellow slip, found those of her angry roommate fixed on her in mingled curiosity and disdain. Ignoring the look she said quietly, "I should like to see you for a moment after breakfast, Elfreda. I have something to tell you."

The stout girl's eyes narrowed. She glanced about the table and saw Virginia Gaines watching her with a disagreeable smile. The sophomore raised her eyebrows and shrugged her shoulders as though to say, "So, you are going to allow her to order you about." Elfreda's face grew dark with angry purpose. She leaned well forward across

the table and said in a tone of suppressed fury: "Kindly keep your remarks to yourself. I don't care to hear them."

"Very well," replied Miriam coldly, although her eyes flashed and the temper that had been all but uncontrollable in days gone by threatened to burst forth in all its old fury. Several girls smiled, and Virginia Gaines laughed aloud.

Page 53

"A new declaration of independence has evidently been signed," she jeered. "Too bad, isn't it, Miss Harlowe? You'll have to begin all over again on some one else."

"I am not likely to trouble you, at any rate, Miss Gaines," returned Grace pointedly.

This time the laugh was at Virginia's expense. A dull flush overspread her plain face. Her angry eyes met Grace's steady gray ones, then fell before the honest contempt she read there. During that brief instant she saw herself through Grace's eyes and the sharp retort that rose to her lips remained unuttered.

In the next instant Grace was sorry for her rude retort. It would have been far better to remain silent, she reflected. By answering she had shown Virginia that the latter's taunt had annoyed her.

"I wish I hadn't answered Miss Gaines," she confided to Miriam as they were leaving the dining room. "It doesn't add to one's freshman dignity to quarrel."

"I am glad you did," returned Miriam. "It was a well-merited snub, and she deserved it."

CHAPTER XV

GREETING OLD FRIENDS

To spend their brief holiday with the Southards was the next best thing to going home, in the opinion of the Oakdale girls. Mr. Southard met them at the station with his automobile, and a twenty minutes' drive brought them to the Southard home. Miss Southard met them at the door with welcoming arms. She was particularly delighted to see Anne, for the few weeks Anne had spent in their house had endeared her to the Southards and made them wish her their "little sister" in reality rather than by fond adoption.

"What shall we do after dinner to-night?" asked Miss Southard, as she showed her guests to their rooms after the first affectionate greetings had been exchanged.

"Everett, as you know, is appearing as Hamlet, and wishes you to see him in the part. However, he has engaged a box for us for to-morrow night. To-night we will go to some other theatre if you wish."

"To tell you the truth," replied Anne, slipping her hand into that of the older woman, "we'd rather spend the evening quietly with you. That is, unless you care particularly about our going out."

Miss Southard's face revealed her pleasure at this announcement. "Would you really?" she asked. "I should like to have you girls to myself rather than go to the theatre, but I supposed you would prefer seeing a successful play to staying at home with me."

“Nothing could drag us from the house after that confession,” laughed Grace. “For my part I think it would be much nicer to stay at home. We have so much to tell you.”

Dinner was a merry meal. Mr. Southard, who in the meantime had come in from the theatre, became so absorbed in the conversation of his young guests that both he and his sister forgot the time. The entrance into the dining room of James, his valet, with his hat and coat, and the warning words, “Ten minutes past seven, sir,” caused him to spring from his chair, glance at his watch with a rueful smile, and hurry out to where his car stood waiting for him.

Page 54

"It's nice to be an idol of the public, but it's hard on the idol just the same," sighed Grace, as the door closed after him. "Shall we see him again to-night?"

"You may stay up and wait for him if you wish," returned Miss Southard, "but it will be after midnight. 'Hamlet' is a long play."

"I saw Mr. Southard in 'Hamlet' long before I knew him," remarked Anne. "My father and I were in New York rehearsing the play in which I afterwards refused to work. The manager of our company was a friend of Mr. Southard. One night he asked me if I would like to see the greatest actor in America play 'Hamlet.' I said that Everett Southard was the only man I ever wished to see in the role. I shall never forget how I felt when he handed me a slip of paper. It was in Mr. Southard's handwriting and called for two seats at the theatre where he was playing. He said he had asked Mr. Southard for the passes purposely for me, because," Anne flushed slightly, "he insisted that in me lay the making of a great artist, and that I ought to see nothing but the great plays, enacted by great players."

"How interesting!" exclaimed Grace. "You never told us anything about your stage days before. What did you think after you saw 'Hamlet'?"

"I went about in a dream for days afterward," confessed Anne. "Then, I began to hate the play we were rehearsing, and finally ended by refusing to stay in the company. Mother was with my sister in Oakdale, so I went to them. I felt that there was no chance for me to ever become great. I had no faith in my own ability, and I was determined not to waste my life as a second or third rate actor. So I gave up the stage and decided to try to get an education, then teach. You know the rest of my story. Now comes the hardest part. After giving up all idea of the stage, the door that I thought was barred has been opened to me. The unbelievable has come to pass, and I have in a measure achieved what once seemed unattainable. Do you think that I ought to bury my one talent when my college days are over and become a teacher, or do you believe that I should put it to good use by becoming an exponent of the highest dramatic art?"

Anne paused, looking almost melancholy in her earnestness.

"My dear child," said Miss Southard gravely. "You are straining your mental eyes with trying to look into the future. Wait until graduation day comes. By that time you will know what is best for you to do. As far as your work in the theatre is concerned, I consider that it is far more to your credit to use the talent God has given you to help yourself through college, than to wear yourself out doing tutoring or servants' work. There is no stigma attached to my brother's art, why should there be to yours?"

"Good for you, Miss Southard," cheered Grace. "I'll tell you a secret. Anne thinks just as you do, only she won't say so."

“While you are here, Anne, Everett wishes you to meet Mr. Forest, the manager of the stock company he wrote you about,” continued Miss Southard.

Page 55

"He is a playwright, producer and manager all in one, isn't he?" asked Miriam. "I have seen ever so many pictures of him, and read a great deal about him. They say he is always on the lookout for material for stars."

"Yes," returned Miss Southard. "He was in Europe during Anne's engagement here last winter. Nevertheless, he heard of her and asked Everett a great many questions about her. I think he will offer her an engagement for next summer with a certain stock company which he controls."

"How can I ever repay you and Mr. Southard for all you have done for me?" said Anne earnestly.

"By accepting the engagement," laughed Grace.

"Grace is right," agreed Miss Southard. "Everett and I are trying to help Anne in the way we think best."

"Then I will be pleasing myself, too," confessed Anne. "For I love my dramatic work as well as I do that of the college. Now, let us talk about Oakdale and all our friends. We have so many things to tell you."

It was after eleven o'clock when the girls retired. They had decided not to stay up until Mr. Southard's return. Once in their rooms they found themselves too sleepy for conversation and five minutes after their lights were out they were fast asleep.

They were up in good season the next morning, as it had been agreed that they should be present at the morning service in the church the Southards attended. Thanksgiving dinner was to be served at exactly half past twelve o'clock, instead of at night, for Mr. Southard had a matinee as well as an evening performance to give and never left the theatre for dinner during this short intermission.

In church that morning as she sat listening to the beautiful service, Grace felt that she had everything for which to be thankful. In her heart she said an earnest little prayer for all those unfortunates to whom life had grudged even bread. She resolved to be more kind and helpful during the coming year, and prayed that she might see the right clearly and have the courage always to choose it.

"I felt as though I wanted to be superlatively good all the rest of my life," confessed Miriam on the way home. "That minister preached as though he loved the whole world and wished it to be happy."

"He does. He is a very fine man," said Miss Southard, "and does splendid work among the very poor people. It will perhaps surprise you to know that he was at one time an actor of great promise in Mr. Southard's company. Then he received the conviction that his duty lay in entering the ministry and he left the stage, entered a theological institute

and after receiving his degree came back to New York as the pastor of a small church on the East Side. Everett and I were among his most faithful parishioners. Then later on he received an appointment to the church we just left, and has been there ever since."

"That will be an interesting story to tell the girls when we go back to college," said Grace thoughtfully. "He is a wonderful man, he made me feel as though it paid to do one's best."

Page 56

"That is the reason he has been so successful in his work, I suppose," remarked Anne. "He makes other people feel that it pays to be good, too."

From the subject of the actor-minister the conversation drifted to Overton. Miss Southard listened interestedly to Grace's vivid description of the college, the various halls and even the faculty.

"Then you are satisfied with your choice? You never wish that you had entered Vassar or Smith or any other college?"

"Yes, I am satisfied," declared Grace, while Miriam and Anne echoed her reply, but Grace might have truthfully added that there were times when even the glorious privilege of being an Overton freshman had its drawbacks.

CHAPTER XVI

THANKSGIVING WITH THE SOUTHARDS

Thanksgiving dinner was served at exactly half-past twelve o'clock, and eaten with much merriment and good cheer. At half-past one Mr. Southard was obliged to leave his sister and guests, and at two o'clock they were getting into their wraps, preparatory to accompanying Miss Southard to another theatre to see one of the most successful plays of the season. That night they saw the actor in "Hamlet," and his remarkable portrayal of the ill-fated Prince of Denmark was something long to be remembered by the three girls as well as by the rest of the enthusiastic assemblage that witnessed it.

"I shall never forget the awful look in his poor eyes," said Grace solemnly. Then she joined in the insistent applause that Everett Southard's art had evoked. Presently the actor appeared and bowed his appreciation of the tribute. Then he made his exit nor could he be induced to appear again.

Anne sat as though turned to stone. She could not find words to express the emotions that had thrilled her during Mr. Southard's marvelous portrayal of the role. His own personality was completely submerged in that of the melancholy ghost-ridden youth, who, dedicating his life to the purpose of avenging his father's murder, welcomed death with open arms when his purpose had been accomplished. She had seen a great play and a great actor. The first time she saw "Hamlet" she left the theatre heartsick and discouraged. To-night she was leaving it alert and triumphant.

"Anne has been touched by the finger of Genius," smiled Miss Southard, as she marshaled her charges to their automobile.

"How did you know?" asked Anne, but in spite of her smiling lips her brown eyes were full of tears.

“My dear, living with Everett has taught me the signs,” said his sister simply.

“I should like to play Ophelia to Mr. Southard's Hamlet,” said Anne dreamily.

“Perhaps you will have the chance to do so some day. Everett thinks you would be a more convincing Ophelia than the young woman you saw in the part to-night,” encouraged Miss Southard.

Anne looked so delighted at those words that Miriam and Grace exchanged swift glances. It was evident that the genuine love of her profession lay deep within the soul of their friend.

Page 57

"We will go for a short drive, then come back for Everett," planned Miss Southard. "He has promised to hurry to-night—then we will have a nice little supper at home." Their hostess and her brother had agreed that there should be no after-the-theatre suppers at any of the so-called fashionable restaurants for their young guests. "I am sure their mothers would not approve of it," Miss Southard had said, "and I feel that I am responsible for them every moment they are here."

The party at home was an informal affair in which there were many cooks, but no broth spoiled. To see Mr. Southard earnestly engaged in making a Welsh rarebit, an accomplishment in which he claimed to be highly proficient, one would never have suspected him of being able to thrill vast audiences by his slightest word or gesture.

"I can't believe that only two hours ago you were 'Hamlet,'" laughed Grace. "You look anything but tragic now."

"He looked every bit as tragic just a moment ago. I saw a distinct Hamlet-like expression creep into his face," stated Miriam boldly.

"You have sharp eyes," smiled Mr. Southard. "I happened to remember that I had forgotten what goes into this rarebit next. I could feel myself growing cold with despair. Then the inspiration came and now it will be ready in two minutes."

The rarebit was voted a success. After decorating the actor with a bit of blue ribbon on which Miriam painstakingly printed "first premium" with a lead pencil, he was escorted to the head of the table and congratulated roundly upon being able not only to act but to cook.

The next morning every one confessed to being a trifle sleepy, but appeared at breakfast at the usual time. After breakfast Mr. Southard carried Anne off to meet Mr. Forest, while Miss Southard, Miriam and Grace decided to go for a drive through Central Park. It was a clear, cold, sparkling day with just enough snow to make it seem like real Thanksgiving weather.

"Too bad Anne can't be with us," said Grace regretfully.

"Everett will take her for a drive before bringing her home," replied Miss Southard.

Shortly after their return to the house Mr. Southard and Anne returned from their drive. Anne's eyes were sparkling and her cheeks rosy as she ran up the steps.

"Anne must have heard good news!" exclaimed Grace, running from her post at one of the drawing room windows into the hall, Miriam at her heels.

"The deed is done, girls," laughed Anne. "Behold in me the future star of the Forest Stock Company. It doesn't sound much like Rosalind, does it? and it means awfully

hard work, but I'll earn enough money next summer to almost finish paying my way through college."

"Hurrah!" cried Grace. "We won't allow you to become lonesome. We will come and visit you during vacation."

"That ought to reconcile me to having to work all summer," smiled Anne. "I shall be selfish and manage to have some of you girls with me all the time."

Page 58

"How do you like Mr. Forest?" asked Miriam.

"Ever so much," returned Anne. "Like most successful men, he is quiet and unassuming. Mr. Southard and he did almost all the talking. I spoke when I was spoken to and did as I was bid."

"Good little Anne," jeered Miriam. "As a reward of merit we will take you shopping this afternoon."

"How would you like to go to the opera to-night?" asked Mr. Southard. "'Madame Butterfly' is to be sung."

"Better than anything else, now that I've seen 'Hamlet'!" exclaimed Grace, with shining eyes. Miriam and Anne both expressed an eager desire to hear Puccini's exquisite opera, and Miss Southard called two of her friends on the telephone, inviting them to join the box party. The same evening gowns had to do duty for the opera as well as for "Hamlet," but this did not detract one whit from their pleasant anticipations. "The people who saw us at the theatre the other night won't see us at the opera," argued Grace. The three girls were in Grace's room holding a consultation on the subject of what to wear.

"That is if they saw us at all," laughed Miriam. "Elfreda says Oakdale isn't down on the map, you know."

"That reminds me, what excuse did you make to Miss Southard about Elfreda not coming with us, Anne?" asked Grace.

"I merely said she had changed her mind about coming."

"Did you mention that she changed it violently?" slyly put in Miriam.

"I did not," was the smiling assertion. "I don't like to think about it, let alone mention it."

"Do you suppose she'll improve the opportunity and tell Anne's private affairs all over college?" questioned Miriam.

"I don't know," said Grace briefly. "Let us put her out of our minds for now. It won't do any good to worry about what she may or may not do. When we go back to Overton we shall know."

That night the girls listened to the wonderful voice of the prima donna whose name has become synonymous with that of "Chu Chu San," the little Japanese maid. Anne wondered as she drank in the music whether this beautiful young prima donna had ever had any scruples about appearing before the public. Miriam was thinking that David would be bitterly disappointed when he knew that Anne was going back to the stage

during vacation. While, though she would not have confessed it for worlds, the throbbing undercurrent of heart break that ran through the music was filling Grace with unmistakable homesickness. She wanted her mother and she wanted her badly. What would she not give to feel her mother's dear arms around her. When the curtain shut out the still form of the Japanese girl and the prima donna received her usual ovation, the tears that stood in Grace's eyes were not alone a tribute to the singer and the tragic death of Chu Chu San.

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Page 59

On Saturday morning the girls went on another shopping expedition, and in the afternoon attended a recital given by a celebrated pianist. After the recital, instead of going home, Miss Southard surprised her guests by taking them over to the theatre where her brother was playing. Mr. Southard had arranged that they should be admitted to his dressing room. It was the same theatre in which Anne had played the previous winter and several of the stage hands recognized her and bowed respectfully to her as she passed through to the actor's dressing room. They found him still in costume. He never changed to street clothing on matinee days.

"You are respectfully and cordially invited to eat dinner in my dressing room," announced Mr. Southard the moment they were fairly inside the door. "I have ordered dinner for six o'clock."

Eating dinner in a dressing room was an innovation as far as Grace and Miriam were concerned, but to Anne it was nothing new. It had been in the usual order of things during her brief engagement in "As You Like It." As it was after five o'clock when they arrived it seemed only a little while until a waiter appeared with table linen and silver, which Mr. Southard ordered arranged on the table that had been brought in for the occasion. Then the dinner was served and eaten with much gayety and laughter. After dinner, a pleasant hour of conversation followed, and later on the visitors were introduced to the various members of the company. Unlike many professionals who have achieved greatness, Mr. Southard was thoroughly democratic, and displayed none of the snobbish tactics with his company which so often humiliate and embitter the lesser lights of a theatrical company.

At eight o'clock they said good-bye to the actor. Through the courtesy of Mr. Forest they were to witness a play in which a wonderful little girl of fifteen who had taken New York by storm was to appear. After the play they were to pick up Mr. Southard at his theatre and go home together. That night another jolly little supper was held in the Southards' dining room, then three sleepy young women fairly tumbled into their beds, completely tired out by their eventful day.

As the return to Overton was to be made on the noon train, the Southard household rose in good season on Sunday morning. Breakfast was rather a quiet meal, for the shadow of saying good-bye hung over the little house party.

"When shall we see you again, I wonder?" sighed Miss Southard regretfully. "You are going home for Christmas, I suppose."

"Oh, yes," replied Grace quickly. "I wish you might spend it with us, but I suppose it would be out of the question. You must come to Oakdale next summer. We can't entertain you with plays and recitals, but we can get up boating and gypsy parties. The boys will be home, then, and we can arrange to have plenty of good times. Will you come?"

“With pleasure if all is well with us at that time,” promised Mr. Southard, and his sister.

Page 60

When the last good-byes had been said and the girls were comfortably settled for the afternoon's ride that lay before them they were forced to admit that they were just a little tired.

"We have had a perfectly wonderful holiday," asserted Grace, "and the Southards are the most hospitable people in the world, but it seems as though I'd never make up my lost sleep. I shall become a rabid advocate of the half-past ten o'clock rule for the next week at least. I wonder how the boys spent Thanksgiving. Of course they went to the football game. I'll warrant Hippy ate too much."

"I wish Jessica and Nora could have been with us," remarked Anne. "Miss Southard wrote them, too, but they couldn't come. Did you see Nora's telegram?"

"Yes," replied Grace. "It said a letter would follow. I suppose she'll explain in that. Well, it's back to college again for us. I wonder if Elfreda has moved."

"We shall know in due season," returned Miriam grimly. "I have visions of the appearance of my hapless room, if she has vacated it. I expect to see my best beloved belongings scattered to the four corners or else piled in a heap in the middle of the floor."

"Perhaps she has thought it over and come to the conclusion that there are worse roommates than you," suggested Anne hopefully.

The early winter darkness was falling when the three girls hurried up the stairs at Wayne Hall as fast as the weight of their suit cases would permit. Miriam's door was closed. She knocked on it, at first softly, then with more force. Hearing no sound from within she turned the knob, flung open the door and stepped inside. Striking a match, she lighted the gas and looked about her. The room was in perfect order, but no vestige of Elfreda's belongings met her eye. The stout girl had kept her word.

CHAPTER XVII

CHRISTMAS PLANS

The month of December seemed interminably long to Grace Harlowe. Since her visit to the Southards the longing to be at home remained with her. She hung a little calendar at the head of her bed and every night marked off one day with an air of triumph. During the three weeks that followed their trip to New York, Overton had not been the most congenial spot in the world for Grace or Anne. 19—— was a very large class, and considered itself extremely democratic; nevertheless, the story of Anne's theatrical career was bandied about among the freshmen and passed on to the sophomores, until the truth of it was lost in the haze of fiction that surrounded it.

Page 61

A certain percentage of the class who knew Everett Southard's standing in the theatrical world and understood that Anne must have the highest ability to be able to play in his company treated the young girl with the deference due an artist. Then there were a number of young women who, though fond of attending the theatre, looked askance at the clever men and women whose business it was to amuse them. They approved of the theatre, but for them the foot-lights divided the two worlds, and they wished no trespassing of the stage folks on their territory. Quite their opposite were the girls who were desperately stage struck and cherished secret designs on the stage. They were extremely friendly for the sake of plying Anne with questions about her art. At first Anne's position among her classmates was rather difficult to define. After the ball which Elfreda had set in motion had rolled itself to a standstill for want of more gossip to keep it going, Grace saw with secret trepidation that despite the loyalty of a few, Anne had lost caste at Overton.

"History is repeating itself," she remarked gloomily to Miriam, as together the two left the library one afternoon and set out for a short walk before dinner. "Anne told me last night that the girls in her elocution class are very distant since she came back from New York. It's Elfreda's fault, too. How could she deliberately try to make it hard for a girl like Anne?"

A slow flush mounted to Miriam's forehead. She gave Grace a peculiar look.

Grace, interpreting the look, exclaimed contritely: "Forgive me, Miriam. I wasn't thinking of you when I spoke."

"I know it," replied Miriam. "It seems as though I can never do enough for Anne to make up for behaving so contemptibly toward her in high school."

"Anne had forgotten all that, ages ago," comforted Grace. "Don't think about it again."

"I'd like to find an opportunity for a serious talk with Elfreda," returned Miriam. "I think I could bring her to her senses. She keeps strictly away from me. She knows that I wish to talk with her, too. I wonder how she likes rooming with Virginia, or rather how Virginia likes rooming with her."

"She is furious with both Anne and me," declared Grace. "She won't look at either of us. It seems a pity, too. She can be awfully nice when she chooses, and I had begun to feel as though she belonged with us. Here we are on the threshold of 'Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men,' and are at odds with at least five different girls. Miss Alden doesn't like us because Mabel Ashe does. Miss Gaines disapproves of us on general principles. Miss Wicks and Miss Hampton dislike me for defending Elfreda's rights. Elfreda thinks us disloyal and deceitful. And it isn't mid-year yet. We are not what you might call social successes, are we?" she concluded most bitterly.

“Still we have made some staunch friends like Ruth and Mabel and Frances. Then there are the girls at Morton House, and Constance Fuller, and I think the freshmen at Wayne Hall are friendly.”

Page 62

"Perhaps they are," sighed Grace. "I hope I'm not growing pessimistic, but I can't help feeling that the girls in our own class are not as friendly as the upper class girls have been. I supposed it would be just the opposite."

Miriam was on the point of saying that she wished she had been wise enough to refuse to room with Elfreda. Then she bit her lip and remained silent.

"I'm glad I've kept up in all my work," Grace said after they had walked some distance in silence. "Mother will be glad and so will Father. I've done my level best not to disappoint them, at least." She sighed, then said abruptly, "Have you bought all your presents yet?"

"I bought some of them in New York. I shopped as long as my money held out. Almost all the things were for the girls here. I'll have to buy my home presents in Oakdale."

"That is just about my case," remarked Grace. "I sent Eleanor's almost two weeks ago, and Mabel Allison's last week. And I gave Miss Southard hers and her brother's with strict injunctions not to open them until Christmas."

"So did I," laughed Miriam. "I forgot to mention it to you at the time. I hope I haven't left out any one. I shall have to ask Mother for more money, too."

The few intervening days before Christmas seemed all too short to the students who were going home for their Christmas vacations. Interest in study declined rapidly. Those girls who usually made brilliant recitations distinguished themselves by just scraping through, while those who were inclined to totter on the ragged edge unhesitatingly confessed themselves to be unprepared. One had, of course, to decide just what to pack, whether to take the morning or evening train and whether it would be worth while to take one's books home on the chance of studying a little during vacation. These were weighty problems to solve satisfactorily, and coupled with the constant, "Have I forgotten any one's present?" were sufficient to drive all idea of study to the winds.

In spite of the mischief Elfreda had endeavored to make, Grace found that she had calls enough to pay to fill in every unoccupied moment before going home.

Late in the afternoon of the day before leaving Overton, she started out alone to pay two calls, going first to Morton House to say good-bye to Gertrude Wells and Arline Thayer. Gertrude was in and welcomed her with enthusiasm, but, to her disappointment, Arline was out. She spent a pleasant half hour with 19——'s president, then, looking out at the rapidly gathering twilight, said with a start: "I didn't know it was so late. I must go down to Ruth Denton's before dinner."

“Perhaps you’ll meet Arline there,” suggested Gertrude. “She was going there, too. She and Ruth are great friends. She was greatly disappointed to learn that Ruth has been invited somewhere else for Christmas. She had set her heart on taking her home with her. Considering the fact that Arline’s father has so much money, she is an awfully nice little girl. She isn’t in the least snobbish or overbearing.”

Page 63

"I like her immensely," agreed Grace. "Do you know whether Ruth accepted the invitation, Gertrude?" she asked suddenly.

"Arline said she thought Ruth wanted to go with her, but was too loyal to the other girl to even intimate any such thing," replied Gertrude.

Five minutes later the two students had exchanged good-byes and Grace was on her way to Ruth's with Gertrude's words ringing in her ears. Several weeks ago she had invited Ruth to go with her to Oakdale for the holidays. At first Ruth had demurred, then accepted with shy gratitude. The three Oakdale girls had become greatly attached to Ruth, and Anne, in particular, had looked forward to taking her home with them. Grace had purposely forestalled Anne in inviting Ruth, because she had decided in her mind that her facilities for entertaining were greater than Anne's. She had managed so adroitly, however, that Anne had never even dreamed of her real motive in inviting the lonely little girl. Now, there was Arline Thayer's invitation to be considered. Grace suspected that Ruth secretly worshipped dainty little Arline. She would have died rather than admit to the girls who had been so good to her that she could find it in her heart to care more for another Overton girl than for them. "I'm sorry, of course," Grace murmured to herself as she hurried along through the shadows, "but I'm going to make her accept Arline's invitation. She can go home with us at some other time."

She rang the bell at the dingy old house where Ruth lived, was admitted by the tired-faced landlady and ran upstairs two at a time. Ruth's door stood partly open. Grace heard Arline Thayer say regretfully, "You are sure you can't go, Ruth?"

Then she heard Ruth say, very quietly: "I am quite sure I can't. I promised Grace first."

Without waiting to hear more, Grace walked briskly into the room, saying decisively, "Of course she can go, Arline."

"Why, Grace Harlowe, where did you come from?" exclaimed Arline, her blue eyes opening wide with surprise.

"From downstairs," laughed Grace. "Just in time, too, to make Ruth change her mind. Now, Ruth, tell us the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Wouldn't you rather go to New York City with Arline than to Oakdale with us?"

Ruth flushed. "That isn't a fair question," she protested. "It isn't because I care more about going to New York than Oakdale. It is——" she hesitated.

"Because you care more for Arline than for us," finished Grace calmly. "I understand the situation, I think. Your friendship for Arline is growing to be the same as mine for Anne. Naturally, you'd rather be with her than with any one else. Now, Arline, I'll leave her in

your hands. We wouldn't have her go to Oakdale with us if she begged on her knees to do so," concluded Grace.

"Grace Harlowe, you're a dear!" exclaimed Arline, catching Grace's hand in both of her warm little palms. "I just love you. Next to Ruth, I think you are the nicest girl at Overton. Thank you a thousand times for being so nice over Ruth. Now, you simply must go," she announced, turning to Ruth.

Page 64

"I will," answered Ruth happily. "You don't blame me for saying so?" she asked, looking pleadingly at Grace.

"Not after having just given my official consent," retorted Grace. "Your penalty for deserting us is that you must come to see us at Wayne Hall to-morrow. We have rich gifts for you. Now I must go. Are you going my way home?"

"No," answered Arline. "I'm sorry, but Ruth and I are going to cook our own supper. I've been asked to help. We are going to have a regular feast. Won't you stay and help eat it? Ruth doesn't care who I invite," she added saucily.

"Please stay, Grace," begged Ruth.

Grace shook her head. "Not to-night. Invite me some evening after the holidays. Good-bye, Arline." She extended her hand, but Arline put both arms around Grace's neck, kissing her warmly. "I hope I can do something for you some day," she whispered. After the usual good wishes for a Merry Christmas had been exchanged, Grace emerged from the house, filled with that sense of warmth and elation that comes from having made others happy. She smiled to herself as her mother's face rose before her. It was only a matter of hours now until she would see her. She could almost hear her father's voice and feel his hand on her shoulder in the old caressing way. Smiling to herself Grace walked rapidly on toward Wayne Hall, so rapidly, in fact, that she ran squarely against a tall girl, who, coming from the opposite direction, had apparently been traveling at the same rate of speed. The collision occurred directly under the arc light. The tall girl gave a smothered exclamation and would have rushed on, but Grace put forth a detaining hand, saying: "Stop a moment, Elfreda. I wish to say something to you."

"I don't wish to hear anything you have to say," sneered Elfreda. "Take your hand off my arm. You can't fool me twice. I know What a hypocrite you are."

Grace's hand dropped to her side. "I beg pardon," she said formally. "I am sorry you have such a bad opinion of me. I was about to say that Anne, Miriam and I join in wishing you a Merry Christmas."

"You can keep your good wishes," snapped Elfreda. "I don't want them." With that she turned on her heel and walked angrily away from Grace and reconciliation.

CHAPTER XVIII

BASKETBALL RUMORS

After the holidays a great interchanging of visits began at Overton that drove away, for the time being, the terrifying shadows of the all too rapidly approaching mid-year

examinations. Almost every girl had brought back with her some treasure that she insisted her friends must see, or some delicious goody they must taste. It was all very delightful, but extremely demoralizing as far as study was concerned.

Santa Claus had been particularly kind to Anne, Grace and Miriam, as Miriam's muff and scarf of Russian sable, Grace's camera, and Anne's diamond ring (a present from the Southards) testified. Then there were the less expensive but equally valued remembrances in the way of embroidered sofa pillows, center pieces, and collar and cuff sets, every stitch of which had been taken by the patient fingers of their girl friends.

Page 65

Miriam and Grace, while at home, had been given permission to raid the preserve closet and had brought back an assortment of jellies, preserved fruits and pickles, tucking them in every available space their trunks and suit cases contained, regardless of the risk of breaking glass.

The evening after their arrival they had picked out a number of the choicest goodies in their stock and accompanied by Anne had called on Ruth Denton. They found her wrapped in the folds of a blue eiderdown bathrobe, Arline's Christmas present to her. There were slippers to go with it, she declared, proudly thrusting forth a felt-incased foot for their inspection. A most mysterious thing had happened, however. The night before she had gone on her vacation two large boxes had been delivered to her by a messenger. One of them contained a beautiful navy blue cloth suit, the other a dark blue velvet hat. On a plain card were written the words, "'Take the goods the gods provide.' I Wish you a Merry Christmas."

"Have you the card?" Grace asked, after the first exclamations regarding the mysterious boxes had subsided.

Ruth opened the top drawer of her bureau and took out a card. Then going to her wardrobe she displayed the blue suit on its hanger, then took the new hat from the shelf. "Here they are," she said.

The three girls praised the suit and hat so warmly that a flush of pure pleasure in her clothes rose to Ruth's face. Grace, however, examined the inside of the coat and the lining of the hat with the utmost care. Every telltale mark had been removed. Even the boxes themselves were plain. The giver had evidently wished his or her identity to remain a mystery. The writing on the card was not particularly distinctive. There was only one thing of which Grace made mental note. The s's were unfinished and the a's were not closed at the top. This in itself amounted to little, and Grace decided that as far as she was concerned the mystery would have to remain unsolved. So she said nothing about this unimportant discovery, and handed Ruth's treasures back to her without comment.

"I thought Arline might have sent it," declared Ruth, "but she swears solemnly she knows nothing of it, and has given me her word that she had nothing whatever to do with it."

"You'll find out some day if you have patience," declared Miriam. "Sooner or later good deeds like that are sure to come to light."

"I wish I knew," sighed Ruth, "but if I had known, then I couldn't have accepted them, you see."

“Evidently the person who sent them was aware of that,” reflected Anne. “Therefore, it is some one who knows all about Ruth Denton’s pride.”

The flush on Ruth’s face deepened. “I can’t help it,” she said. “I don’t like to feel dependent on any one.”

On the way to Wayne Hall, the mysterious presents formed the main subject for discussion.

“We ought to have Elfreda’s opinion,” laughed Miriam. “She would find a clue. Don’t you remember what she said about Ruth’s pride the first time we took her to call on Ruth?”

Page 66

"Yes," replied Grace absently. Then the full force of Miriam's words dawning on her she looked at her friend in a startled way. "I know who sent Ruth those presents. It was Elfreda herself. I'm sure of it. She knew Ruth to be too proud to accept clothes, so she sent them anonymously. Now I know why those 'a's' and 's's' looked so familiar. That's Elfreda's writing. I know she did it. She just had to be nice in spite of herself," concluded Grace.

"But why do you think it was Elfreda?" persisted Miriam.

"It was what you said that put me on the right track," replied Grace. "I believe she made up her mind that day to send Ruth the suit and hat."

"If she did send them, there is still hope that she will come back to us," said Anne.

It was agreed among the three girls that not even Ruth should be told of their suspicions, and that if any possible opportunity arose to conciliate Elfreda it should be promptly seized.

During the short space of time that elapsed before the dreaded examination week swooped down upon them, the three friends were too busy preparing for the coming ordeal to give much thought to the discovery they had made. Elfreda avoided them so persistently that there seemed small chance of getting within speaking distance. It was a week of painful suspense, broken only by brief outbursts of jubilation when some particularly formidable examination, that everyone had worried over, seemingly to the point of gray hairs, turned out better than had been expected.

In the campus houses wholesale permission to burn midnight oil had been granted. Lights shone until late hours and flushed faces bent earnestly over text books as though trying to absorb their contents verbatim. On Friday, the strain, that had been lessening imperceptibly with each succeeding examination, snapped, and Overton began to think about many things that had no bearing on examinations.

"I'm almost dead!" exclaimed Grace, coming into her room on Friday afternoon and dropping into the Morris chair near the window.

"I'm tired, too," returned Anne, who had come in just ahead of her, and was engaged in putting her freshly laundered clothing in the two drawers of the chiffonier that belonged to her.

"Thank goodness, we have four whole days of rest between terms at any rate," sighed Grace. "I'm going to skate and be out of doors as much as I can. I must make a few calls, too. I'm going to give a dinner at Vinton's, too. I'll invite Mabel, Frances, Gertrude Wells, Arline Thayer, Ruth, of course. That makes five," counted Grace on her fingers. "Oh, yes, Constance Fuller, six, you two girls, and myself. That makes nine. I told

Mother about it when I was at home and she gave me the money for it. I'll have it Tuesday night. The new term begins Wednesday. To-morrow I'll go calling and deliver my invitations in the morning. There's a trial basketball game to-morrow afternoon."

Page 67

"When will there be a real game?" asked Anne. "I haven't heard you mention basketball for ages."

"Christmas and examinations put a damper on it, but now all the girls are anxious to play and we have challenged the sophomores to play against us the second Saturday afternoon in February. I am going to play right guard, and Miriam is to play left forward. A Miss Martin is our center, and two freshmen I don't know very well are to play the left guard and right forward. We have a good team. Miss Martin is a wonder. You can see us practice if you wish, Anne."

"Perhaps I will," returned Anne. "Who is on the sophomore team?"

"I don't know," answered Grace. "I don't have much to say to the sophomores. Most of them appear to dislike me, consequently I shall greatly enjoy vanquishing them at basketball."

At the dinner table that night a discussion concerning Saturday's practice game arose, to which Grace and Miriam listened quietly without taking part.

"I suppose I ought to go to this practice game, to see what the freshmen team can do. I think we can make them look sick and sorry before we are through with them," drawled Virginia Gaines.

Grace and Miriam exchanged lightning glances. This was the first intimation they had received that Virginia intended to play on the sophomore team. Miriam frowned. She was thinking of the time when she had been Grace's enemy on the basketball field and off. The recollection was not pleasant. It was very unfortunate that they had to oppose Virginia. Miriam determined to look out for herself and Grace, too, on the day of the game. Involuntarily her face hardened with resolve. She set her lips firmly, then glancing in the direction of Virginia she saw Elfreda, who sat next to the sophomore at the table, eyeing her intently. There was a disagreeable smile on the stout girl's face as she leaned toward Virginia and made a low-toned remark. Miss Gaines looked toward Miriam, smiled maliciously, and shrugged her shoulders.

"That's a danger signal," decided Miriam. "She does mean mischief. I'll speak to Grace about it as soon as we go upstairs." But before they left the dining room the door bell rang. The maid admitted Gertrude Wells and Arline Thayer, and in the pleasure of seeing them, Miriam's resolve to warn Grace was quite forgotten.

The practice game ended in an overwhelming advantage for Grace's team. The other team behaved good-naturedly over their defeat and challenged the winners to play again the following Saturday. They promptly accepted the challenge, and, when the second practice game was played, again came off victorious.

Page 68

Grace's old basketball ardor had returned threefold and every available moment found her in the gymnasium hard at work. The other members of the teams had imbibed considerable of her enthusiasm. Miss Martin, the center, laughingly said Grace was a human whirlwind and simply made the rest of the team play to keep up with her. Miriam's playing also evoked considerable praise. The first Saturday in February marked the last game with the Number Two team. It turned out to be quite an event and the gallery of the gymnasium was crowded with a mixed representation of classes. Virginia Gaines and Elfreda sat in the first row, and as the play proceeded Virginia watched the skilful tactics of Miriam and Grace with anything but enthusiasm. Elfreda, narrowly watching her companion, read apprehension in Virginia's face, although she made light of the playing of the freshmen team and predicted an easy victory for the sophomores. Scarcely knowing why she did so, Elfreda had doggedly insisted that if the sophomores hoped to beat that freshman team, they would have to play exceptionally well. Whereupon an argument arose regarding the respective merits of the two teams that lasted all the way to Wayne Hall, and ended in the two girls not speaking to each other again that night.

"Did you see Elfreda in the gallery this afternoon?" asked Anne, as she and Grace left the gymnasium and set out for Wayne Hall. Anne had waited in the dressing room until Grace finished dressing.

"I did not see any one," laughed Grace. "I was far too busy. I am surprised to learn that she came to the game."

"She was there, in the third row balcony," replied Anne. "She sat with Virginia Gaines, who looked ferocious enough to bite."

"I wish something would happen to make Elfreda see that we are her friends," sighed Grace.

"She will see, some day," predicted Anne. "Sooner or later she will realize her mistake and come back to us."

CHAPTER XIX

A GAME WORTH SEEING

The second Saturday in February dawned anything but encouragingly. The night before a blizzard had set in, and at one o'clock Saturday afternoon the temperature had dropped almost to zero. The wind howled and shrieked dismally, and to venture out meant to nurse frozen ears as a result of facing the blast. But neither wind nor weather frightened the enthusiastic basketball fans. With knitted and fur caps pulled down over their ears they gallantly braved the storm. Even the majority of the faculty were in the

front seats that had been reserved for them and by two o'clock every available inch of space in the gallery was filled.

Page 69

The sophomore colors of blue and gold mingled with the red and white of the freshmen colors in the decorations that were displayed lavishly about the gymnasium. The faculty, too, wore the colors of their respective favorites, while the president of the college held two immense bouquets, one of red, the other of yellow roses, showing that he at least was impartial. On each side of the gallery a group of girls stood ready to lead their respective classes in the basketball choruses that are sung solely with the object of urging the teams on to deeds of glory. These choruses had been written hurriedly by loyal fans who had more enthusiasm than ability as verse writers, and fitted to popular airs. The fact that they possessed neither rhythm nor style troubled no one. The main idea was to make a great deal of noise in singing them, and nothing else counted.

The freshmen and sophomore substitutes were the first to emerge from their dressing rooms on either side of the gymnasium, dressed in their respective gymnasium suits of black and blue, the sleeves and sailor collars of which were ornamented with their colors. They were greeted with a gratifying burst of song from both sides which lasted until they took their places, eager and alert, ready to make good if the opportunity presented itself. After a brief interval the dressing room doors opened again and the real teams appeared. This time the burst of song became so jubilantly noisy that the president of the college half rose in his seat as though to signal for order, then, apparently changing his mind, settled himself in his chair, smiling broadly. Immediately the song ended the referee's whistle blew and the great game began.

From the moment the ball was put in play it was plain to the spectators that this was to be a game worth seeing. The sophomores, with Virginia Gaines as center, adopted whirlwind tactics from the start and the freshmen did little more than defend themselves during the first half, which came to an end without either side scoring. That the freshmen could hold their own was evident, and when the whistle blew for the second half the freshmen in the gallery applauded their team with renewed vigor.

During the brief intermission Grace and Miriam had clasped hands and vowed to outplay the sophomores in the second half or perish in the attempt. The three other members had thereupon insisted on being included in the vow, and when the five girls trotted to their respective positions at the sound of the referee's whistle, it was with a determination to stoutly contest every inch of the ground. Luck seemed against them, however, for the sophomores scored through the clever playing of Virginia Gaines. The freshmen then set their teeth and resolved to die rather than allow the enemy to score again. Then Miriam secured the ball and dodging and ducking this way and that she passed the ball to another player who made the basket and the score was tied. This put the sophomores not only on the anxious seat, but also on their mettle, and try as they might the freshmen found themselves unable to pile up their score.

Page 70

The end of the second half crept nearer and the score still remained tied. Grace, who was becoming more and more apprehensive as the minutes passed, stood anxiously watching the ball, which was being played perilously near their opponents' goal. Catching the eyes of Miriam, who stood nearest it, Grace made a desperate little upward motion. Miriam understood and redoubled her efforts to secure the ball, which she finally did by springing straight up into the air and intercepting it on its way to the basket. A shout went up from the freshmen which grew to a roar. Miriam had thrown the ball unerringly to Grace, who caught it, and facing quickly toward the freshman goal, balanced herself on her toes preparatory to tossing her prize into the basket.

"She'll never make it," groaned a freshman. But her remark was lost in the clamor.

With one quick, comprehensive glance, Grace measured the distance, then with a long, swift overhand toss she sent the ball curving through the air. It dropped squarely into the basket, bounded up in the air, then dropped gently into place.

[Illustration: Grace Measured the Distance.]

For the next few minutes pandemonium reigned in the gymnasium. The happy freshmen burst into song and drummed on the floor in expression of their glee. The freshmen team had outplayed that of the sophomores. Only once before in the history of the college had such a thing occurred. To Grace Harlowe and Miriam Nesbit was given the principal credit for this latest victory. Grace's goal toss had been a record-breaker. Never had a freshman been known to make such a toss.

Now that the excitement was over, Grace felt suddenly weak in the knees. She started for a seat at the side of the gymnasium, but before she reached it there was a rush from the freshman class. Her classmates lifted her to their shoulders and began parading about the gymnasium floor, singing:

"Nineteen—— is looking sad,
Tra la la, Tra la la,
I wonder what has made her mad,
Tra la la, Tra la la,
Her coaching was in vain,
The freshman team has won again,
Little sophomores, run away,
Come again some other day."

Then there followed a song that brought a shout of laughter from hundreds of throats, and one in which the sophomores did not join:

Backward, turn backward, O ball in your flight,
Why did you drop in the basket so tight?

Sadly the sophomores are rueing the day
They asked the freshmen in their yard to play,
Sophomore banners are hung at half mast,
Sophomore tears they are falling so fast,
Sophomore faces are turned toward the wall,
Sophomore pride has had a hard fall.

Grace had been seized and carried around and around the gymnasium on the shoulders of her exulting classmates, who sang lustily as they marched, then gently deposited her in the dressing room. Miriam also had received that honor. When the two girls left the dressing room twenty minutes later, they were taken charge of by a delegation of admiring freshmen and informed that there would be a dinner given that night at Vinton's in honor of them.

Page 71

An air of deep gloom pervaded the sophomore dressing room, however. Virginia Gaines dressed in gloomy silence. One or two of her team ventured to speak to her. She answered so shortly that they did not trouble her further, but went out talking among themselves as soon as they had changed their gymnasium suits for street clothing. Outside Elfreda waited impatiently. "I thought you were never coming," grumbled the stout girl. Then the unpleasant side of her disposition, which she had tried to eliminate during her brief friendship with the Oakdale girls, came to the surface and she said maliciously: "I thought you said they couldn't play, Virginia. Funny, wasn't it, that you had such a poor idea of their playing? It was the best game I ever saw, but all the star playing was on the freshman side."

Virginia's face grew dark. "Stop trying to be sarcastic," she stormed. "I won't stand it. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you. I'm not deaf," returned Elfreda dryly. "As for standing it, you don't have to. Good-bye." Turning sharply about she set off in the opposite direction, her hands in her pockets, a look of intense disgust on her round face. "That's the end of that," she muttered. "I'll move to-morrow. This time it will have to be out of Wayne Hall, unless——." Then she shook her head almost sadly: "Not there," she added. "She wouldn't have me for a roommate."

CHAPTER XX

GRACE OVERHEARS SOMETHING INTERESTING

After the famous basketball game a marked change was noticeable in the attitude of the freshman class toward the Oakdale girls. Grace and Miriam received numerous invitations to dinners and spreads, in which Anne was frequently included. Then the girls at Wayne Hall gave a play in which Anne enacted the role of heroine, stage manager, prompter, and producer, besides doing all the coaching. After that her star was also in the ascendant and the little slights and coolnesses that had been noticeable after Elfreda's ill-timed gossip had done its work, died a natural death.

The stout girl had lost no time in leaving Virginia. The evening after her quarrel with the sophomore she had moved her belongings into the hall the moment she reached her room, then gone downstairs and demanded another room. As it happened, a freshman whose cousin lived at Morton House had invited her to share her room. She had departed that very afternoon and Mrs. Elwood offered Elfreda the now vacant half of her room. Emma Dean, the tall, near-sighted freshman, occupied the other half. There was a single room in the house of Mrs. Elwood's sister, but Elfreda had refused to consider it. Despite the fact that there were now four young women at Wayne Hall with whom she was not on speaking terms, she could not bring herself to leave the house. In her

inmost heart she knew that it was because she did not wish to leave the three girls she had repudiated, but not for worlds would she have acknowledged this to be the case.

Page 72

Several times she had been on the point of throwing her pride to the winds and apologizing to Grace, Miriam and Anne for her childish behavior. Then she would scoff at her own weakness and go doggedly on. Her new roommate, Emma Dean, was a cheery sort of girl who lived every day as it came and refused to borrow trouble. She never criticized other girls, nor did she gossip, and she was extremely thoughtful of the comfort of her roommate. After several days of dubious speculation the stout girl decided she liked Emma, and Emma decided that Elfreda was rather an agreeable disappointment.

There were two young women, however, who had suddenly appeared to take a great interest in Elfreda. Alberta Wicks and Mary Hampton had met Elfreda in Vinton's late one afternoon, and had made distinctly friendly overtures to her. At any other time she would have passed them by in disdain, but on that particular occasion, feeling gloomy and downcast, she decided to forget her grievance against them. Then, too, she did not know them to be the girls who had sent her the anonymous letter. Grace had never told her the truth of the affair, so she played unsuspectingly into their hands. They had invited her to have ice cream with them, and she had insisted that they be her guests at dinner. After that they had invited her to Stuart Hall to dinner and she had entertained them at Wayne Hall one evening, greatly to the surprise of Grace, who suddenly remembered that, after all, Elfreda was not so much to blame as she did not know the truth. But why should these two girls accept the hospitality of the very girl they had tried to drive away from Overton? It was a puzzle that Grace could not solve. She discussed it with Anne and Miriam but they could throw no light on the mystery.

The coming of the Easter vacation gave the three girls more pleasant matters of which to think. This time Ruth Denton accompanied them to Oakdale as Grace's guest, while Miriam invited Arline Thayer also, as a surprise to Ruth. When Arline serenely joined them at the station the morning of their departure, Ruth could hardly believe the evidence of her own eyes.

The two weeks in Oakdale flew by on wings. With the boys and the other members of the Phi Sigma Tau at home, too, there were more things to do and places to go than could possibly be squeezed into that brief space of time. Arline Thayer, who was a joyous, irrepressible spirit, announced with conviction that Oakdale was even nicer than New York. She and Nora became sworn friends and the joint guardians of Hippy, who declared that he never would have believed there were two such relentless tyrants in the world, if he had not seen them face to face.

Mrs. Gray, who had been in Florida during the Christmas holidays, had returned in time to welcome her adopted children home. She was especially delighted to see Anne and would scarcely allow the quiet little girl out of her sight. She had been greatly disappointed because Anne had refused to accept from her the money for her college education, but secretly exulted in Anne's independence and smiled to herself when she

thought of a certain clause in her will that had amply provided for her adopted daughter's future welfare.

Page 73

Altogether it was a vacation long to be remembered, and the four originals separated with the glad thought that the next time they met it would be months instead of weeks before their little company would again set their faces in opposite directions.

The night after their return to Overton, Grace, after having made a conscientious effort to study, threw down her history in despair. "I know a great deal more about the history of Oakdale than I do about the history of Rome," she sighed.

"I wish I had never heard of trigonometry," returned Anne, shutting her book with a snap. "I can't think of anything except the good time we've had. Home has completely upset my student mind." She rose, laid down her book and walked listlessly toward the window. It had been an unusually warm day for early spring and the night air had that suspicion of dampness in it that betokens rain. "It will rain before morning," she declared. "There isn't a star in sight and the moon has gone behind a cloud."

Grace joined Anne at the window. The two girls stood peering out into the darkness of the spring night. "I feel as though I'd like to go out and walk miles and miles to-night," declared Grace.

"So do I," agreed Anne. Then glancing back at the clock, she remarked, "It's twenty minutes past ten. Too late for us to go now. We can go to-morrow night, can't we?"

Grace nodded. "We'll get our work done early, or, better still, we can go walking early in the evening and study when we come back. I wish you'd remind me that I must call on Mabel Ashe this week. In fact, all three of us ought to go over to Holland House."

The next day, however, Anne remembered regretfully that she had promised to help a troubled freshman through the mazes of an especially trying trigonometry lesson, while Miriam had a theme to write which she had neglected until the last minute, and had to rush through on record time.

"You're a set of irresponsible young things who don't know your own mind from one minute to the next," laughed Grace. "As I can't very well go walking alone, I'll make my call on Mabel."

Directly after dinner she set out for Holland House and Mabel's delighted: "I'm so glad you came, Grace. Where have you been keeping yourself?" sounded very sweet to Grace, who adored Mabel and outside of her own particular chums liked her better than any other girl she knew at home or in college. The two young women were deep in conversation when a rap sounded at the door. Mabel opened it, looked inquiringly at the girl who stood outside and exclaimed contritely: "Oh, Helen, I'm so sorry I forgot all about you. I'll get ready this minute. Come in. Miss Harlowe, this is Miss Burton. Grace, I wonder if you will mind making a call to-night. I promised Helen I'd take her

down to Wellington House and introduce her to a junior friend of mine who plays golf. Helen is a golf fiend.”

Page 74

"So am I," laughed Grace. "I brought my golf bag to Overton, but didn't play much in the fall. I'm going to try it, though, as soon as the ground is in shape."

"How nice!" exclaimed Helen Burton, with a friendly smile that lighted up her rather plain face and brought the dimples to her cheeks. "We can have some nice times together. You had better come with us now."

"Thank you, I shall be pleased to go," replied Grace politely. "I have never been in Wellington House. It is an upper class house, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Mabel. "It is given up entirely to juniors and seniors. It is the oldest house on the campus, and very difficult to get into. Personally, I like Holland House better. I had an opportunity to get into Wellington House last fall, but refused it." Grace noted that Mabel frowned slightly and set her lips as though determined to shut out an unpleasant memory.

To reach Wellington House was merely a matter of crossing one end of the campus. Grace looked about her curiously as they were ushered into the long, old-fashioned hall that extended almost to the back of the house. They entered the parlor at one side of the hall and sat down while Mabel excused herself and ran upstairs after Leona Rowe, the junior she had come to see. She had hardly disappeared before a flaxen head was poked in the door and a surprised voice said: "For goodness sake, Helen Burton, when did you rain down? You are just the one I want to see. What do you think of tomorrow's German? I can't translate it. It's frightfully hard. Come up and help me, dearest."

The ingratiating emphasis she placed on the word "dearest" caused both Grace and Helen to laugh.

"All right, I will for just two minutes. Want to come upstairs, Miss Harlowe?"

Grace smilingly shook her head. "I'll stay here in case Mabel comes back."

"Thank you," returned Helen. "Miss Harlowe, this is Miss Redmond."

The two girls exchanged friendly nods. Then the flaxen-haired girl led the way, followed by Helen Burton, and Grace settled herself in the depths of a big chair to await their return. As she sat idly wondering what the subject of her next theme should be, the sound of voices reached her ears, proceeding from the back parlor that adjoined the room in which Grace sat. Two girls had entered the other room, but the heavy portieres which hung in the dividing arch, hid them from view. The voices, however, Grace recognized with a start as belonging to Beatrice Alden, the disagreeable junior, and Alberta Wicks of the sophomore class.

“I’ll be glad when my sophomore year is over,” grumbled Alberta Wicks. “Mary and I have asked for a room here. I hope we get it. If we do we will be able, at least, to eat our meals without the eternal accompaniment of Miss Harlowe’s and Miss Nesbit’s doings. Ever since that basketball game, Stuart Hall has talked of nothing else.”

Page 75

"Are there many freshmen at Stuart Hall?" asked Beatrice Alden.

"Too many to suit me," was the emphatic answer.

"If you are so down on freshmen in general, how in the world do you manage to endure that dreadful Miss Briggs?"

"J. Elfreda is a joke," replied Alberta. "Nevertheless, she is a very useful joke. In the first place, she has plenty of money to spend, and we see to it that she spends a good share of it on us. Then, too, we can borrow money of her. She is a great convenience. The funny part of it is she doesn't know about that letter we wrote. For once that priggish Miss Harlowe did manage to hold her tongue to some purpose."

"Suppose she does find out?"

"She can't prove that we wrote the note," was the quick retort. "When Miss Harlowe tried to pin us to it that day at Stuart Hall I merely said that a number of sophomores felt justified in sending the note. Of course, she drew her own conclusions, but conclusions are far from proof, you know. She would hardly dare circulate any reports concerning it. We aren't going to bother with J. Elfreda much longer at any rate. It's getting too near warm weather to risk being bored to death. Mary expects a check from home soon, and I've written Mother for some extra money, so we won't need hers. Besides, I don't wish to let our acquaintance lap over into my junior year. She's frightfully ill bred, and I'm going to begin to be more careful about my associates next year."

"What a frightful snob you are, Bert," said Beatrice rather disgustedly.

"Well, you are my first cousin, you know," retorted Alberta significantly. "I never considered you particularly democratic."

"I'm not deceitful, at any rate," reminded Beatrice. "If I dislike a girl I take no pains to conceal it, and I am certainly not a grafter."

"Neither am I, Beatrice Alden, and the fact of your being my cousin doesn't give you the right to insult me. I intended to tell you about a stunt we had planned for Friday night, but since you seem to be so conscientious about Miss Briggs, I shan't tell you anything."

Then a silence fell that was broken the next instant by the violent slam of the front door. Grace rose to her feet, took a step forward, paused irresolutely, then pushing apart the heavy curtains walked into the other room. Beatrice Alden stood unconcernedly running through the leaves of a magazine she had picked up from the table.

"Miss Alden!"

The senior turned quickly, looking inquiringly, then sternly, at Grace. "How long have you been here?" she said abruptly.

"I heard part of the conversation," replied Grace coldly. "When you began talking I recognized your voices, then I heard my name mentioned, and true to the old adage about listeners I heard no good of myself. When I heard Miss Briggs's name spoken I decided that under the circumstances I was justified in listening further, as I intended at any rate to announce my presence and just what I heard as soon as you two had finished speaking. Miss Wicks's sudden departure prevented me from carrying out my intention as far as she was concerned. I shall, however, notify her at the earliest opportunity." Grace paused, looking squarely at the older girl.

Page 76

Beatrice Alden's expression of intense displeasure gave way to one of reluctant admiration with dislike struggling in the background. "You are extremely frank in your statements, Miss Harlowe," she said sarcastically.

"There is no reason why I should not be," returned Grace composedly. "Miss Wicks and Miss Hampton, for reasons best known to themselves, chose to make Miss Briggs the victim of an unwomanly practical joke on the very day of her arrival at Overton. I think you are in possession of the story. Miss Briggs's method of retaliation was unwise, I will admit, but Miss Wicks and Miss Hampton had no right to try to drive her from Overton on account of it. In her distress over a certain anonymous letter she received, Miss Briggs came to me, and I, suspecting the source from which the letter came, tried as best I could to straighten out the tangle, without allowing Miss Briggs to know who was at fault.

"Since then, unfortunately, a misunderstanding has arisen between us. I have now no influence whatever with Miss Briggs, and she has played directly into the hands of the only two enemies she has in college. All along I have been certain that Miss Wicks and Miss Hampton meant mischief. What I have heard to-day confirms it. Miss Alden, you are Miss Wicks's cousin. I heard her say so. As a true Overton girl, will you not use your influence with her in persuading her to abandon whatever plan she and Miss Hampton have made to annoy Miss Briggs?"

Beatrice Alden eyed Grace reflectively but said nothing.

Grace looked pleadingly at the irresponsible junior. For a moment tense silence reigned. Then Beatrice Alden shook her head.

"I'm sorry, Miss Harlowe," she said soberly. All trace of hauteur had disappeared. "But you know how angry Alberta was when she left here. She wouldn't listen to me. I doubt if she speaks to me again this year. She has a frightful temper and holds the slightest grudge for ages. She will carry out her plan now, merely to show me how utterly she disregards my disapproval."

"I'm sorry, too," smiled Grace ruefully. "I shall try to see Miss Briggs, but she is utterly unapproachable."

The two girls looked into each other's eyes. Then they both laughed. Beatrice Alden stretched out her hand impulsively. "We're both in an evil case, aren't we?" she laughed.

Grace met the hand half way. "But we are of the same mind, aren't we?" she asked.

“Yes,” replied Beatrice simply. She hesitated, looked rather confused, then added: “I used to think I disliked you, Miss Harlowe, but I find my feelings toward you are quite the opposite. I hope we shall some day be friends.”

“I hope so, too,” agreed Grace earnestly. “We have a mutual friend, you know, in Mabel Ashe, although yours and Mabel’s friendship began long before I came to Overton.” A shadow crossed Beatrice’s face. Grace noted it and interpreted it correctly. “You are very fond of Mabel, are you not, Miss Alden?” she asked.

Page 77

"Very," was the short answer.

"Anne Pierson is the dearest girl friend I have in the world," declared wily Grace. "Then two Oakdale girls who are studying in an eastern conservatory of music come next, and after that Miriam Nesbit. There are also three other girls, members of a high school sorority to which I belong, and a girl in Denver, who have very strong claims on my affection. I have a number of dearest friends, you see. Some time I should like to tell you more of them."

Beatrice had brightened visibly as Grace talked. She now felt assured that this attractive freshman with her clear grey eyes and straightforward manner would never attempt to monopolize Mabel's entire attention.

At this moment Mabel's voice was heard at the head of the stairs. She descended, followed by Leona Rowe and Helen Burton.

"Why, hello, Bee!" cried Mabel. "I asked for you upstairs, but was told you were out."

"So I was," smiled Beatrice, "but I'm here now. What is your pleasure?"

"Come over to Holland House and have tea and cakes and candy, if there's any left in the box of Huyler's that came last night. Every girl in the house sampled it. You know what that means."

"I'll go for my hat and coat," returned Beatrice brightly. "See you in a minute." She ran lightly up the stairs, smiling to herself. Helen and Leona rushed out in the hall to interview a girl who had just come in. Finding themselves alone for the moment Mabel turned to Grace with a solemnly inquiring air, "How did you do it?" she asked in a low tone.

"I'll tell you some other time," replied Grace. "It was a surprise to me, but the chance just happened to come and I took advantage of it."

The return of the three young women cut off further opportunity for explanation, but as Grace walked back to Holland House, one arm linked in that of Mabel Ashe, while Beatrice Alden, heretofore frigid and unapproachable, walked at the other side of the popular junior, she could not help wishing a certain other tangle might be as easily straightened.

CHAPTER XXI

AN UNHEEDED WARNING

The next day found Grace rather at a loss how to proceed in the case of Elfreda. From what she had overheard it was evident that Alberta Wicks and Mary Hampton had decided to make Elfreda the victim of some well-laid plot of their own. What the nature of it was Grace had not the remotest idea. To approach Elfreda was embarrassing to say the least. To warn her against the two mischievous sophomores without being able to state anything more definite than what she had overheard at Wellington House was infinitely more embarrassing.

Page 78

"What time had I best try to see her?" Grace asked herself. She had come from Overton Hall with Anne and Miriam late that afternoon and the three girls had lingered on the steps of Wayne Hall, reluctant to go indoors. Spring was getting ready to fulfill all sorts of tender promises she had made to her children. The buds on the trees were bursting into tiny new green leaves. The crocuses were in bloom in the yards along College Street, and the grass on the campus was growing greener every hour. The roads, too, were obligingly drying, so that adventurous walkers might visit their favorite haunts in the country surrounding Overton without running the risk of wading in the mud.

There was Guest House, the famous colonial tea shop that had been built and used as an inn during the Revolution. In this quaint historic place ample refreshment was to be found. There one could satisfy one's appetite with dainty little sandwiches, muffins and jam, tea cakes and tea, fresh milk or buttermilk.

There was also Hunter's Rock that overhung the river, and whose smooth, flat surface made an ideal spot for picnickers. It was five miles from Overton, but extremely popular with all four classes, and from early spring until late fall, it was occupied on Saturday by various gay gipsy parties from the college. Then there were canoes for the venturesome, and staid old rowboats for the cautious, to be hired at a nominal sum, while girlish figures dotted the golf course and the tennis courts. Girls strolled about the campus in the early evenings, or gathered in groups on the steps of the campus houses. It was the time of year when spring creeps into one's blood, making one forget everything except the blueness of the sky, the softness of the air and the lure of green things growing.

"I must go into the house," sighed Miriam Nesbit. "I have that appalling trigonometry lesson for to-morrow to prepare from beginning to end. I haven't looked at it yet."

"I peeped at it yesterday," said Anne. "It's the worst one we've had, so far."

"The end is not yet," reminded Grace.

"Well it will be in sight before long. Our freshman year is almost over, didn't you know it, children!" queried Miriam laughingly.

"It has seemed long in some respects and short in others," reflected Grace. "I think—" Grace paused. A tall, rather stout girl came hurriedly up the walk. She stalked up the steps and into the house without looking to the right or left. Even in that fleeting moment Grace noted that she seemed rather excited and that she carried in her hand an open letter. "I wonder if now would be a good time to tackle her," speculated Grace. Then deciding that, after all, there was nothing to be gained without making a venture, Grace walked resolutely to the door. "I'll see you later, girls," was her only remark as she passed inside.

Once outside Elfreda's door, Grace did not feel quite so confident. Summoning all her courage, however, she knocked. An impatient voice called, "Come in," and Grace accepted the rather ungracious invitation to enter. J. Elfreda sat facing the window intent upon the letter Grace had seen in her hand. She turned sharply as the door closed, then catching sight of Grace, sprang to her feet, her face clouded with anger. "How dare you come in here?" she stormed.

Page 79

"You said 'Come in,' Elfreda," returned Grace quietly.

"Yes, but not to you," raged Elfreda. "Never to you. Leave my room instantly and don't come back again."

"I won't trouble you long," returned Grace. "I came to put you on your guard against two young women who are about to make mischief for you. I am very sorry I did not tell you long ago that Miss Wicks and Miss Hampton were the originators of the anonymous letter which caused you so much unhappiness. I suspected as much at the time, and accused them of writing it. They neither affirmed nor denied their part in the affair, although they admitted that certain members of the sophomore class wrote the letter. I threatened to take up the matter with the sophomore class if the two young women persisted in making you unhappy, and this threat evidently influenced them to drop their crusade against you."

"To a certain extent I feel responsible for what has followed, for if I had told you this before you would hardly have afterward become friendly with them. However, I can do this much. From a conversation I overheard the other day I am convinced that Miss Wicks and Miss Hampton intend to play a practical joke on you on Friday night. I am afraid that it will not be of the tame variety either, and may cause you trouble. These two girls do not like you, Elfreda, and they have not forgiven you nor never will."

"You are awfully anxious to make me think that no one but you and your friends ever liked me, aren't you?" sneered Elfreda. "Well, just let me tell you something. Those girls may have their faults, but they aren't stingy and selfish, at all events. This letter here is an invitation to——, well, I shan't tell you what it is, but it's far from being a practical joke, I can assure you."

Grace looked doubtfully at Elfreda, who stood very erect, her head held high with offended dignity. Perhaps, after all, she had been too hasty. Perhaps the two sophomores really intended playing some harmless trick. Then the words, "We are not going to bother with J. Elfreda much longer," returned with a force that left Grace no longer in uncertainty.

"Elfreda," she said earnestly, "I wish you would listen to me for once. Miss Wicks and Miss Hampton are not your friends. If you accept their invitation for Friday night you will be sorry. Take my advice, and steer clear of them."

"Please mind your own business and get out of my room," commanded Elfreda fiercely.

Casting one steady, reproachful look at the angry girl, Grace left the room in silence. Once outside her own door she clenched her hands and fought back her rising emotion. Tears of humiliation stood in her gray eyes, then winking them back bravely,

she drew a long breath and opened her door. Anne, who in the meantime had come upstairs, turned expectantly. "What luck?" she questioned.

"None," returned Grace shortly. "She ordered me out of her room."

Page 80

At this juncture Miriam Nesbit joined them. "What's the latest on the bulletin board?" she inquired, smiling mischievously.

"Don't laugh, Miriam," rebuked Grace. "Things are serious. Elfreda has some sort of engagement for Friday night with those two girls. She almost told me what it was, then changed her mind and invited me to mind my own business and leave her room. I'm going to try to find out something about Friday night and see that she gets fair play. After that I shall never trouble myself about her," concluded Grace, her voice trembling slightly.

"Don't feel so hurt at Elfreda's rudeness, Grace," soothed Miriam. "She doesn't mean half she says. She'll be sorry some day."

"I wish 'some day' was before Friday," replied Grace mournfully. "I wonder who else is to take part in this affair?"

"Watch Miss Wicks and Miss Hampton," advised Anne quietly.

"That's sound advice," agreed Grace. "I appoint you and Miriam as secret service agents. You must unearth the enemy's plans for Friday night."

"What will you do if we should happen to stumble upon them?" asked Miriam curiously.

"I don't know, yet," said Grace slowly. "It will depend entirely on what they are. Since we can't prevent Elfreda from going to her fate, we may be obliged to go along with her. If I were to ask you girls to drop everything and follow me on Friday night, would you do it?"

Anne and Miriam nodded.

"Then that's settled," was her relieved comment. "I am going to take two other girls into our confidence. I shall tell Mabel Ashe and Frances Marlton. They will come to the rescue if I need them. Besides they are juniors, and if I am not mistaken, upper class support may be very desirable before we are through with this affair."

"And all this anxiety over J. Elfreda," smiled Miriam. "But to tell you the truth, girls, I shall be only too glad to fare forth in the cause of Elfreda. I thought her a terrible cross when she first came, but now I am positively lonesome without her, and I don't care how soon she comes back."

CHAPTER XXII

TURNING THE TABLES

For the next two days the three girls bent their efforts toward discovering the plot on foot against Elfreda, but to little purpose. So far, Grace had refrained from imparting her vague knowledge of what impended to Mabel and Frances. Her naturally self-reliant nature would not allow her to depend on others. She preferred to solve her own problems and fight her own battles if necessary. Whatever the two sophomores had planned was a secret indeed. By neither word nor sign did they betray themselves, and by Thursday evening Grace was beginning to show signs of anxiety.

"I haven't been able to find out a thing," she declared dispiritedly to Anne. "I suspect one other girl, but I'm not sure about her. Anne, do you think Virginia Gaines is in this affair, too?"

Page 81

"Hardly," replied Anne. "She and Elfreda are not friendly, and Elfreda could not be coaxed to go where she is likely to see Miss Gaines."

"But suppose Virginia Gaines kept strictly in the background, yet helped to play the trick," persisted Grace.

"Of course she could easily do that," admitted Anne. "But what makes you think she would?"

"Just this," replied Grace. "I saw her in conversation to-day with Mary Hampton. They were standing outside Science Hall. They didn't see me until I was within a few feet of them. Then they said good-bye in a hurry, and rushed off in opposite directions. Now, what would you naturally infer from that?"

"It does look suspicious," agreed Anne.

"That is what causes me to believe Virginia Gaines to be one of the prime movers in this affair," was the quiet answer. "They are all very clever. Too clever, by far, for me."

A knock at the door caused Grace to start slightly. "Come in!" she called, then exclaimed in surprise as the door opened: "Why, Miriam, where did you go? You disappeared the moment dinner was over."

"I had to go to the library," replied Miriam quickly. "Do you know whether the girls on both sides of us are out?"

Grace nodded. "What's the matter, Miriam?" she asked curiously. "What has happened? You look as mysterious as the Three Fates themselves."

"I've made a discovery," announced Miriam, taking a book from under her arm and opening it. "I found something in this book that you ought to see. I was in one of the alcoves to-night looking for a book that I have been trying to lay hands on for a week. It has been out every time. To-night I found it and inside the leaves I found this." She handed Grace a folded paper.

Grace unfolded it wonderingly and began to read aloud:

"Dear Virginia:

"We decided that the haunted house plan would be quite likely to subdue a certain obstreperous individual. We have already invited her to a moonlight party at Hunter's Rock, as you know. Once she is there we will see to the rest. Sorry you can't be with us, but that would give the whole plan away. A little meditation in spookland will do our friend good, and this time if she is wise she will keep her troubles to herself. Of course,

if any one should see her going home in the wee small hours of the morning it might be unpleasant for her, but then, we can't trouble ourselves over that.

"Yours, hastily,

"Bert."

Grace stared first at Anne, then Miriam, in incredulous, shocked surprise.

"What a cruel girl!" she exclaimed. "Poor Elfreda!"

"Of course, the writer meant Elfreda," agreed Miriam. "'Bert,' I suppose, stands for Alberta. In the first place, what haunted house does she mean?"

"I don't know," answered Grace, knitting her brows. "Wait a minute! I'll go down and ask Mrs. Elwood."

Page 82

Within five minutes she had returned, bristling with information. "I found out the whole story," she declared. "It is an old white house not far from Hunter's Rock. Two brothers once lived there, and one disappeared. It was rumored that he had been killed by his older brother, and that the spirit of the murdered man haunted the place so persistently that the other brother left there and never came back. They say a white figure, carrying a lighted candle, walks moaning through the rooms."

"How dreadful!" shivered Anne. "It is bad enough to think of those girls coaxing Elfreda to go there. I believe they intend to persuade her to go there, then leave her, too."

"We might show Elfreda this note," reflected Miriam. "No; on second thought I should say we'd better make up a crowd and follow the others to Hunter's Rock. Of course, we won't stay there. Those girls are breaking rules by going there at night. We shall be breaking rules, too, but in a good cause."

A long conversation ensued that would have aroused consternation in the breast of a number of sophomores, had they been privileged to hear it. When the last detail had been arranged, Grace leaned back in her chair and smiled. "I think everything will go beautifully," she said, "and several people are going to be surprised. Miriam, will you see Mabel Ashe, Constance Fuller and Frances Marlton in the morning? Anne, will you look out for Arline Thayer and Ruth? That will leave Leona Rowe and Helen Burton for me, and, oh, yes, I'll have a talk with Emma Dean."

To all appearances, Friday dawned as prosaically as had all the other days of that week, but in the breasts of a number of the students of Overton stirred an excitement that deepened as the day wore on. As is frequently the case, the object of it all went calmly on her way, taking a smug satisfaction in the thought that she was the only freshman invited to the select gathering of sophomores who were to brave the censure of the dean, and picnic by moonlight at Hunter's Rock. For almost the first time since her arrival at college Elfreda felt her own popularity. Despite her native shrewdness, she was particularly susceptible to flattery. To be the idol of the college had been one of her most secret and hitherto hopeless desires. Now, in the sophomore class she had found girls who really appreciated her, and who were ready to say pleasant things to her rather than lecture her. She was glad, now, that she had dropped Grace and her friends in time, and resolved next year that she would put the width of the campus between herself and Wayne Hall.

As she slipped on her long blue serge coat that night—the air was chilly, though the day had been warm—a flush of triumph mounted to her cheeks. Then glancing at the clock she hurriedly adjusted her hat. Her appointment was for half-past seven. Alberta said the party was to be in honor of her and she must not keep her friends waiting. She looked sharply about her to see who was in sight. She had been pledged to secrecy. Alberta had said they would return before half-past ten, so there would be no need of

asking Mrs. Elwood to leave the door unlocked for her. Then she walked briskly down the steps and up the street.

Page 83

Fifteen minutes before she left the house, three dark figures had marched out single file down the street. Two blocks from the house they had been met by a delegation of dark figures, and without a word being spoken, the little party had taken a side street that led to Overton Drive, a public highway that wound straight through the town out into the country. The company had proceeded in absolute silence, and finally leaving the road had turned into the fields and plodded steadily on. It was the new of the moon and the landscape was shrouded in heavy shadows. On and still on the silent procession had traveled, and when their eyes, now accustomed to the darkness, had espied the outlines of a tumble-down, one-story house that stood out against the blackness of the night a halt had been made and each dark figure had taken from under her arm a bundle. Then the faint rustle of paper accompanied by an occasional giggle or a smothered exclamation had been heard, and last but not most remarkable, the dark figures had given place to a company of sheeted ghosts who had glided over the fields with true ghost-like mien and disappeared in a little grove just off the highway.

In the meantime, Elfreda had been received with acclamation by the treacherous sophomores, who vied with each other as to who should be her escort. There were nine girls, and each of them also bore a bundle, which contained not sheets, but the eatables for the picnic. This procession also set out in silence, which was broken as soon as the town was left behind. Alberta, who walked with her arm linked in Elfreda's, began to relate the story of the haunted house.

"Do you suppose for one minute that that house is really haunted?" said Elfreda sceptically.

"No one knows," was the disquieting reply. "People have seen strange sights there."

"What sights?" demanded Elfreda.

"They say the murdered brother walks through the house and moans," replied Alberta, shuddering slightly.

"That's nonsense," said Elfreda bravely. Nevertheless, the idea was not pleasant to contemplate. "I don't believe in ghosts," she added.

"I dare you to go into the room where the man was murdered," laughed Mary Hampton.

"I'm not afraid," persisted Elfreda.

"Prove it, then," taunted Mary.

"All right, I will," retorted Elfreda defiantly. "Show me the room when we get there and I'll go into it."

"I don't think we ought to go near that old house at night," protested a sophomore. "We'd get into all sorts of trouble as it is, if the faculty knew we were out."

"Now, don't begin preaching," snapped Alberta Wicks. "If you are dissatisfied, go home."

"I wish I'd stayed at home," growled the other sophomore wrathfully.

While this conversation was being carried on, the party was rapidly nearing the haunted house. They halted directly in front of it, and Mary Hampton said, "Now, Miss Briggs, make good your promise."

Page 84

Elfreda walked boldly up to the house, although she felt her courage oozing rapidly.

"I'll go inside with you, and show you the room. It's that little room off the hall," volunteered Alberta.

The outside door stood wide open. Elfreda peered fearfully down the little hall, then stepped resolutely into the little room at one side of it. A door slammed. There was the sound of a key turning in a lock, a rush of scurrying feet; then silence. Across the field fled the dark figures, nor did they stop until they had crossed the highway and entered the little grove that led to Hunter's Rock.

Suddenly a piercing scream rang out. It was followed by a succession of wild cries, and with one accord the terror-stricken conspirators made for the highway. But at every step a white figure rose in the path filling the air with weird, mournful wails. Fright lent speed to sophomore feet, and without daring to look behind, eight badly scared girls ran steadily along the road to Overton, intent only on putting distance between themselves and the terrifying apparitions that had sprung up before them. If they had stopped to deliberate for even five seconds they would, in all probability, have stood their ground, but the silent, ghostly figures that had bobbed up as by magic, coupled with the tale of the haunted house which Alberta had related, was a little too much for even vaunted sophomore courage.

A death-like stillness followed the ignominious flight of the plotters. Then from behind a tree stepped a white figure and a cautious voice called softly: "Come on, girls. They have gone. We must hurry and let Elfreda out of that awful house." At this command a ripple of subdued laughter rose from all sides and the ghosts began to appear from their nearby hiding places.

"Wasn't it funny?" laughed a tall ghost with the voice of Frances Marlton.

"I know several sophomores who will walk softly for the rest of this year at least," predicted another ghost, ending with the giggle that endeared Mabel Ashe to all her friends.

"These masks are frightfully warm," complained a diminutive spectre. A quick movement of her hand and the mask was removed, showing the rosy face of Arline Thayer.

"Keep your mask on, Arline," warned Gertrude. "Even in this secluded spot some one may be watching you."

The party proceeded with as little noise as possible to the haunted house. Pausing at the front door a brief council was held. Then removing their masks and the sheets that enveloped them, Grace and Miriam resolutely entered the hall and went straight to the

locked door, behind which Elfreda was a prisoner. The key had been left in the lock. It turned with a grating sound. Slipping her hand in the pocket of her sweater, Grace produced a tiny electric flashlight which she turned on the room. In one corner, seated on the floor, her back against the wall and her feet straight in front of her, sat Elfreda. She eyed the flashing light defiantly, then saw who was behind it and said grimly: "I might have known it. If I had taken your advice I wouldn't be here now."

Page 85

"Oh, Elfreda!" exclaimed Grace. "I'm so glad you are not frightened. It was a cruel trick, but, thank goodness, we found out about it in time."

Elfreda rose and walked deliberately up to Grace and Miriam. "I'm sorry for everything," she said huskily. "I've been a ridiculous simpleton, and I don't deserve to have friends. Will you forgive me, girls? I'd like to start all over again."

"Of course we will. That was a direct, manly speech, Elfreda," laughed Miriam, but there were tears in her own eyes which no one saw in the darkness. She realized that in spite of her childish behavior she was fond of the stout girl and was glad that peace had been declared.

"Let us forget all about it, shake hands and go home," proposed Grace, "or we may find ourselves locked out."

The two girls shook hands with Elfreda, and all around again for good luck, then linking an arm in each of hers they conducted the rescued prisoner to where the rest of the party awaited them. During their absence the ghosts had doffed their spectral garments and the instant the three joined them the order to march was given. Once fairly in Overton, conversation was permitted, and on the same corner where they had met, the rescuers parted, after much talk and laughter.

"Come into my room and have tea to-night, Elfreda," invited Miriam, as they entered the house. "I have a pound of your favorite cakes."

"I'd like to come to stay," said Elfreda wistfully. "But I've been too hateful for you ever to want me for a roommate again."

"It's rather late for you to move now," replied Miriam slowly. "But I'd love to have you with me next year."

"Would you, honestly?" asked Elfreda, opening her eyes in astonishment.

"Honestly," repeated Miriam, smiling.

"I'll think about it," returned Elfreda, flushing deeply.

"But there is nothing to think about," protested Miriam. "I wouldn't ask you if I did not care for you."

"That isn't it," said Elfreda in a low tone. "It isn't you. It's I. Don't you understand? You are letting me off too easily. I don't deserve to have you be so nice to me."



"We wish you to forget about what has happened, Elfreda," said Grace earnestly. "Everyone is likely to make mistakes. We are not here to judge, we are here to help one another. That is one of the ways of cultivating true college spirit."

"I'll tell you one thing," returned Elfreda, her eyes shining, "whether I cultivate college spirit or not, I'm going to try to cultivate common sense. Then, at least, I'll know enough to treat my best friends civilly."

CHAPTER XXIII

VIRGINIA CHANGES HER MIND

Page 86

What the vanquished sophomores thought of the trick that had been played on them was a matter for speculation. Once back in Overton, the truth of the situation had dawned upon them. Their common sense told them that real ghosts, if there were any, never congregated in companies the size of the one that had risen to haunt them the previous night. Obviously some one had overheard their plan to picnic at Hunter's Rock and treated them to an unwelcome surprise. It did not occur to any one of them until they had returned to their respective houses that they had left J. Elfreda locked in the haunted abode of the two brothers. Then consternation reigned in each sophomore breast.

Directly after chapel the next morning, eight young women were to be seen in an anxious group just outside the chapel. Several freshmen and two or three juniors glanced appraisingly at them, then passed on.

"Did you notice the way that Miss Wells looked at me this morning?" muttered Mary Hampton to her satellites.

"Never mind a little thing like that," snapped Alberta Wicks. "The question is, where is J. Elfreda? If she is still shut up in that house we might as well go home now instead of waiting to be sent there."

"Nonsense, Bert," scoffed one of the sophomores. "You are nervous. We may not be found out."

"Found out! J. Elfreda will be raging. She'll go straight to the dean, the minute she is free. Oh, why didn't we think to run back and let her out in spite of those ridiculous white figures?"

"What made you lock her in there, then, if you were afraid she'd tell?" asked one of the others rather sarcastically.

"Yes, that's what I say!" exclaimed a second. "This affair has been very silly from start to finish. I'm ashamed of myself for having been drawn into it, and in future you may count me out of any more such stunts."

"You girls don't understand," declared Alberta Wicks angrily. "We only meant to even an old score with the Briggs person. We were going to call for her on the way home, and tell her that we had evened our score. She wouldn't have breathed it to a soul. She knew that we'd make life miserable for her next year if she did. She wouldn't tell a little thing like that, but to leave her there all night. That really was dreadful. Mary and I are in for it. That's certain."

"If I'm not mistaken, there goes Miss Briggs now!" exclaimed a girl who had been idly watching the students as they passed out of the chapel.

"Where? Where?" questioned Mary and Alberta together.

The sophomore pointed.

"Yes; it is J. Elfreda," almost wailed Alberta Wicks. "I'm going straight back to Stuart Hall and pack my trunk. Come on, Mary."

"Better wait a little," dryly advised the sophomore who had announced her disapproval of the night's escapade. "You may be sorry if you don't."

"Good-bye, girls," said Alberta abruptly. "If I hear anything, I'll report to you at once. Now that J. Elfreda is among us, we'd better steer clear of one another for a while at least."

Page 87

She hurried away, followed by Mary Hampton.

"That was my first, and if I get safely out of this, will be my last offense," said another sophomore firmly. "All those who agree with me say 'aye.'" Five "ayes" were spoken simultaneously.

In the meantime, Grace was trying vainly to make up her mind what to do. Should she go directly to the two mischievous sophomores, revealing the identity of the ghosts, or should she leave them in a quandary as to the outcome of their unwomanly trick? One thing had been decided upon definitely by Grace and her friends. They would tell no tales. Grace could not help thinking that a little anxiety would be the just due of the plotters, and with this idea in mind determined to do nothing for a time, at least, toward putting them at their ease.

But there was one person who had not been asked to remain silent concerning the ghost party, and that person was Elfreda. Grace had forgotten to tell her that the night's happenings were to be kept a secret and when late that afternoon she espied Alberta Wicks and Mary Hampton walking in the direction of Stuart Hall she pursued them with the air of an avenger. Before they realized her presence she had begun a furious arraignment of their treachery. "You ought to be sent home for it," she concluded savagely, "and if Grace Harlowe wasn't——"

"Grace Harlowe!" exclaimed Alberta, turning pale. "Do you mean to tell me that it was she who planned that ghost party?"

"I shall tell you nothing," retorted Elfreda. "I'm sorry I said even that much. I want you to understand, though, that if you ever try to play a trick on me again, I'll see that you are punished for it if I have to go down on my knees to the whole faculty to get them to give you what you deserve. Just remember that, and mind your own business, strictly, from now on."

Turning on her heel, the stout girl marched off, leaving the two girls in a state of complete perturbation.

"Had we better go and see Miss Harlowe?" asked Mary Hampton, rather unsteadily.

"The question is, do we care to come back here next year?" returned Alberta grimly.

"I'd like to come back," said Mary in a low voice. "Wouldn't you?"

"I don't know," was the perverse answer. "I don't wish to humble myself to any one. I'm going to take a chance on her keeping quiet about last night. I have an idea she is not a telltale. If worse comes to worst, there are other colleges, you know, Mary."

"I thought, perhaps, if we were to go to Miss Harlowe, we might straighten out matters and be friends," said Mary rather hesitatingly. "Those girls have nice times together, and they are the cleverest crowd in the freshman class. I'm tired of being at sword's points with people."

"Then go over to them, by all means," sneered Alberta. "Don't trouble yourself about your old friends. They don't count."

"You know I didn't mean that, Bert," said Mary reproachfully. "I won't go near them if you feel so bitter about last night."

Page 88

It was several minutes before Mary succeeded in conciliating her sulky friend. By that time the tiny sprouts of good fellowship that had vainly tried to poke their heads up into the light had been hopelessly blighted by the chilling reception they met with, and Mary had again been won over to Alberta's side.

Saturday evening Arline Thayer entertained the ghost party at Martell's, and Elfreda, to her utter astonishment, was made the guest of honor. During the progress of the dinner, Alberta Wicks, Mary Hampton and two other sophomores dropped in for ice cream. By their furtive glances and earnest conversation it was apparent that they strongly suspected the identity of the avenging specters. Elfreda's presence, too, confirmed their suspicions.

In a spirit of pure mischief Mabel Ashe pulled a leaf from her note book. Borrowing a pencil, she made an interesting little sketch of two frightened young women fleeing before a band of sheeted specters. Underneath she wrote: "It is sometimes difficult to lay ghosts. Walk warily if you wish to remain unhaunted." This she sent to Alberta Wicks by the waitress. It was passed from hand to hand, and resulted in four young women leaving Martell's without finishing their ice cream.

"You spoiled their taste for ice cream, Mabel," laughed Frances Marlton, glancing at the now vacant table. "I imagine they are shaking in their shoes."

"They did not think that the juniors had taken a hand in things," remarked Constance Fuller.

"Hardly," laughed Helen Burton. "Did you see their faces when they read that note?"

"It's really too bad to frighten them so," said Leona Rowe.

"I don't agree with you, Leona," said Mabel Ashe firmly. Her charming face had grown grave. "I think that Miss Wicks and Miss Hampton both ought to be sent home. If you will look back a little you will recollect that these two girls were far from being a credit to their class during their freshman year. I don't like to say unkind things about an Overton girl, but those two young women were distinctly trying freshmen, and as far as I can see haven't imbibed an iota of college spirit. Last night's trick, however, was completely overstepping the bounds. If Miss Briggs had been a timid, nervous girl, matters might have resulted quite differently. Then it would have been our duty to report the mischief makers. I am not sure that we are doing right in withholding what we now know from the faculty, but I am willing to give these girls the benefit of the doubt and remain silent."

"That is my opinion of the matter, too," agreed Grace. "It is only a matter of a few days until we shall all have to say good-bye until fall. During vacation certain girls will have plenty of time to think things over, and then they may see matters in an entirely different

light. I shouldn't like to think that almost my last act before going home to my mother was to give some girl a dismissal from Overton to take home to hers."

Page 89

A brief silence followed Grace's remark. The little speech about her mother had turned the thoughts of the girls homeward. Suddenly Mabel Ashe rose from her chair. "Here's to our mothers, girls. Let's dedicate our best efforts to them, and resolve never to lessen their pride in us with failures."

[Illustration: Over the Tea and Cakes the Clouds Dispersed.]

When Elfreda, Miriam, Anne and Grace ran up the steps of Wayne Hall at a little before ten o'clock they were laughing and talking so happily they failed to notice Virginia Gaines, who had been walking directly ahead of them. She had come from Stuart Hall, where, impatient to learn just what had happened the night before, she had gone to see Mary and Alberta. Finding them out she managed to learn the news from the very girl who had declared herself sorry for her part in the escapade. This particular sophomore, now that the reaction had set in, was loud in her denunciation of the trick and congratulated Virginia on not being one of those intimately concerned in it.

But Virginia, now conscience-stricken, had little to say.

She still lingered in the hall as the quartette entered, but they passed her on their way upstairs without speaking and she finally went to her room wishing, regretfully, that she had been less ready to quarrel with the girls who bade fair to lead their class both in scholarship and popularity. It was fully a week afterward when a thoroughly humbled and repentant Virginia, after making sure that Anne was out, knocked one afternoon at Grace's door.

"How do you do, Miss Gaines," said Grace civilly, but without warmth. "Won't you come in?"

Virginia entered, but refused the chair Grace offered her. "No, thank you, I'll stand," she replied. Then in a halting fashion she said: "Miss Harlowe, I—am—awfully sorry for—for being so hateful all this year." She stopped, biting her lip, which quivered suspiciously.

Grace stared at her caller in amazement. Could it be possible that insolent Virginia Gaines was meekly apologizing to her. Then, thoughtful of the other girl's feelings, she smiled and stretched out her hand: "Don't say anything further about it, Miss Gaines. I hope we shall be friends. One can't have too many, you know, and college is the best place in the world for us to find ourselves. Come in to-night and have tea and cakes with us after lessons. That is the highest proof of hospitality I can offer at present."

"I will," promised Virginia. Then impulsively she caught one of Grace's hands in hers. "You're the dearest girl," she said, "and I'll try to be worthy of your friendship. Please tell the girls I'm sorry. I'll tell them myself to-night." With that she fairly ran from the room, and going to her own shed tears of real contrition. Later, it took all Grace's reasoning

powers to put Elfreda in a state of mind that verged even slightly on charitable, but after much coaxing she promised to behave with becoming graciousness toward Virginia.



Page 90

Over the tea and cakes the clouds gradually dispersed, and when Virginia went to her room that night, after declaring that she had had a perfectly lovely time, Grace took from her writing case the note that Miriam had found, and tore it into small pieces. She needed no evidence against Virginia.

CHAPTER XXIV

SAYING GOOD-BYE TO THEIR FRESHMAN YEAR

The few intervening days that lay between commencement and home were filled with plenty of pleasant excitement. There were calls to make, farewell spreads and merry-makings to attend, and momentous questions concerning what to leave behind and what to take home to be decided. The majority of the girls at Wayne Hall had asked for their old rooms for the next year. Two sophomores had succeeded in getting into Wellington House. One poor little freshman, having studied too hard, had brought on a nervous affection and was obliged to give up her course at Overton for a year at least. There was also one other sophomore whose mother was coming to the town of Overton to live and keep house for her daughter in a bungalow not far from the college.

It now lacked only two days until the end of the spring term, and what to pack and when to pack it were the burning questions of the hour.

"There will be room for four more freshmen here next year," remarked Grace, as she appeared from her closet, her arms piled high with skirts and gowns. Depositing them on the floor, she dropped wearily into a chair. "I don't believe I can ever make all those things go into that trunk. I have all my clothes that I brought here last fall, and another lot that I brought back at Christmas, and still some others that I acquired at Easter. If I had had a particle of forethought I would have taken home a few things each trip. Don't dare to leave the house until this trunk is packed, Anne, for I shall need you to help me sit on it. If our combined weight isn't enough, we'll invite Elfreda and Miriam in to the sitting. I am perfectly willing to perform the same kind offices for them. Oh, dear, I hate to begin. I'm wild to go home, but I can't help feeling sad to think my freshman joys are over. It seems to me that the two most important years in college are one's freshman and senior years.

"Being a freshman is like beginning a garden. One plants what one considers the best seeds, and when the little green shoots come up, it's terribly hard to make them live at all. It is only by constant care that they are made to thrive and all sorts of storms are likely to rise out of a clear sky and blight them. Some of the seeds one thought would surely grow the fastest are total disappointments, while others that one just planted to fill in, fairly astonish one by their growth, but if at the end of the freshman year the garden looks green and well cared for, it's safe to say it will keep on growing through the sophomore and junior years and bloom at the end of four years. That's the peculiarity

about college gardens. One has to begin to plant the very first day of the freshman year to be sure of flowers when the four years are over.

Page 91

"In the sophomore year the hardest task is keeping the weeds out, and during the junior and senior years the difficulty will be to keep the ground in the highest state of cultivation. It will be easier to neglect one's garden, then, because one will have grown so used to the things one has planted that one will forget to tend them and put off stirring up the soil around them and watering them. I'm going to think a little each day while I'm home this summer about my garden and keep it fresh and green."

Grace laid the gown she had been folding in the trunk and looked earnestly at Anne as she finished her long speech.

"What a nice idea!" exclaimed Anne warmly. "I think I shall have to begin gardening, too."

"Your garden has always been in a flourishing condition from the first," laughed Grace. "The chief trouble with mine seems to be the number of strange weeds that spring up—nettles that I never planted, but that sting just as sharply, nevertheless. It hurts me to go home with the knowledge that there are two girls here who don't like me. I know I ought not to care, for I have nothing to regret as far as my own conduct is concerned, but still I'd like to leave Overton for the summer without one shadow in my path."

"Perhaps, when certain girls come back in the fall they will be on their good behavior."

"Perhaps," repeated Grace sceptically.

The entrance into the room of Elfreda and Miriam, who had been out shopping, brought the little heart talk to an abrupt close.

"We've a new kind of cakes," exulted Miriam. "They are three stories high and each story is a different color. They have icing half an inch thick and an English walnut on top. All for the small sum of five cents, too."

"We bought a dozen," declared Elfreda, "and now I'm going out to buy ice cream. This packing business calls for plenty of refreshment to keep one's energy up to the mark. I've thought of a lovely plan to lighten my labors."

"What is it?" asked Grace. "Your plans are always startlingly original if not very practical."

"This is practical," announced the stout girl. "I'm going to give away my clothes; that is, the most of them. I found a poor woman the other day who does scrubbing for the college who needs them. I found out where she lives and I'm going to bundle them all together and send them to her. I don't wish her to know where they came from. I'll just write a card, and—"

The three broadly smiling faces of her friends caused her to stop short and regard them suspiciously. “What’s the matter?” she said in an offended tone.

Grace ran over and slipped her arm about the stout girl’s shoulders. “You are the one who sent Ruth her lovely clothes last Christmas. Don’t try to deny it. I was sure of it then.”

“Oh, see here,” expostulated Elfreda, jerking herself away, her face crimson. “I—you—”

Page 92

"Confess," threatened Miriam, seizing the little brass tea kettle and brandishing it over Elfreda's head.

"I won't," defied Elfreda, laughing a little in spite of her efforts to appear offended.

"One, two," counted Miriam, grasping the kettle firmly.

"All right, I did," confessed Elfreda nonchalantly. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Present you with your Christmas gifts now," smiled Miriam. "You wouldn't look at us last Christmas, so we've been saving our gifts ever since. Wait a minute, girls, until I go for mine."

As she darted from the room, Grace said softly: "We hoped that you would understand about Thanksgiving and that everything would be all right by Christmas, so we planned our little remembrances for you just the same. Then, when—when we didn't see you before going home for the holidays, Anne suggested that we put them away, because we all hoped that you'd be friends with us again some day." Rummaging in the tray of her trunk she produced a long, flat package which she offered to Elfreda. Anne, who, at Grace's first words, had stepped to the chiffonier, took out a beribboned bundle, and stood holding it toward the stout girl. Another moment and Miriam had returned bearing her offering. "I wish you a merry June," declared Miriam with an infectious giggle that was echoed by the others. Then Elfreda opened the package from Miriam, which contained a Japanese silk kimono similar to one of her own that her roommate had greatly admired. Grace's package contained a pair of long white gloves, and Anne had remembered her with a book she had once heard the stout girl express a desire to own.

"You had no business to do it," muttered Elfreda. Then gathering up her presents she made a dash for the door and with a muffled, "I'll be back soon," was gone. It was several minutes before she reappeared with red eyes, but smiling lips. Then a long talk ensued, during which time the art of trunk-packing languished. It was renewed with vigor that evening and continued spasmodically for the next two days. In the campus houses the real packing dragged along in most instances until within two hours of the time when the trunks were to be called for. Then a wholesale scramble began, to make up for lost minutes. One of the most frequent and painful sights during those last two days was that of a wrathful expressman, glaring in impotent rage while an enterprising damsel opened her trunk on the front porch to take out or put in one or several of her various possessions which, until that moment, had been completely forgotten.

The night before leaving Overton the four girls paid a visit to Ruth Denton. The plucky little freshman had refused an invitation to spend the summer with Arline Thayer, but had accepted a position in Overton with a dress-maker. The last two weeks of her vacation she had promised to spend with Arline at the sea-shore.

Their last morning at Overton dawned fair and sunshiny. Grace, who had risen early, stood at the window, looking out at the glory of the sparkling June day.

Page 93

The campus was a vast green velvet carpet and the pale green of the trees had not yet changed to that darker, dustier shade that belongs only to summer. Back among the trees Overton Hall rose gray and majestic. Grace's heart swelled with pride as she gazed at the stately old building surrounded by its silent, leafy guard. "Overton, my Alma Mater," she said softly. "May I be always worthy to be your child."

"What are you mooning over?" asked Anne, who had slipped into her kimono and joined Grace at the window.

"I'm rhapsodizing," smiled Grace, her eyes very bright. "I love Overton, don't you, Anne?"

Anne nodded. "I'm glad we didn't go to Wellesley or Vassar, or even Smith. I'd rather be here."

"So would I," sighed Grace. "Next to home there is no place like Overton. I almost wish I were coming back here next fall as a freshman."

"But it's against the law of progress to wish one's self back," smiled Anne, "and being a sophomore surely has its rainbow side."

"And it rests with us to find it," replied Grace softly, placing her hand on her friend's shoulder.

A little later, laden with bags and suit cases, the three Oakdale girls, accompanied by Elfreda, walked out of Wayne Hall as freshmen for the last time.

"When next we see this house it will be as sophomores," observed Elfreda. "I'm glad we are all going home on the same train. Do you remember the day I met you? I thought I owned the earth then. But I have found out that there are other people to consider besides myself. That is what being a freshman at Overton has taught me."

"That's a very good thing for all of us to remember," remarked Grace. "I'm going to try to practise it next year."

"You won't have to try very hard," returned Elfreda dryly. "How much time have we?"

"Almost an hour," replied Miriam, looking at her watch.

"Then we've time to stop at Vinton's for a farewell sundae. It's our last freshman treat. Come on, everybody," invited the stout girl.

"No more sundaes here until next fall," lamented Miriam, as they sat waiting for their order. "I shall miss Vinton's. There is nothing in Oakdale quite like it."

“And I shall miss you girls,” declared Elfreda bluntly.

“Why don’t you pay us a visit, then?” suggested Miriam. “We expect to be at home part of the time this summer.”

“Perhaps I will,” reflected Elfreda. “But you must write to me at any rate.”

At the station groups of happy-faced girls stood waiting for the train.

“We are going to have plenty of company,” observed Anne. “Do you remember how forlorn we felt when we were cast away on this station platform last fall? We won’t feel so strange next September.”

“We shall feel very important instead,” laughed Miriam. “It will be our turn to escort bewildered freshmen to their boarding places.”

Page 94

"Yes, and we'll see that they don't stray, too," retorted Elfreda grimly.

"Or mistake the Register for the registrar," smiled Grace.

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Page 103

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